

## Problems Faced by University Teachers and Students in the Semester System

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### Abstract

A semester is a period of six months. This system is very effective in higher education. It is considered more innovative, appropriate, and cooperative than the annual system. It provides the students with an opportunity for continuous learning, assessment, and feedback. However, many teachers and students criticize that they always miss the deadline for course completion so that students cannot engage in extracurricular activities. In this regard, the present study aims to explore the problems faced by university teachers and students in the semester system. To accomplish the objective, the researcher adopted a phenomenological research design under the qualitative method. It is based on the lived experiences of University-level English teachers and students about the semester system at TU. The total population of this study consisted of university EFL teachers and students in Nepal, out of which, the researcher selected only five university EFL teachers and ten students from Tribhuvan multiple campus, Palpa using a purposive sampling procedure. Similarly, the researcher made an interview guideline and then took the interview with the sampled teachers and students to obtain in-depth information. The results revealed that the most of the teachers and students paid more attention to their course contents than to extracurricular activities. Similarly, there are piles of materials in the syllabus; however, most of the important materials are not available in the market. There is no extra facility for economically backward students.

**Key words:** innovative system, subjective judgment, mandatory attendance, limited knowledge

### Introduction

The education system in the world is not the same all over, and it changes due to the course of time and technology. The beginning of new innovations, practices, and concepts in the field of education is always expected for the advancement of education. The semester system has emerged as a product of recent investigations in the field of education. A

semester system is an academic term in which an academic year is divided into two parts or sessions, each lasting six months. In a semester system, the final examination is conducted after six months, at the end of the course. Many studies show that the semester system is very much effective in higher education. It is considered more advanced, rigorous, and engaging compared to annual system (Akhtar & Hashmi, 2021). The application of the semester system at the university level enhances students' education and improves teacher instruction. In comparison to the annual system, the semester system is more practical and research-based, which is an important part of quality education. The main objective of this system is to enhance students' knowledge, skills and capacity continuously, extensively and in-depth (TU, 2074).

Tribhuvan University is the oldest and largest university of Nepal founded in 1959. In the beginning, it adopted the semester system until the 1970s. However, it could not last long. Many problems occurred in teaching, learning, and examination in this system. Then after, it enforced an annual system where students had to engage the whole year as a single academic session. TU reintroduced the semester system at the central departments of the university campus in 2014, creating a fresh debate in the higher education sector (Pandey, 2015). After that, it adopted this system at all the campuses in Kathmandu Valley in 2017 for master's degree programs. From the academic session 2018, TU extended this system at the postgraduate level to all its constituents and affiliated campuses across the country.

The semester system aims at focusing on a continuous assessment system for regular monitoring of students' progress and setting a comprehensive and in-depth learning environment to build the capacity of learners by developing required knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Pathak & Rahman, 2013). Moreover, it encompasses individual and group presentations, case studies, and other critical reading tasks, which simplify the conventional one-way lecture technique. There are many benefits to the semester system in higher education. The greatest benefit is that each student remains knowledgeable about their production and development through non-stop opinions from the college and students (Bidani, 2010). It provides a chance for students to learn more through the presentations, mid-term examinations, group discussions, submission of assignments, etc. on a regular basis (Abro, 2014). It provides the students with an opportunity for continuous learning, assessment, and feedback. Students do not feel the burden of the syllabus because the annual syllabus is usually divided into two halves. It allows greater freedom and scope for designing and delivering a variety of courses. Similarly, students attend the college regularly as their attendance is mandatory in the classroom.

The essence of the semester system is a classroom with full academic activities. Teachers must keep a close eye on their students' academic progress and spend long hours beyond the classroom (Lamsal, 2018). Besides, an effective and successful implementation

of the semester system depends upon a number of conditions such as a well-designed curriculum, content coverage, regularity of classes, timely and constructive feedback to students, accessibility of teachers to students outside the class, availability of resources, a higher level of confidentiality in examinations, transparency in evaluation and grading, and the timely declaration of results (Pathak & Rahman, 2013).

