

Choice Based Credit System: An Opinion Survey of Students of Mizoram University

F.Lalrinzuali*
R.P. Vadhera**

Abstract

Many of the higher education institutions in India, in the recent past, have introduced the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) in their UG or/and PG level courses. The CBCS provides a 'cafeteria' type approach in which the students can take courses of their choice, learn at their own pace, undergo additional courses and acquire more than the required credits, and adopt an interdisciplinary approach to learning. The credit based semester system provides flexibility in designing curriculum and assigning credits based on the course content and hours of teaching. The Mizoram University has implemented the CBCS system in its PG Programmes from 2012 and has already produced two batches of students under CBCS. This paper highlights the opinions of students of Mizoram University regarding different issues relating to Choice Based Credit System which have been practiced in Mizoram University for almost 5 years now. The paper deals with the important issues like impact of CBCS on quality of education, adequacy of choice in selecting papers on open electives, factors affecting students' choice of open electives, impact of CBCS on the work load of students, difficulties encountered by students under CBCS and their suggestions for effective implementation of CBCS.

Keywords: Choice Based Credit System, Open Electives, Soft Courses

Introduction

University Grants Commission has come up with the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) programme in which the students have a choice to choose from the prescribed courses, which are referred to as core, elective or minor or soft skill courses, and they can learn at their own pace and the entire assessment is grade-based on a credit system. The basic idea

is to look into the needs of the students so as to keep up-to-date with development of higher education in India and abroad. CBCS aims to redefine the curriculum keeping pace with the liberalization and globalization in education. CBCS allows students an easy mode of mobility to various educational institutions spread across the world along with the facility of transfer of credits earned by students. The

*F.Lalrinzuali is Research scholar, Department of Education, Mizoram University

**R.P. Vadhera is Professor & Head, Department of Education, Mizoram University

CBCS imminently fits into the emerging socio-economic situations, and could effectively respond to the educational and occupational aspirations of the upcoming generations. Aided by modern communication and information technology, CBCS has a high probability to be operated efficiently and effectively - elevating students, institutions and higher education.

There have been many debates and deliberations regarding the implementation of CBCS all over the country, CBCS is implemented in such haste in many universities, so without clear guidelines or without proper training/orientation it has been implemented. It may be too early to jump into conclusions as it has been practiced only for a few years now. As CBCS is a process of evolution of educational reforms that would yield the result in subsequent years and after a few cycles of its implementation.

Mizoram University, in view of the aforesaid recommendations, has implemented Choice Based Credit System in its PG Programs from 2012-2013 academic session, and has already produced two batches of students. Mizoram University has drafted two regulations for Post Graduate programmes under CBCS, the first one in 2012 and the second one in the year 2015. There have been various modifications and changes in the second regulation; there has been a change in the course structure, modifications have been made. However,

the present study has been confined to the students' opinions on the various provisions under CBCS Regulation-2012 of Mizoram University.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the opinions of students on different aspects of CBCS.
2. To examine the problems and challenges faced by students in pursuing their education under CBCS.
3. To study the perceptions of students with regard to the benefits of CBCS.
4. To enlist problems faced by students in pursuing their course under CBCS.
5. To seek suggestions of students on effective implementation of CBCS in Mizoram University.

Population and Sample

All of the Post-graduate students of 2012-14, and 2013-15 batches from all academic departments of Mizoram University constituted the population of this study. The sample of the present study consisted of 697 students of 2 batches of 4th semester (i.e. 2012-14 and 2013-15) from 24 Post graduate departments of Mizoram University.

Tools Used for Data Collection

An opinionnaire consisting of 20 statements on different issues relating to CBCS was developed by the investigators.

Findings and Discussions

Findings and discussions of the study have been presented under the following sections:

1. Opinions on Issues relating to CBCS
2. Perceived Benefits of CBCS
3. Problems faced in Pursuing their Courses under CBCS
4. Suggestions for Effective Implementation of CBCS.

