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Comparative analysis of MA English Results under Annual and Semester system: Quality Assurance in Pakistan

**Tayyaba Malik, Ph.D Candidate, Priya Avais, M.Phil. Candidate
& Tahira Khanam, Ph.D. Candidate**

Abstract

This paper attempts to explore the significant difference in the results of M.A. English under annual and semester system. It also focuses to identify which system provides quality education to the students to make them better professionals. For that hypothesis adopted was that there is significant difference in the results of M.A. English under annual and semester system.

A questionnaire was distributed among randomly selected people from education department, students who experienced both these systems and focus group discussion was carried out to record the perceptions of people towards both systems of education. Independent sample t test was also applied.

The results proved that there is significant difference in the quality of results of M.A. English under annual and semester system. In annual system students get ample time to mastery over the subject while semester system train the students to synthesize the Language in India www.languageinindia.com

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subjects and students are not only intellectually evaluated but also on grounds of behavior.

Introduction

Academic concerns have now become an extensive debate for understanding the concept of enhanced academic quality. Educators and higher authorities are always trying to devise new ideas and explore several options for making education as effective as possible in terms of outcomes. Outcomes in an academic set up means achievement of overall excellence in terms of results.

This research article is an analysis of the field research that we conducted in a women's college. This research aims to investigate and present a comparative analysis of M.A. English results under annual and semester system Quality Assurance.

In order to compare the semester and annual system the researcher has taken into account the qualities that are present in both the systems. Annual system has been a successful system for our education in the past. However there were many loopholes in the system. This research talks about the possibilities of comparing the two systems as well as finding out which one is better to ensure quality for M.A. English results.

Research Questions

1. Do the documented results of the semester system for M.A. English, Annual and MA English semester differ remarkably?
2. Is there a difference in the acquired knowledge and competence of the students from either system i.e. Semester or Annual system?

Objectives

- To find trends of teaching practitioners towards the effectiveness of Annual or Semester system.
- To find out the short comings of both the systems.
- To investigate whether our educational culture is ready for Semester System or not.

Hypothesis

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There is a significant difference in the results of the MA English Semester System and M.A. English Annual System.

Literature Review

Educational system all over the world has never been consistent over the year. Through advancement and exposure to new concepts, Educationists investigate possibilities to teach texts in various feasible manners. According to Myron Tribus (1994), there are innumerable proposals/suggestions for reforms and changes in educational system and there are infinite number of good ideas and research results. The target is not just to pick one of them but rather it is to have comprehensive attitude and approach within which to bring to action many good works known to us.

Pakistan has had an inherited educational system from the British. This was predominantly based on a two year extensive and comprehensive study session followed by an examination that tested memory and comprehensively acquired knowledge. For many years in the past the Punjab Board and many other educational boards of our country have been operating under the principles and methods of “**An Annual Education System**”.

An annual system is a traditional method that gives students an ample chance of two years to understand and grasps concepts, and sits for a comprehensive exam at the end of two years. This exam includes both subjective and objective portions but it predominantly tests on subjective or comprehensive exam.

In many countries, especially in the West, the Annual system is called TAP, or Tuition Assistance Programme. Even in some British Universities the annual system existed fifty years ago.

Educationist over the world are also not only looking at the annual or semester but there are many other including quarterly and term semester, and a more recent debate is going on choosing either Quarter or Semester system.

Aggarwal (1997) argues that only that system of education is good which ensures effective learning. The criterion for success is effective learning. So, some precautions or some details about the semester system must be informed to the students before switching from annual to semester or from semester to quarter system (2005). Evaluation is a cyclical process having four phases: preparation, assessment, evaluation and reflection.

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Assessment and evaluation serves two purposes. It enhances student education and improves teacher instruction

Kinnaird College for Women runs two 15-week semesters, rather than the traditional three terms. Each semester has:

- A mid-semester exam
- A tuition time/reading/study block
- A one -week exam period at the end

For example, at Kinnaird College for Women, Autumn Semester typically runs from - September until just before Christmas. There is then an extended winter break of 2 weeks. The Spring Semester usually runs from Jan/February to the end of May, followed by a 15-week break over the summer. It's also possible to start your studies in the Spring Semester.