In TU, the semester system is being implemented all over Nepal for Master's, M.Phil., and Ph.D. levels. However, TU officials are quite indifferent towards the problems of teachers and students (Sherpa & Baraily, 2022). They fail to provide even basic office space for teachers and classrooms for students. Even today, a TU teacher lacks a chair and a table to sit on while assisting students in research work and helping solve their problems (Khaniya, 2014). There is no proper mechanism for teachers' professional development in the university education system, which impedes the construct of motivation theory. Teachers are not provided with in-service and other refresher trainings. Similarly, there is no incentive for teachers to be engaged and highly devoted to students' learning. In this context, most of the teachers and students are not satisfied with the master's level semester system in Nepal. So, this study aims at exploring the problems faced by university teachers and students in their language classroom.

## Method

The researcher adopted interpretivism as a philosophical ontology and subjectivism as an epistemology for the present research paradigm, as the research is based on the multiple realities of the respondents. Here, knowledge is generated by exploring and understanding the social world. The present research is based on a phenomenological research design under the qualitative method. Phenomenology is a research design based on the lived experiences of participants. It is a method of inquiry in which the researcher explores the essence of human experiences about a situation as described by participants (Creswell, 2009). Here, the present research is based on the lived experiences of University level teacher and student about the semester system of TU. It is mainly based on primary sources of data. The total population of this study consisted of university EFL teachers and students in Nepal. However, the researcher selected only five university EFL teachers and ten students from Tribhuvan Campus, Palpa using purposive sampling procedures. Similarly, the researcher made an interview guideline, and then took the interview with the sampled teachers and students using recording devices to obtain in-depth information. After that, he analyzed the data thematically under four different headings. After exploring the results of the study, the researcher interpreted them by comparing their features with those of previous research works. To assure participants' confidentiality and anonymity, all identifying information from the transcripts has been removed, and the participants have been referred according to identification codes. These codes included the teachers (T) and students (S) codes, which are used in the results section to identify the source of quotations.

## Results and Discussion

This section comprises the results of interviews with the research participants and their interpretation with the support of appropriate theory. After transcribing the data, the following themes for the study were extracted, and a conclusion was drawn accordingly.

### Instructional Techniques

The semester system focuses on student-centered teaching and learning. The course is based on credit hours; students are admitted on the basis of merit; the total course is divided into 3 credit hours. For the successful implementation of the semester system, teachers should prepare a detailed work plan and academic calendar. The activities in the semester system need to create an overall sense of development for the students.

However, TU has not given enough pedagogical orientation and training to the faculty members, as most of the teachers teaching in the semester classes have not studied in this system. They follow the same traditional method in their classes. The physical arrangement of the classes—the fixed benches, the packed setting of students' sitting, the lack of multi-media projectors, the lack of internet connection in classes, the lack of a good library and laboratory, etc.—have made teaching and learning difficult. Likewise, the courses of the semester system are difficult to teach in comparison to the annual system, so that students pay more attention to their course contents and less about extra-curricular activities. They are not properly following the norms and ethics of the semester system in their classroom. They do not have enough time to have intensive readings and perform in-depth research. Most of the teachers frequently miss the deadlines for completing their courses, so that students do not get enough time to practice their contents. In this regard, T1 mentioned: *In this system, teaching is delivered very quickly. Students are unable to learn everything due to a lack of time. They just recall the items and focus on them.* Similarly, most of the teachers complain that many students do not attend the class regularly as the majority of them are job holders. They do not actively participate in teaching and learning activities.

On the other hand, most students believe that some teachers come to the classroom without full preparation while others come with notes. It means that there is a problem with the delivery system. Although some teachers present the lesson with a multimedia projector, they copy the materials exactly from the book. Teachers do not use teaching materials in their classroom. In this reference, S5 said: *In a teaching practice course, students are asked to use materials, but teachers never use such materials in their courses.* Similarly, when students are taking classes, noises frequently occur from outside the class as many students play different games on the campus ground.