Opinions on Various Issues Relating to CBCS

a) Impact of CBCS on Improvement in Quality of Education:

From Table-1 we can see that 84 percent of the students agreed that quality of education has improved with the introduction of CBCS, whereas the remaining 16 percent did not think so. When asked the degree of its impact on quality improvement, 28 percent reported that it has been improved to a great extent, 71 percent opined to some extent, whereas 1 percent of them are of the view that the introduction of CBCS has no impact on the improvement of quality of education.

Table No. 1
Impact of CBCS on Improvement in Quality of Education

Statement	Response	N	%
Has the quality of education improved with the introduction of CBCS?	Yes	587	84%
	No	112	16%
	If yes, to what extent		
	(a) To great extent	162	28%
	(b) To some extent	407	71%
	(c) Not at all	7	1%

Note: Out of 587 students who reported the positive impact of CBCS on quality of education, 11 did not give response to the question on degree of its impact on quality.

b) Impact of CBCS on Students' Work-load:

Under CBCS system 40 percent marks in each paper have been assigned for internal assessment for which departments are expected to undertake class tests, assignments and seminars etc. on regular basis throughout the semester. While answering to the question of impact

of such exercises on students' work load, 65 percent of the students reported that CBCS has overburdened students with too many tests and other evaluative exercises. On the contrary, 35 percent of them reported that CBCS has not overburdened students. When asked about the degree of such overburdening, 21 percent of students reported it to a great extent, 72 percent said to some extent.

Table No. 2
Impact of CBCS on Students Work-load

Statement	Response	N	%
Does CBCS overburden students with too many tests and other evaluative exercises?	Yes	447	65%
	No	236	35%
	If yes, to what extent	95	22%
	(a) To a great extent		
	(b) To some extent	322	76%
	(c) Not at all	8	2%

Note: Out of 447 students who reported CBCS overburdens the students, 22 did not respond to the question on degree to what extent.

c) Job-Oriented Courses under CBCS: One of the prime objectives of CBCS is to offer skill based and job oriented course under open electives. We can see from the table-3 that 66 percent of students think that CBCS is more jobs oriented than the old system, while 34 percent of students do not think so.

d) Impact of CBCS on transforming the Teacher-Centric System to Student-Centric System: One of the basic assumptions of introduction of CBCS is that it will result into a paradigm shift from a teacher-centric system to student-centric system. However, when asked whether CBCS is more student-centric than the

traditional system, 73 percent of them reported positively on this issue, whereas the remaining 27 percent did not agree with this proposition (See Table-3).

e) Problems Faced by Students in Attending Open Elective Classes: From Table-3 we can clearly see that 90 percent of students, who participated in this study, reported that they faced problems in attending Open Elective classes due to the long distance between their parental department and department offering their selected open elective. Only 10 percent of them were of the view that they did not face such problem. May be they had selected their open electives from nearby departments.

Table No. 3
Opinions of Students on Various Paradigm Shifts under CBCS

Statement	Response	N	%
Is CBCS more jobs oriented than the old system?	Yes	455	66%
	No	238	34%
Is CBCS more students-centric?	Yes	503	73%
	No	182	27%
Do students face problems in attending Open Electives classes due to the long	Yes	633	90%
	No	68	10%

f) Factors Affecting the Students Selection of Open Electives:

A quick glance at data vide Table-4 shows that 24 percent of the students opted for open electives (OEs) due to short distance of the department, 3 percent selected their open electives because these were opted by their close friends, 2 percent of the students selected their OEs due to the popularity of the teacher in-charge of the open elective, and 5 percent of the

students select their open elective in view of the advice given by Head/Senior teacher/Academic adviser. It is pleasing to report that 41 percent and 14 percent of students selected their OEs on the basis of their personal interest, and relevance of open elective respectively, whereas, 11 percent of the students did not have freedom in selecting as they were compelled to take certain OEs due to non-availability of seats.

