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Perception of University Students regarding Semester System and Research: Case of Karachi University**Farooq Ahmed Kalhoro,**

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Corresponding Author: inayat.magsi@smiu.edu.pk**Abstract**

The perception of students is different about the semester system and research being carried out in the Universities. This perception varies from individual to individual and vice versa. This study aims to identify the students' preferences in the context of the semester system and research. The study is quantitative and the University of Karachi was selected as the universe. Whereas, accidental and convenience sampling techniques have been utilized for this study. The sample size is 400 respondents. The results reveal that according to the perception of the students, more preference for the semester system is positively associated with preference for research. The semester system creates more competition among students. The study proved otherwise, the majority of the students were found willing to studying in the semester system and doing research. It is further revealed that the research is a critical component of higher education that is encouraged in the semester system as well. Based on findings, it is recommended that the universities may focus on research and innovative activities in their semester system. It is also recommended that the universities should introduce a semester system in their affiliated colleges, where research may be entertained.

Keywords: Students, Perception, Semester, Research, Karachi University.

Introduction

Human beings perform many activities as individuals when they consciously coordinate in a social unit; they compose a group and form organizations; among these organizations, the educational institution is one of the most important and fundamental to any social system (Scott, 2008). Education provides techniques and methods of social life. It prepares human beings how to live in society independently. It helps the family, economy, political and religious institutions. This social institution is highly interconnected and interlinked with all other basic institutions of society. Its major functions are cultural transmission, social integration, training, and learning of



techniques, socialization, rational thinking, family living, patriotism, and character-building (Ball, 2001).

The strength and contribution of any educational system make the economic, social, intellectual, and structural development of any nation; These institutions are the forceful instruments, which shape not only the character building and personality of an individual student; but also the whole generation and the society (Behrman, 1997). Educational institutions have even settled the fate of the whole human civilization; these institutions are the places, where ideas are born and nurtured. To run an educational institution smoothly require many important elements, out of these important elements, three are the most important, a leader, a teacher, and the students (Casey et al. 1998). Students are one of the prospective nation builders, the future of any nation lies in their hands. Whatever education they receive; through this, they lay the foundation of a society.

Education with research benefits individuals with knowledge and understanding to tackle their day to day problems. Through research, any subject and its principles can be made better which will experience new inquiries and the same will lead us to learn new hypotheses (Tinto, 2006). Research implies to try for something out of the box. When it is done, such things will distinguish one student from another. The study with research proves beneficial for the students throughout their career.

According to Richards & Schmidt (2013), the examination is a method for measuring ability, performance, and knowledge. A good examination system evaluates both the teaching and learning process (Duncan, 2012). The examination is a comprehensive term; there are still two systems in our educational policies; one is an annual examination and the other is a semester system; these systems are still working with a low preference for research particularly for those who are not regularly getting the education in any general or professional university (Aggarwal, 2003). There are numerous proposals in the education system as well as a good number of reasonable ideas, but one of them cannot be picked as a target; rather a comprehensive approach is adopted to combine all good works (Tribus, 1994). Usually, the examination refers to test and estimate students' academic ability and performance through written or oral questions; it is based on the prescribed syllabus provided for the test within a specific period (Collins & Brien, 2011). The examination is an important aspect of the teaching, learning process, and educational development that determines the future of students (Mirza, 1999).

Definition of Terms

Perception

Word perception has been taken from the Latin language word 'perceptio' this does mean receiving or gathering.

Perception is an act with the help of which we apprehend and perceive through our senses, cognition, and mind (Dictionary. Com, 2020). This is the interpretation, identification, and organization of information gathered through our senses to understand and represent the knowledge or environment (Schacter, 2011). It is an opinion or belief and usually held by a large number of people and the same is based that how things appear (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). This study aims to know how the students perceive the semester system and research. Is the research a product of the semester system or research is promoted through the semester system?



Preference

Preference is also an act whereby we prefer and it is a state of being preferred (Merriam Webster 2020). It is a fact whereby we like something or prefer more one thing to another thing or person. (Cambridge Dictionary (2020)). So, in this present study preference will be considered that how students are considering or prefer the semester system for the best promotion of the research.

