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A Critical Analysis of Choice-Based Credit System

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Abstract

The Choice-Based Credit System (CBCS) revolutionizes students' learning experience by offering a 'cafeteria' approach to course selection. This system empowers students to choose their courses, learn at their own pace, pursue additional courses, and adopt an interdisciplinary approach to learning. The courses are measured in terms of credits, offering a flexible and personalized learning experience. The CBCS is a student-centric educational evaluation system that enhances the quality of education and can be compared to the standard evaluation system at higher levels of education across the country.

Keywords: *Choice-Based Credit System, Cafeteria approach, Flexible learning, Student-centric, Interdisciplinary learning.*

Introduction

Education serves as the cornerstone of nation-building, and it is asserted that a nation's educational attainment mirrors its standing. Since gaining independence, India's education system has experienced significant transformations to address emerging concerns. There is substantial evidence that transformations continue in the education sector. The national and state governments are endeavoring to reform and innovate higher education. The University Grants Commission (UGC), a statutory agency established by an Act of Parliament in 1956, is primarily responsible for coordinating, determining, and maintaining the standards of higher education (UGC, 2018). There are 1,278 universities, 46,468 colleges, and 11,787 stand-alone institutions in India (AISHE, 2023-24), which are guided by the policies and guidelines of the UGC. The UGC advises essential measures to enhance university education in collaboration with relevant authorities, universities, and institutions. Since its inception, it has endeavoured to enhance the nation's higher education system in terms of equity, efficacy, and quality (Sarkar, 2020). Notwithstanding all endeavours, it has been seen that students have gaps in knowledge, values, confidence, and skills. The education was predominantly teacher-centric, with limited flexibility afforded to students. The assessment

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framework was extremely inflexible, relying on marks or percentages. These alarming findings compelled UGC to drastically change the higher education system (UGC, 2009, 2012, and 2014).

According to the UGC (2014), India's higher education system can become more flexible by adopting the Choice-Based Credit System (CBCS), an internationally recognized system. This system enables students to pursue courses aligned with their interests across various fields, while also allowing them to explore supplementary learning opportunities beyond core subjects to foster their holistic development. "The CBCS will undoubtedly facilitate us to benchmark our courses with the best international academic practices" (UGC, 2014). Since 2015, it has been advised that the CBCS be introduced in all higher education institutions and universities in India (Sarkar, 2020).

The Need for a Choice-Based Credit System

The implementation of a Choice-Based Credit System (CBCS) can help achieve several objectives in the higher education system. The primary reasons for implementing CBCS in the educational framework are stated below.

1. **To Uphold Equity, Quality, and Excellence in Higher Education:** CBCS is a fundamental assessment and evaluation system that offers patterns and flexibility. Although the pattern is typical, it considers individual demands and requirements. This system also considers individual learning pace, interest, aptitude, choice, and demand, along with a standardized grading style. One special feature of this pattern is its uniformity, combined with a sense of variety. Consequently, it contributes to equity in the education sector (Basantia, 2019).
2. **Globally Recognized Framework for Education and Assessment:** There is a necessity for an educational framework that equally values knowledge and skills, in accordance with temporal demands. Choice-based and credit-based education have achieved significant prominence in the global education sector. Many nations globally are using choice-based and credit-based educational and assessment frameworks, each with distinct terminology. Soon, the entire international education system will shift towards a choice-based and credit-based approach (Basantia, 2019).

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3. **To Sustain the Indian Higher Education System at Par with Global Standards:** The CBCS is crucial in maintaining the Indian higher education system at par with global standards. Many industrialized societies, including those in Europe, Australia, the United States, and Japan, have implemented choice-based and credit-based educational systems, acknowledging their importance. They utilize a choice-based and credit-based educational style, such as
    - European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) in European universities
    - National Qualification Framework (NQF) in Australia
    - Credit-Based Educational Systems in the United States, Japan, and others.

If the Indian school system effectively implements the CBCS, it will become comparable to those of many leading countries worldwide. Considering all these contexts and purposes, CBCS is widely accepted and appreciated in our education system (Basantia, 2019).

Methodology

The nature of the present study is qualitative; therefore, to address the proposed study, the investigator utilised qualitative research methods. To understand the implications, various perceptions of students and teachers, issues, and challenges faced by students and teachers, as well as policy recommendations, a thematic analysis was conducted based on the latest review of related literature on CBCS.