The semester system is not practiced well, and teachers are not fully satisfied with the semester system because of poor administrative preparedness and professional incompetence (Sherpa & Baraily, 2022). Although traditional lecture methods are shifting toward a student-

centered approach and students are encouraged to self-learn using digital resources, teachers in the semester system are left with no time for research, to attend conferences, or to take a refresher course that is important to keep them updated and help them teach better. However, Ramsden (1979) examines various methods of instruction in order to create an encouraging atmosphere. A student's level of satisfaction with their academic experience is influenced by the relationship between students and teachers' dedication, work pressure, formal and informal learning methodologies, course relevance, and learning needs.

## Evaluation System

The courses in the semester system aim to have both internal and external assessment systems. Scoring is based on GPA. Students are internally evaluated with 40% marks and externally evaluated with 60% marks. Internal marks are assigned on the basis of their attendance, classroom participation, and first, second, and third assignments. There is a provision for 80% student attendance, and their presentation is a must in the semester system. Different tasks, such as project work, book reviews, article writing, unit tests, and quizzes, are provided in the first and second assignments. Usually, an internal examination is administered in the third assignment. On the other hand, external exams are conducted by the concerned dean offices of TU.

Most of the teachers do not follow the norms of evaluation as most students do not attend the class regularly. Students do not participate in teaching or learning activities. They have very poor writing skills and are inactive in doing tasks and activities. They miss their assignments. Some of the students want to attend only one day for all their assignments and tests. Even if they submit the assignments, they do not meet any requirements for being evaluated. Most of them copy the assignments from books and other friends. It is very difficult to score them without their attendance and assignments. In this regard, T4 claimed: *"Most of the students cross the deadlines to submit the assignments due to their irregularity in the classroom." Even if they submit the tasks in time, they do not meet the requirements for being evaluated. Moreover, students tend to read only what appears in the exam.* Hence, deeper knowledge about the contents is missing.

On the contrary, many students claim that teachers provide the marks without any proper criteria. There is no difference in the marks of laborious and tourist students. There should not be any bias between regular and irregular students. In this reference, S4 claimed: *"I am irregular due to my job." There is no alternative approach to getting a degree other than this system. I have submitted the assignments on time, either physically or virtually, but my teachers are not responding well. I request all the teachers to provide the marks as they do for the regular ones.* Some regular students claim that the teachers should assign more marks to them than irregular ones, as they have played a great role in conducting classes regularly. They have attended and presented papers regularly. Most irregular students do not like the semester system because teachers follow subjective judgment in evaluating students.

Although teachers identify many problems related to evaluation in the semester system, it definitely reduces the academic burdens of the students. Routine evaluation and frequent class tests are integral parts of the semester system; such activities compel the students to keep themselves updated all the time. As a result, students become more study-oriented. Examination has become part and parcel of the daily routine, and the system no longer produces any sort of stress or strain among the students (Singh & Kumar, 2016). However, most of the students disagree with the semester system of examination due to a number of drawbacks like favoritism, bias, and subjectivity (Munshi, Jane, & Hussain, 2012). As a result, universities around the world are introducing different evaluation systems in order to keep their students motivated and satisfied.

### **Resources and Materials**

Tribhuvan University has launched approximately two dozen courses in the master's level semester system, where there were only 10 courses in the annual system. Each course introduces a pile of prescribed and reference books and materials. Some important materials prescribed in the syllabus are not available in the local market. Some materials mentioned in the elaborate syllabus do not match their editions. Although courses have been revised regularly, the subject committee has not prepared compendiums or reference books in English subjects. In this regard, T2 mentioned that *the course has incorporated a pile of prescribed and reference materials. Most of them are not found on the market. Some of the materials mentioned in the syllabus do not match the books available. Most often, books are published after completing the course. Many courses are prepared based on experts' expertise, not on the needs, interests, and levels of the students.* Similarly, most of the teachers do not use multimedia in their language classrooms as they do not have the accessibility of computers and projectors. Some of the teachers have no confidence in using modern technology in the classroom.