Academically, the eight-semester Honors programmes offer flexible entry for non-graduating study abroad students, who may study any course for which they have the appropriate academic background, regardless of the semester level or Department involved.

However, Annual system has its strong points as it provides a good opportunity to go through topics extensively, develop extensive reading and writing skills. However, the HEC (Higher Education Commission) had different findings.

In Pakistani context, we may see that the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan has been doing a lot of study for realizing the need to introduce new systems in the country. There has been a change in the overall educational scenario as it was felt that the already running semester system is not producing good results in term of knowledge acquisition of students.

As a result National Committee on Examination System (NCES) was constituted in 2003 to go through the effectiveness of the existing system and to seek possibilities for improving the existing examination system followed in Higher Education institutions of Pakistan.

It was strongly felt by the Committee that an in-depth analysis of existing examination system is mandatory before any remedial measures are suggested. A Sub-Committee was thus formed to collect data on existing examination processes and practices. This was done with two aims in mind: First, to find the inadequacies and malpractices in existing

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annual examination system across the country, and secondly, to suggest comprehensive changes to formulate nationally agreed principles and practices.

The members of NCES, in its 3rd meeting held on 1st March, 2005, again deliberated on the information collected from various universities and formulated final recommendations

1. Different types of examination systems i.e. Annual, Semester, and Term are being practiced all over the country. In order to attain the uniformity and harmony it was decided that, by fall 2008, all higher education Institutions will gradually shift towards semester system.
2. Strategies for assessment of quality of items and examination processes cannot be improved without intensive professional training of the staff involved in the examinations. HEC shall arrange pertinent training at regular basis of all the staff concerned with examinations.
3. Course objectives in terms of students' learning outcomes and Table of Specification should be available to all concerned persons including students.
4. Choice of questions in examinations, e.g., 5 out of 8 questions encourages selective study and should be totally abolished.
5. Grace marks in examinations to pass the candidates should not be allowed in any circumstances by the year 2007. A system of moderation/ arbitration, however, must be evolved by then for all institutions with consensus.
6. Paper Setting: final paper setting should preferably be done by a panel of 2 or more examiners. Wherever applicable, in annual system of examination, final papers shall be reviewed by a neutral examiner.
7. Most of the questions should assess higher level of cognition, i.e., conceptual knowledge and application of learned material in practical field.
8. Wherever applicable, a "Key" (agreed answer/solution) should be prepared by the paper setters before the question paper is used in the examination. The "Key" should also give the Weight age and detailed breakdown of the marks for subcomponents. In descriptive questions, where writing of exact solution may not be practical, the paper setter must write the key points of each question that are required from the students.
9. Assessment Tools: Use of multiple choice question (MCQs) and short essay questions (SEQs) should be encouraged to increase the content validity of question papers. Descriptive questions, should preferably be done away with except where writing skills, concepts or ability to dialogue need to be evaluated.
10. A policy of complete transparency must be adopted in Semester/Term system where candidates are guaranteed an opportunity to discuss the marks awarded to them with the concerned teacher.

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11. In case, a student fails in an examination should wait for six months at least before appearing to second chance of examination.
12. All examinations to be held from year 2007 will follow the policy of “No Choice” at under graduate level

After through consideration the National Committee on Examination System and Quality Assurance Committee in its meetings held on 10th September, 2005 and 29th October, 2005, respectively, has approved the above recommendations for improvements in examination system of higher education institutions in Pakistan. The above recommendations were forwarded and placed on the agenda of Commission meeting held on 15th August, 2006

Looking through the outcomes of the meeting at HEC it is clear that measures have been taken to introduce Semester system in our culture all over the government sector institutions. In many other private and semi private institutions semester system has been existing since 2003 and even before for e.g. Kinnaird College for Women Lahore. Even at Kinnaird, 2004 in the beginning there were many questions and problems that students and faculty had to face. The prospectus became bulkier and more comprehensive since for each subject a full detail of topics and time lines of each semester were clearly given. Students became vigilant and teachers diligent. However the effectiveness of the system did not take place over night .It is still in its teething stage.

