



Students' Experience on Studying in Semester System

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Abstract

The semester system has emerged as a significant reform in higher education in Nepal, aiming to enhance the quality of teaching, learning, and evaluation processes. Unlike the traditional annual system, which primarily depends on final examinations, the semester system emphasizes continuous assessment, active participation, and the holistic development of learners. This study explores the lived experiences of students studying under the semester system in order to understand its effectiveness and challenges from the learners' perspective. This research adopts a qualitative approach, specifically a phenomenological design, to capture the real-life experiences of students. Five students from the fourth semester were purposively selected as participants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews conducted in two phases to ensure depth and clarity. The collected data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings of the study reveal three major themes. First, the semester system functions as a learning platform that promotes life skills such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Second, students experience both pressure and satisfaction due to continuous assignments and evaluations. Third, the semester system fosters a culture of continuous learning and academic engagement. The study concludes that the semester system is more effective than the annual system in promoting student-centered learning, continuous improvement, and skill development. However, its success depends on proper implementation, availability of resources, and institutional support.

Keywords: semester system, student experience, continuous assessment, learning culture, higher education

Introduction

Higher education plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' intellectual capacity, professional competence, and social responsibility. In recent decades, educational systems across the globe have undergone significant transformation to improve quality, relevance, and effectiveness. Among these reforms, the semester

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system has emerged as one of the most widely adopted approaches in higher education. This paper aims to examine the effectiveness of the semester system, particularly in the context of Nepal, with a focus on its implementation, advantages, limitations, and students' experiences.

The semester system refers to an academic structure in which the annual curriculum is divided into two equal parts, each typically lasting six months. Derived from the Latin word "*semester*," meaning six months, this system emphasizes continuous learning, regular assessment, and active student participation. Unlike the traditional annual system, which relies heavily on a single final examination, the semester system incorporates periodic evaluations such as assignments, presentations, mid-term examinations, and class participation. This continuous assessment approach is considered more comprehensive in evaluating students' overall academic performance.

Globally, the semester system is recognized as a student-centered and efficient method of instruction. It discourages exam-oriented learning and encourages students to engage consistently with academic content. According to Akhtar (1980), the semester system is a modern and effective educational approach that promotes active learning and better academic outcomes. Similarly, Cohen (2016) highlights that this system enhances interaction between teachers and students, thereby improving the overall teaching-learning process.

In Nepal, the adoption of the semester system represents a significant shift in higher education policy. Historically, the roots of the semester system can be traced back to the National Education System Plan (NESP) of 2028 B.S., which introduced reforms aimed at modernizing the education system. Although initially implemented, the system faced discontinuation due to various challenges. However, recognizing its global relevance and effectiveness, Nepali universities, particularly Tribhuvan University, reintroduced the semester system in recent years. Tribhuvan University (TU), the oldest and largest university in Nepal, has implemented the semester system in all master's degree programs and selected bachelor's level faculties. The university is also working toward expanding this system across all undergraduate programs. The primary objectives behind this transition include enforcing academic discipline, ensuring timely completion of degrees, enhancing academic quality, and restoring institutional credibility. Furthermore, the semester system aims to make students more responsible and engaged in their studies by requiring regular attendance and active participation.

Despite its advantages, the implementation of the semester system in Nepal has not been without challenges. One of the major issues is the lack of adequate infrastructure and qualified faculty, particularly outside urban centers such as Kathmandu Valley. Many affiliated colleges struggle to meet the requirements of the semester system due to limited resources, insufficient teaching materials, and a shortage of trained instructors. As a result, students often face difficulties in adapting to the new system. The expansion of higher education in Nepal has also contributed to these

challenges. With the increasing demand for higher education, it became difficult for constituent campuses to accommodate all students. This led to the growth of private colleges, many of which operate under affiliation from Tribhuvan University. Currently, more than a thousand affiliated colleges are functioning across the country. While this expansion has increased access to education, it has also raised concerns about maintaining consistent academic standards, especially under the semester system.

The semester system emphasizes continuous learning and immediate feedback, which are essential for effective education. Unlike the annual system, where students often study intensively only before final examinations, the semester system requires consistent effort throughout the academic period. This promotes better retention of knowledge, development of critical thinking skills, and application of concepts in practical contexts. (Bhattarai, 2014) argue that the semester system enhances students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes by encouraging in-depth learning.

