



TOWARDS EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF SEMESTER SYSTEM IN PAKISTAN: LESSONS FROM PUNJAB UNIVERSITY

Prof. Dr. Zafar Iqbal Jadoon

Director, Institute of Administrative Sciences &
Dean, Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences,
University of the Punjab, Lahore – Pakistan



Dr. Zafar Iqbal Jadoon has received his M.A in Public Administration from University of the Punjab and PhD in Public Administration from the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, USA. He is presently Professor of Public Administration, Founding Director of Institute of Administrative Sciences (IAS) and Dean, Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences. He is also the founding Director of Human Resources Development Centre (HRDC), University of the Punjab. He is holding a professorship at Department of Management, University of Stirling, UK. He looks after the Faculty and Staff Development Program of the Punjab University. He has published papers in research journals of international repute. His research focus has been on state enterprises, TQM, Human Resource Development and organizational ageing. He is presently focusing on governance, administrative reforms. He has an extensive international exposure. He has taught at several foreign universities including University of Southern California, University of Phoenix, University of Stirling, Utrecht University and Herriotwatts University. He has attended and completed Faculty Development Program conducted by the University of Phoenix in 1995. He is actively involved in community and civil society organizations.



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Prof. Dr. Zafar Iqbal Jadoon

Director, Institute of Administrative Sciences &
Dean, Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences,
University of the Punjab, Lahore – Pakistan

Prof. Dr. Nasira Jabeen

Institute of Administrative Sciences,
University of the Punjab, Lahore - Pakistan

Farah Zeba

Assistant Professor, Institute of Education and Research,
University of the Punjab, Lahore - Pakistan

ABSTRACT

Two types of learning systems are prevalent in higher education institutions of Pakistan, the annual system and the semester system. Both these systems have their unique characteristics; hence it would be incorrect to label them as good or bad. However, keeping in mind the dynamics of learning this paper proposes the semester system as a desirable system of learning. Taking University of the Punjab as an example of the transition from an annual system to a semester system, the author suggests, that for semester system to work in Pakistani Universities strong management and financial support is crucial as is insulation from restrictive internal and external environmental pressures. This paper covers the holistic perspectives of annual and semester system, indicators and conditions of effective implementation of semester system and evolution of semester system in University of the Punjab. It concludes with recommendations on how to achieve this transition effectively in our indigenous environment.

INTRODUCTION

Semester system is not alien to public sector universities in Pakistan. It has been around in one way or the other, fully or partially. The experiences of universities with this system are mixed. Some universities have succeeded while other failed in the implementation of this system. Different departments within the same universities have different experiences. However, presently a concerted effort is being made at government level to introduce semester system of education in all universities across the board. The Higher Education Commission is encouraging public sector universities to switch over to semester system. In Punjab, the Chancellor of Universities of Punjab Gen (R) Khalid Maqbool has directed all the Vice-Chancellors to convert all their departments to semester system. Consequently, public sector universities, especially those where the annual system is well entrenched, are confronted with two basic questions: 1) How can semester system be effectively implemented in a university which is structurally, financially, culturally, cognitively, and historically oriented towards annual system of education? 2) What should be the strategy to switch from annual system to semester system? Therefore, there is an urgent and greater need for documenting and sharing experiences of public sector

universities that have used semester system of education partially or fully, successfully or unsuccessfully, and have had experience of converting their departments from annual system to semester system.

This paper examines and reviews the implementation of semester system in Punjab University which has gained rich experience in implementation of semester system: it has first time introduced semester system in its two departments in 1960s with a great success; it started semester system in all its departments with one or two exceptions in 1973 and reverted back to annual system in 1981 allowing semester system to continue in the departments/disciplines which had no tradition of annual system; since 2000 the semester system is being increasingly adopted by various departments of the university in new disciplines and conversion from annual to semester system is also underway. Thus, there is a lot to learn from Punjab University for effective implementation of semester system in public sector universities of Pakistan.

LOGICAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The logical and analytical framework which guides the study of implementation of semester system in Punjab University is based on following premises: a) annual system and semester system are two different systems based on distinct paradigms of education. While annual system is based on teaching paradigm the semester system is guided by learning paradigm; b) none of the two systems is good or bad. A system, semester or annual, may work very effectively in one university and the same may turn into a disaster in other university. The critical factor in the success of either system is its effective implementation of rules and regulations; c) In general, annual system by design is best suited to Pakistan as the social norms (i.e., rule of law, merit, equality, transparency) supportive to effective implementation of semester system are weak in Pakistani society; d) semester system can only succeed in Pakistani universities if it is implemented in its entirety with strong management and financial support and is insulated from constrictive internal and external environmental pressures.

METHOD OF INQUIRY

The authors draw upon over 30 years of experience of studying and teaching under semester system in Pakistan and abroad especially in USA and United Kingdom. The author has also closely observed the rise and fall of semester system in Punjab University being a student and faculty member of department which has never been under annual system of education. Now while semester system is once again rising in the Punjab University, the author being part of the core management team and one of the strong advocates of semester system is contributing his share to its effective implementation and witnessing the process of change through which the University system, faculty, students and other stakeholders are going through.