Results from a Women’s College

For M.A. English, there are three programmes running at Kinnaird: English Literature, ELT and Applied Linguistics. During the late 90s the exams were conducted annually and the average highest marks during 1995-2000 Punjab Board Exams were a high second division for MA literature and after that the percentage slightly increased now Masters students of Literature are getting an average of 3.23 CGPA. Applied Linguistics, however, had always been running in semester system (Kinnaird College; Record room file Number KC: L23/1995_1999), and KC/L 23 2004_2007).

Following are the results of the semester M.A. English 2007 semester system:

<u>Regd. No.</u>	<u>Name of the Candidate</u>	<u>Result</u>	<u>CGPA</u>	<u>Grade</u>
Deptt. of English Language & Literature, K.C Lahore				
2007- 5591	Saliha Abid	Pass	3.35	B

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2007-331	Habiba Hasnain D/o Hasnain Ijaz	Pass	3.3	B
2007-156	Amina Bashir D/o Bashir Ahmad Saleemi	Pass	3.15	B
2007--1350	Nida Mushtaq Khan D/o Muhammad Mushtaq Khan	Pass	3.10	B
2007--1	Smia Mujahid S/o Mujahid Pervez	Pass	2.60	B-
2007-1-158	Rabia Sohail D/o Sohail Rasool	Pass	2.86	B-
2007--532	Maimoona Anwar D/o Idris Ahmed Anwar	Pass	3.61	B+
2007-209	Nida Ahsan D/o Ahsan Akbar	Pass	3.48	B+
2007--1	Sana Aslam D/o Muhammad Aslam	Pass	3.36	B
2007--33	Rabia Hotiana D/o Muhammad Ahmed Hotiana	Pass	3.20	B
2007--960	Sana Hamid D/o Abdul Hamid	Pass	3.28	B
2007--471	Ayesha Kanwal D/o Tariq Javed	Pass	2.67	B-
2007-20	Madiha Rana S/o Rana Manzoor Ahmed	Pass	2.95	B-
2007-21	Sadia Rafi D/o Muhammad Rafi Ullah Khan	Pass	3.05	B
2007-23	Laiba Dawar S/o Zafar Ullah Khan Dawar	Pass	2.56	B-
2007-24	Amber Khalil D/o Muhammad Khalil Ahmad	Pass	2.71	B-

Methodology

For this research two methods have been chosen:

Quantitative: Questionnaire based on: Semantic differential scale

Qualitative: Comments from Focus group discussion

Institution for conducting Research: Kinnaird College for Women Lahore and University of Management and Technology Lahore.

Respondents:

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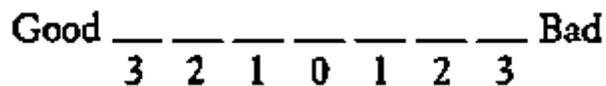
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The respondents were a population of teachers within them there were two groups:

1. One group was of teachers who had been students here and had studied through both Semester (M.Phil. level) and Annual (M.A. level) system. They are all teaching in semester system now.
2. A group of senior teachers who have taught for more than fifteen years are professionally oriented and know both the annual and semester system however they had studied in an annual system.
3. A group of teachers assistants and internees who wish to teach at college level .

Semantic Differential Scale

The Semantic Differential (SD) measures people's reactions to stimulus words and concepts in terms of ratings on bipolar scales defined with contrasting adjectives at each end. An example of an SD scale is:



Usually, the position marked 0 is labeled "neutral," the 1 positions are labeled "slightly," the 2 positions "quite," and the 3 positions "extremely." A scale like this measures directionality of a reaction (e.g., good versus bad) and also intensity (slight through extreme). Typically, a person is presented with some concept of interest, e.g., Red China, and asked to rate it on a number of such scales. Ratings are combined in various ways to describe and analyze the person's feelings.

The Questionnaire is designed according to this differential scale .At the two extremes the Semester and Annual systems are taken .0 is considered as moderate and the questionnaire was monitored explaining to the respondents the purpose of research. The major focus in the questionnaire is on these things.

- Annual or semester system provides good grading criteria, better job opportunities, focused academic goals, testing through different techniques, better reading and writing skills, better interviewing and presentation skills and autonomy to the students.

