

# Choice Based Credit System: An Analysis



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## Abstract

The current higher education curriculum does not impart the necessary skills that would make the students employable adequately. There is a lack of interdisciplinary approach as well as there is a very little scope for value based courses to be taught. The evaluation methods are largely based on memory recall process. In addition, students don't learn to think and analyze on their own. The University Grants Commission has initiated several measures to bring equity, efficiency and excellence in the higher education system of the country. UGC has come with the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) program in which the students have a choice to choose from the prescribed, which are referred as core, elective or minor or soft skill courses and they can learn at their own pace and the entire assessment is graded based on credit system. The CBCS system allows a student to study what he prefer in his own sequence as per his interest. They can also opt for interdisciplinary approach. Students can opt for additional courses and can achieve more than the required credits. Inter college/university migration within the country and outside becomes easy with the transfer of credits. This means that it will be easier for foreign universities to come and offer courses in India. Students can opt for one part of the course in one institute and other part in other institute and this will help in making a clear choice between good and bad colleges/institutions. The students have more scope to enhance their skills and more scope of taking up projects and assignments, vocational training including entrepreneurship. The system improves the job opportunities for students. However, it is too early to say whether CBCS will be successful or not as this program seems to have certain limitations and shortcomings as the autonomy of good institutions would be compromised. It moves towards centralization of higher education. A common syllabus is neither desirable nor feasible as this will diminish creativity and lower standards in order to conform to common standards. The current higher education curriculum does not impart the necessary skills that would make the students employable adequately. There is a lack of interdisciplinary approach as well as there is a very little scope for value based courses to be taught. The evaluation methods are largely based on memory recall process. In addition, students don't learn to think and analyze on their own. The University Grants Commission has initiated several measures to bring equity, efficiency and excellence in the higher education system of the country. UGC has come with the Choices Based Credit System (CBCS) program in which the students have a choice to choose from the prescribed, which are referred as core, elective or minor or soft skill courses and they can learn at their own pace and the entire assessment is graded based on credit system. The CBCS allows a student to study what he prefer in his own sequence as per his interest. They can also opt for interdisciplinary approach. Students can opt for additional courses and can achieve more than the required credits. Inter college/university migration within the country and outside becomes easy with the transfer of credits. This means that it will be easier for foreign universities to come and offer courses in India. Students can opt for one part of the course in one institute and other part in other institute and this will help in making a clear choice between good and bad colleges/institutions. The students have more scope to enhance their skills and more scope of taking up projects and assignments, vocational training including entrepreneurship. The system improves the job opportunities for students. However, it is too early to say whether CBCS will be successful or not as this program seems to have certain limitations and shortcomings as the autonomy of good institutions would be compromised. . However, it is too early to say whether CBCS will be successful or not as this program seems to have certain limitations and shortcomings as the autonomy of good institutions would be compromised. It moves towards centralization of higher education. A common syllabus is neither desirable nor feasible as this will diminish creativity and lower standards in order to conform to common standards

**Keywords:** Choice, Credit, Curriculum, Transfer, Courses, Syllabus, Standards.

**Introduction**

Higher education plays a very important role in the process of nation building. All sorts of discoveries and innovations took place within the premise of higher education. However present higher education system in India is producing graduates and post graduates and does not impart the necessary skills that would make the students employable adequately. There is a lack of Interdisciplinary approach as well as there is a very little scope for value based courses to be taught. Students don't learn to think and analyze on their own. In addition the evaluation methods are largely based on memory recall processes. Presently the performance of the students reported using the conventional system of marks secured in the examinations or grades or both and putting all the pressure on the student at the end of the year. The conversion of marks to letter grades and the letter grades used very widely across the higher education institutions in the country. This creates difficulty or confusion in understanding the performance of students the students graduating from different universities and colleges based on grades. Also, the system is not effective enough in meeting/ empowering students to think or matters/issues independently. Due to lots of diversity in the in the system of higher education in India, there are multiple approaches followed by university towards examination, evaluation and grading system. Indian higher education system calls for necessary reforms to develop a learner centred approach as well as a globally claimed evaluation system.