In addition to experiential knowledge of author, the relevant record of the Meeting Section in the office of the Deputy Registrar (Academic) has been sifted through particularly the proceedings of the meetings of Academic Council, Boards of Faculties, Senate, and Syndicate where the decisions regarding introduction and termination of semester system were taken. The semester rules have been thoroughly examined using the logical and analytical framework developed for this study.

The students who have studied during the heydays of semester system, teachers who have taught both in annual and semester system, and advocates and opponents of semester system

were also selectively interviewed to capture various perceptions, images, and experiences of faculty of Punjab University about semester system of education.

Together all the above sources of information yields an interesting insight which the author believes is close to ground realities despite the fact that the findings of this study may not meet even the basic standards of scientific method of research. Nevertheless, this paper represents a good starting point to look at semester system holistically within the institutional and societal context of public universities in Pakistan. Keen observation and analysis of semester system in various leading universities with this approach will hopefully help conceptualizing and developing a Pakistani brand of semester system which is indigenously applicable and internationally accepted. This paper is a humble contribution towards this direction.

ORGANIZATION OF THE PAPER

The paper is organized into six sections. First section provides a quick comparison of annual system and semester system of higher education to set the stage for fully understanding the issues related to effective implementation of semester system. Second section provides a brief account of socio-cultural context of Pakistan which needs to be understood for any meaningful observation about the implementation of semester system in Pakistani universities. Third section briefly introduces the Punjab University to place the study of implementation of semester system in this university in its proper organizational context. Fourth section provides an overview of the history of semester system in the university to contextualize various developments. Fifth section reviews the implementation of semester system in Punjab University through close examination of semester rules related core components of semester system and their implementation. The management of semester system has also been discussed in this section. Sixth section draws lessons for effective implementation of semester system in public sector universities of Pakistan.

A HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE ON SEMESTER SYSTEM

The semester system is not only the examination system rather it is an education system which places more emphasis on learning rather than teaching. In simple words, it is a learner-centered system of education which puts more emphasis on building learning potential of students rather than imparting knowledge through rigid system of instruction. The courses are designed with specific learning objectives and outcomes keeping in view the learning needs of the target student group. The course contents, learning strategy, learning methodology, and learning process with specific techniques of assessment and evaluation of students are decided on course by course basis. To meet the learning objectives of each course for specific group of students, teacher autonomy and internal system of assessment through variety of methods including tests/examinations become vital for the implementation of semester system. A teacher takes the role more as a facilitator rather than a teacher in its strictest and traditional sense. A student instead of being recipient of knowledge delivered through lectures takes an active role as a participant and major stakeholder in the learning partnership between teachers and students. This learning partnership can only thrive in the environment of trust among teachers and students, teachers and administration, and teachers and parents. Trusting relationship among all the stakeholders can only be created if their conduct is guided by the norms of honesty, integrity, rule of law, merit, justice and fairness, equality. These norms not only voluntarily guide the stakeholders, but are also enforced through strict implementation of a system of rewards and punishment built in the rules and regulations and the incentive structure of the university which

is based on equity and fairness. Rule of law which means one law for everyone and everyone equal before law is a single most important norm which is the life blood of any effective organization or system at any level. It equally applies to both semester and annual system. The only difference is that in annual system everything is behind the curtain while semester system is open, and transparent.

In a university environment where there is a weak tradition of rule of law both semester system and annual system will collapse or will not produce the desired results. University of London and Oxford University conduct O-Level and A-level examination for domestic and international students as external examination bodies. Pakistani students go through these examinations and no one questions the credibility of their results and academic standards. There are success stories of both public and private universities/institutions running semester very effectively. The notable examples are IBA, LUMS, Agha Khan University, NUST, GIK and probably many other examples. All of these and others who are running semester system effectively share the following: 1) they started their existence under system of education; 2) they were able to insulate their system of education from the societal and student pressures through strong management system, autonomy, and strict implementation of rules and regulation; 3) the incentive structure provided enough motivation to teachers to contribute to the effectiveness of the semester system. The public sector universities especially the old and large ones with strong tradition of annual system, weak governance and management system, a typical civil service type pay and incentive structure, power and politics void of professional norms do not enjoy good track record in the implementation of semester system. This observation is equally valid for their annual system.

Indicators and Conditions of Effective Implementation of Semester System

The effective implementation of semester system in an institution can be assessed through a number of indicators that include: 1) curriculum develop ensuring well designed and coordinated courses with clear objectives, outcomes, assessment techniques, contents, deadlines of assignments, latest books and information resources without any overlap; 2) coverage of course contents within stipulated time; 3) regularity of classes; 5) timely and constructive feedback to students by the teachers; 6) Accessibility of teachers to students outside the class; (7) availability of information resources to students such as stat-of-the-art library and computer facilities; 8) highest level of secrecy and confidentiality in examination; 9) transparency in evaluation and grade; 10) timely declaration of semester results.

The conditions for effective implementation of semester system includes a well designed curriculum, clear rules, competent and motivated teachers as well as students, professional ethics, competent, honest and motivated administrative staff, strong and committed leadership at department as well as university level, examination information system, supportive socio-cultural environment.