Table No. 4
Factors Affecting the Students Selection of Open Electives

Statement	Factors Affecting Choice of Open Electives	N	%
Which of the following factor(s) influenced your selection of Open Electives?	● Short distance of the department	214	24%
	● My personal interest	357	41%
	● Relevance of the Open Elective	127	14%
	● Selection of Open Elective by close friends	29	3%
	● Advice given by the Head/Senior teacher/Academic adviser of department.	40	5%
	● Popularity of the teacher.	20	2%
	● I was compelled to take certain Open Electives due to non-availability of seats.	92	11%

g) Removal of all Restrictions Imposed on Selection of Open Electives:

A quick glance on data vide Table-5 shows that 85 percent of students agreed that all restrictions imposed on selection of Open Electives be removed and students be given complete freedom in the selection of their open electives, however, 15 percent of think otherwise, may be they

are the one who could select their Open Elective course of their choice in both 2nd and 3rd semester, and hence don't mind the continuation of existing restrictions.

h) Availability of Academic Adviser for Students:

As per the provisions under CBCS Regulation of MZU, each of the academic departments is expected to appoint an

Academic Adviser to facilitate students' decision in the selection of open electives and soft courses. While responding to this issue 41 percent of the students reported that their department did not appoint any Academic Adviser, while 59 percent reported the availability of Academic Adviser in their respective departments.

Table No. 5

Removal of all Restrictions Imposed on Selection of Open Electives and Availability of Academic Advisors

Statement	Response	N	%
Whether students be given complete freedom in the selection of their open electives?	Yes	587	85%
	No	100	15%
Has your department appointed Academic Adviser to assist students in the selection of their Open Electives and Soft Courses?	Yes	277	41%
	No	403	59%

i) Availability of help in the Selection of Soft Course:

While responding to this issue 21 percent of the students said that the head of department himself/herself helped them in selecting their open electives and soft course, 8 percent reported that academic

adviser assisted them in their selection of open electives, 14 percent said that senior teachers helped them in their selection. However, 57 percent of them had to take this decision at their own as no one in their department helped them in taking such an important decision.

Table No. 6

Availability of Help in the Selection of Soft Course (SCs) and Open Electives (OEs)

Statement	Response	Soft Courses		Open Electives	
		N	%	N	%
Who helped you in selecting your soft courses and open electives?	Head of Dept.	181	26%	143	21%
	Academic Adviser	61	9%	58	8%
	Senior Teachers	103	15%	99	14%
	No one	349	50%	390	57%

j) Selection of Soft Courses of Their Choice:

With regard to the selection of Soft Courses, it was shocking to know

that only 54 percent students in 2nd semester, and 49 percent in 3rd semester could select the Soft course of their choice, whereas the remaining 46

percent in 2nd semester, and 51 percent in 3rd semester could not select the Soft Courses of their choice. It may be due to the fact that many academic

departments include many papers in the list of soft courses but due to the shortage of faculty are not able to offer all these courses.

Table No. 7
Selection of Soft Courses of Their Choice/Interest in 2nd and 3rd Semesters

Statement	Response	In 2 nd Semester		In 3 rd Semester	
		N	%	N	%
Could you select the Soft Courses of your choice in 2 nd Semester and 3 rd Semester?	Yes	365	54%	337	49%
	No	315	46%	348	51%

k) Regularity of Classes in Open Elective:

As per the arrangement under CBCS, students, during their 2nd and 3rd semester, are expected to attend first two classes on Monday and Tuesday in other departments on their open electives. When asked on

the regularity of their open elective classes, it is pleasing to report that 86 to 90 percent of students opined that their OE classes in both 2nd and 3rd semesters were quite regular; however, 10 to 14 percent reported such classes to be irregular.

Table No. 8
Regularity of Classes in Open Elective Papers in 2nd and 3rd Semesters

Statement	Response	2 nd Semester		3 rd Semester	
		N	%	N	%
How regular were your classes in Open Electives in 2 nd and 3 rd semester?	a) Very regular	145	21%	111	16%
	b) Regular	482	69%	486	70%
	c) Irregular	70	10%	93	13%
	d) Very irregular	-	-	7	1%

l) Freedom in Exercising the Selection of Open Electives:

One of the core features of the CBCS is freedom in choosing their open as well as soft electives. As shown in table-9 only 65 percent of the students in second semester and 52 percent in second

semester could exercise their freedom in selecting both of their open electives, which implies that the remaining 35 percent of students of 2nd semester, and 48 percent students of 3rd semester were not that fortunate. Out of 35 percent students of 2nd semester that could not

select both electives of their choice, 26 percent could exercise their freedom in selecting at least one open elective, whereas the remaining 9 percent had no choice in selecting both of their open electives. Likewise, out of 48 percent students of 3rd

semester that could not select both electives of their choice, 34 percent could exercise their freedom in selecting at least one open elective, whereas the remaining 14 percent had no choice in selecting both of their open electives.

