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### An Evaluation of Gomal University's BS /AD Programs in light of the Feedback of Stakeholders

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#### Abstract



*The study aims to evaluate the BS/AD program at Gomal University and its affiliated colleges using various parameters, i.e., program objectives, curriculum, physical facilities, academic & administrative facilities, teaching method, assessment, evaluation, and other social factors. The research team adopted a qualitative research design for this study. The population of the study comprised all Deans, HODs, and Coordinators of the BS/AD programs of eight faculties, forty-eight departments of Gomal University, and, similarly, principals/HODs of twenty-seven public sector and thirty-three private affiliated colleges. The team interviewed twenty respondents in-depth and freely allowed them to discuss various aspects of the BS/AD program and its strengths and weaknesses in detail. Their views and voices were summed up as a narrative summary. The Higher Education Department (HED) runs public sector colleges, and its policy is also implemented in these colleges. There are some differences in how programs are being carried out at Gomal University and its affiliated public and private sector colleges. During assessing these education programs, various factors were considered, including the calibre of teachers, the quality of facilities, the structure of academic schedules, teaching methods, assessment techniques, the presence of research opportunities, and the availability of extracurricular activities. The study suggests that teaching staff should receive professional development to gain a better understanding of semester rules, regulations, and its requirements. The university faculty, particularly the affiliated colleges' staff, need more training in developing curricula, teaching methods, assessments, and research areas.*

**Keywords:** BS Program/Associate Degree, Semester System, Gomal University, Affiliated Colleges

#### Introduction

It was a paradigm shift from an annual /term system to the BS program, and B.Ed (H) Elementary was started in 2012 at the Institute of Education & Research Gomal University with a semester system. All the programs except Pharmacy were gradually shifted from the term to the semester system. The two years BA/B.Sc. and MA/M.Sc. Conventional programs were gradually phased out, and BS programs were formally started in all departments and affiliated colleges. It is a significant change; whenever change comes, it requires a lot of alterations and improvements over time. There are eight faculties, i.e. Faculty of Sciences, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Faculty of Law and Administrative Sciences, Faculty of Pharmacy, Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, Faculty of Engineering and Technology, Faculty of Agriculture, and Faculty of Veterinary & Animal Sciences and these faculties have 48 departments. Overall there are 60 affiliated colleges of Gomal University, of which 27 are the public sector while 33 are private sector affiliated colleges. Out of 27, 06 public sector affiliated colleges have the BS program while the rest of the public sector affiliated colleges have the Associate Degree programs. Higher Education Department (HED) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa financially supports these public sector colleges affiliated with Gomal University and follows the rules and regulations of Gomal University.

There is a difference in conducting exams at Gomal University and its affiliated colleges (public and private). The semester system is truly implemented in the BS/AD programs of Gomal