A Snapshot of the University of the Punjab

University of the Punjab was established in 1882. At that time, the whole Punjab upto Delhi and Kashmir fell into its jurisdiction. Originally, the University was set up for teaching and examinations. These two functions remained intact throughout its existence till today. The University since its days of origin conducted all examination including Matriculation, Intermediate, Degree and Postgraduate Diploma. Over the years, a massive increase in

population overburdened the University though it managed magnificently with the given resources. However, to relieve the University of increasing pressure, Boards of Secondary Education were created for the conduct of the Matriculation and Intermediate examinations. Not only that some new universities were also set up to share responsibility of the Punjab University within their respective geographical limits. This process continues and in recent years, even within the geographical jurisdiction of Punjab University, several new universities have been established. In Lahore alone six new public sector universities have come into existence in addition to Punjab University. Despite these developments, Punjab University continues to be the largest university in the country. While the University was being trimmed externally, it has shown unprecedented expansion internally in terms of its academic programs, departments, and constituent colleges. Most of the developments took place in the last seven years since late 1999. The University has now 13 faculties, 6 constituent colleges, 78 departments, and over 50 affiliated colleges with over 26000 student body on campus and over 150,000 in affiliated colleges. The budgeted faculty positions are over 650. The number of Master degree being offered by the University is not less than 90. Being the oldest examining body, the University system by design is basically oriented to annual system though semester system has been in place in several management disciplines since early 1960s.

Evolution of Semester System in Punjab University

The semester system as it exists in its present form in Punjab University has passed through four phases since its inception in early 60s. Each phase offers unique lessons for effective implementation of this system in Pakistani universities.

First Phase (1960-1973)

The semester system came to the Punjab University under US Technical Assistance Program through USAID Mission to Pakistan under which two departments, the Institute of Education and Research, and the Department of Public Administration were established in 1960 and 1962 respectively. While the IER was established by the Indiana University, the Department of Public Administration was set up by the University of Southern California. Both these departments since their inception designed and implemented their academic programs under semester system under the leadership of a team of American professors and Pakistani professors educated at American universities. These departments were considered as islands within Punjab University having a distinct system of admission, teaching, and examination. These departments enjoyed full autonomy in the implementation of semester system with letter and spirit. The decisions regarding curriculum, teachers appointments, admissions, examinations, academic calendar were taken at the departmental level by the faculty under the supervision of management committee/board of governors. One of the professors who had taught at the Department of Public Administration described the semester system during 1962 to 1973 in these words:

“The teachers enjoyed a great of autonomy at that time, but at the same time they were very professional and their conduct was ethical. They knew how to maintain objectivity in marking while staying close to students. It was possible because they had experience of studying and teaching under system. The results were declared in time before the start of next semester in a transparent manner. The teachers used to show the papers and assignments to students. The system as whole was student-centred”.

The same observations were made by some of the senior teachers of Institute of Education and Research about the implementation of semester system in their institute. But unfortunately, all was changed when the University under the instruction of federal government decided in 1973 to introduce semester system in all its departments with the exception of law as a result, the departments already running semester system with reasonable level of effectiveness lost autonomy and became part of the larger system.

During the first phase of semester system, the scenario of higher education and socio-economic context was totally different. There were only two universities in Lahore, University of the Punjab and University of Engineering and Technology. The teachers were totally committed to their departments as there were not many options of part-time teaching outside the University. Paper marking was considered to be the only additional source of income especially under the annual system of examination. The Department of Public Administration was the only department which had evening classes for people working in the government and state enterprises which served as the additional source of income for the full time and visiting teachers. The life style in general was very simple and the same was reflected in the University. Educating children was not an economic challenge for the teachers. Very few teachers in the university used to have cars and these were generally those who spent sometime abroad for their higher education under government scholarships. It is interesting to see that campus houses which were built during these years did not have car porches. There was no cable TV and many other opportunities for entertainments except cinema. All this resulted into one thing that teachers were not overburdened with commitments other than teaching and research. The alienation which is observed now among the public sector universities was probably not there rather they were more contented and committed to the University.

Second Phase (1973-1981)

In 1973, the University decided to introduce semester system in all its departments. Though this decision was approved by the competent bodies such as Academic Council and Syndicate, the idea of semester system for all the departments was originated from the top, the federal government. Interesting debate took place in the Academic Council in its meeting held on MAY 28, 29, & 30 when the decision was taken that the semester system would be started from the session 1973-74 in all the departments. The proceedings of the meeting reveal that semester was recognized as an education system which gave more freedom to teachers in curriculum design hard work from both teachers and students. Creativity and originality was recognized as the natural outcome of semester system of education. However, several members expressed apprehension about the implementation of this system as they thought University environment is not ready for this new system pointing particularly to teachers, students, and the administration. Those members who were well versed with the semester system particularly from the Department of Administrative Science and Department of Business Administration put forth useful suggestions and highlighted the prerequisites for effective implementation of semester system in all the departments of the University which included:

- a) curriculum development
- b) orientation of the teachers
- c) willingness of students to learn
- d) financial and administrative support
- e) They proposed that several committees should be set up to address these problems and put up an action plan.

