

CREDIT-MODULE SYSTEM IN UZBEKISTAN UNIVERSITIES: INTRODUCTION, CHALLENGES AND MEASURES

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Abstract. This article defines the term of credit-module system and describes the history of the gradual transition to a credit-module system in Uzbekistan. This paper also investigates the challenges faced by universities and measures taken by the government.

Key words: *Education, Credit-module system, European ECTS system, autonomous learning, academic mobility, curriculum.*

Since its independence, the Republic of Uzbekistan's education system has experienced significant transformations which have led to a shift in the fundamental approach to education. Uzbekistan's flexible education system has expanded the boundaries of the educational sphere, meeting new requirements in the context of global competition. According to the education statistics agency, the number of students studying in 191 higher education institutions (HEIs) in Uzbekistan was more than 500 thousand in 2020, doubling in just two years to reach one million in 210 HEIs (1). Surveys confirm that receiving higher education for many nowadays is becoming a social norm and the number of educational institutions is increasing along with the number people who wish to become qualified. Therefore, it has become more crucial now than ever before to set out a clear mechanism to provide quality education for the quickly growing demand for higher education.

The formation of quality knowledge and science is closely related to the well-governed education system. Hence, the education system in HEIs is usually assessed by the level of academic staff, the infrastructure for the formation of independent learning and most importantly the alignment between the needs of students and course content (Farida 287). The credit-module system is a system aimed at independent education, which determines the creative mastering of knowledge on the basis case of credits. This system is structured as a mix of two approaches - modular and credit-based teaching technologies, which are generally established in the educational

system of developed countries and, have proven their effectiveness over time, and, while distinct, complement each other (Inom 723). After all, the British philosopher Francis Bacon, who lived in the Middle Ages, argued that the main key to a strong conflict resolution is a logical analysis of each terminology in the problem.

First of all, it is important for HEIs to differentiate between the terms and recognize how they interact to create systematized quality education as well as an understanding of what objectives and tasks the system puts forward. A **credit represents** a unit of study workload spent by a student to study and master a subject in a particular field of study or program. Defined by normative guidelines, it typically reflects a minimum amount of time usually equivalent to one week, including in-class and independent study. According to Farida and Umida, flexibility in designing curriculum and assigning credits based on the course content and hours of teaching are the main tasks involved (288). It means that the system should allow students to create their own curricula increasing the share of autonomous learning in the educational process so that he or she could become a competitive professional in his or her chosen field in the future.

A module is a component of the curriculum which covers multiple subjects and courses. It usually integrates different disciplines designed to develop students' knowledge, skills, and ability for analytical and logical thinking. Teachers organize the learning process by delivering live, video, and audio lectures while coordinating and monitoring student activities when they engage in independent study and mostly explore topics on their own. The research conducted by Farida and Umida emphasizes the following objectives as key components for module-based curricula: full disclosure of learning objectives and tasks; to ensure that the module contents are relevant to the current job market, to develop clear assignments for the assessment of independent learning (289). In our view, providing a degree which will provide knowledge outside the academic environments that will benefit social, economic and cultural development is key mission for HEIs to implement through the credit-based system.

If we look back at the history of credit-module system adoption in developed countries, U.S. universities may be considered as a pioneer in introducing it first in

the 18th and 19th centuries to liberalize the learning process and determine a student's weekly academic workload. In 1869, Charles William Eliot, president of Harvard University and a prominent figure in American education, introduced the concept of the "credit hour". Thus, in 1870-1880, a system of credit hours was introduced and the strict, predefined university curricula were cancelled, allowing students greater autonomy to select and study subjects of their interest from those offered within the curriculum. This transformation played an important role in the revitalization of Harvard University.

The efforts of European countries regarding transferring HEIs to a single credit system began in 1970s, based on the American credit system and the Netherland higher education system. As a result of the introduction of the credit-module system, student exchange began to develop between universities in European countries (Maxammadjonova 145). Today, different educational systems are widely used, including the United States Credit System (USCS), European Credit System (ECTS), Asia-Pacific Credit System (UCTS), and the UK Credit System (CATS). Among these, the U.S. and European models are the most commonly adopted.

The Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation of Uzbekistan prioritized the implementation of the European ECTS system after thoroughly researching world credit education models. The decision was based the fact that the ECTS system is recognized by many foreign countries, to facilitate exchange of professors and professors and students as well as the result of the fact that this system shows effective results in education and similarity of educational stages (Majidova 1595). After the approval of the Action Strategy on the five priority directions of the development of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2017-2021 by the head of our state, Sh.Mirziyoev, issues such as increasing the efficiency of higher education institutions and introducing world standards for evaluating the quality of education were put on the agenda. Hence, the system was introduced in 2020 throughout the country but it was first initiated by the president in 2019. This transformation was needed in order to develop competitive personnel in the world labour market and to improve the quality education that is being steadily adapted by universities to ensure that it provides the consistency and uniqueness of curricula, that clearly reflect the

information about the educational process in a particular field of study and specialization. However, as the system is totally new for Uzbek universities it has been raising questions regarding many aspects of the credit-based system management among both educators and administrators. Thus, it is now important to examine some of the most widespread challenges faced by Uzbekistan universities today.

One of the most common challenges that this system is not compatible with the world's developed education systems. The research by Ruzumboy discusses that unnecessarily extensive curricula leads to pedagogic overload for the teachers and learners (93). Most parts of curricula are based on one-sidedness of pedagogic processes and, hence, there is a little attention on the practice and alignment with real-life experiences. The reason is that a larger part of the university staff do not possess practical experience in their own fields. Therefore, most students tend to struggle to meet practical job market requirements when they graduate from university.

Also, the research paper by Inom discusses that the fact that students remain mostly listeners in the universities of Uzbekistan, as a result of which the personnel who have reached the slowness of practice are not able to give good results in the fields (723). Educators' pedagogical practices have traditionally relied on lectures as the primary mode of instruction which has usually resulted in the classrooms often resembling one-way communication channels where educators deliver knowledge and students passively receive it. Another important factor contributing to this problem is strong reliance on conventional assessment methods that prioritize memorization and standardized tests rather than critical thinking and application of knowledge in practice. However, according to Maxammadjonova "the principles of the credit-module system are to organize student-oriented education, achieve transparency in education, strengthen flexibility in education, and most importantly developing student critical thinking" (131). In other words, this system is not only the process of organizing education but also a model of evaluation based on a collection of modular teaching technologies and a credit measure. It should increase the commitment and demand from university professors where the teacher performs not

only informational and supervisory functions, but also advisory and coordinating functions.

Most importantly, the failure of universities to effectively assess and promote independent learning among students is a significant challenge. Many students who enter higher education occasionally lack prior experience in independent learning approaches, such as self-directed study and critical thinking exercises. As research shows that in most universities a student is assigned a task, thereby receives an assessment during class hours. There is a little emphasis placed on the creative, independent work of the student (723). Additionally, students are assessed by their test results or in-class assignments. This is typically because the curriculum structure may not effectively include the independent study hours in teachers' workloads and results in instructors viewing their teaching responsibilities limited to contact hours.

It should be noted that the government has been taking further steps to address the issues at hand. The decree "On approval of the concept of the development of the higher education system of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030" signed by the President on October 8, 2019 ensures the step-by-step transfer of the educational process to the credit-module system in higher education. On this basis, the development of a regulation on measures to radically improve the efficiency of the personnel training system in the universities was developed by the Ministry of Higher Education for each of the universities. Another outstanding example is "El-Yurt Umidi" foundation which organizes seminars and trainings with the participation of foreign experts who are closely familiar with the system. In addition, one of the members of the International Council of Experts under the "El-Yurt Umidi" Foundation has been appointed as an expert advisor to 10 self-financing universities (Farida 291). Apart from trainings, the foundation now allocates a considerable amount of the budget to the students who choose to study abroad. By providing employment opportunities in administrative roles for these students following their studies, the country aims to improve the overall effectiveness of education management.

In order to make independent work for students more convenient, most universities are now using a special site created by the Higher Education. On this site,

students can download tasks in the given order, while the teacher assess them. The student's rating is determined by both the online and the instructor's deadline. Additionally, independent work and home tasks are not evaluated by students who do not upload them to the site (Inom 725).

Uzbekistan universities are stepping forward to improve the quality of education through the implementation of the credit-module system. A greater emphasis on good governance will help guarantee transparency, reveal the true knowledge of the student, and allow students to study and work independently. In turn, autonomous learning will lead to an increase in students' independence and help inspire, creative initiative and activities of professionals in the future. Not only will the universities benefit from higher levels of academic mobility but also may help the government set up effective collaboration with foreign countries in the future. Today, the European credit system is practiced in almost all universities of Uzbekistan. In our perspective, one of the most important missions now is to train personnel in accordance with the requirements of the labor market. Therefore, the measures to tackle challenges and the efforts to fundamentally reform the higher education system is a big step in the right direction for Uzbek education.

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