University. The same academic calendar is followed in all faculties except the Faculty of Pharmacy, where there is still annual system. The assessment is internal; the concerned teacher prepares and checks the paper. However, in public sector affiliated colleges, there is a cluster system, i.e., one staff member of any affiliated college prepares the concerned subject paper and is sent to all the affiliated colleges for its administration in all affiliated colleges. In these colleges, the examination paper is conducted on the same date, and they have the same academic calendar. The concerned college staff conducts exams, and even viva is conducted internally. A slight difference in assessment in BS/AD programs occurs in private affiliated colleges. The university conducts 60% of the exam i.e. final term exam, and the rest 40 % assessment is conducted internally by the same college. The university awards the degree to the graduates. The AD program graduates are admitted in the 5th semester of the concerned BS program at Gomal University or its affiliated colleges. At Gomal University, different programs have different semester lengths. The BS program (4 year) lasts for eight semesters, while the BS Law (Professional), Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) programs (5 year) and Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) program (5 years) last for ten semesters. The AD program (2 years), on the other hand, has four semesters. Each semester is 18 weeks long, with two weeks set aside for sessional tests, quizzes, midterms, and terminal exams. The BS program in Gomal University has various credit hour requirements, depending on the program duration. The 2-year program has 60-70 credit hours, the 4-year program has 120-140 credit hours, and the 5-year program has 160 credit hours. Full-time undergraduate students need to complete 15-18 credit hours per semester, while postgraduate students need to cover 09-12 credit hours per semester. To earn one credit hour for laboratory or practical work/project, students need to be in the lab for at least 120 minutes per week for the entire semester. Credit hours are denoted by two digits in parentheses with a hyphen in between. The first digit represents the theory portion, while the second digit represents the practical portion. For instance, 4(3-1) means a 4-credit course, with 3 credits for theory and 1 credit for practical work. Each credit hour is worth 20 marks. Each faculty member has to prepare the academic calendar for Fall, Spring, and Summer Semesters includes important dates such as the start and end of the semester, course registration, withdrawal deadlines, mid and final examination dates, and result notification dates. Additionally, on the first day of the semester, each teacher will provide students with a daily teaching program for each course. Students must adhere to the rules, regulations, course load, prerequisites, and policies of their respective Department/Institute. The Head of Department will conduct orientation classes during the first week of the semester to inform students about the Semester System of examination and discipline rules. Deans will ensure that all semester requirements and deadlines are met. To be able to take the final exam for the semester, a student must attend at least 75% of their classes. Students can make changes to their course schedule with approval from the Head of Department and relevant Dean. Within the first seven days, they can switch courses, and within the first five weeks, they can drop a course. To transfer courses, students need a B grade or higher in their previous course, and content equivalence verified by the Department of Basic Sciences. No transfers from unrecognized universities in first or final semesters, and admission merit must match previous year's admitted students. Mid Exam worth 30%, covers 50% of course material, in the week 9. Quizzes, assignments, and presentations worth 10%. Final Exam worth 60% covers 100%, in the week 18.

The grading of the students in semester system shall be as follows:

Marks obtained	Numerical Grade	Letter Grade	Remarks
90% - 100%	4.00	A+	Outstanding
80% – below 90%	4.00	A	Excellent
75% – below 80%	3.50 – 3.99	B+	Very Good
70% – below 75%	3.00 – 3.49	B	Good
65% – below 70%	2.50 – 2.99	C+	Fair
60% – below 65%	2.00 – 2.49	C	Fair
55% – below 60%	1.50 – 1.99	D+	Pass
50% – below 55%	1.00 – 1.49	D	Pass
Less than 50%	0.00 – 0.00	F	Fail
NA	NA	W	Withdrawn from the course
NA	NA	I	Incomplete

Source: Gomal University website

The date sheet will be posted one week before the exam on the notice board and will be shared with several officials. Teachers should give students the chance to review and sign their answer sheets after the midterm and final exams. The teacher should make the final award list within a week and include the answer sheets and question paper. After the final exam, the teacher will post awards on the notice board and send a copy to the Head of Department and the Dean. Within 10 days, answer sheets and unfair means cases will be sent for processing. Results will be announced within 15 days of receiving the final award list, except for unfair means cases (GU semester rules, 2016).

The strength and contribution of any educational system determine a nation's economic, social, intellectual, and structural development; these institutions are powerful instruments that shape not merely the personality and traits of a single student but also the entire generation and society (Kalhor et al., 2022). Many vital aspects are required to run an educational institution smoothly; three crucial elements are a leader, a teacher, and the students (Casey et al., 1998). Students are future country builders; the destiny of any nation is in their hands. Universities, as we all know, play an essential role in defining the standard for excellent work, such as developing new ideas, fostering innovation, educating young brains, and cultivating conscious and energetic people in the country (Aslam et al., 2012). Whatever education they acquire establishes the groundwork for a civilization (Kalhor et al., 2022).