Execution of policy and promotion of higher education comes under the responsibilities of University Grants Commission. To bring out reforms in Indian higher education system as well as to ensure the quality of Indian higher education and make it at par the world levels, UGC recently made Choice-based Credit System (CBCS) mandatory for all 400 public universities at the undergraduate and postgraduate level beginning in the academic year 2015-2016. In this system students have a choice to choose from the prescribed courses, which are referred as core, elective or minor or soft skill courses and they can learn at their own pace and the entire assessment is graded-based on a credit system. The main objectives behind the introduction of this programme are: improvement in quality of education, ability to match learners scholastic needs and aspiration, interuniversity transferability of learner, flexibility in completion of the course, standardization and comparability of educational programmes across the country. 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 liberalisation and globalisation 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. The syllabus of CBCS courses was centrally structured by the UGC and universities were only granted 20% to 30% autonomy or freedom to restructure the syllabus. National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) also gives special importance to ascertaining whether a Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) is in place in any given institution when assessing it.

**Need of the Study**

The CBCS offers wide range of choice for students to opt for courses based on their interest, aptitude and career goals. The CBCS allows a students to study what they prefer and at their own pace. They can also opt for interdisciplinary approach. Students can opt for one part of the course in one institution and other part in the other institution. With this system the students have more scope to enhance their skills and more job opportunities. However, very few research studies have been undertaken for this subject which could contribute to policy making. Hence the present research paper is being undertaken to bring clarity and newer vistas on the subject of CBCS.

**Research Methodology**

The research methodology towards producing this paper is mainly based on the own thoughts and ideas towards CBCS. Help has been taken from various research papers, literature reviews, websites, journals and newspapers. Limitations are bound to be there in a form of non coordination of many ideas towards the ideas of experts and theoretical nature of this paper.

**Objective of the Study**

1. To analyze the difficulties encountered with the traditional higher education system.
2. To analyze the basic features of CBCS.
3. To analyze the advantages and disadvantages of CBCS.
4. To analyze the challenges to CBCS.
5. To make suggestions for efficient implementation of CBCS.

**Review of Literature**

CBCS is new for India therefore very few research literature is available on this subject with respect to India. Studies conducted by research scholars and experts were reviewed and presented hereunder.

Stanley Jeyasingh (2005) pointed out that there exists a strong resistance to change from every quarter of the academic world. Students are not encouraged to take courses according to their abilities and interest and there is no freedom for the first year student to take an advanced course or a third year student to take an introductory course. Thorat Sukh Deo (2009), indicated that introduction of CBCS can familiarise relevance of new ideas concepts and knowledge to the concerned discipline. He

suggested that with CBCS, institutions need to pay a serious attention to the procedures for merit based admission. Institutions also need to review circular contents, term papers and assignments of various programs. The assessment of student performance should be carried out through combination of internal and external evaluation. Chaudhary Chetna (2012), reported that credit is the weightage given to a course, usually in relation to the instructional hours assigned to it. The option must be introduced for the students to choose additional subjects not related to their core courses. CBCS has the ability to accommodate diverse choices that students may like to have. It is also recommended to establish centres of excellence in all universities and provisions for core credits for different levels of academic performances, Core credits would be unique to the programme, and earning them would be essential for the completion of the programme. Elective credits are likely to overlap with other programs or disciplines of study. Das Amutha Joseph (2012) pointed out that required flexibility for the students to have a wider choice of courses, appropriate to their interests, needs and long term goals is not available even in autonomous colleges. She further pointed out that a credit system can function well only when we start to see out students as mature individuals, capable of making their own decisions. Alka S. Kelkar and Lakshmy Ravishankar (2014) indicated that teachers are the integral part of the system and valuable stakeholders, it is essential to understand their perspective and opinion about the CBCS to get its better implementation.

