

Choice-based credit system: boon or bane?

Alka S. Kelkar and Lakshmy Ravishankar

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has made it compulsory to implement choice-based credit system (CBCS) in all undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) courses under the XI Plan¹. While many universities/autonomous institutions have already implemented the same, Mumbai University made it compulsory in 2011. By 2013, the entire UG and PG programmes became credit-based. The main objectives of introducing such programmes by UGC are: Need for reforms in higher education; enhanced learning opportunities; ability to match learners' scholastic needs and aspirations; inter-university transferability of learners; improvement in quality of education and excellence; greater flexibility to complete the course; standardization and comparability of educational programmes across the country.

According to UGC guidelines, in the new system there is a shift in focus from teacher-centric to learner-centric education. Emphasis is on studying/learning and not on teaching, with the learner being at the centre stage of all academic transactions.

Teachers being an integral part of the system and valuable stakeholders, it is essential to understand their perspective and opinion about the CBCS. The present study analyses the teachers' opinions, problems faced and recommended suggestions for better implementation of the CBCS.

The study involved collecting data by administering a four-part questionnaire under the following headings. These were evaluated on a five-point grading scale: Objectives of CBCS – whether they have been met; problems faced by teachers in implementing the CBCS; conduct of the credit system; methodology evolved to adapt/change to CBCS.

As the problems faced by arts, science and commerce faculty are similar, the sample for the study comprised of teachers from all the three faculties. While universities in Lucknow, Guwahati, Garhwal and Kumaon do not follow the CBCS (according to the response received from the faculty affiliated to these universities), request for feedback from faculty members of other universities in the

southern and western regions, did not elicit any response. So the study basically involves faculty members from colleges affiliated to Mumbai University. Fifty teachers were given the questionnaire and 40 of them from nine colleges responded to the same.

The break-up is as follows: arts: 15; science: 16 and commerce: 9. The first part of the questionnaire was related to the following objectives of CBCS and whether they were achieved. Improvement in teaching-learning, teaching methodology, classroom performance, class attendance, exam results; helping advanced and slow learners; development of students; interactive learning – subject, content and application.

Figure 1 shows that 42% of the teachers agreed that the objective of CBCS was achieved, 39% felt that they were not met and 18% were uncertain.

In response to the question whether CBCS emphasizes on only teaching or evaluation, or both, the feedback was mixed – majority (62.5%) felt that the emphasis is on evaluation only, while 20% felt that the emphasis was on teaching only and 15% felt that both teaching and evaluation were given equal weightage in the CBCS.

In response to the problems faced by teachers in the implementation of the credit system, the following points were evaluated: class size, teaching hours,

maintenance of records, time spent on evaluation, work load, stress levels and preparation time.

Practically all the respondents felt that the increased class size was a major hurdle in the successful implementation of the credit system. In the first year programme of the UG commerce and science faculties, on an average, there are about 100 students in a class and many colleges have nearly four and five divisions, accounting for nearly 500 students each in the first year B Com and B Sc programmes. There was a unanimous response that the new system resulted in less teaching hours, as emphasis was on evaluation and most of the time was spent on setting exam papers and evaluating them. Another major problem which had a 100% response was the lack of storage space for maintaining the projects/assignments and other records of each student. Majority of the respondents claimed that the CBCS has increased the workload and along with it the stress levels of the teachers.

The CBCS emphasizes on continuous evaluation with 40% weightage given to internal assessment and 60% to the final exam. Internal assessment comprises one test for 20 marks, one assignment for 10 marks and 10 marks (5 marks each) for active participation in class and overall conduct of the student in class. In response to the conduct of the credit

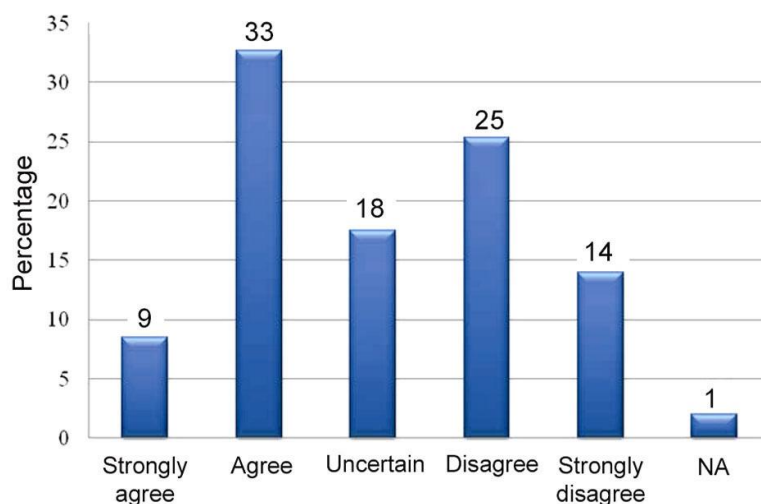


Figure 1. Results of the study – objective of credit-based system.