Some members suggested that instead of making it mandatory for all the departments to convert to semester system, option should be given to the departments. Others suggested that the new system should be introduced in few departments which are ready for it and University should learn from their experience. However, the Academic Council decided that semester system would be introduced only on campus, affiliated colleges would remain under the annual system of education. Semester rules for the entire university were approved and the Semester Implementation Committee was established to interpret and propose modification in the semester rules.

The implementation of the semester during this time period in the history of Punjab University was very poor. Inflated grades, delays in result, lack of transparency in results, no adequate curriculum development resulted in deterioration of academic standards which reflected in Federal and Punjab Public Service Commissions examinations. As a result, in 1981, the University decided to discontinue this system and reverted back to annual system with the exceptions of departments where there was no tradition of annual system. It appears that semester system was started in all the departments without doing proper ground work as it was proposed by the faculty members trained in semester system when the decision was taken in 1973.

The scenario of higher education and socio-economic context of the society during 1973-1981 was not very different from that of 1960-1973 except the students politics was on its peak often resulting into bloody conflict among rival students groups.

Third Phase (1982-2000)

During this period, semester system operated only in three departments which were originally started under semester system. However, these departments could not recover from the traumatic effect of the previous phase in which semester system was put in the general stream. The shortage of permanent qualified teachers and increasing reliance on visiting faculty added to the problems of these departments which resulted in the same problems on the basis of which semester system was discontinued in other departments. Since there was no tradition of annual system in the management sciences, the semester system in these departments survived despite being poor in implementation. Because of decentralized system and loose administrative control on the semester system, departments like IBA, MPA, IER, and Hailey College attracted lots of politicized students backed by student union. In the presence of these students, strict implementation of semester rules was a distant possibility. Others also benefited from this situation.

After 1985 the context of higher education started gradually changing when the government granted charter to two private universities, LUMS and Agha Khan University. This was a major shift in government policy on higher education. By early 1990s mushroomed growth of private institutions had already started in business education which created part-time teaching opportunities for teachers. In late 1990s, after IT revolution, the private sector institutions started gaining recognition by the government. Since there was no tradition of semester system in business management all the private sector institutions started their operation under semester system. During this time new time new public sector universities such as GIK and National University of Science and Technology also started their academic programs under semester system. With these developments, not only the semester system also gained acceptance in the

country, the teachers of public sector universities including Punjab University got heavily involved in part-time teaching in the private sector institutions.

Fourth Phase (1999-2006)

This is the most current phase through which the University is passing through. The scenario of higher education in the country has totally changed. It started with the take over of regime by General Pervez Musharraf. The higher education received a new emphasis in the country. The University Grants Commission was converted into the Higher Education Commission which received liberal funding from the present government. The new universities both in public sector and private sector have been established. At present over 110 degree awarding institutions exist in the country which are recognized by the HEC. Public sector universities also initiated self-supporting programs in addition to their regular programs.

The process of growth and expansion in Punjab University started much before the establishment of HEC. It started with the appointment of present Vice-Chancellor Lt. General (R) Arshad Mahmood. During his tenure the university experienced multi-dimensional growth. The number of students has gone up to 26000. The number of constituent colleges has increased from 2 to 7. The number of departments has gone up to 73. Several new programs have been started. BS/BA/B.Sc (Hons) four year programs have been initiated during these years. PhD programs have been restructured and started in many departments where there was no tradition of doctoral studies. Self-supporting programs in the form of replica programs have become a regular feature of all the departments.

Parallel to developments in Punjab University, Lahore has experienced unprecedented expansion in higher education during these years. The city of colleges and libraries has become city of universities. Over 25 public and chartered private universities are operating in Lahore. The general and field-specific universities are included in this count. These universities/degree awarding institutions are offering four years Bachelor's programs, Master's programs, and in some cases professional 4/5 years qualification in engineering and medicine. With this changing scenario in higher education, the opportunities for part-time teaching within Punjab University and other universities in the city have increased manifold. A typical teacher of Punjab University irrespective of subject is over committed within and/or outside Punjab University. Additional income through part-time teaching serves as a cushion for teachers in facing challenges of urban life in the wake of poor public services and rising cost of living.

Implementation of Semester System in Punjab University

In this section, the implementation of semester system in Punjab University is assessed against the standards or indicators of effective implementation of this system. It also discusses the difficulties in implementation of semester rules in the core areas of semester system. Some of these difficulties are PU-specific while others are social and cultural.

Curriculum Development

A well designed and state-of-the art curriculum is fundamental to any education system. Curriculum development covers a wide range of decisions about the academic program and individual courses such as credit hours requirement, types of course (foundation, core, electives, specialization, auxiliary), the level of courses (undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate), thesis,

projects, internship, course objectives, course outcomes, course contents, assessment strategies and techniques, course policy, text books, assigned and recommended readings, lesson plans, lectures, individual and group projects, tutorial/seminars. A course outline is an important instrument of planning and execution of curriculum in a semester system. A course outline is developed by a course instructor within curriculum guideline and policy of the university. The course outline is considered as a contract between students and the instructor for a particular course which must be provided to participants of the course within first week of classes. In a typical semester environment, the course outlines of all the courses taught in a school/department/institute and the course evaluations by students are accessible to students. The students before the start of a semester usually go through these documents to make decision about the courses and instructors for registration.