#### **Some Important Aspects**

Some of the important aspects of CBCS system are semester system, choice of courses evaluation system i.e. grading system, credit system, credit transfer system etc. These are elaborated as:

#### **Semester System**

The Indian higher education institutions have been moving from the conventional annual system to semester system. The semester system accelerates the teaching learning process and enables mobility in learning. The credit based semester system (CBSS) provides flexibility in designing curriculum and assigning credit based on the course content and hours of teaching. The program of one, two and three years duration is divided into two, four and six terms respectively of Approximate 6 month duration called semester. The learners have the opportunities to select courses from a lot of courses in every semester. The results will be declared at the end of every semester

#### **Choice of Courses**

Under CBCS system, students will be able to pursue three types of courses- Core Elective and Foundation. Core course will compulsorily be studied by the student. There may be a core course in every semester. This

course is compulsorily be studied in every semester as a core requirement to complete the requirement of a programme in a said discipline of study. Elective course is the course which can be chosen from a pool of papers which may be related or not related to student's discipline. It may be supportive to the discipline of study or enabling an exposure to some other discipline. This means that a student of physics can still opt for history as an elective..A study of varied subjects widens students horizon of knowledge and exposure. The Foundation Courses may be of two types: 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 aimed at man-making education.

#### **Evaluation System**

The traditional higher education system has a non-uniform performance assessment system putting all the pressure on the student at the end of the year. With the semester system associated with CBCS, not only will the curriculum be uniformly distributed, but one can also cover 10 subjects instead of five in a year as the student will spend more time with the faculty.

CBCS gives emphasis to continuous and comprehensive system of evaluation. It gives 40% weightage to internal assessment and remaining 60% to the final exam. External evaluation consists of one test for 20 marks, one assignment for 10marks, 5 marks for active participation in the class and 5 marks for overall conduct of the learner during class hours.

#### **Credit Transfer**

Credit is a unit by which the course work is measured. It determines the number of hours of instructions required per week. One credit is equivalent to one hour of teaching (lecture or tutorial) of two hours of practical work/field work per week. Apart from maintaining an account of credits acquired by a learner over a period of time for a wide range of courses, the main idea behind implementing the credit system is to make provision for learner mobility. Credit Transfer means that credits earned at one institution for one or more courses under a given program are accepted under another program either by the same institution or another institution. In practice this means that it is accepted that a certain chunk of learning has already been successfully completed by a learner. Inter college/university migration within the country and outside becomes easy with the credits. This means that it will be easier for foreign universities to come and offer courses in India.

A major system engaged in Higher Education in the global scenario is operating a system of credits. The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), the 'National Qualifications

Framework' in Australia, the Pan-Canadian Protocol on the Transferability of University Credits, the Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS) in the UK as well as the systems operating in the US, Japan, etc are already in a system of credit to measure the level of competency.

#### **Transcript or Grade Card or Certificate**

The word Grade is derived from the Latin word *gradus*, meaning, step. Grading, in the educational context is a method of reporting the result of a learner's performance subsequent to his evaluation. The academic performance of a semester and the cumulative performance for the entire program will be indicated by SGPA and CGPA respectively. Based on the grades earned, a grade certificate shall be issued to all the registered students after every semester. The grade certificate will display the course details (code, title, number of credits, grade secured) along with SGPA of that semester and CGPA earned till that semester. The UGC recommends the following procedure to compute the Semester Grade Point

#### **Average (SGPA) and Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA)**

1. The SGPA is the ratio of sum of the product of the number of credits with the grade points scored by a student in all the courses taken by a student and the sum of the number of credits of all the courses undergone by a student, i.e

$$\text{SGPA (Si)} = \frac{\sum(C_i \times G_i)}{\sum C_i}$$

Where  $C_i$  is the number of credits of the  $i$ th course and  $G_i$  is the grade point scored by the student in the  $i$ th course.