Yousaf and Hashim (2012) highlighted that many universities worldwide have introduced and preferred semester systems at BS, AD, M. Phil, and Ph.D. levels to promote quality education in a true spirit by eradicating poor teaching-learning practices and rote learning. Students and instructors in Pakistan confront several challenges while implementing newly implemented semester-based evaluation procedures, including formulating assessment criteria, training for university faculty, and monitoring mechanisms (Shouka t& Muhammad, 2015). It is critical to developing a more innovative and futuristic semester system so that changing expectations of teachers and students worldwide may be met (Singh & Pravin, 2016).

Professors and teachers perceive the semester system nicely. Projects, fieldwork, seminars, tutorials, and the curriculum are favourable aspects. Similarly, learning system collaboration, regular progress monitoring, holding courses in standard methods, and helpful academic and physical environment innovation may all be regarded in the semester system's quality. However, there is a need for improvement in the semester system's implementation (Subedi, 2019). Full-time students, skilled instructors, applicable and creative curriculums, scientific teaching techniques, a resourceful library, a learning environment, and a timely academic calendar are required for the semester system to work well (Baral et al., 2019). The annual system's administrative personnel were instructed to switch to the semester system upon its implementation (Shoukat & Muhammad, 2015). However, the majority still requires training (Kalhor et al., 2022). Aral and Meher (2019) stated that both teachers and students are content with the semester system's examination implementation. Nonetheless, challenges arise in attaining excellence and quality in higher education in the 21st century, necessitating remedial action by the authorities. As a result, a research study was conducted at Gomal University and its affiliated colleges to improve the quality of the semester system for the BS/AD programs.

### **Literature Review**

According to Rahman (2013), the semester system is a way of organizing academic terms into two sessions of six months each. This approach to education has gained popularity as an innovative and effective way to improve the quality of teaching and learning. By dividing the school year into semesters, students can benefit from a more structured and consistent approach to exams, assessments, and overall classroom environment. According to Jadoon, Jabeen, and Zeba (2008), implementing a semester system is crucial for nurturing talented students by giving them consistent learning opportunities, feedback, and quality assessment. This helps to develop their work ethics, punctuality, and regularity, even when faced with limited resources and opportunities.

Supporters of the semester system argue that it has multiple benefits for students, including continual learning, regular feedback, improved comprehension of subjects, a manageable workload, focused discussions, and consistent study habits (Garcha, 2017). Bidani (2010) has stated that the semester system is more effective than the annual system. Many students, educators, scholars, and philosophers believe that the semester system allows enough time for students to participate in extracurricular activities that enhance their academics and confidence. However, for the semester system to work effectively, certain requirements must be met. These include a well-organized

curriculum, consistent class scheduling, timely and constructive feedback from faculty, easy accessibility to faculty for students to complete their coursework on schedule, reliable student information resources, a secure examination process, transparent evaluation, and timely release of student assessment results (Aslam et al., 2012). The semester approach allows students to engage in ongoing learning, evaluation, and feedback and get a deeper comprehension of the topic (Perveen & Saeed, 2014). A significant factor of globalization regarding the semester system is a requisite for creating an interaction between student and teacher. As a result, the semester system can provide students with opportunities for continual learning and assessment (Singh & Pravin, 2016).

The semester approach has resulted in an extraordinary success rate in terms of the overall passing ratio (Aslam et al., 2012). Furthermore, as compared to the yearly system, the score of graduates and toppers has grown (Longkumer, 2019). Similarly, Awan and Bilal (2015) stated that the semester system enables students to develop students regular study habits for getting and securing more meritorious marks. The semester system enables students at BS and AD level to complete their courses well in time along with all assignments, presentations, quizzes, assessments, etc. Aslam et al. (2012) asserted that students better understand and learn CGPA and the importance of attendance in the semester system. Therefore, the semester system is a better and more effective system to promote and enhance the education system at BS, AD, M. Phil, and Ph.D. levels. Abro (2014) found that it's very important for the government of the time, policy-makers, administrators, teachers, and decision-makers to cooperate by removing all demerits or drawbacks of semester system where necessary to make it more effective. Teachers are dedicating greater time and attention to teaching and evaluation (Biswas, 2007). (Regmi, 2017).Khaniya (2014) discovered that one of the major criteria that separate it from the yearly system is continual student evaluation. The opportunity for interactions within the classroom, in the form of a mandatory provision, distinguishes it paradigmatically from the annual system, which ultimately falls under the premise of knowledge imparting in the form of a 'transfer of knowledge' from knowledgeable faculty to students who are deprived of that (Dahal, 2019).