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- Acquired knowledge through annual or semester system of education is applicable to practical life.
- Teachers are more diligent and alert in annual or semester system.

Processing the Questionnaire Data

The Responses from forty respondents were collected from the above questionnaire and results were analyzed on SPSS .As it is evident from above that there are two independent systems ,measured on the same construct(statement) therefore it is similar for measuring relation between any two independent variables .For independent variables we apply the “**Independent Sample t Test**”.

Grouping variable	N	X Mean Score	Sd Standard Deviation	Df Degree of Freedom	t
Male	20	38.10	14.63	27	0.043
Female	20	29.11	3.55	23.35	

Table

Analysis/ Interpretation of Result

Significance for the Equal variance assumed has come out to be less than 5, i.e. .043 this means that there is significance difference in the results of the semester and annual systems.

Qualitative Tool

Focus group research is based on facilitating an organized discussion with a group of individuals selected because they were believed to be representative of some class (professors and lecturers of English Language /Literature). Discussion is used to bring out insights and understandings in ways which simple questionnaire items may not be able to tap. Focus group research has long been prominent in social sciences (Morgan, 1988), in part because it seeks to tap emotional and unconscious motivations.

The interaction among focus group participants brings out differing perspectives through the language that is used by the discussants. People get caught up in the spirit of group

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discussion and may reveal more than they would in the more formal interview setting. As discussants ask questions of each other, new avenues of exploration are opened.

In discussions, multiple meanings are revealed as different discussants interpret topics of discussions in different ways. Interaction is the key to successful focus groups. In an interactive setting, discussants draw each other out, sparking new ideas. The reactions of each person spark ideas in others, and one person may fill in a gap left by others. One may even find a form of collaborative mental work, as discussants build on each other to come to a consensus.

Focus group discussion with Professors and Lecturers

Venue: Department of English Language and Literature

Number of respondents: 6

Prof. Qaisar Sheikh, Prof. Rubina Shahid (Head of English Department), Associate Professor Mrs. Nasreen Pasha, Associate Professor Mrs. Ghazala Hameed., Rabia Zaheer (Lecturer), Tehmina Perzada (Lecturer).

Questions were asked and for each question there were consensus, however any unique comments were also recorded.

Q1: Do you think that there can be an absolute comparison between the outcomes in terms of standards of these two annual and semester system?

Responses

Definitely! Both are **Comparable educational system** this provides room for conceptual understanding that whether we are ready for such change or not: Prof. Qaisera says: The semester system is no doubt the best system in the world but unfortunately it is not being applied in an appropriate manner. Prof R. Shahid says: We need to understand the true spirit of this system. As an administrator this has given me focus to look at “**Designing my courses in an adequate manner**”. It was assumed that this system may not be too good for Literature students but believe me it has made our students more research oriented instead of cramming notes they are now interpreting dramas and poems with their own perspective because previously they were asked to give critical comments in board exams, so now they do not do this.

Q 2.Has the Role of a teacher changed after this switch over from Annual to Semester system?

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To this question there were many responses some said not really, however some of them agreed that the role changed remarkably .A.P Ghazala Hameed says: I am very honest about this as I have been here for 29 years during my stay I have taught many courses at Ma literature and One course in ELT .In annual system the teacher is not held accountable for results. The papers are checked externally and to **some extent there is objectivity as the examiner does not know the candidate**. Here in semester system we have to do every thing, I feel pressurized all the time that I have to mark quizzes prepare mid term and listen to presentations!! On the other hand the student has more autonomy, so this system eliminates tardiness in terms of both students and teacher.

Mrs Shahid says: It has helped me to become sharp and efficient. The teacher is actually standing in a confession stand where the student can challenge us. Sometimes positive favoritism develops towards students.

Q3; Do you think the time slots/credit hours for each course are being followed appropriately in our college.

Rabia Zaheer says: The slots some times are not enough. For theater skills module we had to have separate workshops for completing course work. Semester system is an excellent was **“To achieve academic orientation”** If followed we need to nurture a culture for semester system. **That means that we can’t go out station for relatives weddings, Can’t fall ill, etc.** Most of the time the semester is reduced to a Quarter as we have to do quizzes. Also to do justice with a poet like Keats a 24 hours course in not enough.

