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## **EXAMINATION IN SEMESTER SYSTEM: WHAT IS OBSERVATION OF FACULTY AND STUDENTS?**

### ***Abstract***

*The examination is an organized system of evaluating and estimating students' academic abilities and performance. It is a standardized procedure to measure quantitatively or qualitatively through verbal or non-verbal behaviors. It can also be defined as a means of measuring knowledge, skills, feelings, intelligence, or aptitude of an individual or a group. Both the annual and semester systems of examination are in practice simultaneously at university level in Pakistan. This paper is a case study that discusses the students and teachers' perception toward the semester system of examination at university level in Pakistan. A small sample consisting of 270 students and 45 teachers of different departments of The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan includes both the Bahawalnagar and Rahimyar Khan Campuses was taken from the representation of all the programs of the university. A 34-item questionnaire on 5-point Likert scale was administered to the students. Data was analyzed by using SPSS version 18. The results of this study revealed that most of the students disagreed with the semester system of examination due to a number of drawbacks like favoritism, biases, and subjectivity. The students criticized the other negative aspects of semester system of examination as well. Contrary to this, the teachers agree with the semester system of examination to some extent as compared with the students' perception.*

### ***Keywords***

***Perception, Students, Teachers, Semester System, Evaluation***

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## ***Introduction***

Generally, the examination means testing and estimating one's academic ability and performance. It also means to test the knowledge of a student through written or oral questions based on the prescribed syllabus provided for the test within a specified period of time (Collins & O'Brien, 2011). According to Hill (1982), examination is both a subject of research and the basic data for research. It is a vital part of the teaching, learning process, and educational development which determines the destiny of students and their life career. The efficacy of an education system, basically, depends upon the usefulness and effectiveness of its examination system. Examinations not only assess the competency of students' learning for admission but also for employment.

According to Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (Richards, & Schmidt, 2010-2017), any procedure for measuring ability, knowledge, or performance is called examination. An examination is normally a formally administered summative or proficiency test usually administered by an institution or examination board. The terms 'examination' and 'test' can be used interchangeably as there seems to be no generally accepted agreement regarding the distinction between the two.

The examination is a tool to measure the students' skills, knowledge, and abilities they have acquired during a specific time period. It looks like target, incentive, motive, or stimulus. It provides the motive force to both the teacher and students. An ideal examination system evaluates both the teaching and learning process as well (Duncan, 2012; Gay, 1985).

According to Page and Thomas (1978), the examination is a tool to assess the students' caliber in any area. It is also considered a mechanism for decision making about teachers and students. Examinations not only serve the purpose of certification of educational attainments and determine a students' standing on the scale of achievements and educational standards, but also helps foster accountability for institutions and their standing (Government of the Punjab: 1992).

### ***Brief History of Examination System in Pakistan***

The indigenous system of examination was started in 1857 in sub-continent with the establishment of the universities of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras. Since then the examinations have been under a severe criticism. Their validity, reliability, and practicability have been called in question. From 1857 to 1990, so many commissions and committees were constituted to formulate the reforms in examinations system, and their recommendations have been implemented and many changes have been brought into the system of examinations. Despite all these efforts, the credibility of examinations is still dubious (Aggarwal, 2003; Deakin, 1974).

### ***Functions and Objectives of Examination***

In the Educational Policy of 1992, stated a few functions of examination such as to:

- a) provide a systematic evaluation system to judge to what extent the educational aims, goals and objectives have been achieved.
- b) evaluate the students' academic achievement in the prescribed contents in a particular period of time
- c) assess the students' educational development in respect of personality and character building
- d) develop the students' study habits, planned research work and competition.
- e) provide feedback to the institutions to take steps for improvement in strategies
- f) make decision about any meritorious reward and scholarship for students (Government of the Punjab: 1992).

## ***Report of the National Commission of Pakistan***

The National Committee on Examination (1970) was appointed by the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research, which passed a resolution in 1970. It can be concluded as follows.