### **Research Methodology**

A qualitative research design is adopted in the study, and it is suitable for striving to thoroughly comprehend the relevance, experience, and perspective of the participants. The qualitative design allows us to gain a deep and comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives. The approach was focused on truly listening to and valuing each individual's unique insights and opinions, rather than simply quantifying or generalizing information. To ensure that the team gathered the most valuable insights possible, conducted semi-structured interviews with a diverse range of individuals, including two deans, eight HODs, four internal controllers of Gomal University, four principals, and two faculty members of affiliated colleges. They used a purposive sampling technique to ensure that they heard from a variety of voices and perspectives. The interview items were developed based on updated literature and reviewed by various HODs and research experts. The team carefully selected fifteen items for the interviews, but also encouraged participants to share their opinions on any other relevant topics. The process focuses to receive written feedback on the BS/AD programs and semester system, including their strengths and weaknesses. Participants were given the choice of a comfortable location and could opt for a half-hour audio-taped interview or to write their responses. The team used semi-structured questions following Creswell's (2008) and Merriam's (2009) recommendations for in-depth qualitative studies. The research team asked predetermined questions but allowed follow-up questions to gain more information or clarity. Later on a thorough analysis was done and its result was presented in a narrative summary form. This study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human participants, including respect for human dignity, free and informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality. Participants had the right to withdraw at any time without negative consequences, and all provided information was kept strictly confidential. Their names do not appear in this study.

### **Research Instrument**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the targeted respondents. The semi-structured interview covered the related areas. The items/questions of the semi-structured interview were related to the BS program's objectives and whether these are being achieved during BS/AD programs. Whether the program affects on students' academic performance, as well as whether the courses align with job market demands. The teaching and learning process is effective in the BS program, along with the teachers' access to assessment policies and procedures. Additionally, feedback from teachers



to students was asked, and the types of questions are subjective or objective or mixed questions are used in exams. The assessment procedures were analyzed to ensure they covered the content, cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. The development of critical thinking skills, assistance with research proposal development, research method adoption, and guidance on data collection and analysis were also asked. The items asked related to the implementation of rules and regulations, as well as discussing the issues and problems teachers and students face with admission and job finding in BS/Associate degree programs.