Another significant advantage of the semester system is its focus on holistic development. It encourages teamwork, communication skills, and problem-solving abilities. Students are required to complete assignments, participate in group discussions, and present their ideas, which foster both academic and personal growth. Moreover, the system reduces reliance on rote memorization and promotes analytical and creative thinking. However, critics argue that the semester system demands a high level of preparedness from both institutions and students. Effective implementation requires well-trained faculty, adequate infrastructure, and proper academic planning. In many cases, these prerequisites are not fully met, leading to inconsistencies in delivery and evaluation. Additionally, frequent examinations and tight schedules may create pressure for students, particularly those who are not accustomed to continuous assessment.

Comparatively, the annual system has its own advantages. It allows students more time to understand concepts and prepare for comprehensive examinations. It is also considered more economical, as it requires fewer examinations and administrative resources. However, the annual system often encourages last-minute preparation and does not provide regular feedback, which can hinder effective learning. Burns (2009) notes that both systems have their merits and demerits. While the annual system emphasizes comprehensive evaluation, the semester system promotes continuous engagement and improvement. The choice between the two depends on institutional capacity, educational goals, and contextual factors. Nevertheless, the global trend indicates a growing preference for the semester system due to its flexibility and effectiveness.

Technological advancements and changing educational needs have further strengthened the case for the semester system. Modern classrooms are evolving into collaborative learning spaces that support interactive and multi-modal teaching methods. Traditional lecture-based approaches are gradually being replaced by student-centered pedagogies that emphasize participation, discussion, and practical application.

In this context, the semester system aligns well with contemporary educational practices.

Furthermore, research studies highlight the importance of student attitudes in determining academic success. For instance (Braun & Clark, 2000) found that students' attitudes significantly influence their participation and performance, particularly in subjects like mathematics. The semester system, by promoting continuous engagement and feedback, can positively impact students' attitudes toward learning. Despite these benefits, the successful implementation of the semester system in Nepal requires careful planning and sustained effort. Institutions must invest in faculty development, infrastructure improvement, and resource availability. Students should also be adequately oriented to adapt to the demands of continuous assessment and active learning. Additionally, policymakers must ensure that academic standards are maintained across all affiliated colleges.

This study, therefore, aims to explore students' experiences with the semester system and identify the challenges they face. By analyzing these experiences, the research seeks to provide insights into the effectiveness of the system and suggest pedagogical implications for its improvement. Understanding students' perspectives is essential for evaluating the practical impact of educational reforms and ensuring that they meet their intended objectives. The semester system represents a significant advancement in higher education, offering numerous benefits in terms of continuous learning, comprehensive evaluation, and skill development. However, its success depends largely on effective implementation and institutional readiness. In the context of Nepal, while the system has the potential to enhance academic quality and align education with global standards, addressing existing challenges is crucial for its sustainability and success.

Difference between Semester and Annual System

The annual and semester systems are two widely practiced models of education adopted by universities across the world. The annual system represents a traditional, teacher-centered approach, whereas the semester system is considered more modern and student-centered. Both systems aim to facilitate learning and assess academic performance, but they differ significantly in structure, evaluation methods, and their impact on students' learning behavior.

The annual system is organized around a single academic year, at the end of which students are evaluated through comprehensive final examinations. In contrast, the semester system divides the academic year into two equal terms, typically lasting five to six months each, with examinations conducted at the end of each term. This structural difference forms the foundation for several key distinctions between the two systems.

One of the most important differences lies in the mode of assessment. In the semester system, evaluation is continuous and multifaceted. Students are assessed through a combination of internal assignments, presentations, class participation, mid-

term examinations, and final tests. This continuous evaluation allows instructors to monitor students' progress regularly and provide timely feedback, which enhances learning outcomes. On the other hand, the annual system relies heavily on a single final examination conducted at the end of the academic year. As a result, students' performance is judged based on their ability to recall and reproduce knowledge within a limited time frame.

From the perspective of student learning, the semester system is generally considered more effective. Since assessments are conducted periodically, students are encouraged to engage with their studies consistently throughout the year. This reduces the tendency toward last-minute preparation and promotes better understanding and retention of knowledge. In contrast, the annual system often leads to irregular study habits, as students may postpone serious preparation until the examination period approaches. This not only increases academic pressure but also limits meaningful learning.

Another significant difference is related to academic workload and stress. In the annual system, the concentration of examinations at the end of the year can create a heavy burden for students. They are required to prepare a large volume of content within a short period, which may lead to stress and anxiety. Conversely, the semester system distributes the academic workload more evenly across the year. Although students face more frequent evaluations, the scope of each examination is relatively limited, making the process more manageable and less overwhelming.