*'It is alleged that most of the defects and weaknesses of the examination system and due to factors prevalent in the educational system as a whole. For example, it is claimed that the curriculum is much overloaded, knowledge oriented, and of poor quality. The textbooks are defective; sometimes inaccurate, outdated, full of printing mistakes, and prepared somewhat haphazardly. Similarly, it is said that the teachers are poor in knowledge and skills without satisfactory pre-service and in-service training, not devoted to the teaching profession and not doing justice with their job and responsibilities seriously. The only prevalent tendency is to make shortcuts with the least possible efforts' (Government of Pakistan, 1970).*

The system of examination is attacked in a similar manner. It is agreed that it evaluates only a fraction of the outcomes of teaching learning process. It gives emphasis on rote memory, as opposed to real understanding, comprehension, and problem solving. It tends to develop poor study habits among the students and they keep avoiding any effort until the last month or so. Thus, no efficient efforts are made to develop critical thinking, problem solving, and positive attitude or study habits among the students in the classroom (Memon, 2007, Government of Pakistan, 1996).

## ***Helmick Report***

Helmick (1974) analyzed deeply the system of examination in Pakistan and pointed out some observations regarding the National Education Commission 1959. He stated that the complex system of examination in Pakistan has generated many complicated issues. It failed to create conducive environment to boost up the students' ability, creativity, and critical thinking. Common issues such as outdated curriculum, practice of cramming a selected contents, and malpractices in the examination have made the examination system defective and ineffective. Consequently, the system of examination in Pakistan failed badly to achieve the aims and goals.

Annual system of examination is that system in which the examinations are conducted at the end of each academic year. This system of examination has a number of drawbacks. It encourages lethargy in students. It destroys the influence of teachers among the students that is directly responsible for indiscipline. It delimitates syllabi that retards students' intellectual abilities and make them inactive. It promotes cramming and different standards of evaluation. Behavioral development of a learner cannot be judged properly in this system. It is extremely vulnerable to unfair means, unethical practices, chicanery, deceit, and fraud. Keeping in view these drawbacks and deficiencies, the semester system of examination replaced with the annual system (Patil, 1984).

In the semester system of examination, the semester means "half of an academic year, usually 16-18 weeks." It means that in the semester system the students would study half of the course. In the first semester, they will appear in the examination. Then they would study the next half of the course in the second semester and again appear in the examination. In a semester system of examination, one-year course is divided into two semesters and two-year course is divided into four semesters (Ballantyne, 2003).

### *Examination Reforms*

In December 1982, the Commission formulated the program of Examination Reforms and advised the universities to take suitable steps in this regard, beginning with examinations in 1983-84. This includes suggestions regarding the demarcation of the syllabi into well-defined units/areas of content with a topic-wise break down, replace of overall choice of internal options and the holding of examinations only after the requirements of minimum number of lectures/tutorials/laboratory work is fulfilled. The universities were also advised to take effective security measures to conduct the examinations in order to establish the credibility of the examination system, which have eroded over the past several years. The basic point, which the Commission intended to emphasize, is that students should be assessed continuously rather than being assessed at the end of the year or after the end of the two years.

## ***Implementation of Semester System of Examination***

The universities are gradually adopting the semester system of examination in Pakistan. This has been done because the conventional annual system, which conducts the comprehensive examinations at the end of the year, was extremely criticized by the intelligentsia, teachers, students, and the press. Accordingly, depending upon the infrastructure of each university and the findings of their expert committees, the universities are switching over to the semester system of examination in phased manner. The University of Agriculture Faisalabad was the first to adopt this system in 1968, Quaid-e-Azam University Islamabad adopted it in 1971, and the University of Karachi in the year 1974. Other universities have adopted it from 1975-76. The system is restricted to university teaching departments and some affiliated colleges conducting postgraduate teaching and has not been introduced at the Bachelor Degree Level. At present, there are two systems of teaching and evaluation, namely the conventional annual system and the semester system. The universities following the annual system hold their examinations twice a year, namely the first annual and second annual examinations and the universities following the semester system hold examinations at the end of each semester in addition to the periodic evaluation during the semester (University Grant Commission 1976).

## ***Policy Guidelines Approved by Higher Education Commission (HEC) Pakistan for the Implementation of Semesterization***

The National Committee on Examination System (NCES) constituted by Higher Education Commission, Pakistan in 2006, deliberated on the two systems of examinations such as annual system and semester system of examination, and the NCES issued a set of the following recommendations for the implementation and improvement in the semester system of examination (Parveen, Rashid, Iqbal, & Khan, 2011, Batool & HEC, 2007).

- i. All higher education institutions should gradually switch over for the semester of examination to attain harmony and uniformity at national level.