Statement of the Problem

Two different examination and assessment methods are found in our educational institutions, one is an annual system and another is a semester system, both are separate in nature but the semester system as compared to the annual method is based upon research and innovation activities (Yousaf & Hashim, 2012). What are the real perception and thinking of the students about this semester system and research is not yet known scientifically? The present study is determining the students' perception regarding the semester system and the task of research being involved in this system. This study is oriented towards the utility and output of the semester system. A few studies have demonstrated numerous aspects of the semester system and research. This study will fill the gap of research in the perspective of perception of the students towards the above-mentioned procedures of the educational system in universities of Pakistan.

The present study intends to measure the impact of the sacred orientation of the students on their satisfaction from present educational / examination system (both annual and semester system) and role of research and their interrelationship.

Significance of the Study

The educational and examination systems of the universities are not fulfilling the expectations and demands of the students and the society to impart quality education (Haider, et al. 2015). The country has inherited the problems of students, mass failure and a low standard of education. In the modern era of information technology, how our students compete with rest of the world, the students can compete with the world only if the results and performances are in a positive direction. The present study is an attempt to explore the opinion of university students about the semester system and research.

Followings are the significance of the study.

1. The findings will add to existing knowledge about perception of university students regarding the semester system and research.
2. It will help the administration of universities to understand the point of view of students regarding the semester system and research.
3. The study will provide an opportunity to the university administration to adopt the measures about semester system which promote research and scientific investigation as perceived by the students.
4. The study would be of practical utility for policymakers of the universities in Pakistan and educationist, to adopt and implement the rules, which can make education, examination (semester) system and tendency towards research more effective and successful.



5. The study will provide the perception to implement the result to affiliated colleges and institutions.

The study involves the following specific objectives:

- i. To add new knowledge to the theory of perception of students about semester system and research.
- ii. To determine the viewpoint of the students representing different academic disciplines regarding the semester system and research.
- iii. To know the relationship between semester system and research.

Scope of the Study

The study is being conducted to identify scientifically the effects regarding preference for semester system with student research work. The physical scope of the study is that it is being conducted on the students of science and arts faculties of the university. The findings of this research will be applicable to all students of the university and including affiliated colleges and institutions etc.

Literature Review

The students and teachers face several problems while practicing newly introduced assessment procedures of semester systems in Pakistan; especially the development of assessment criteria, training for the university teachers, and monitoring mechanism (Ayubbuzder & Ali, 2013). In the age of globalization, it is essential to make the semester system more innovative and futuristic as changing demands of the teacher and student all over the world can be responded (Singh & Pravin, 2016). To maintain the standards and to update the quality of the semester system require commitment and training of teachers concerned. The semester system provides an opportunity to the students for continuous learning and assessment or feedback and a better understanding of the subject (Perveen & Saeed, 2014).

According to Chongbang and Campus (2014), the passing percentage of students in the semester system is comparatively higher than the annual system; therefore, the semester system should be implemented on the large scale. The education seekers criticize the negative aspects of the semester system of examination, however, the teachers agree with the semester system of examination to some extent as contrary to students' perception (Munshi, et al. 2012).

The annual examination practices at public sector universities of Punjab are conducted in a very formal way as compared to the semester system. The final grades of students depend upon the final examination, but the questions in the annual system are lengthy (Perveen & Saeed, 2014). The Pakistani educational institutions are conducting an annual system for a long and still in operation in many institutions; Majority of teachers and administrative personnel working under the annual system are trained to run the semester system (Shoukat & Muhammad, 2015).

It has been now felt by students and observed by the teachers and management of HEI's (Higher Education Institutions) that the annual system of education was much more beneficial. Hence, there is a likelihood of reverting to an annual system of education soon (Yousaf & Hashim, 2012). An attempt is being made to describe the well-deserved benefits of an annual system of education over the semester system (Singh, 2014). An important component of globalization concerning the semester system is a need for



producing an interaction between teacher and student. Consequently, the semester system can provide an opportunity to the students for continuous learning and assessment (Singh & Pravin, 2016). The perception of students towards internal assessment and overall evaluation is not quite satisfactory. However, the lack of resources at degree colleges is a hindrance to making a semester system effective and successful (Tarali, 2013).