Review of the Related Literature

The CBCS has been instituted in India as a significant reform in higher education. The conventional educational system has many deficiencies, including an inconsistent curriculum, limited flexibility in topic selection, limited student mobility across institutions, a rigid temporal framework, a disparate assessment methodology, and a teacher-centric orientation. The CBCS was instituted in accordance with international best practices to afford students autonomy and flexibility in course selection, a standardized curriculum, a consistent evaluation framework, and the ability to pursue their education across multiple institutions and at their own pace. The dissertation, practical sessions, and tutorials have been given particular emphasis. There is a shift from the traditional teacher-centred approach to education to a student-centred approach (Chakraborty & Mahanayak, 2021). Interdisciplinary approaches are lacking, and value-based courses require attention. The

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solution to this dilemma is to offer students the opportunity to concentrate in diverse topics while concurrently engaging in several disciplines. Consequently, the UGC has launched many efforts, encompassing the creation and refinement of course curriculum, the introduction of novel examination formats, and the establishment of evaluation and assessment systems. The CBCS offers the educational system flexibility, enabling students to select interdisciplinary and skill-based courses that align with their interests and goals (Biswas, 2018).

Implementation of Choice-Based Credit System (CBCS)

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has taken various initiatives, including introducing a paradigm shift in learning and teaching methodologies, exams, and the educational system, as well as promoting innovation and improvement in course curricula. The implementation of a "choice-based credit system" aims to enhance the educational framework by allowing students to choose interdisciplinary, intra-disciplinary, and skill-oriented courses in accordance with their interests and aptitudes. The choice-based credit system offers opportunities and pathways to study key courses, explore learning paths beyond the core subjects, and foster holistic growth. For undergraduate programmes, the UGC has created model mainline and specialized syllabi, making them available to institutions to aid in implementing the CBCS (Kapur, 2017).

Improving the Quality

The CBCS represents an initiative by the UGC to enhance academic quality across all dimensions. Different universities in India follow varying methods in their examination and evaluation systems; therefore, implementing the CBCS will promote a uniform grading system across India (Phukan, 2015). The primary emphasis of modern higher education is quality, which can be assessed solely through a universally recognised evaluation system. Through the CBCS, this might be achievable. CBCS is crucial for higher education, as it encourages students to be sincerer, as they have the opportunity to choose the courses they want to study (Biswas, 2018).

The CBCS has been recognized as required to provide uniformity in the educational system, particularly at the undergraduate level. The Indian educational system is notably more heterogeneous, posing inherent problems for the implementation of a standardized

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evaluation system. Substantial innovations and inventions directly influence the quality of higher education. Consequently, quality is the foremost priority in contemporary higher education, and only the assessment system that has received universal praise may be used to measure and assess quality. The CBCS might enable such an outcome (Hasan & Parvez, 2015).

Perception of students towards the CBCS

The study's main conclusions were that female students comprehended the CBCS better than male students and were ready to switch over as early as the following academic year. Ultimately, the students appreciated how the CBCS system assigned distinct scores to the key dimensions. Decision-makers should be flexible and allow each institution and teacher to exercise their creative freedom in devising and trying out different teaching techniques (Barla, 2012).

The CBCS is crucial to higher education, as its implementation has encouraged students to engage in self-directed study aligned with their preferences. Sincerity among the teachers also increased significantly. Both teachers and students agreed that CBCS was student-centric (Sumitha, Krishnamurthy, and Winfred, 2016).

Boys' students with science backgrounds and their attitudes toward CBCS were more favourable than girls with art backgrounds (Roy, Khanam, and Devi, 2013). Science students have a more favourable attitude towards CBCS than the art students of GDC Women, Anantnag (Bhat, 2017). The workload posed no issues for the learners. The flexibility to select subjects from different departments did not impede core subject instruction. The majority of students favored the absence of dilemmas in selecting optional subjects, as they had predetermined their choices from the university's offerings well in advance. Students concurred that they may further their academic careers in alignment with their interests. A significant number of students believed that the CBCS had facilitated academic justice in evaluating our educational system (Chahal & Manan, 2017). A notable disparity existed in the attitudes of postgraduate students from the science and arts disciplines. No notable differences were detected amongst students, irrespective of gender (i.e., boys and girls), regarding their opinions about the Choice-Based Credit System (Hossain, 2018). No substantial difference existed in the perceptions of boys and girls regarding the workload in