Table No. 9
Freedom in Exercising the Selection of Open Electives (OEs)

Statement	Response	N	%
Number of OEs you could select as per your choice in 2 nd Semester.	Both	447	65%
	One	179	26%
	None	60	9%
Number of OEs you could select as per your choice in 3 rd Semester.	Both	356	52%
	One	231	34%
	None	98	14%

m) Missing of Classes in Parental Department:

While responding to the question, whether they had ever missed their classes in their parental department due to non-availability of buses in time after attending

open elective classes in other departments, 64 percent of students reported to have missed their class, whereas the remaining 36 percent did not report so. When asked how often it happened, 21 percent said many times and 79 percent said sometimes.

Table No. 10
Missing of Classes in Parental Department due to Non-availability

Statement	Response	N	%
Did you ever miss your class in your own (parental) department in view non-availability of buses in time?	Yes	445	64%
	No	252	36%
	If yes, how often	93	21%
	(a) Many times		
	(b) Sometimes	352	79%

n) Selection of Open Electives from within the Department and School:

The CBCS system, in order to give multidisciplinary flavor to students'

learning, does not allow students to choose open electives from their parental department, and at the same time makes provision to allow students to select their

OEs from any academic department in the university. When asked their opinion on this issue of not allowing students to select their OEs from parental department, it was interesting to find that 31 percent of students expressed their agreement with this restriction, however, 69 percent of students were against this

restriction, and wanted that university should do rethinking on this restriction. Further, when asked about the selection of OEs only from within the school, 88 percent of students expressed their agreement, whereas only 12 percent of them wanted the present provision to be continued.

Table No. 11
Selection of Open Electives from within the Department, and School

Statement	Response	N	%
Do you agree that students should not be allowed to select Open Electives from their own department?	Yes	213	31%
	No	472	69%
Do you think that students be allowed to choose Open Electives only from within their school?	Yes	602	88%
	No	86	12%
Do you believe that CBCS has transformed the traditional teacher centered education to a student-centered education?	Yes	472	69%
	No	215	31%

o) CBCS and Student Centric System:

One of the serious criticisms against the traditional system of education is teacher centrism. It is presumed that adoption of CBCS will bring a paradigm shift from teacher centered system to student centered system. When asked on this issue 69 percent of the students reported that CBCS has transformed the traditional teacher-centered education to a student-centered education; whereas 31 percent of the students do not think so.

Students' Perceptions on Benefits of CBCS:

Some of the prominent benefits of CBCS, as reported by the sample students to an open ended question are given as under:

1. It reduces monotony.
2. Gives chance to listen to more experienced and popular teachers of other departments.
3. Punctuality in submission assignments.
4. Frequent seminar creates confidence in the students.
5. It gives quality education.
6. Provides scope for social interaction with students from other disciplines.
7. It improves students' attendance in classes.
8. It helps them to score more marks.
9. It gives them knowledge about other disciplines.
10. Makes students to be more competitive.
11. It motivates students to do better in their studies.

12. They can select the open electives according to their interests.
13. Provision of regular feedback helps students to know where they stand.
14. Frequent tests make students alert and active.
9. No time for social activities.
10. Lots of choices, but getting the open electives of one's choice depends on luck.
11. Makes lots of stress on students.