Furthermore, the semester system supports active and participatory learning. It encourages students to attend classes regularly, complete assignments on time, and engage in discussions and collaborative activities. This approach not only improves academic performance but also helps in developing essential skills such as communication, teamwork, and critical thinking. In contrast, the annual system often promotes passive learning, where students rely primarily on lectures and focus mainly on examination preparation.

In terms of performance outcomes, students in the semester system tend to perform better academically. Continuous assessment motivates them to remain focused and prepared throughout the academic term. As a result, they are more likely to achieve higher grades. In the annual system, however, students who begin their preparation late may struggle to cover the entire syllabus effectively, leading to comparatively lower performance.

Evaluation practices also differ between the two systems. The semester system incorporates both internal and external evaluation components. Internal evaluation is typically conducted by instructors based on various academic activities such as assignments, presentations, attendance, and class participation. External evaluation may include final examinations conducted by the institution. This combination ensures a more comprehensive and balanced assessment of students' abilities. In contrast, the

annual system relies predominantly on external evaluation, with limited scope for internal assessment.

In conclusion, while both the annual and semester systems have their own advantages and limitations, the semester system is generally regarded as more effective in promoting continuous learning, reducing academic stress, and enhancing overall student performance. Its emphasis on regular assessment and active participation aligns well with modern educational practices. However, successful implementation of the semester system requires adequate resources, trained faculty, and proper academic planning to achieve its intended outcomes.

Internal evaluation system

Attendance	5 marks,
Participation in learning activities	5 marks,
First assignment/mid-term exam	10 marks,
Second assignment/assessment	10 marks,
Third assignment/assessment	10 marks.

External evaluation system

60% Examination Division, Office of the Dean, Faculty of Education will conduct final examination at the end of the semester:

Objective questions (multiple choice questions) (10 x 1) =	10 marks,
Short answer questions (6 questions with 2 OR questions) (6 x 5) =	30 marks and
Long answer questions (2 questions with 1 OR question) (2 x 10) =	20 Marks.

Importance of Semester System

The semester system is widely regarded as one of the most effective educational approaches worldwide. As a result, it has been adopted by many prestigious universities, including those in South Asia. This system offers numerous advantages. One of its key benefits is the opportunity for continuous assessment and regular feedback, supported by ongoing interaction between teachers and students. It promotes a deeper understanding of subjects through practical learning, often described as “learning by doing.” Students actively engage in various learning activities, making the process more student-centered and interactive.

Moreover, the semester system encourages consistent study habits among students because evaluations and feedback occur regularly. It creates a supportive environment for continuous improvement in learning. With requirements such as 85% attendance and 40% internal assessment, students are motivated to remain regular and actively participate in academic activities. Continuous assessment also allows students to better grasp course content at a manageable pace.

Another significant advantage is that student performance is not judged solely by a single final exam at the end of the year. Instead, examinations are conducted twice a year, allowing for ongoing evaluation of progress. This reduces the academic burden, as students prepare for only part of the syllabus at a time, leading to deeper understanding and more effective learning. Additionally, the semester system supports interdisciplinary learning, enabling students to gain knowledge and skills beyond their main field of study. It offers flexibility in course selection, allowing students to choose from a variety of subjects that enhance their overall learning experience. For these reasons, the semester system is considered one of the most effective approaches in higher education.

Methods and Materials

This study follows an interpretive research paradigm, as it is grounded in a relativist view of reality, a subjective way of understanding knowledge, and naturalistic research procedures (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It adopts a qualitative approach, specifically using a phenomenological design, to explore the lived experiences of students who have completed their thesis writing. According to Berstein (1971, p. 2), phenomenology focuses on describing and interpreting human experiences as they are perceived and reflected upon. Since this approach is considered highly suitable for studying human experiences (Creswell, 2000), it was selected for this research. In this study data analyzed and presented thematically. Phenomenology, as a qualitative research design, emphasizes understanding individuals' lived experiences in depth. Originating from the philosophical ideas of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, this method seeks to reveal the essence of experiences by exploring how people perceive and interpret different situations and concepts.

In this research on students' experiences with the semester system, the population consists of all students studying under this system at the selected institution. However, due to the intensive and detailed nature of qualitative research, it is not practical to include the entire population. Therefore, five participants were intentionally chosen to represent the larger group and provide rich, detailed insights. This study includes purposive sampling, involves selecting individuals based on specific characteristics and their ability to offer valuable information. As highlighted by (Khanal,2080), phenomenological research commonly uses purposive sampling. The participants in this study were master's students from Dhankuta Multiple Campus in Dhankuta district, Nepal.