The semester system is an effective method of effectual learning. However, some of the students disagreed due to excessive drawbacks. While, due to the multi-dimensional perspectives, the faculty members were in favor of the semester system (Mehmood, et al. 2014). The semester system divides the academic year into two terms, and it is contrary to the annual system, semester system is considered more advanced, accurate, and interactive than the annual system as it examines the student performance after every six months (Umair, 2013).

The teachers and students have perceived various positive features of the semester system. Some of these positive attributes are the projects and fieldwork, seminars, tutorials, and the curriculum. Likewise, learning system in collaboration, usual progress monitoring holding of the classes in regular manners, assistive academic and physical environment creativity can also be considered in the goodness of the semester system. Yet improvements need in the practice of the semester system (Subedi, 2019). The semester system has brought an outstanding success in the overall passing ratio. Besides, the score of graduates and toppers as compared to the annual system has increased (Longkumer, 2019).

A good percentage of the students and teachers consider the applicability of the semester system on the undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) levels. They are also of the view that it is good as compared to the traditional examination systems. The study further reveals that students and teachers prefer good to the curriculum and evaluation methods under the semester system. Whereas, provision of the results not on the time is considered by the students as the weak point of the semester system (Behera et al., 2018). For the attainment of quality education, it is not enough to implement the semester system. It needs a few fundamental requirements for its successful execution and in the results; the old examination system may be replaced with it. For the well-functioning of the semester system full-time students, professional teachers, applied and innovative curriculums, scientific teaching methods, a resourceful library, a learning environment, and a prompt academic calendar are essential requirements (Baral et al., 2019).

Grounding of Hypothesis on Theory

The researchers have based the hypothesis of this study on the Theory of Cognitive Dissonance of perception as put forward by Leon Festinger (1956). A cognitive dissonance is a person with two different and contradictive thoughts. Likewise, in this study relevance is being tried to be observed whether students opt for the semester system as it is best for the promotion of research and innovation. Therefore, preference for the semester system is in contradiction with other available options of the education systems such as the annual examination system.

H₀ Preference for semester system is not positively associated with preference for research.



H₁ Preference for semester system positively associated with preference for research.

Operationalization

The concept of preference for the semester system is being used in the present study as a stable set of social exceptions developed on the basis to see the preference for research. To measure the relationship between preference for semester system and research, the following indicators have been developed.

1. Semester system develops more sense of competition among students
2. Semester system supports the research

Methodology

The study was conducted to know the perception of students of the university about the relationship between the semester system and research. The study is quantitative in nature. The research was conducted on the students of the natural and social sciences faculties of Karachi University. The researchers have selected only one university for the collection of the data because in the city of Karachi this is the biggest public sector university with the highest numbers of students having vast experience. Additionally, this has remained a practice in the previous studies, where only one university or campus has been selected as a sample for knowing the student's perception about the semester system such as Subedi, 2019, Behera et al., 2018, Longkumer, 2019, Baral et al., 2019. The sample size of this study was 400 participants, whereas, accidental and convenience sampling techniques have been utilized for this study. The tool for data collection was a structured questionnaire on the Likert scale. This tool was a self-constructed questionnaire. The reason for the selection of this tool was that all the respondents were educated and they were able to understand the questions easily. The tool consists of twenty-one questions; thirteen questions about the semester system and eight questions about the research. For measuring demographic information, performa was also included in the instrument. The demographic section contains classes, gender (male, female), the family belongs to (city, rural), residence (hostel, day scholar, others), etc. Pre-testing of the questionnaire was carried out and the same was tested in a small sample of the universe. The reliability test results are given under the following table no. 01. The pretesting sample of the population for this tool was the economics and history departments. Whereas, the questionnaire was also sent to three research experts for checking the validity. After the checking of validity and pre-testing, it was found that the tool measures what it intended to measure. The data have been analyzed using the software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).