- ii. All the concerned staff of the examination system should be given relevant professional training on a regular basis to handle the matters related to semester system of examination effectively.
- iii. Choice of questions should be abolished in examinations to be held from year 2007.
- iv. Grace marks should not be awarded by the year 2007.
- v. The question papers should be set in such way so that the students' conceptual knowledge may be assessed.
- vi. Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs) and Short Essay Questions (SEQs) should be encouraged to evaluate students' academic achievement. Detail questions/Long Essay Questions (LEQ) can/may be used for the purpose to evaluate writing ability in case of the discipline of social sciences etc.
- vii. The practical / project should always be evaluated by constituting a panel of external and internal examiners, and marking of each examiner should be given weightage necessarily.
- viii. The process of examination should be made transparent so that the students can discuss about the marks with their concerned teachers.
- ix. It is mandatory to evaluate the teachers' performance by the students anonymously at the end of each semester in the classroom without the presence of the concerned teacher. The outcomes should be shared by the administration with the concerned teacher to teaching strategies.

The Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Pakistan were not much familiar with the semester system of examination before 2007, therefore HEC planned to set the guidelines, rules, and regulation to launch the semesterrization (Higher Education Commission, Pakistan, 2006).

Shirazi (2004) stated certain positive aspects of the semester system of examination. Its structure or schedule is very tight. The students are required to be very regular otherwise; they would face the consequences resulting due to attendance shortage. There are twenty sessional marks that make the students obedient and they avoid from mischievous behaviour in the classroom. These sessional marks also distinguish between regular and non-regular or non-serious students. Despite all these merits, there are many deficiencies in the semester system of examination.

### ***Review of the Related Literature***

The annual system of examination is replaced with the semester system but the semester system still has many deficiencies.

As compared the science subjects with arts subjects, there is hardly a precise allocation of marks and measuring for examination. The standards and grades vary from institution to institution, from term to term and from paper to paper in the same year. Each teacher does not possess the competency to set a reliable measuring tool to evaluate the students' academic achievement. Consequently, it will create dissatisfaction among students. Moreover, it looks rather difficult to apply the rules of semesterrization on a considerable strength of students appearing in the examination as private students. Furthermore, the local pressure affects the examination system. The students and their parents do not rely too much in internal assessment.

There are numerous chances of favoritism and subjectivity. This system may not be fruitful due to the lack of professional training for teachers. Students rely much on guessing the correct option in MCQs instead of comprehension. Teachers also feel relax in completing the prescribed syllabus within a stipulated time period (Fallows & Symon, 2000).

According to Yousaf, and Hashim (2010), about 16% respondents are against the semester system of examination and 56% of the respondents are of the view that semester system is more costly as compared to the annual system of examination. The majority of the

students agreed that the semester system of examination is involved with the subjectivity in assessing and grading the students' progress. Teachers show authoritative behaviour in this system. The majority of the teachers (80%) is of the view that there are a few drawbacks in the semester system of examination such as subjectivity and favoritism as compared to annual system. Furthermore, the teachers agreed that the semester system needs a proper training to run the semester system of examination successfully (Khattak, Ali, Khan, & Khan (2011).

Malik, Avais, and Khanam (2010) concluded in their research that the semester system of examination does not provide opportunities for the students to develop thorough concepts and in depth studies. The findings of Cates and Monk-Tutor (2010) revealed that the semester system has made the system of examination uneven. Surprisingly, the semester system of examination has faded the uniformity in the examination system. Furthermore, this system of examination is tougher, time consuming and more expensive.

As regards the teachers, they become more authoritative in semester system; their personal liking and disliking affects the students' marks also. The students are confined to their courses in the semester system. They do not bother to spare time for extensive studies. Consequently, their knowledge remains restricted and limited to a very narrow perspective. Another fault of this system is that courses are much shorter. As discussed earlier, the semester system is comparatively expensive; therefore, the poor students cannot get admission or continue their studies.

### *Objectives of the Study*

The major objectives of the study were:

- i. To find out the teachers and students' perception about the ineffectiveness of the semester system.
- ii. To give useful suggestions to improve the semester system a University level.

## ***Method and Procedure of the Study***

The students and teachers of university level who are studying / teaching under the semester system was the population for this study. A small sample comprising 270 students and 45 teachers of different departments of The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan including both the Bahawalnagar and Rehimyar Khan Campuses was taken through simple convenient sampling technique. Five different departments such as Commerce, Computer Science, Education, Educational training, and Management Sciences were chosen from three campuses. Ninety-five students per campus (18 from each department) for the representation of all the programs of the university and forty-five teachers (15 from each campus & 3 from each department) were selected randomly.