On the other hand, many students claim that books and other resources are not available in the library. Almost all students expect a ready-made compendium or course book for each subject. The fourth semester students complained that they found no compendiums or books in some of the subjects of the first, second, and third semesters, although they attended the exam. It means that they appeared for the final exam without any reading materials. In this regard, S7 claimed: *"I teach at a school in Gulmi." I did not find any notes from the teachers and friends. So, I tried to buy some books, including solution papers for ease of examination, but I could not find them anywhere. Then, I appeared for the exam, but unfortunately, I could not succeed.* Not only irregular students but also regular ones have the same problems.

In addition, narrow office rooms for faculty members, a lack of technicians and staff, inadequate books in the library, and a lack of communication among the dean's office, campus administration, and departments are some other challenges in the semester system

(Sherpa & Baraily, 2022). However, successful learning depends on the availability of learning resources and materials such as textbooks, reference books, computer facilities, and the use of ICTs in teaching learning activities (Pathak & Rahman, 2013).

### **Administration and Policy**

Administration refers to the planning, organizing, coordinating, staffing, budgeting, etc. The mutual relationships among faculties and administration enhance the organizational goals (Krucken, Blumel, & Kloke, 2013). If the administrative system of the organization is unable to contribute to the professional and career development of the faculties, they exhibit negative feelings towards their responsibility and develop a negative attitude towards their profession; if they are treated properly by the administration, they develop a positive attitude and wish to contribute more to the organization with their dedicated responsibility (Louis & Kruse, 1995). In the context, T2 stated: *"In the beginning, campus administration did not provide physical and psychological support." We knew nothing about the core of the semester system because campus administration had not conducted any orientation on the semester system and course dissemination. Since then, we are adapting ourselves to the semester parameters prescribed by the TU curriculum. The administrative personnel are performing their duty with dogmatic thought and stigmatization.* In the semester system, the students learn themselves through a constructivist approach, and campus administration needs to facilitate their participatory learning (Gold, 2001).

On the contrary, the semester system is more expensive than the annual system. There is no discount in the fees for the semester system. So, this system is costly for many economically disadvantaged students. Another problem is the entrance exam. If they fail or miss the entrance exam, they are not allowed to enter. In this regard, S1 claimed: *"I could not admit in the beginning year as I missed the entrance exam." Later on, when I was admitted there, I learned that I was not getting any facilities, despite coming from an economically and socially deprived family.*

The overall activity adopted by the campuses was a recurrence of old traditions with the fragmentation of the annual system (Deroy & Clegg, 2015). Effective administrative systems can also contribute to the career development of children. Pandey (2015) opposed the semester system due to various reasons. Students argue that the quota system or provision of fixed seats that is strictly exercised under the semester system deprives a large number of students from pursuing higher education because the number of students aspiring for it is much higher than the number of seats allocated. Another problem is that regular attendance is a must in the semester system, which students fail to make because the majority of those pursuing higher education are either service members or engaged in some other job. Therefore, many such students engage themselves in both earning and learning activities simultaneously. For such students, regular attendance at colleges seems impossible.

## Conclusion

The semester system is more innovative and collaborative than the annual system. The major strength of this system is that it allows students to learn, be assessed, and receive feedback. However, most teachers do not meet the deadlines for course completion. Here, teachers and students pay more attention to their course contents than extra-curricular activities due to a lack of time. Some students do not attend their classes regularly, although 80% attendance is mandatory. Teachers provide marks with their subjective judgment. Students expect good marks even without completing their tasks and requirements. Similarly, there are piles of irrelevant materials attached to the syllabus; however, many important materials are not available in the market. The subject committee has neither prepared compendiums nor published prescribed books for each subject. Most of the teachers do not use multimedia in the language classroom. They come with some traditional notes. Both teachers and students do not have enough time for intensive study and in-depth research in the semester system. Moreover, there is no extra facility for economically backward students. Further, this study can be beneficial to those teachers and students who are studying the semester system. The policy makers can go through this study to rethink their policies for the effective implementation of the semester system. This is a small-scale study. If another researcher wants to carry out a large-scale study, he can select a large number of data points and interpret them from multiple perspectives.

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