Semester rules for postgraduate studies authorize the course instructor to develop the course outline which is to be approved in a faculty meeting. This is to ensure that course instructors exercise academic freedom and autonomy with responsibility. It also provides a mechanism for coordination to avoid redundancy and overlapping in the courses. Learning from the past experience with semester system, the university has issued a curriculum guideline to help the teachers to learn the art of developing effective course outlines in their subjects. The curriculum development is also included in the courses designed for faculty development by the Human Resources Development Centre which is responsible for faculty and staff development.

The Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor have mobilized the faculty members, directors/chairmen on the importance of curriculum development through directives, faculty meeting, and public meetings. The Deans/Chairmen/Directors and teachers all recognize the importance of state-of-the art curriculum, well designed and well coordinated course outlines. However, in practice, development and coordination of course outline is left entirely to the individual instructor. Coordination of this important activity at faculty level has yet to be seen in Punjab University. This omission is sometime rationalized or justified in the name of academic autonomy and freedom and at times lack of administrative support or departmental politics is cited as an excuse for lack of coordinated course outlines.

Coverage of Syllabus

The implementation of course outline in letter and spirit is vital for accomplishment of stated learning objectives. In 1970s, one of the reasons for failure of semester system in Punjab University was lack of coverage of syllabus in a semester. The new semester rules addressed this issue by providing a mechanism for monitoring coverage of syllabus and class room activities. Each department should have an Examination Committee consisting of three to four senior teachers which has been given this monitoring role. The Examination Committee is to be appointed by the Vice-Chancellor. Despite provision of this committee in the semester rules, it is not being used to monitor class room activities and coverage syllabus.

The Vice-Chancellor has recently issued a directive to all the heads of departments/institutes/colleges entitled “Conversion of Syllabus into Curriculum” in which they were asked to send the detailed course outlines with daily lesson plans for each course. Such directives and initiatives from the Vice-Chancellor can only sensitize the faculty, but it is not possible for the office of the Vice-Chancellor to monitor this activity on sustainable basis. Coverage of syllabus and monitoring of class room activities can only be effectively done by the Head of Department through Examination Committee and the Dean. A quick survey by the authors reveals that in

many departments either Examination Committee is non-existent or it is not playing its defined role. On the other hand the rules are silent about the role of Dean's office on this subject.

Monitoring of coverage of syllabus and class room activity is being done in few departments where most of their teachers are either on contract or visiting and are paid handsome salary package. Monitoring of syllabus and class room activities in a mainstream department appears to be an alien concept in a prevailing culture of the university. Group politics, professional jealousies, inter-personal conflicts, and lack of professionalism among teachers together make it difficult for a head of department to take up this challenge.

Regularity of Classes

The success of semester system depends on the regularity of classes. Classes can be disrupted due to a number of factors, university as well individual related. Academic calendar with start and completion dates, dates of final examination, holidays (national and local) and strict adherence to it can ensure regularity of classes. Punjab University's academic calendar fits with well annual system, but it clearly stands in conflict with the requirements of semester system. Departments running semester system often runs into problem when such conflict occurs resulting in disruption of classes. Classes sometime are also suspended due to individual teachers' other commitments. Such occurrences are usually observed among visiting faculty members on which many departments have a heavy reliance. The academic calendar given in the semester rules has never been implemented. Several departments running semester system follow their contingency plan to cope up with problems related to semester planning.

Timely and Constructive Feedback

Timely and constructive feedback to students on their assignments, projects, quizzes, and examination by the course instructors is essential for learning of the students as well as for effective implementation of the semester system. The feedback in a semester environment is much more than the grades. Students expect comments and suggestions by the teachers on students' examination script and session work along with grades. In Punjab University, for all practical purposes, feedback is viewed only in terms of grade. Normally, neither teachers nor students are interested in this time-taking activity. Students are generally grade conscious. Neither good grader nor poor grader is interested in comments and suggestions from the teacher.

There could be a number of reasons for not fully utilizing opportunity provided under semester system for direct feedback to students by their teachers. First, most of the teachers and students have neither taught nor studied under semester system. Second, the teaching workload of a teacher and class size are not compatible to semester system. A teacher teaching three courses (9 hours teaching per week) in a semester to a class of 50 to 60 students may not find enough time for giving timely and thorough feedback to each student on two exams, quizzes, assignments, and term reports for each course. Third, teachers are awfully busy in part-time teaching in and outside Punjab University and are unable to give serious consideration to careful assessment of students' examination and assignments.

Under the above circumstances, teaching guides with ready made power point slides and ready made MCQs are a big blessing for teachers teaching day and night, in and outside the university, on week days and Sundays. As a result, both lecturing and assessment has become mechanical. Heavy reliance on slide shows in lectures, MCQs for quizzes and examinations

leave no room for detailed and constructive feedback to students rather it makes the life easy for both teachers and students. MCQs for teachers are easy and quick to check and for students easy to prepare especially when they have access to the same sources which are being used by the teachers. Thanks to internet and information technology which is a double edge weapon, a tool for learning and a tool for cheating and plagiarism. If this goes unchecked, the future generation of university students will have serious handicaps in thinking as well as in writing. The teacher will also be the likely victim of this excessive and irresponsible use of technology in teaching and assessment.