Table No. 01 Illustrating Statistics of Reliability Test

| Name of Variable | Cronbach's Alpha | Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items | N of Items |
|----------------------------------|------------------|--|------------|
| Perception about Semester System | 0.795 | 0.795 | 13 |
| Perception about Research | 0.788 | 0.788 | 8 |

The above-mentioned table shows the reliability of the scale, measured using SPSS in the terms of Cronbach’s Alpha. The Cronbach’s Alpha value for Perception about Semester System is 0.795 and for Perception about Research is 0.788 which are acceptable under the social sciences. According to Hulin et al., (2001), 0.6-0.7 is a general rule and an acceptable level of reliability. Whereas, the values at 0.8 or greater are considered a very good level of reliability.

Testing of Hypothesis

- i) H_0 : Preference for semester system is not positively associated with preference for research.
 H_1 : Preference for semester system is positively associated with preference for research.
- ii) Level of significance α
 $\alpha = 0.05$
 i. e 95% confidence level
- iii) We use the test for independence of attributes. χ^2

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$$
- iv) The critical region is $\chi^2 = \chi^2_{0.05, (1)} = 3.84$
- v) Computation

Table No. 2: Observed and Expected frequencies regarding semester system and research

| O _i | E _i | (O _i -E _i) ² | (O _i -E _i) ² /E _i |
|----------------|----------------|--|--|
| 222 | 228.06 | 36.72 | 0.16 |
| 140 | 133.94 | 43.30 | 0.32 |
| 30 | 23.94 | 36.72 | 1.53 |
| 08 | 14.06 | 36.72 | 2.61 |
| | | $\chi^2=4.63$ | |

Where

O_i = Observed frequencies

E_i = Expected frequencies



Interpretation

By comparing the two values of χ^2 i.e $\chi^2_{\text{tabulated}} = 3.84$ and $\chi^2_{\text{computed}} = 4.63$, it is clear that the computed value of χ^2 falls in the critical region, therefore null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. It is concluded that according to the perception of the University students that more preference for the semester system is positively associated with preference for research.

Analysis of Data

The opinion was solicited from 400 students who were picked up through accidental and convenience sampling. Out of 400, male respondents were 191, the female participants were 200, whereas, 09 did not mention their gender. Resident arrangement-wise 128 students were living in hostels, 229 were day-scholars, and 36 were others. Whereas, 07 did not mention their residence. As far as, the academic year is concerned, 57 were from BS-I, 248 were from BS-II, 04 were from BS-III, and 91 did not mention their academic belongings. In rural and urban residences, 266 respondents belong to big cities, 88 were from small cities, 37 were from rural areas and 09 did not mention their area.

Variables of the study were formed continuous in quantifiable terms at interval scale of measurement. As semester system variable and research variable were the main concern, so an attempt was made to discover the extent of the relationship between these variables applying χ^2 .

Table No.3: Results of the students’ perception regarding Semester system and research

| Semester System and Research Preference | | | | |
|---|-------------|-----------|---------------|-------|
| | | Supported | Not Supported | Total |
| Research Preference | Favorable | 222 | 30 | 252 |
| | Unfavorable | 140 | 8 | 148 |
| | Total | 362 | 38 | 400 |

With the help of the χ^2 test, it can be observed the preference for the semester system is positively associated with the high performance of students in their research activities according to the perception of students of the University.

2x2 contingency table was constructed in which the “Semester System” was taken as an independent variable and “The Research Preference” was taken as a dependent variable, by analyzing the above, it is concluded that:

As per the table, 222 students out of 362 respondents highly favor the semester system as well as research and perceive that the semester system supports the research and provides better results. It argues that relation with research brings the students’ high performance in their research work.

There are 08 out of 38 respondents, who do not support both semester system and research; their perception was that the semester system and research are not favorable for students. From the available responses, 140 out of 362 are in the support of the semester system but they do not support the research. They prefer the semester system because they think that there is no relationship between these two variables. On the other side, 30



out of 38 of total categorically do not support the semester system but they are in the support of research.

If the overall result is compared to the available response and then, independent variables with the dependent variable, 362 respondents out of 400, supported the semester system, and only 38 respondents were in opposition to the semester system. On the other hand, in the response of dependent variable i.e. research, 252 respondents are in the support of the research and 148 are against the research.