However, with Linguistics, Mrs.Qaisera says that 32 credit hour course provides enough time but sadly enough our students forget some concepts when the same is asked for reference in other modules. More time should be given for in class **reading and responding**.

4. Do you think that both systems provide ample vistas to the students for applying all the language learning skills?

Immediate response: ooh!! This question had uproar. However most of the teacher agreed that since annual system if it had been followed significantly, could have provided the students with An in-depth understanding of comprehensive tests. Unfortunately send ups and class tests during the annual systems were not given mush importance and it used to be a “One shot” opportunity where mostly the students would conveniently do selective studies other than that “Yes” annual system provides thoroughness and detailed

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understanding of concepts. Even in semester system the comprehensive exams at the end do take the students through the grind of hard core learning reading and writing.

As an observation Mrs. Shahid says: **Semester system students show better presentation skills because we make them go through a lot of in class group and individual presentations, dramatization, role plays and improvisation thus helping.** The reason why we can't really talk about the job market is that right now most of the generation that is in the field are those who have gone through the annual system and it will take some time for the semester system students to come in the main stream.

Discussion

The results of the above research show that there is a significant difference between the results of the semester and annual systems .As per result of the questionnaire the respondents who were selected from both the semester and annual systems expressed that the difference in the output is not only on the basis of numerical results but also in terms of competence of the students that they show in the field situation. Secondly the various levels of how the systems are used effectively also helps in maintenance of the result quality.

The results of the questionnaire and the focus group discussion had slightly different results because the outcome of the discussion showed trends of the teaching practitioners as to what level of understanding they had regarding the results.

Conclusion

Both the education systems, i.e., semester and annual have their weak and strong presentation skills. However the annual system gives an opportunity to develop through concepts and in depth study of texts. In this system students get ample time to mastery over the subjects. Smooth running of the semester system means being careful about timelines and constraints of concepts that can be comprehended in a concise manner. It trains the students through a process of analysis, synthesis and evaluation. For cognitive learning semester system moves to the higher level of learning and student is evaluated on both intellectual and behavioral grounds. Check and balance system can facilitate the learners with the full benefit of the system. Teacher training can help both the semester and annual systems to assure quality.

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APPENDIX

A Questionnaire for analyzing two Educational systems

Name _____ Age _____ Qualification _____
Designation _____

Note: The Researcher wants to find out your views about the degree of quality assurance in education through either semester system or annual system. You will see two columns below for each one there is a range from 1 to 3 for each choose one system that you think fulfills what the statement asks then choose either 0 for neutral 1 for Disagree, 2 for moderately agree and 3 for agree.

Semester	Differential Scale	Annual
1. Provides good grading criteria	3 2 1 0 1 2 3	Provides good grading criteria
2. Students of this system get better job opportunities	3 2 1 0 1 2 3	Students of this system get better job opportunities
3. Provides thorough understanding of concepts	3 2 1 0 1 2 3	Provides thorough understanding of concepts

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4.Our academic culture accepts this system	3 2 1 0 1 2 3	Our academic culture accepts this system
5.Results of the students of this system show focused academic goals	3 2 1 0 1 2 3	Results of the students of this system show focused academic goals
6.Students are tested through different techniques	3 2 1 0 1 2 3	Students are tested through different techniques
7.Results of this system show better presentation skills	3 2 1 0 1 2 3	Results of this system show better presentation skills
8.Results of this system show better reading writing skills	3 2 1 0 1 2 3	Results show better reading writing skills
9.Students perform better in interviews	3 2 1 0 1 2 3	Students perform better in interviews
10.Teachers are more diligent and alert	3 2 1 0 1 2 3	Teachers are more diligent and alert
11.Students are academically overburdened	3 2 1 0 1 2 3	Students are academically overburdened
12.Subjectivity in Evaluation	3 2 1 0 1 2 3	Subjectivity in evaluation
13.Student has more autonomy	3 2 1 0 1 2 3	Student has more autonomy
14.Continuous assessment of students	3 2 1 0 1 2 3	Continuous assessment of students
15.Acquired Knowledge is applicable to practical life	3 2 1 0 1 2 3	Acquired Knowledge is applicable to practical life

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