Plagiarism in assignments and term reports has become a serious issue in the semester system especially after availability of easy access to internet. However, it often goes unnoticed in the departments offering studies under semester system. Neither students nor teachers normally recognize plagiarism as a problem and those who want to address this issue feel handicapped due to absence of rules and lack of will to address this issue. The rules and regulation of annual system pertaining to use of unfair means in examination hall do not properly cover plagiarism. There is a need to clearly define use of unfair means and plagiarism in semester system. Even in case of clear rules, plagiarism will only be dealt with if teachers will have enough time and will to overcome this academic epidemic.

Accessibility of Teachers

No system can prove good without the commitment and availability of teachers to students in and outside the class room. In semester system the need for their availability is even greater. Universities running semester system effectively ensure availability of teachers to students. The practice of “student hours” or “office hours” posted outside the office of a teacher is taken for granted in a semester system. The semester rules of the Punjab University do not have any such provision. It is taken for granted that teachers will be available during the office hours of the university which is in fact not the case. There is a general perception that teachers are exempted from this requirement as their prime responsibility is teaching and research. The presence in the office is only expected from those who have any administrative responsibility. It is the hard reality of university culture probably embedded in annual system of education. No head of department can dare to go against this prevailing norm because they all have enjoyed this privilege during the time when they were not the heads and partly due to peer pressure. Thus, accessibility of teachers to student in Punjab University is considered to be a voluntary act. There is nothing which can be done to make teachers available to students if they are themselves not willing. The number of such teachers is increasing due to their heavy commitments outside their departments. In other words, ‘moonlighting’ among teachers is a growing phenomenon which does not go well with the semester system. The existing rules do not prohibit the teachers willing to teach outside their department even during the office hours.

Availability of Information Resources

Access to state-of-the-art library and computing facilities is pre-requisite of an effective semester system. The University of the Punjab has no shortage of libraries and computing facilities. Each department has its own library in addition to the main library which has a central computing facility. The departments also have their own computing facilities in some cases available from 8:00 am till 10:00 pm. Internet is available in all the hostels. Students are allowed to keep their personal computer in hostels. HEC’s databases for online journals are available to both teachers and students. All the departments can use their savings from their self-supporting

funds for purchase of computers and books/journals without the approval of the Vice-Chancellor. The physical size of the campus and unequal availability of funds, university or self-supporting, among departments may well create hindrance in access to these resources for some students which may be overcome through measures to avoid redundancy through developing a centralized library system. At present, students of one department are not allowed to use the library of other departments which is against the very spirit of semester system. There is a need to wind up departmental libraries and set up libraries at faculty levels in different blocks giving access to all students.

Secrecy and Confidentiality

In semester system, all examinations are held at departmental level. Staff preparing examination books and question papers is local. Result compilation is done at the departmental level. Students can easily approach them. Therefore, it is important that heads of department keep strict control over the staff engaged in examination matters. In case of departments having limited number of students and programs, it may not be serious issue, but in case of large student body and more than program it is important that strict vigilance is exercised through a formal system of control over examination matters. To ensure secrecy and confidentiality, an examination cell is to be created in each department with exclusive responsibility of examination affairs. General staff assigned the examination duty with other office duty diffuses the responsibility. The examination cell of each department should work without exception under a faculty member who should be exempted from teaching load. In the absence of such administrative arrangements, decentralized examination under semester system shall always be vulnerable to neglect and corruption.

Transparent and Timely Results

The annual system of examination due to maintaining strict anonymity provides safeguard to victimization, discrimination, and favoritism in evaluation. It is generally believed that students under semester system are vulnerable to such tendencies. However, critics of semester system forget that if anonymity protects the students against victimization or favoritism in annual system, transparency protects them in a semester system. The semester rules of the Punjab University make it mandatory for the teacher concerned to show scripts of examination, quizzes, and assignments to students. In case a student is not satisfied with his/her award even after checking answer book or clarification from the teacher, he/she may make a written complaint to the head of department who will refer the case to the Examination Committee. The decision of the committee will be final.

Timely results of mid-term examination, quizzes, assignments, and submission of final awards within one week after final examination is not only required for transparency but is also a pre-requisite for declaration of semester result before the start of the next semester. The students who do not meet the GPA/CGPA requirement for promotion can not be dropped if the result of the semester is not declared before the start of a next semester. This is a chronic problem in many departments running semester system. Late submission of results by teachers and not declaring semester results in time is such a serious violation which not only de-motivates the good students it also makes sub-standard students liability of the department.

It is often difficult for a head of department to discipline his/her teachers who should be supposedly driven by their own sense of responsibility and professional ethics. It becomes more

difficult when teachers are politically divided into groups and are united at the platform of Academic Staff Association against the administration even if they are their own colleagues. Indiscipline is the natural outcome of this paradox. Command and control in strict sense can not work in a university or in any professional organization. Professional ethics or incentives are the only alternate instruments which can ensure discipline among highly educated and trained professionals. In Punjab University, like other public sector universities, both these instruments are very weak. Performance pay or performance based incentives is a distant dream in the existing pay structure embed in the concept of job security.