Before starting data collection, participants were informed about the objectives of the study and assured that their information would remain confidential. Their verbal consent was obtained before participation. The interviews were conducted in two stages. In the first stage, in-depth interviews were carried out and recorded with the participants' permission. The researcher used an open-ended "funnel" questioning approach, beginning with broad, simple questions to make participants feel at ease, and gradually moving to more focused and detailed questions (Creswell, 2014). After

transcribing the first set of interviews, it became clear that some important information was missing. As a result, a second round of interviews was conducted to collect additional details, which were then combined with the initial data.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a technique used to identify, examine, and present patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis followed six steps. First, all interviews were transcribed and reviewed repeatedly to become familiar with the data. Then, initial codes were developed systematically from the transcripts. These codes were grouped into possible themes and sub-themes, and related data were organized under each category. The themes were then reviewed and refined to ensure they were meaningful and accurate. Finally, the themes were clearly defined, named, and presented in a structured report.

To maintain the quality and credibility of the study, important criteria such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability were applied. These helped ensure the research findings were reliable and valid. Credibility refers to how accurately the findings reflect the participants' views. This was ensured through direct engagement with participants and follow-up interviews to clarify and improve the data.

Transferability refers to the possibility of applying the findings to other similar contexts. Since the results are based on real field data, they may be relevant to comparable situations. The researcher minimized personal bias during data collection while carefully interpreting the information. Dependability and Conformability are ensured in this study. The findings are based on participants' responses rather than researcher influence. To achieve this, all research steps were carefully documented, and differing or conflicting data were also considered. Overall, the study ensured quality and trustworthiness through methods such as member checking, prolonged engagement in the field, collaboration, detailed descriptions, peer review, debriefing, and external evaluation.

Results and Discussion

Recognition of opinions in parties, this chapter discusses the lived- experience of the students towards the semester system. The codes of: frustration, pleasure, learning skills like communication, rapport building, reading, interpreting, critical thinking and exploration skills were merged into three themes: Semester system as a learning platform, feeling pressure and pleasure while working with the thesis, creating the learning environment.

Semester System as a Learning Platform for Life skills

Semester system is a system in which the students totally involve in the learning process. Students are engaged in the different group works and projects. They need to involve and be regular. They learn the presentation skill, critical reading skill and interpretation skills. Hence, it is a learning platform. The participants of the study expressed their views in this way. Five students who have been studying in fourth semesters were taken in-depth interviews regarding semester system. After taking

interviews it was identified that semester system. Were the skills learning platform for the learners? One of the participants of the study Ganesh (Pseudonym) responded that:

"Unlike annual system, semester system taught us many life skills while studying. It taught us to work collaboratively and also enhanced leadership skill. While writing term-paper I went to the different places for collecting data and met with different people. I communicated them and got required data for my assignment which made me practical and develop my interpersonal skills".

To fulfill the requirement of the semester system, students must write the term paper and carry out the project work. Hence, they have to go to new place and met the stranger who makes them to do many works. Like to communicate, to convince, to collaborate and to be patient. These are the very skills which are necessary in our life. Therefore, semester system humanizes the person. In this connection, next participant of the study Sarita (pseudonym) mentioned:

"I was very dull and timid in my initial days in my study in semester. However, while studying semester my personality changed. It forced me to talk with my friends, to work in group, to ask for help and many more. Indeed, it was teaching me the skills. I learnt how to collaborate, how to ask for help, how to assimilate in group work".

Completing semester develops the whole skills. It needs to do many things not only memorization. Students are exposed with different inputs which are interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary in nature. This helps to develop the capacity of the students. Next participant of the study Roshan (pseudonym) stated:

"Before I began to study in semester I was not very good to collaborative with people. I could not talk to people in well manner. Such as I used to use direct language to my seniors as well. But in semester I learnt the skills for the effective communication".

For example, before asking something greeting is necessary (Streve & Meneshe 2017). Pointed out there is sufficient evidence about the potential of students: active learning practice in semester system than in annual system which teach the life and social skills which are very much essential to live successful life. Hence apart from gaining the expertise in higher studies students learn the skills necessary to cope with advertise.

Study in Pressure with Pleasure

In semester system students have to submit their assignments of each subject on regular intervals within given deadline which creates pressure on students. Students feel the sense of achievement when they complete their assignment and semester. One of the participants of the study Sita (pseudonym) responded:

"In the beginning of the semester I felt very nervous because we had six subjects in each semester and we had assignments of every month. It is because we didn't have the habit of such works in our bachelor or annual system. Each assignment needs

different aspects to be fulfilled. Sometimes I felt frustrated but I felt pleasure when I completed first semester".