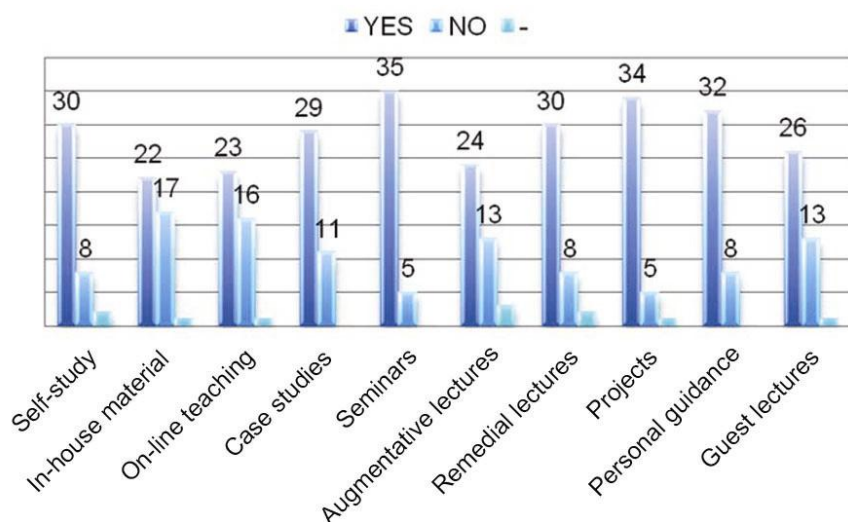


Figure 2. Response to the different methodologies adapted.

system, with respect to the internal assessments, the following feedback was received.

- Fifty-five per cent of the respondents stated that the students are not serious about the internal tests and assignments.
- Only 25% of the respondents agreed that tests and assignments have improved conceptual knowledge and analytical skills of the student.
- Forty-eight per cent of the respondents stated that internal assessments, only test the rote memorization skills of the student.
- Seventy-five per cent of the respondents felt that the credit system does not help students retain what they have studied in the previous semester.
- Thirty-five per cent of the respondents agreed that internal assessments have helped improve pass percentage.

With respect to the marks for class participation and attendance, there was a 50–50 response with some teachers believing that they are justified, while others disagreeing with the same. In a class of more than 100 students, it is difficult to know each student individually, and then to give marks for their participation is a big challenge. Often these marks are kept as a buffer to pass a student.

With respect to methodologies evolved by teachers to adapt to the credit-based system, majority have come up with newer methods of teaching and learning like use of case studies, seminar presentations, industrial visits, generating in-house study materials and on-line study material (Figure 2).

The idea of implementation of the credit system was to allow greater flexibility for students to opt for various interdisciplinary courses, and to bring academic programmes on par with the standards of international universities and premier Indian institutions. Whether this will be achieved is something which only time will tell and one will have to wait and watch.

What ails the implementation of the credit system? While many top institutes in India like IITs, ICT, etc. follow the credit system, one needs to see why it is successful there. The most valid reason is that although the class size is big, every teacher handling the course is assigned several teaching assistants who help in conducting tutorials and in evaluation. The class of 250 is split into smaller groups of 25–30 students and once a week, tutorial sessions are conducted with the help of teaching assistants. Students are given problem sheets and the

class discusses the same with the assigned tutors. As a result the burden on the teacher is reduced considerably and he/she can concentrate on the teaching. This would be wishful thinking for UG teachers, who have to assess nearly 100 projects/assignments at times, besides the additional workload assigned to them.

Some of the suggestions which have been put forth by the teachers in the present study are as follows.

- Reduce class size to improve student–teacher ratio (suggested 1 : 50).
- Teaching assistants to be appointed to assist the teachers in assessment and tutorials.
 - Term period to remain fixed.
 - Exam questions should test conceptual understanding and not rote memorization skills.
 - Mentorship to be introduced.
- Certain topics should be given as self-study.
 - Improved infrastructure with proper storage space to be provided to every teacher.
 - Laptops and projectors to be provided in every class.
 - Collar mikes and PA systems should be provided.

While the credit system has increased the workload of the teachers, has it really benefitted the students? Going by the performance of the students in the internal and external exams/assessments, it does not really seem so. However, it may be too early to reach a judgement and probably one will need to do a detailed study to draw a logical conclusion about the students' feedback.

1. Higher education in India: strategies and schemes during XI Plan (2007–2012) for universities and colleges, University Grants Commission, January 2011, p. 76.

Alka S. Kelkar is in the Department of Accounts and Lakshmy Ravishankar is in the Department of Chemistry, KET's V. G. Vaze College of Arts, Science and Commerce, Mithagar Road, Mulund (East), Mumbai 400 081, India.*

**e-mail: kelkar_alka@yahoo.co.in*