



# The Impact of CBCS Curriculum on Education at the Graduation Level: A Philosophical and Psychological Perspective

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## Abstract

The Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) represented a major curriculum reform in Indian higher education aimed at introducing flexibility, interdisciplinarity, and student autonomy at the graduation level. This paper examined the impact of CBCS from both philosophical and psychological perspectives, situating it within the larger framework of educational reform. Philosophically, CBCS aligned with the ideals of liberal and pragmatic education, emphasizing learner choice, autonomy, and holistic development. Psychologically, it affected student motivation, engagement, stress, and cognitive growth. The study highlighted CBCS as both innovative and problematic—while it fostered flexibility and experiential learning, it also created challenges of decision overload, uneven implementation, and inequities across institutions. Importantly, the paper contextualized CBCS as a precursor to the Curriculum and Credit Framework (CCF), reflecting on how lessons from CBCS informed the design of new reforms under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The discussion concluded that while CBCS was imperfect in practice, it played a transitional role in Indian higher education by moving pedagogy closer to global standards. The article recommended greater faculty training, stronger student counselling, and context-sensitive implementation to make future frameworks more equitable and psychologically attuned to learner needs.

**Keywords:** Choice based credit system (CBCS), higher education, philosophy of education, psychology of learning, Curriculum and Credit Framework (CCF), curriculum reform.

## Introduction

Education at the graduation level had long played a crucial role in shaping an individual's intellectual, social, and professional identity. In India, the shift from the traditional annual system to the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) was not merely an administrative reform but represented a paradigmatic transformation in curriculum design and pedagogy (MHRD, 2015) [7]. Introduced under the guidelines of the University Grants Commission (UGC), CBCS aspired to bring Indian higher education closer to global standards by emphasizing flexibility, multidisciplinary learning, and student-centric approaches.

From a philosophical perspective, CBCS embodied the ideals of liberal education, autonomy, and the holistic development of learners (Aggarwal, 2019) [1]. It resonated with the pragmatic philosophy of John Dewey, which stressed experience-based learning and freedom of choice (Dewey, 1938) [3]. From a psychological perspective, the system directly affected learners' motivation, cognitive load, stress levels, and overall learning outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2000) [2]. However, the implementation of CBCS evoked diverse responses. While proponents hailed it as progressive, critics argued that it remained structurally weak, poorly implemented, and sometimes disconnected from socio-economic realities (Singh & Babu, 2019) [12]. Thus, an in-

depth exploration from philosophical and psychological standpoints was essential in understanding its impact at the graduation level.

## Philosophical Underpinnings of CBCS

Philosophy of education concerned itself with the aims, values, and justification of educational practices. CBCS aligned with constructivist epistemology, wherein knowledge was viewed as something learners actively constructed rather than passively received (Naik, 2011) [8]. Its foundations could be traced to:

**Liberal Philosophy:** Emphasizing individual freedom and holistic development.

**Pragmatism (Dewey, 1938):** Encouraging flexibility, choice, and experiential learning [3].

**Humanism (Rogers, 1983; Maslow, 1943):** Stressing learner-centeredness, self-actualization, and autonomy [10, 6].

## Psychological Dimensions of CBCS

The system also drew upon principles of educational psychology:

**Motivation Theories:** Autonomy and choice enhanced intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000) [2].

**Cognitive Load Theory:** Flexibility in subjects could either reduce or increase mental burden depending on

implementation.

**Assessment Psychology:** Continuous evaluation promoted consistent learning but sometimes generated stress.

### Philosophical Perspective on CBCS

Philosophically, CBCS embodied a vision where the learner was at the centre of the educational process. It allowed students to select from a basket of courses, combining core, elective, and skill-based subjects, aligning with Aristotle's vision of eudaimonia.

Freedom of choice in courses reflected existentialist philosophy, emphasizing individual responsibility in shaping one's destiny (Aggarwal, 2019) <sup>[1]</sup>. However, socio-economic disparities often restricted this freedom, challenging the principle of justice in education.

CBCS attempted to break disciplinary silos by encouraging interdisciplinary approaches. This reflected a postmodern critique of grand narratives, recognizing knowledge as fragmented and plural. Yet, critics questioned whether CBCS genuinely fostered critical inquiry or reduced learning to a checklist of credits.

### Psychological Perspective on CBCS

From a psychological lens, CBCS had both strengths and drawbacks:

**Motivation and Engagement:** Choice increased satisfaction and engagement, but without strong counselling, extrinsic motivations (grades, employability) often dominated (Deci & Ryan, 2000) <sup>[2]</sup>.

