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Students and Instructors' Attitudes towards and Perceptions of Block Scheduling in relation to Modular Postgraduate Courses: The Dilemmas there of

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***Abstract**: The main aim of this study was to examine postgraduate instructors' and students' perception of and attitude towards practices of block scheduling in ensuring effective learning of various subjects. Both quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (interview) methods were employed for data collection. Participants included postgraduate instructors, students, and program coordinators /Department heads from all academic units. Two sets of questionnaire (for the instructors and students) were developed. A total of 102 senior postgraduate students and 30 instructors were selected, filled out and returned the Questionnaires. Findings indicated that most instructors perceived their students as unprepared to pursue postgraduate education. The majority of the instructors' attitude towards the block teaching mode is negative and characterized by reservations of various kinds. Predominantly, negative attitudes also characterized students' responses. Both groups were not in support of the block schedule. Findings of the present study gleamed Less Is Not More if not least. It remains to be answered as to which mode of scheduling and method of teaching would better enable actualizing the competence–based learning outcomes of the modular courses. Block-scheduling alone is not the answer either.*

***Keywords:** Block scheduling, instructors, students, attitudes, perceptions*

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Introduction

The issue of block scheduling has already come into vogue and been implemented in the College of Humanities, Language Studies, Journalism and Communication, Addis Ababa University, following the introduction of the Modular Curriculum/Education at Addis Ababa University in 2009 - 2010. The then higher authorities of the University advocated modular programs which were simultaneously introduced with block scheduling/teaching. They were executing their plans by using the motto "less is more" taken from the literature on modularization as their driving force. The "less is more" philosophy espouses that students better understand and retain material when they have an opportunity to apply information to various contexts rather than merely cramming the facts (Rettig & Canady, 1996). Proponents utter the motto "less is more," meaning that less is covered but more is learned, distinguish essential and non-essential content/ subject matter and focus on the essential but are unable to prove the truth of such impressive language. It is said that with block scheduling, students and instructors are able to focus on fewer subjects, and to explore them in greater depth. It is also asserted that this exploration allows students to become engrossed in the subject matter rather than moving rapidly through material. However, in addressing the quantity versus quality issue of curriculum implementation in a block schedule, whether less really be more has been questioned in the literature and it is described as too optimistic.

If indeed less is more, we can get rid of content to our conscience's desire under the customary semester–based schedule. If the issue is a matter of introducing more active/interactive methods of teaching and assessment, there are various Departments in the College which are used to employing various methods/ways of teaching language through, say, the implementation of task-based approaches, skill-based practical approaches; these methods assign active roles to students. Many years long before the introduction of the block mode of teaching, postgraduate students of the College had been working in groups, working on individual and group assignments, projects, paper presentations which demand them to exploit library resources through hard work beside attending to their instructors' lectures and feedback, of course.

The block mode of delivery allocates one-month duration in most cases, two months in some cases, and even up to a maximum of two weeks in few cases, to cover a course including assessment and evaluation regardless of the very nature of courses. The practice is based on the positive and normal assumption that the postgraduate students can and should work on their own by taking responsibility for their own learning as they are matured, competent and motivated enough.

In education there has been a plethora of uses of the term module so much that it has resulted in several definitions and confusions. For example, in Britain, "module" is used, most commonly, for credit hours; and "modular structure/ course" for the credit system, noting by way of caveat that modules go by a variety of other names, e.g. units, blocks, course units, unit courses, courses (Theodossin, 1986). For the purpose of the present paper, however, modularization of courses involves the packaging of course content, either theory or practical, into shorter, virtually self-contained units which together cover the content which would be covered by a conventional, longer course and a method of teaching that is based on the building up skills and knowledge in discrete units. There seems to be general agreement that a module is a curriculum package intended for self-study. Modular Instruction (MI) may be defined as instruction which is either partly or entirely based on modules.

