

Questions

- 1. In your view, why was a change from three-year to four-year undergraduate programmes made at DU?**
- 2. As a teacher of English, what bearing has this change had or is this change likely to have on the subject area?**
- 3. Should similar restructuring of undergraduate programmes be implemented more widely in Indian higher education?**

Sunaina Kumar, Professor of English, Director, School of Humanities, Indira Gandhi National Open University, Delhi

1. In your view, why was a change from three-year to four-year undergraduate programmes made at DU?

I believe to make it more "international"

2. As a teacher of English, what bearing has this change had or is this change likely to have on the subject area?

I believe it has unnecessarily looked for international certification when a majority of students are looking for MA or PhD or job openings in India itself. Also, I believe it could have been run as a pilot first instead of implementation without adequate consultation with interest groups--students, teachers, potential employers

3. Should similar restructuring of undergraduate programmes be implemented more widely in Indian higher education?

NO! Not if it is done in the same way. Where students are looking for studies abroad, jobs abroad or have the luxury of delaying jobs it could be considered.

G.J.V. Prasad, Professor of English, Jawaharlal Nehru University

1. In your view, why was a change from three-year to four-year undergraduate programmes made at DU?

A desire to emulate the American system rather than the British. Also to create avenues to ensure that students leave the programme without an honours degree but with more than

an attendance certificate! Really I cannot fathom any academic reason for the change because it gives no flexibility at all to the students except to leave the programme at the end of two or three years. Students are still admitted to their majors right at the beginning of the programme and are asked to do a number of compulsory courses in areas decided by the university. So, if this is meant to usher in a Liberal Arts undergraduate programme, it has started off tying itself into completely illiberal knots.

2. As a teacher of English, what bearing has this change had or is this change likely to have on the subject area?

What the degree tries to do is to give students a number of basic (soft) skills including competence in English. What this will ensure is that a number of English teachers will have to re-invent (or recognise) themselves as language teachers or that a large number of English posts will be for ELT specialists. Eng lit teachers will have to promote their discipline as oriented towards skill development and convince administrators that critical thinking is a necessary skill and that it is best developed through a study of literary texts.

3. Should similar restructuring of undergraduate programmes be implemented more widely in Indian higher education?

Restructuring -- yes. Similar -- NO.

Saugata Bhaduri, Professor of English, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi

1. In your view, why was a change from three-year to four-year undergraduate programmes made at DU?

It is difficult to fathom the exact reason as to why this important change was implemented in such a great hurry, with very little consultation with the stakeholders, but if one were to speculate, it appears that there could be two reasons: (a) to have some kind of a notional parity with the US system, in terms of the number of years a student spends to earn a bachelor's degree at least, so that students who go to the US for higher studies do not have to undergo an additional year of coursework there (this reason having no utility, and only a loss of one precious year of one's life, for all those who will not go to the US though!); (b) to allow students three levels of exit, thus demarcating between the bulk of the students who, in spite of having undergone an undergraduate programme at a university, would be mere diploma-holders or non-honours degree holders (if they quit after 2 or 3 years, respectively), and a few who will get 'real' honours degrees, thus creating a hierarchy among students in terms of their differential levels of skills and employability, while also euphemizing the high current dropout rate.

A third probable reason, which is otherwise not germane to the increase of the duration of the programme from three to four years but which also accompanied this change through an overhaul of curricular content, is to subject students to dumbed down and non-specialized courses so that undergraduates emerging out of the DU system hereafter have very little criticality, and are instead easily manipulable as cogs in the normative machinery.

2. As a teacher of English, what bearing has this change had or is this change likely to have on the subject area?

Not belonging to DU, this change has not had any impact on my pedagogic practices or even on the discipline as a whole (because DU is just one university, and changes in its curricular structure are not significant on a disciplinary scale), but as I gather from my research students, most of who teach in DU colleges, the change has had disastrous effects on those who are its poor objects. The inclusion of diverse subjects unrelated to the chosen discipline in which one ought to have been given specialized and intensive input, the dilution of standards even within courses that are ostensibly on 'Language, Literature and Creativity' by including inane readings and exercises, and the three-tiered exit policy, where students who leave at different points will be exposed to only certain periods of English literature (since the 'discipline' courses are arranged chronologically as per period of English literature over the four years!), displaces the very notions and objectives of English Studies, and not in a positive way. I tell my students, who are the teachers of these courses, that since you have been taught to be critical of the texts you read, be critical now of the very texts and the curricular modules you teach, and train your students to be critical of what they are being taught, lest English studies loses out on its historical mandate.

3. Should similar restructuring of undergraduate programmes be implemented more widely in Indian higher education?

No way! Fortunately, all other universities of India have had better sense to not allow such tendentious and dangerous experimentations within their spaces, and I sincerely hope even DU considers a rollback of the programme, as has been the demand from most quarters of its stakeholders.

Name withheld, Jamia Millia, Delhi

1. In your view, why was a change from three-year to four-year undergraduate programmes made at DU?

I think the reason why the FYUP was introduced is two-fold.

First, there is a need to change/revamp/reform the educational paradigm which has been followed in India that is 10+2+3+2. The change/reform is proposed to make it more contemporary and in sync with the American college education system in a more and more globalised educational market.