It can be concluded based on the above analysis that the majority of the respondents who like to study in a semester system favors the research, and the students who opt for the research thesis have a better image.

Findings

The problem of the study was to know the perception of students of the university to observe the relation between preference for semester system and research, in the study the independent variable i.e. preference for semester system and dependent variable i.e. preference for research were defined. For the collection of the data, the questionnaire was used because the population was educated and was able to understand the purpose of the research. From the population, 400 convenient samples were selected. The relationship between this variable was labeled as supported and not supported.

The study aimed at exploring the relationship between dimensions. The study also focused on establishing a relationship between the variables. The alternative and null hypotheses were tested. The reason for this testing is to show and prove a strong relationship and preference.

The summary of principal findings is as under:

- i) 61.32 percent of respondents supported the semester system as well as research.
- ii) 21.05 percent of respondents not supported both semester and research.
- iii) 78.95 percent of respondents not supported the semester but supported the research.
- iv) 38.78 percent of respondents supported the semester system and not supported the research.
- v) Total 95.5 percent supported the semester system and 37 percent not supported the research.

The students' responses show that the semester system supports the research and improve the capabilities of the students.

Conclusion

Before undertaking this study, it was generally believed that students are not keen to take a difficult path to research work and write a thesis for the degree. The study proved otherwise, the majority of the students were found willing to studying in the semester system and doing research. As, semester system creates more competition among students. If nothing else, at least basing on empirical observation of this study, it can be concluded that the students in universities are keen to take on research. Through this way, the energy of the students can be utilized through effective research-based work especially in the field of science and technology because it is a need of time.

The results of this study clearly show that as per the perception of the students, the research is a critical component of higher education that is encouraged in the semester



system as well. Hence, whatever is done to engage the students in doing research will help them to attain the real objectives of education at the university. Changing the orientation of those who either did not seem interested or are not aware of the benefits of the semester system and undertaking the research may take a long time and considerable effort.

Theoretical Implication

222 participants perceive that the semester system supports the research and provides better results. These findings are in line with the previous study as Singh & Pravin (2016) who considers the semester system as more innovative and futuristic. Secondly, a study carried out by Perveen & Saeed (2014) is seems to be in resemblance to the findings of this study. For them, the semester system is good for continuous learning and assessment and a subject can better understand. This study also perceives the semester system as good for research and performance. This feature of the study is being supported by the previous studies such as Chongbang and Campus (2014) and Longkumer (2019) that have also identified the semester system as good for the passing percentage and innovative activities. The studies carried out by Mehmood, et al. (2014) and Umair (2013) have been identified by the researchers in accordance with the findings of this study. Therefore, this study has theoretical implications under the perspective of previous studies. Besides, the hypothesis of this study is being grounded in the theory of Cognitive Dissonance of perception as given by Leon Festinger (1956). The findings in the perspective of preference are in line with the theory.

Theoretically, this study contributes to a better understanding of the perception of the students about the semester system. It emphasizes and creates a relationship between the semester system and the promotion of research. The previous studies on this topic have identified the perception of the students and teachers about the semester system or annual examination system. The previous studies have given attention towards the curriculum and other essential components of the semester system on the basis of the same they have declared it as good. Whereas, this study is filling the gap by identifying the goodness of the semester system in the promotion of research. Students according to this study prefer the semester system due to the research. Definitely, this study has good and enough theoretical implications.

Besides, the findings of this study do have practical implications as well. This provides the guidelines to the policymakers, heads of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) as the semester system should prevail because it is good for research and innovations.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

- i) The research indicates that the semester system is an effective tool to run the educational institution; therefore, emphasis may be laid on the formulation of an effective system of the University which may support research and finding of innovation.
- ii) It is also recommended that in universities, research and innovative work should be emphasized.
- iii) The training programme may be organized for teachers so that they become in a better position to benefit the students.
- iv) The semester system may be introduced in affiliated colleges for the promotion of research activities and the tools and financial support may be provided.



- v) For private / external candidates, Universities should introduce a program where the students easily take classes and aware of the research.

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