### **Results**

The views and voices of Deans HODs, coordinators of Gomal University, and principals, coordinators, and internal controllers of affiliated colleges are submitted here in a narrative summary for the convenience of the readers and policymakers for appropriate policy decision. They are of the view that the objectives of the program may be preferred for improving the practical skills of the students and may be provided opportunities for their engagements in practical activities. Internship/project activities need to be focused to keep them prepared for the practical world. They may get in touch with real-world issues by solving various field-related case studies through the semester system in the BS program. Moreover, students may visit various factories and industries so that they could get the real picture of what they have studied in the books. Courses of BS/AD programs may be updated at regular intervals to keep these courses in line with the need of the market and global demand. Discipline and uniformity in these programs may be maintained in programs of the university and its affiliated colleges. Teachers may be provided with continuous professional development to keep them updated about the BS/AD program and its semester system's rules and regulations. Some of the views are that they have less time for the semester system and due to sudden emergent or unfavourable circumstances the academic activities may not be continued and they cannot do justice to the essence of the semester system. They were of the view that the student's academic performance is improved via the semester system. The continual evaluation of students may make them habitual to study and keep them engaged. This system upgrades their cognitive skills. The teachers are supposed to give back the answer sheets and discuss the whole paper with the students before the announcement of the results. This prevents the students to do not repeating the same mistakes in the future and make students satisfied with their marks. However, some faculty members do not share the marks and discuss the examination paper with the students because of a shortage of time. They were of the view that some of the faculty members know research, however, training may be provided to the faculty members regarding advanced teaching methods, thesis topic selection, how to write the literature review, adapt/adopt or develop tools, and research software to polish their existing capabilities/skills and to incorporate new skills. These trainings may highly support the faculty members to fruitfully and efficiently conduct their students' thesis projects. Different views were observed from the interviews about the format and the course content of the exam paper. Some were with the view to just have subjective questions in the papers while some favoured objective questions. However, most of the participants favoured the mixed questions approach that may properly judge the students' understanding and command of the subject. However, all the formats reflect the course content of the BS program and AD. There is a proper mechanism and body to monitor the semester system. However, they face certain problems. They face problems of time management limited time for a semester, financial incentives, rewards for achievement, and overburden of course content. They need professional grooming for attending seminars workshops and symposiums to keep themselves updated on global marketable needs. The students face problems in covering the whole course due to sudden unavoidable circumstances, the closure of the university, or any other issue. The teachers and students complain of having no easy access to teaching helping materials, lack of facilities like, E-Library, scientific labs, computer labs, and no study tours, Shortage of time creating problems, Maintenance of transparency and quality of education. The teachers of affiliated colleges and sub-campus face correspondence issues with the university. Teachers should ensure timely feedback to the students on formative and summative evaluation, easy access to physical and electronic resources, and timely assessments from faculty. The curriculum should be thoughtfully organized, with consistent schedules, transparent evaluations, and secure exams to ensure a positive learning experience. This study will contribute valuable insights to the field and help inform future decisions.

### **Conclusion/Discussion**

This study focuses on the professional development of teaching staff at Gomal University and its affiliated colleges, particularly in research and teaching methodologies for BS programs. The results indicate a need for proper professional training in areas such as teaching methodology, curriculum development, assessment, research, and student supervision. This includes training on how to write introductions and literature reviews, how to adapt or develop study tools, and how to use statistical software for data analysis and referencing. The study also found that the semester system is more efficient and productive compared to the annual system, which is supported by previous studies from (Bidani, 2010; Umair, 2013; Regmi, 2017; Kathmandu & Dhakal, 2022). The semester system encourages engagement, discourages absenteeism, and allows for regular assessment and constructive feedback to help teachers identify their students' weaknesses and strengths. Overall, the study's findings are supported by previous literature. The semester-based system differs fundamentally from the earlier annual system, specifically in teaching, learning, and evaluation. Continuous learning, evaluation, and feedback are superior factors that improve the semester system compared to the annual system (Regmi, 2017). Uprety and Pokharel (2016) found issues with uniformity in student evaluation and English competency hindering Master's students' understanding. Some students rely on guess papers and notes from others instead of prescribed readings. Faculty members also do not always follow the syllabus. Improvements are necessary to bridge the gap between bachelor and master level studies. The semester-based education system encourages interaction in class. The success of the semester system implementation should be evaluated to avoid repeating past mistakes. Yousaf, A., & Hashim, M. (2012) found that semester and annual systems have notable differences in student competence and effectiveness. Annual system offers in-depth study, while the semester system focuses on analysis and evaluation. Quality education requires proper implementation and teacher training. A study by Rahman (2013) found that students were unhappy with internal assessment and needed more help understanding CGPA. The research suggests that teachers should be fair, grade based on performance, encourage co-curricular activities, provide feedback, and offer workshops to improve competence in the semester system. Nasira Jabeen (2008) found that students who are evaluated through a semester system tend to score higher marks than those who undergo an annual system. This is because the semester system allows more time for students to integrate their knowledge and skills across different disciplines, resulting in better learning outcomes. Aggrawal (1997) recommended that learning objectives and strategies for the semester system be communicated to students and teachers via seminars. However, there is still room for improvement in the semester system, particularly in addressing the anxiety students have about finding time for extracurricular activities. Tribhuvan University's Faculty of Education has switched from annual to semester systems in some subjects to keep up with global education trends. The change has resulted in higher student pass rates and satisfaction. Tribhuvan University's Faculty of Education has switched from annual to semester systems in some subjects to align with global education trends, resulting in increased student pass rates and satisfaction (Chongbang, K.B., 2014).