Problems Faced by Students with Regard to CBCS:

When asked about the problems encountered by them while pursuing their courses under CBCS, they reported the following difficulties and concerns:

1. Due to long distance of the department students have no time for eating Tiffin and going to the bathroom.
2. Seriousness of students will go away from the examination as much weightage is given to continuous or internal assessment and evaluation.
3. Grading system is not satisfying. It should be replaced by marks.
4. No leisure time under CBCS.
5. Reduction in differentiation of students' performance by grading system under CBCS may discourage the gifted and talented students.
6. Teachers are not interested enough in open elective subject.
7. Unavailability of study materials.
8. Departments offer only selected not all soft courses included in the syllabi. This restricts students' choice of soft courses.
12. No uniform system in marking for Open Electives in various academic departments.
13. Sudden implementation of CBCS without proper training and orientation creates confusion among teachers and students.
14. Long distance of the department makes students miss their class in parental department.
15. Lots of tests and assignments etc. overburden the students.

Suggestions given by students to overcome the problems in successful implementation of CBCS in Mizoram University:

1. Students should be allowed to see their end semester answer scripts.
2. The teachers should give feedback at the earliest.
3. The number of tests in one day should be reduced.
4. Students should be allowed to choose OE from parental department.
5. The teachers should be more regular in classes.
6. Diploma/Certificate should be awarded on OE papers.

7. OEs should be stopped as they dilute the core courses.
8. Syllabus should be adjusted as it is too vast to finish within a stipulated time.
9. Every department should follow uniform system in giving marks in OEs.
10. OEs should be clearly described in the syllabus.
11. Number of OE papers should be reduced.
12. There should be proper time table for internal tests and it should be informed to the students in advance.
13. Due to lack of infrastructure and less number of teachers Mizoram University is not yet in position for the proper implementation CBCS.
14. Number of tests/assignments/seminars should be reduced.
15. Orientation programmes and workshops should be organized for teachers to understand the details about grading, semester, credit system, credit transfer etc. by inviting and involving resource persons with appropriate expertise.
16. The students should be allowed and given complete freedom in their selection of open electives.

Conclusion

Choice Based Credit System has been in practice in Mizoram University

for almost five years now, from the above study we can see that majority of the students opine that quality of education has improved with the introduction of CBCS and are of the view that this is the right step to quality education. But at the same time they also feel that the Mizoram University has not yet been able to successfully implement the CBCS in its full form due to various reasons like lack of infrastructure, shortage in number of teachers, long distance of the departments and no uniformity in open electives. Beside, the students feel that the CBCS has been implemented by the university hurriedly without proper training and orientation of teachers, students as well as the office staff of academic departments and examination branch. Consequently, there is much diversity in academic departments with regard to the implementation of various provisions of CBCS.

The most important features of Choice Based Credit System implemented by the Mizoram University in 2012 is the concept of choice to be exercised by students in selection of their papers on Open Electives in 2nd and 3rd semesters. However, the findings of the study suggest that a considerable percentage of students are not able to select the open electives of their 1st and 2nd choice in both semesters which negates the basic principle/philosophy of CBCS. The restriction on the selection of open electives is largely because of the limited number of seats available in the open electives of their choice. Another major problems faced by

students is the non-availability of transport for their to and fro movement to other academic departments for attending their open elective classes. In the absence of the transport many of the students miss their classes in their respective parental departments

Too much of testing and evaluation is another inherent feature of CBCS, the majority of students opine that the whole semester is occupied with tests, assignments, seminars etc; there is hardly any time left for the course in-charge to finish the course, which in many papers is too heavy. Besides, the students also do not have much time under the CBCS for their self and in-depth study. So, majority of the students wanted to reduce the number of tests and assignments.

There have been many criticisms on the implementation of CBCS, like lack of faculty, lack of infrastructure, unclear

guidelines, top down approach, difficulty in implementation etc, though some criticisms are genuine some are unjustified. So, for effective implementation of CBCS these criticisms have to be addressed and necessary modifications in the various provisions in CBCS regulation, as suggested by students, need to be effected.

The UGC has always initiated measures to bring efficiency and excellence in the higher education system in India, right from the curriculum to the teaching-learning process, to examination and evaluation systems. However, looking at the present scenario of Mizoram University, it is still in the process of adjusting and experimenting with CBCS. Thus, it may be too early to make final judgment whether CBCS is the right step to address the quality issues in higher education.

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