In each semester of M. Ed, students have six subjects and three internal assignments of each subject apart from final examination. It is the challenging tasks for the beginner of semester system. Slowly and gradually they feel pleasure when they become habituated. Hence, they move from challenging stage to self-satisfaction. On this regard Manoj (pseudonym) expressed:

"In the initial days of my semester studies I got very puzzled regarding the assignments to be fulfilled. Some works made me confused and put me in dilemmas. I began to think that I will not complete my study. But with the help of my teachers and friends. While working in groups my colleagues supported me to fulfill the given tasks. By the end of the first semester I began to visualize the things vividly and began to feel relief."

Unless and until the students are familiar with the tasks that are needed to fulfill and nature of the courses, they seem to fall in the puzzles and confusions. Later on, when they become familiar they become happy with the work that they fulfilled. In this connection Gita (pseudonym) opined:

" I had thought as an annual system to semester system but when I knew the criteria to be fulfilled to pass semester. I felt very terrible and anxious. I became nervous that time and asks for the suggestion from the seniors. I studied semester in pressure since the time is limited."

However, at the end of the first semester we became familiar and habituated. Studying in semester system after annual system gives the sense of pressure and pleasure. As they have to fulfill different assignments on time in this sense there is pressurize learning and they achieve what they have done at the end of semester which gives them a sense of pleasure and happiness. In this reference Shyam (pseudonym) stated:

"Reading the authentic materials was very hazardous task for me as I had not been habituated learning the authentic materials in my bachelors. I got puzzled and nervous to carry on at the beginning. But later on I learned to be patient and creative. I thought the alternative way to solve the existing problems. In this way, I overcame this problem and I had the sense of satisfaction finally".

To be habituated for learning in semester students had to be patient and dedicated. Students feel very anxious at the beginning in the semester system. However, when they become familiar to everything they have the feeling of satisfaction and they will be in right tract. Hence it is the important learning platform.

Semester system as a culture of learning

Learning atmosphere and semester system are the synonym to each other. Since learning goes through the whole semester. Students learning and evaluation process

goes side by side. They learn by completing certain tasks and they deeply soaked in learning Semester system encourages the learning habits. There is learning by doing different tasks and activities. Most of the participants of the study expressed their views as favorable learning. On this regard, Semester system cultivated the learning environment on me. I frequently visited the library and bought many books for preparing the term-papers and project works. I worked collaboratively with my friends to accomplish my tasks. We supported each other and learn from each other. In this sense, it enhanced the learning culture among us. In semester there is learning culture among students as they help each other to complete their group project. They study in group and learn from each other. There is the culture of sharing and caring. The students learn together and grow together. In this connected, Rohan (pseudonym) opined

"In annual system I solely depend upon the notes and a book for my studies. But when I enrolled in semester system I got to know that what is studying. Reading became the part- of my life. I began to read the books working in kitchen and garden. I took the book before going outside. It develops the culture of reading upon like me, students."

In semester, students are bound to do the extensive studies. They should read many books and articles to complete their studies. They should Google the articles to fulfill their given tasks, and study of semester which ultimately develops the culture of learning among the students. In this connection, Hari (pseudonym) stated:

"Semester system made me a real learner, good analyzer and risk taker. It made me autonomous learner and pro-active. I experienced it as the culture of learning. I learnt a lot in semester system and have been learning. I feel learnable environment in semester system".

In the context of T.U. semester system is newly born system. Students develop different skills and makes student active. Semester system is mostly adopted in worldwide. The main motto of semester system is to put emphasis on continuous comprehensive and in-depth learning aiming the capacity building of the students by developing required three domain of learning, cognitive affective and psychomotor to become an efficient and effective citizen. Different types of assessment are taken in semester system frequently.

Conclusion

This study examined students' experiences with the semester system using a sample of five participants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, which were then transcribed, coded, and organized into themes. Three major themes emerged from the analysis. The findings revealed that the semester system serves as an effective platform for developing life skills, including cooperation, collaboration, communication, and interpersonal abilities. At the same time, students experienced pressure due to the need to complete assignments and projects within set deadlines. However, this pressure was often followed by a sense of satisfaction and achievement once tasks were successfully completed. The study also showed that the semester

system helps foster a strong learning culture. Students were encouraged to explore various resources, particularly online materials, to complete their academic work.

Participants highlighted that the system provided them with opportunities to search for, collect, organize, and use information effectively, making learning more meaningful. Although timely submission of assignments created stress, it also motivated students to stay disciplined and responsible. Upon completing their work, they felt a sense of accomplishment and happiness. Overall, the findings suggest that the semester system is an effective approach to learning, as it supports continuous improvement and actively engages students in the learning process from the very beginning.

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