**Stress and Anxiety:** Frequent assessments created stress, particularly for first-generation learners.

**Cognitive Development:** Exposure to diverse disciplines fostered higher-order thinking (Piaget, 1972) <sup>[9]</sup>, though excessive options sometimes led to decision fatigue (Schwartz, 2004) <sup>[11]</sup>.

**Peer and Teacher Relationships:** Faculty increasingly acted as facilitators, aligning with Vygotsky's (1978) <sup>[14]</sup> scaffolding model, though lack of training weakened this shift.

Practical Challenges of CBCS Implementation

**Infrastructural Gaps:** Many colleges lacked resources to offer a wide range of electives.

**Faculty Readiness:** Teachers often lacked training in outcome-based and interdisciplinary pedagogy.

**Assessment Overload:** Continuous evaluation sometimes became mechanical rather than meaningful.

**Equity Concerns:** Rural students often could not fully benefit due to limited exposure and support.

**Employability Link:** Skill enhancement did not always match labour market needs.

**Table 1:** Comparative Philosophical and Psychological Insights

Aspect	Philosophical View	Psychological View
Choice & Autonomy	Embodied freedom, self-determination, and democratic values	Enhanced intrinsic motivation but often caused decision anxiety
Assessment	Ensured continuous growth and accountability	Promoted engagement but increased stress
Knowledge	Encouraged interdisciplinary, holistic learning	Broadened cognitive skills but risked superficial understanding
Equity	Aimed for universal access but faced ethical challenges	Unequal access undermined psychological well-being of marginalized learners

### Discussion

The CBCS curriculum represented a philosophical and psychological experiment in higher education. At its core, it resonated with democratic ideals of choice, learner autonomy, and holistic development (Dewey, 1938; Rogers, 1983) <sup>[3, 10]</sup>. Psychologically, it acknowledged the diversity of learners, aiming to address individual differences and promote lifelong learning.

Yet, the success of CBCS depended heavily on contextual factors. In resource-rich universities, CBCS enabled dynamic learning experiences. In contrast, underfunded institutions often implemented CBCS superficially, creating a disconnect between ideals and reality (Singh & Babu, 2019) <sup>[12]</sup>.

Thus, CBCS needed to be seen not as an end but as a process of continuous refinement. Its legacy informed the development of the newer Curriculum and Credit Framework (CCF), which attempted to address some of the gaps in CBCS while retaining its learner-centric spirit (UGC, 2022).

### CBCS as a Precursor to CCF

The introduction of the Curriculum and Credit Framework (CCF) in 2022 - 23 marked the next phase of higher education reform in India. In many ways, CCF built upon the experiences, successes, and shortcomings of CBCS.

**Continuity of Learner-Centric Philosophy:** CBCS introduced autonomy and flexibility; CCF expanded this vision in line with NEP 2020 (Government of India, 2020).

**Credit Mobility:** CBCS established the credit structure; CCF institutionalized it through the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC).

**Psychological Insights:** CBCS revealed students' struggles with stress and choice overload; CCF incorporated mentoring and multiple exit/entry options.

**Equity Issues:** CBCS exposed disparities between institutions; CCF emphasized phased implementation and integration of MOOCs (UGC, 2022).

In sum, CBCS acted as a transitional framework. It familiarized stakeholders with new practices, highlighted systemic gaps, and paved the way for a more robust reform. Understanding CBCS remains essential for interpreting and refining CCF.

### Recommendations

- Strengthen career counselling to support informed decision-making.
- Provide continuous faculty training in interdisciplinary pedagogy.
- Ensure balanced assessment with more reflective and project-based tasks.
- Invest in infrastructure, particularly in rural colleges.
- Adapt frameworks contextually rather than imposing uniform models.
- Integrate value-based education and psychological support alongside academics.

### Conclusion

The Choice Based Credit System marked a transformative attempt to redefine higher education at the graduation level in India. Viewed philosophically, it aspired to foster autonomy, democratic values, and holistic knowledge. Psychologically, it promised to enhance motivation, engagement, and cognitive development. However, its effectiveness depended on robust implementation, sensitivity to student psychology, and commitment to the ideals of equity and justice.

Ultimately, CBCS acted as a bridge between the ideals of

liberal education and the practical needs of learners, though its practice remained uneven. With the advent of the Curriculum and Credit Framework (CCF), the experiences and challenges of CBCS serve as important lessons. By integrating philosophical depth with psychological sensitivity, the new reforms may succeed where CBCS fell short, ensuring that higher education in India moves toward a more equitable and meaningful future.

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