The existing system (10+2+3+2) works with a precise logic. Ten years a student is introduced to various fields of knowledge and his/her tastes are expected to be refined at the end of matriculation. With this the student can join a field of study which is a combination of similar subjects at the +2 level, and after the completion of the +2 level the student can still narrow down his/her subject area and focus on a specialised field for undergraduate course at the +3 level. At the postgraduate level the knowledge gained at undergraduate level is intensified with more critical and analytical perspectives so as to make a student eligible to teach the same or go for higher-end researches or to choose other professional options.

But the foundation courses introduced at the first 2 semesters of FYUP in DU aims at reminding a student of all that he/she had learned in the 10+2 level. The logic of this reminding is still not very convincing.

Second, there are education reform bills pending in the parliament including that of foreign university bill. The government needs a system to evolve in practice which would create necessary background for the passing of reformation bills and introduce foreign universities in India. It is clear common sense that no foreign university will come and directly start undergraduate courses which would need a lot of infrastructure. They will begin with PG courses. There should be a set of UGs, who can join for the 1 year PG provided by foreign universities. Now that DU is going to introduce 1 year PGs it is pretty clear that an identical system can be imported from abroad which will be termed more competent, more advanced, more valid, and more marketable.

It is no harm to make identical system with that of foreign universities. But my hypothesis is this, which is the source of my contention:

When foreign universities come to India, it is fairly certain that they won't introduce all faculties from abroad. They'll bank on the best of Indian teachers, catching them with the best of career prospects, salary scales, and so on. The best professors leave Indian public universities, the standard of education goes down in Indian universities. Now that UGC has made it mandatory for all universities to have NAAC accreditation to get future funding, the financial aid to universities from UGC and government will gradually be based completely on grading. You take out the best faculties from the public sector, grade the universities with low grades, decrease the funding gradually, cut down scholarships for underprivileged sections, and Indian public sector higher education will collapse. There you are, those who can afford a competent education from abroad or Indian private universities will go for higher education, and naturally others will be out.

The idea that Dr. Dinesh Singh celebrates, namely the multiple exit points, is a great farce. You tell a student that s/he can leave the college with a diploma after the 2 years and don't think about a Hons degree. The claim is that the diploma will entitle the student to get a job. The irony is that candidates with a post doctorate find it difficult to get a job, how will a mere diploma with no particular competence in any field of knowledge but a mere re-introduction to all that the student learned in 10+2 help him/her get a job?

Another hypothesis:

When you have multiple options in FC courses and the optional (DC2) courses a student has to take, there will never be a confirmation of the number of teachers needed to teach in any institution. The students of one batch may go for a set of optional courses that the students

of a future batch may not. So you have to keep on changing your teaching staff. This means that no complete permanent appointments can be made in any department, because the workload which comes to a department in one semester may not be there in the next semester. So you can carry on with adhocism and temporary appointments. But adhocism/temporary appointment is not merely a DU phenomenon, but a nation-wide phenomenon in all public sector educational institutions. The problem is that it will lead to an eternal uncertainty with the teaching staff and will gradually affect the quality of their teaching and pedagogy..

2. As a teacher of English, what bearing has this change had or is this change likely to have on the subject area?

To put it simply, not much. Students of English will learn English at any cost like any other student of any other discipline. But if we can give a Hons degree in 3 years why should we make the students wait for one more year? One year costs a lot in terms of time, economy, and future. One might say that foreign students spend four years in UG class and one year in PG class and we can follow the same. My simple contention is that we need to realise the basic differences between the western and the Indian education systems.

Moreover, in the DU format, why should a student of English literature be compelled to study mathematics, business management, Hindi, etc etc? One might say that it is good in a sense that it gives them an introduction to many fields and literature encompasses all. But the fact is that they already had introduction to all these fields in their 10+2 stage and this reminding does nothing but to waste their one valuable year. Teaching FC courses to English literature students diverts their attention and which, as it is experienced in DU, provides less room for literature students to focus on their subject area.

The shifting and shuffling of authors, periods, works, movements, etc are specific to specific universities and a DU model has nothing to do with it. And, I have never thought that DU curriculum is a paradigm for English literature courses in UG and PG level. There are better courses at offer for BA English and MA English students in other parts of the country. But courses like Language Literature and Creativity (English) and Applied Language Course in English (Translation and Interpreting) seem to be very promising. Despite the disinterest with which the students have met these courses being FC courses, they have been fruitful enough to inculcate in the students a certain positive attitude towards the units under discussion. These courses bear the limitation of being the lone players at display instead of the previous set of courses like Business English, Technical Writing, Individual and Society, Language, Literature and Culture, Linguistic Plurality and Literary Traditions in India, etc which were offered to different groups of students according to the demands of their discipline. What I would suggest is a midway between both.

3. Should similar restructuring of undergraduate programmes be implemented more widely in Indian higher education?

As I mentioned in the first answer, there is no harm if a four-year undergraduate programme is introduced elsewhere. But the above concerns remain.

In the case of DU, the major criticism is that the reformation does not fit into the constitutional mandates. If the constitution provides a model 10+2+3, one has to pass an

amendment in the parliament to reform that model. But it is just a matter of following the proper procedures so as to respect the democratic machinery.

But if there has to be a complete reformation of higher education, making it four-year undergraduate and one-year postgraduate in the national level, then the UGC and the central government must think about it. They must constitute committees, get the responses from intellectuals, state governments, students, parents, and experts from the academic market. Such a reform is possible but we need to make our UGs more competent making them research oriented and asking them to submit a dissertation at the end of UG and PG. It is better to make students do serious and original research in their specific areas than teaching them some of the “really useless” FC courses.