Many students choose to attend public colleges within Gomal University due to their lower admission fees of around Rs. 10,000 , which adds up to a total of Rs. 40,000/--50,000/- for the entire four-year program. In comparison, a university within the same field charges Rs. 30,000 per semester, resulting in a total of Rs. 240,000 for a full BS program. Private colleges affiliated with the university have a slightly different fee structure. Gomal University provides quality education with a majority of Ph.D./MPhil faculty, while the colleges have staff with MA/M.Sc degrees, though some do have MPhil/Ph.D. qualifications. The university offers extracurricular activities, seminars, workshops, and symposiums, which the students attend to learn new trends. Graduates of Gomal University communicate well and can easily understand gender issues due to the mixed class environment. According to the results, students who graduated from AD require assistance with admission in the 5th semester due to limited availability of seats. Most students require help with admission as they can quickly gain admission to Gomal University and its affiliated colleges, but universities with different subject combinations and variations require additional assistance. The study also suggests that the course content's time duration in the semester system is not being optimally utilized. Teachers could benefit from better training in time management skills. Additionally, inadequate access to technology (internet facilities, PCs, etc.) is another issue that needs to be addressed. The respondents suggest providing training and up skilling opportunities for faculty in the university and staff in affiliated

colleges, both private and public. This is highly needed to enhance the skills of teaching and non-teaching staff in course content, curricula development, teaching methodologies, ICT integration, assessments management, student results compilation, and research projects. These efforts can unlock the potential of affiliated college educators to support their students' growth and improve the teaching and learning experience. Parents and students should be informed about AD program admission policies, subject combinations, and requirements for AD graduates' admission into a BS program in the 5th semester.

### Recommendations

The study suggests that the university should set up a centre for continuous professional development. This centre should provide training on curriculum development, teaching techniques, assessment methods, research skills, communication skills, SPSS, and data analysis techniques on a regular basis. Shoukat and Muhammad (2015) also noted that implementing semester-based evaluation procedures in Pakistan has been challenging for both students and professors. They highlighted the need for assessment criteria formulation, faculty training, and monitoring mechanisms. The BS/AD programs with semester systems are new, and stakeholders should be informed about the rules and regulations so they can be implemented properly. All colleges affiliated with Gomal University should have the same academic calendar, course outlines, exam dates, and policies. The study recommends improving the quality of teachers, physical facilities, and strict adherence to the academic calendar, teaching methods, assessment techniques, research opportunities, and the availability of extracurricular activities. Compared to university faculty, the staff of affiliated colleges needs more training in developing curricula, teaching methods, assessments, and research areas, as well as understanding semester rules, regulations, and requirements. Awareness seminars for parents and students should be organised about AD program admission policies, subject combinations, and requirements for AD graduates' admission into a BS program in the 5th semester.

### Suggestions for Future Research

This study focused on the perspectives of Gomal University's Deans of faculties, HODs of various departments/principals of affiliated colleges and faculty members, future researchers should also consider students' viewpoints. This study is qualitative, so future studies should try on a mixed method approach. Additionally, this study was conducted at a government university in Pakistan, so future studies should expand to private universities and government universities across the country.

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