Conditions for Effective Implementation

The conditions for effective implementation identified earlier in the paper includes, competent and committed leadership at the university and departmental level, competent and motivated teachers, good and motivated students, and clear and enforceable semester rules.

At university level, commitment to semester system is not an issue. The Vice-Chancellor has consistently demonstrated his commitment with this system. Several initiative taken in the University are the outcome of their commitment and support such as curriculum development, curriculum guideline, training of teachers, revised semester rules, revival of Semester Implementation Committee, increase in faculty positions, generous funding for library and computers, peer review of departments and above all restructuring of faculties. These initiatives provide an environment conducive for effective implementation of semester system.

The leadership and management needed at department level for effective implementation of this decentralized system of education is a challenge for which the heads have to be prepared. The primary responsibility of implementation lies with the chairmen and directors. In other words, it is the head of department who have to face pressure from students and parents and invite trouble from his colleagues if he decides to maintain strict academic discipline and implements the semester rules in letter and spirit regarding attendance, drop outs, coverage of syllabus, regularity and punctuality of teachers, and timely declaration of results. According to the former Director of IBA, Karachi and Vice-Chancellor of University of Karachi, “the head of department can only implement semester rules if he can afford to be unpopular among his colleagues, students and their parents” In management, this is called a leadership challenge.

There is no dearth of competence and commitment in Punjab University. Despite structural and financial limitations, University of the Punjab being the oldest and largest public university and by virtue of its academic excellence, and geographical location in the country and province, has always been able to attract good faculty. University has maintained its position and status in the country through competence and commitment of the faculty despite internal and external constraints being a public institution. However, motivation of teacher these days is a problem which has serious implications for implementation of the semester system. Low motivation of teachers for utilizing full potential for teaching and research under semester system is purely an economic issue. Punjab University teachers are a hot commodity in the teaching market, internal as well as external due to wide gap between demand and supply of good teachers as a result of proliferation of colleges and universities in Lahore. National Pay Scales of university teacher with a secure job can only motivate teachers to stay in the university but are not in any sense motivator to put up excellent performance needed for effective implementation of semester. This is an administrative issue which needs immediate attention. TTS is no solution to this problem, therefore, it should be addressed and some university specific policy should be

worked out. Any policy option which ensures competitive salary for teachers would work if followed by strict discipline and complete ban on teaching outside the department. Pay for performance may also be introduced to offer incentive for good performance. Until this is done, skepticism about the effective implementation of semester system is justified even among those who are ardent supporters of this system.

A good and motivated student body is a precondition for effective implementation of semester system. The students in Punjab University are selected on merit (marks obtained in BA/BSc) which is at time very deceptive especially in case of professional disciplines such as management. To overcome this issue test has been introduced in some departments for admission. Interview has yet to gain acceptability as one of the components of admission process. By and large, student body of Punjab University is relatively very good. However, motivation of students and their willingness to learn is an issue. Pakistani students, unlike students in the western societies, are financially dependent on their parents even up to university level. They do not have an attitude of ‘value for money’ which is a norm among students in the industrialized world where they earn and pay for their education. Low fee structure of Punjab University further adds to erosion of motivation of students as well as their parents. Neither parents nor students value ‘the free lunch’ being provided by the University in the form of low fee and elaborate and magnificent facilities. It has been observed that the students of self-supporting programs who pay relatively higher fee are more serious in their studies the students of regular programs. It should not taken as an argument for raising the fee of Punjab University rather it call for rigorous academic programs, high standards, and strict discipline, which is only possible through competent and motivated faculty and strong leadership at the department and faculty level.

Clear, comprehensive, and enforceable rules, is one of the core requirements for effective implementation of semester system. The current Regulations for Postgraduate Studies were issued by the Punjab University in 2004 which is a revised version of regulations issued in 1979 and 2004. These regulations provide a reasonable legal framework for semester system, but it only applies to postgraduate studies. There is a need for continuous review and analysis of these rules to make them current. Semester Implementation Committee provided in the semester rules provides a mechanism for continuous improvement in the semester system. This committee is responsible for providing support to the departments, monitoring of implementation of semester system, addressing issues related to the implementation, and recommending necessary amendments in the rules. So far, the semester committee has been dormant. There is a need for active role of this committee.

Lessons from Punjab University

Two questions were raised in the beginning of this paper: 1) what should be the strategy for change? 2) how can a semester system be effectively implemented in a university which is structurally, financially, culturally, and historically oriented towards annual system? These questions are relevant to all the public sector universities of Pakistan that are converting from annual to semester system. The review and analysis of semester system in Punjab University in this paper offers lesson in both these areas, strategy for change and effective implementation of the system.

Change Strategy

The decision to switch over from annual to semester system is a strategic decision which has implications for the entire university both from management and academic standpoint. It requires change in the structure, budget, curriculum, and behavior of stakeholders i.e., students, faculty, administrators. When such a massive change is needed, it is quite natural that people resist to change both explicitly and implicitly, overtly and covertly, manifestly and latently. Therefore, management of change becomes crucial for success of any such change. The right strategy and viable action plan are needed for smooth transition.