2. The CGPA is the ratio of total credit points secured by a student in various courses in all semesters and the sum of the total credits of all courses in all the semesters. It is expressed up to two decimal places. The CGPA is also calculated in the same manner taking into account all the courses undergone by a student over all the semesters of a programme, i.e.

$$\text{CGPA} = \frac{\sum(C_i \times S_i)}{\sum C_i}$$

Where  $S_i$  is the SGPA of the  $i$ th semester and  $C_i$  is the total number of credits in that semester.

3. The SGPA and CGPA shall be rounded off to 2 decimal points and reported in the transcripts.

Some institutions in India convert marks to letter grade based on absolute and relative grading system and awards the grades. There is a marked variation across the institutions in number of grades, grade points letter grades used, which creates difficulties in comparing students across the institutions. The UGC recommends adoption of nine-letter-grades including one-letter-grade for the absence of the student in the examination under CBCS system. The grades may be relative or absolute. The relative grading is based on the distribution

(usually normal distribution) of marks obtained by all the students of the course and the grades are awarded based on a cut-off marks or percentile. Under the absolute grading, the marks are converted to grades based on pre-determined class intervals.

Unanticipated factors and the general mobility of our society create numerous circumstances under which students must move from one institution to another without prior planning.

Under CBCS system the requirement for awarding a degree or diploma or certificate is prescribed in terms of number of credits to be completed by the students. A major system engaged in Higher Education in the global scenario is operating a system of credits. The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), the 'National Qualifications Framework' in Australia, the Pan-Canadian Protocol on the Transferability of University Credits, the Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS) in the UK as well as the systems operating in the US, Japan, etc are already in a system of credit to measure the level of competency.

#### **Advantages of the Credit-Based-Grading-System**

Following points can be said the advantages of choice based credit system.

1. It respects 'student autonomy'. It represents a shift in focus from teaching based to learning education since the workload is based on the investment of time in learning. It allows learners to choose according to their own learning needs, interests and aptitudes. It also helps the learners to pursue their courses at different times.
2. It records student's workload realistically. It 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.
3. It helps self-learning.
4. In this system students may undertake as many credits as they can cope with without repeating all the courses (papers) in a given semester if they unsuccessful in one or more courses (papers).
5. It offers more flexibility to the students allowing them to choose inter-disciplinary (known as extra-departmental papers) courses along with major courses, which makes education more broad-based.
6. It facilitates students' mobility by providing opportunity to transfer the credit earned at one institution to another. It also provide more transparency and compatibility between different educational structures.
7. It broadens the base of education system.
8. It is also helpful in employment as it offers knowledge of different interdisciplinary and intra-disciplinary subjects which may be helpful for that.

9. It has ability to take education system as par the global standards as it has the provision of offering different courses at the same time.
10. This system stresses on exercising maximum use of information and communication technology.

The current framework suggests allotting 50% of the total credits to core subjects, 25% to applied core subjects, 20% to interdisciplinary subjects and 5% for foundation courses. With this interdisciplinary approach, students can choose to develop different skills like communication, writing and debating through their electives and emerge as more employable individuals.

#### **Disadvantages**

In spite having some advantages stated above the CBCS have some disadvantages and practical limitations that can be stated as under:

1. To maintain compatibility among main subject papers and soft papers would be a very challenging task. Offering more than one program of different nature simultaneously would be challenging one.
2. In the view of shortage of teachers and infrastructure facilities especially in villages and sub urban areas the successful implementation of this system is doubtful.
3. It would be difficult to calculate the exact marks
4. Extra burden would be experienced by the institutions as CBCS has the flexibility in taking or choosing credits.
5. Numbers of courses are imposed in the CBCS, which is an overburden for the students as well as teachers.
6. Unfortunately a large section of the society suffers from inertia and is, therefore, reluctant to accept any change.
7. The new system which is planned for implementation has not been much clearly explained. Teachers, academic administrators and community at large are inattentive and unaware of the technicalities of CBCS system which affect their reliability, validity and objectivity. Additional time is required to prepare proper guidelines and manuals so as to enable the stakeholders in understanding the new system.
8. Mastery over concern subject would be hampered. Students can have only partial knowledge of any new subject chosen by the student as extra credit subject.
9. Seriousness of students will go away from the examinations as much weightage is given to continuous or internal assessment and evaluation.
10. Equalization of performance through it may discourage the talented students.
11. Research work and innovation would be hampered, as most of the time teachers have to be involved in setting papers and making arrangements for the examinations.

#### **Challenges and Implementation**

The basic motive of higher education is to expand academic quality in all aspect right from the curriculum to the learning teaching process to examination and evaluation system but the CBCS seems to narrow the role of education from encouraging the development of well rounded individual to training for marketable skilled workforce. It is important to emphasize the difference between curricula and syllabi which seems to be ignored in CBCS. There are challenges such as drafting the entire new syllabus, defining the credit system, motivating and training staff for effective implementation, encouraging students to stay involved throughout the term and improving attendance, and continuous evaluation.

The academic boards in the universities will have to play an important role to overcome these challenges and help in preparing the new syllabus in a definite time.

CBCS would increase the need for faculty and workload of teachers, as institutions are supposed to widen their offerings to provide more optional courses but unfortunately, there was no attention paid on reflecting upon the curricular or pedagogic issues involved. Thus instead of targeting the core problem areas in the Indian education system, the CBCS is set to increase the already existing problems in the higher education system. However, considering the diversity the implementation of CBCS seems to be a good system in assessing the overall performance of student in a universal way of a single grading system. What is needed is that the universities implement the CBCS following some rigorous elaborate steps such as review of curricular contents, subdividing into units and subunits as well as assigning numerical values and termed credits to bring more clarity to the faculty, students and examiners.

#### **Conclusion**

Thus on the basis of analysis of the present time education system and emphasis is made on the positivity of CBCS. Indian education system is expected to go under reformatory process. India should show the concern over the quality in education as the education in India is not competitive in terms of the quality and quantity with other countries. Therefore there is a need to explore the concept of CBCS. Undoubtedly, CBCS has added new vista in the existing system of higher education. But everyone should be well known with CBCS so that the opportunities can utilized in the best way. India is a giant country. The higher education is more complex in India with varied courses and stream hence maintaining harmony all over the country is required. It has been assumed that implementation of CBCS would have been succeeded in equalising the higher education system through the uniform evaluation system. Student autonomy, self learning, all round development of students, flexibility in

choosing papers, mobility of students and common syllabus are the major features of CBCS. But the existing differences between central university, state university and colleges in terms of infrastructure and academic environment, would pose problem in the success of this system. Therefore it would be advisable to have open discussion, seminars, workshops, on better and successful implementation of CBCS. Hopefully CBCS would bring a welcome change in the higher education system of India.

#### Suggestions

1. Following points could be considered as the suggestions regarding the implementation of CBCS
2. Every aspect of CBCS should be explained clearly to the students.
3. In CBCS System time is very short, so syllabus should be prepared accordingly.
4. Equal Infrastructure should be provided to every university, college and department if not, care should be taken about the gap between central university, state university and college.
5. Workshops, seminars and conferences should be organized for teachers and students to understand the details about credit system, grading, semester, credit transfer etc.
6. Professional training should be given to the teachers to handle it successfully.
7. Equalization in standard of education system should be maintained so that mobility students could be checked.
8. Choice assigned should be realistic and not just for name sake.
9. Evaluation reports submitted by all faculty members should be reviewed for transparency.
10. Guidance and counselling should be arranged for students while choosing soft core papers.

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