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the choice-based credit system. A notable disparity occurred between the attitudes of boys and girls regarding the difficulty of subject selection in the CBCS and their perspectives on the choice-based credit system. The boys asserted that it had not exacerbated the situation, whereas the girls contested this view. No substantial difference was found in the perceptions of male and female students regarding the impact of the core subject in the CBCS and the choice-based credit system itself. A notable disparity existed between male and female students' perceptions regarding enhanced academic performance in the CBCS and their perspectives on equitable assessment inside the CBCS. Girls had a greater preference for CBCS than boys in several major features. No difference was found between the attitudes of boys and girls regarding their satisfaction with the grading system in the CBCS (Sarkar, 2019). In terms of gender, location, and stream, there have been no notable variations among the students. However, there were notable distinctions among the students regarding their programmes and courses, such as honours (Sarkar, 2020).

Challenges and Issues in Implementing the Choice-Based Credit System

Research assessing higher education indicated that the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) has augmented teachers' workload. In the CBCS, continual and internal assessment was predominantly reliant on written examinations and practical evaluations. The syllabus presented numerous elective courses, although only a limited number were being implemented in practice. Limited faculty and scarcity of resources might be the main reasons for this (Prasuhn, 2014). The approach necessitates additional time, and the syllabus is extensive, rendering it difficult to finish within the semester. Despite these challenges, the importance of internal assignments, seminars, and projects must be addressed (Mathrubhumi, 2012).

According to Prasuhn (2014) and Kelkar & Ravishankar (2014), the implementation of a choice-based credit system has increased teachers' workload. Most universities and institutes have accepted this new evaluation system for their postgraduate courses, but it still needs to be fully implemented. The teacher community and the students held different opinions and attitudes about this new curriculum and assessment method (Deuri, 2015; Chahal and Manan, 2017 & Bhat, 2017)

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A study on implementing the CBCS at the University of Delhi identified several challenges. Six undergraduate programs existed, and students were confused by the rapid changes. The examination department encountered challenges annually due to the introduction of a new pattern each year, while still needing to ascertain the list of institutions that selected specific papers. With the changes in the teaching pattern and subjects, students and faculty needed clarification due to a lack of clarity (Solomon, 2015). The choice-based credit system (CBCS), introduced by the University Grants Commission, has generated numerous challenges at universities and colleges in Andhra Pradesh. The semester system was intended to be implemented in the CBCS framework; instead, only independent institutions were conforming to the semester model. Affiliated colleges were not adhering to the semester system; examinations would need to be administered if a semester structure were implemented. At that time, the UGC had issued a model curriculum for undergraduate (honours) and undergraduate (pass) programs. The university in Andhra Pradesh did not provide an honours programme. No credit was assigned to the second language, and it was not compulsory to learn English, as it was part of the Ability Enhancement Compulsory Course, which offered options in Environmental Sciences or a Modern Indian language (Verma, 2015).

Conclusion

Every system has its merits and demerits. Although it has some limitations, it also has many advantages. Intuitive readiness, a favourable attitude, and optimistic thinking towards CBCS among institutional stakeholders are also important factors in successfully introducing and implementing this new system nationwide. Most higher education institutions (HEIs) in our country have adopted this new pattern at their convenience. Consequently, it is anticipated that it will assume a prominent role in the future national higher education system. The NEP 2020 aims to enhance the CBCS to promote innovation and flexibility. It states that higher education institutions would transition to a criterion-based grading system that evaluates student performance according to the learning objectives of each programme, thereby enhancing fairness and comparability of outcomes. It also says that HEIs should move away from high-stakes tests in favour of more continuous and thorough evaluations (NEP, 2020). The NEP, 2020 identifies the Academic Bank of Credit and Multiple Entry and Exit in Academic Programmes as two of the most critical changes that higher education institutions

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should implement. The UGC has amended the CBCS and established a new Curriculum and Credit structure for Undergraduate Programmes. The framework encompasses NEP proposals, including redesigned degree programmes; multiple entry and exit points; flexible degree options, including single and double majors; multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary options; and a curriculum that incorporates employability skills and academic subjects. The UGC has designed a new student-centered "Curriculum and Credit Framework for Undergraduate Programmes (CCFUP)" in response to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. It incorporates a flexible, elective credit system, a multidisciplinary methodology, and several entry and exit pathways. This new framework will make it easier for students to pursue their chosen field of study or professional route (UGC, 2022).

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