Punjab University's experience with the semester system during 1973-1979 reveals that imposition of the new system from the above without proper homework was the basic reason for its failure. The federal government was primarily interested in controlling the students on campuses through this system. This was a political initiative rather than a step towards improving the quality of education. Neither the teachers nor the students were ready for the new system of education. The collective wisdom reflected in the proceedings of the meeting of various bodies of the university was for gradual implementation of the semester system with proper homework, but command from the government was affirmatively responded by the university. The semester system was implemented in all the departments/institutes with a very few exceptions which failed miserably to the extent that university had to revert back to annual system.

Punjab University has definitely learnt from its earlier experiences with the semester system. It is now being implemented gradually on voluntary basis. The departments have been given a choice. The strategy of the present Vice-Chancellor who is leading this change is "persuasion not imposition" and "evolution not revolution". The faculty has been prepared for this change through a series of meeting, lectures, and training programs. This time the launching of semester system is not politically motivated rather it is a sincere move toward quality assurance. Curriculum guidelines, new semester rules, revival of Semester Implementation Committee, training of teachers, regular meetings of Selection Board and other statutory bodies, two days weekend, are some of the initiatives taken by the current leadership contribute towards creating a environment conducive to semester system.

Implementation of Semester System

A university which is basically designed for annual system of education and has implemented this system for decades develops a cognitive identity or in other words a mindset which view, define, and interpret problems and issues of semester system from annual system's standpoint. This has exactly happened in Punjab University. For example, there is no concept of missing classes by students in a semester system. In the semester rules of Punjab University a student is automatically exempted from 20% attendance. Only 80% attendance is required to sit in the final examination of a course. This rule has emerged from the tradition of annual system in which 70% attendance is required for appearing in an annual examination. There are several other areas where a real spirit of semester system has been overpowered by annual system's way of looking at academic and administrative issues such as teachers workload, teachers remuneration for marking, academic calendar. It is absolutely necessary that semester system should be implemented within its own spirit and traditions.

Effective implementation of semester requires a great deal of discipline among the heads, teachers, staff, and the students. Rule of law is the key to discipline. The availability of students, accessibility of teachers, coverage of syllabus, timely results, transparency and accountability can be achieved if the given rules are implemented with letter and spirit. In Punjab University, the record of implementation of semester rules is not very consistent across various departments. For example, some departments implement attendance rules religiously while others ignore it. Dropping a student who fails to obtain a required GPA/CGPA is also a difficult decision for many heads of departments. A student who is caught cheating during the examination or commit plagiarism in session work is generally set free because it seems difficult for the chairman and teachers to take stern punitive action against their own students. Making teachers to follow the semester rules regarding curriculum, punctuality, results, coverage of syllabus by a head of department is the most unpleasant and terrible job. The head of department who does all these things are vulnerable to all kinds of pressure, intrigue, blackmailing, and exploitation by students, parents, and their own colleagues. Easy escape from these pressures is to adopt annual system. The other way is to design and structure a mechanism for administrative buffering which protect the implementers from negative pressures and enhance their pressure absorbing capacity.

There are several semester rules of the University which in one way or the other serves as a buffer against constrictive forces on implementation of semester system. For example, Departmental Semester Committee may serve as a buffer between students and the head of department. The sharing of result with the class provides teachers with a shield against any favoritism. However, the existing rules are neither sufficient in this regard. The office of Dean has not role in the monitoring and supervision of semester implementation. The Controller of Examination has also been kept away from the implementation of semester system in individual department except that he is a member of Semester Implementation Committee. These offices can play a great role in providing buffering support to the individual departments through mandatory reporting requirements regarding time table, results, course outlines, coverage of syllabus, etc. Central reporting system through a well managed information system can be of a great help.

The teachers' over-commitment due to part-time teaching within and outside university seriously affect the quality of teaching in a semester system. This is a serious problem which is being addressed now. One way to address this issue is to put teachers on double salary with a defined workload of teaching both in the morning and evening classes and no one should be allowed to teach outside their department or faculty.

CONCLUSION

This paper reviewed the experiences of Punjab University with the semester system. It is evident that the University has learnt from its past experience in implementation of semester system. It has taken preemptive measures for effective implementation of this system when it decided in 2000 for the second time to adopt this system. There are some cultural impediments to effective implementation at the departmental level. It is often difficult for the head of department and teachers to face pressures from their students and parents. To protect them from pressures and increase their pressure absorbing capacity, plugging buffering mechanism in the system is the only solution. The ground realities about Punjab University highlighted in this paper are in fact cultural realities of Pakistan which surface in any decentralized activity which requires self-governance. The study of implementation of semester system in Punjab University provides an interesting insight of organization behavior in public sector universities and it uncovers the new

socio-cultural and economic realities surrounding the teaching profession which are often discussed in informal gathering of teachers. The perceptions and observations of many colleagues have been put boldly in a systematic way in order to look for solutions. The solutions will come when the problems will be discussed openly and frankly, open confessions are made, introspection becomes the norm, and soul searching is taking as a strategy for bringing change at individual as well as at university level. This paper should be seen as a modest attempt towards this direction.