After having reviewed the related literature, a questionnaire on a five point Likert scale was developed to collect the data to assess the students and teachers' perceptions toward the semester system of examination at university level. Thirteen items (eight for students and five for teachers) were included in the instrument. The questionnaire was personally administered to the sample; therefore, the return rate was 100%.

## ***Data Analysis***

To analyze the data, students and teachers' responses were calculated according to the likert scale such as strongly agree 5, agree 4, neutral 3, disagree 2, and strongly disagree 1. Percentage and standard deviation were calculated at the first step. Later on, the results were presented in a consolidated table to state the students and teachers' perceptions toward the semester system of examination at university level in Pakistan.

## ***Results and Findings***

Each item was analyzed separately. A consolidated result of the study is given in table-1 and table-2 (Annexure I & II).

**A. According to the results presented in Table-1 (Annexure I)**

1. Out of 270 respondents to whom the question was asked about, 58% strongly agreed that the semester system increases the chances of favoritism and biases.
2. Fifty per cent respondents opined that the teachers' award unjustified sessional marks in the semester system of examinations.
3. About 37% of the respondents strongly agreed that the students have to bear an extra financial burden in the semester system of examination.
4. Approximately 36% respondents agreed that they could not spare time to participate in the co-curricular activities due to the academic burden in semester system.
5. The majority of the students (56%) strongly agreed that they could not prepare examination in semester system very well due to the non-availability of leave(s) during exams.
6. The majority of the respondents (38%) agreed that the drop out ratio of the students increases in the semester system because of the hard and fast rules of this system.
7. More than one third (36%) of the respondents strongly agreed that the students' exposure in writing skill affects due to the excessive use of objective type questions in the exams.
8. About 51% of the respondents strongly agreed that the equal time duration for mid (30 marks) and final exam (70 marks) is unjustified.

**B. According to the responses presented in Table-2 (Annexure II)**

1. The majority of the faculty members (73%) strongly agreed that the semester system has increased teachers' workload as they have to prepare the results themselves.
2. About 62% faculty members are of the view that their performance affects due to non-availability of professional training related to semester system of examination.
3. About 56% of the respondents strongly agreed that the students' do not remain serious thinking that the class teachers, who may be more lenient, will award the marks in the examination.
4. About 71 % of the teachers strongly agreed that the semester system increases their workload.
5. Sixty per cent teachers are of the view that they are influenced by the local pressure groups.

***Discussion and Conclusion***

Both the annual and semester systems of examinations are simultaneously in practice at the Pakistani universities. The semester system of examination is replaced by the annual system of examination due to the deficiencies and flaws of the annual system. The semester system is rather better than an annual system but it still has a few drawbacks.

As regards the present study, the students and teachers' perception is analyzed here. According to the results and findings of this study, the students perceive that the semester system increases the chances of favoritism and biases. The teachers award unjustified sessional marks in the semester system of examinations and the students have to bear an extra financial burden in semester system of examination. The results of the research done by Khattak, Ali, Khan, and Khan (2011) are similar to these results.

They are unable to participate in the co-curricular activities due to the academic burden even they could not prepare examination in semester system very well because they have to take the paper on a daily basis. Furthermore, the drop out ratio of the students increases in this system. The students' writing skill also affects because the majority of the questions are objective type questions in the exams. As regards the time given to both the mid and final exams, the students viewed it as unjustified because each exam has different weightage of marks. The findings of Cates and Monk-Tutor (2010) are similar to the results of this study.

As regards the teachers' perception toward the semester of examination, the teachers stated that the semester system has increased teachers' workload as they have to prepare the results themselves, and non-availability of professional training affects their performance too. They also found that the students are non-serious in this system of examination. Furthermore, they have also to face the local pressure to get the marks increased. The results of the present study are similar to the findings of the research done by Pathak and Rahman (2013).

### ***Recommendations***

Keeping in view all these facts, following are the recommendations for the improvement in the semester system of examination at University level in Pakistan.

1. The teachers should be fair to minimize the chances of favoritism and biases.
2. The teachers should award sessional marks impartially according to the performance of each student so that the students may be satisfied.
3. The teachers should encourage the students to participate in the co-curricular activities that are the integral part of teaching and learning process.

4. The teachers should also give the descriptive tests during session to improve the students' writing skill.
5. The workshops should be organized for all the teachers so that they may improve their competency after getting professional training related to the semester system of examination.
6. The teachers should try to work fairly and honestly so that they may not be exploited or influenced by anyone.
7. The time duration for mid and final term exams should be allocated according to the distribution of marks.

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