Module has the following characteristics as outlined by Sejpal (2013): *independent*, *Self-contained*, *Self-instructional*, *well defined*, *clearly defined objectives*, *concern individual differences*, *Association, structure sequence of knowledge*, *systematically organized learning opportunities*, *Utilization of a variety of media*, *Active participation by learner*, *immediate reinforcement of responses*, *Mastery of evaluation strategy* and evaluation *of the work*. French (2015) reviewed the rationale for modularization in the western world such as UK and throughout Europe, and USA focusing around five broad interrelated needs and desires: *the need to cater to more diverse student groups by creating greater flexibility and student mobility* (relates to the changing nature of the student population, and also linked to credit transfers, which permit students to transfer between courses and between universities with credit for academic achievement), *the desire to allow students greater choice in developing and managing their own studies*, *the desire to respond to the needs of employers and improve student employability*, *the desire to introduce inter- disciplinarity and breadth into the curriculum* (used to expand opportunities for interdisciplinary learning by permitting students to combine modules from different disciplines, or to promote curricula breadth by including units from other disciplines alongside a student's core degree), and *the need to reduce costs and maximize resources and efficiency* (2015: 3).

The extant literature is quite consistent in describing the use of modules in the working environment of students that modules can be administered to single use, small group or large group and can be made available or easily accessible for classroom use and free distribution. Modular instruction also needs mixing and matching - the art of combining modules independently i.e., the ability for a module to be combined with a number of different modules and to combine that module with a number of other modules.

Modular instruction therefore needs equipped instructors to know current needs of their students and create teaching modules to fit the specific needs. This demands consistent and periodic revisions, adaptations and inclusion of new content or subject matter.

Various perspectives in favor and against modularization are observed in the debates found in the literature which have also ideological and epistemological concerns beside pedagogical arguments related to student choice, quality and academic standards, learner motivation, improving learning outcomes, clearer curriculum objectives, assessment and feedback (French, 2015). The key feature of modularization cited is student choice and individualization dictated by intrinsic and extrinsic factors, such as learning and career aspirations, choosing modules that are perceived to be easier, choosing modules with classes that are held at a convenient day and time and exercising choices that avoid particular modes of assessment (Hennesy, Harrison, & Wamakote, 2010; Hedges, Pacheco, & Webber, 2014). The sharing of modules between different groups of students and instances is the other key feature.

In terms of the definitions given and characteristic features of modular courses reviewed above, we can identify various limitations, peculiarities and some may even wonder whether the Ethiopian Higher Education is modularized in the strict sense of the term as used in the Western World or in the literature in general. The practice in Addis Ababa University's CHLSJC[1] in particular does not satisfactorily fulfil the features or qualities identified above of modularized higher education system. It is a kind of *one size fits all* and *we decide for you* practice not as such substantially different from practices of the traditional curriculum/ syllabus and use of resources or reference materials. Many of the modules or outlines and brief descriptions of the modules are recycled versions of textbooks or course/reference books in use for the last many years. What appears to be taken for granted for modular curriculum is the course description which consist of an outline of learning outcomes, learning and teaching strategies, instructor's and student's roles, content and time breakdown (in ECTS), evaluation schemes/assessment methods and list of references for the course. It is actually similar to the traditional course outline except perhaps the learning outcomes are competence based.

Modularization is a content-based division while block–teaching is a time-based division that separates the academic year into hundred twenty-eight or more periods. Modularization, block-teaching or semesterization can either operate concurrently or independently. For instance, a module can be structured

[1]*In other Colleges of the University we may have similar observations, but this is itself another subject of study in its own right.*

in any amount and period of time, such as semester-based, a month or two or in even less amount of time, such as two weeks. Nonetheless, block teaching is much associated with modular education/ instruction in Addis Ababa University for it was simultaneously introduced with the term modularization following the wider Business Process Reengineering (BPR) reform the university has implemented. The reform required all academic departments and/or academic programs running Master's Programs to modularize and present their curricula through block teaching mode. Almost all of the CHLSJC modules are block-delivered, meaning students undertake a condensed period of study/time where they focus on one module a time. Their roles and practices are dictated by what is required in the modules they study. Thus, the author found it not sensible to dissociate modular education from block-teaching in the context of implementation of the reform in the CHLSJC.

However, modular education cannot be equated with or reduced to block teaching practices as can be concluded from the preceding lines. And, the study is not a study of the way in which modular instruction is realized in the CHLSJC. It does not aim to make a case either for or against modularization.

Objectives

The higher authorities of the University seem to have introduced modular program on the basis of its purported advantages without demanding or considering empirically valid research outputs from our own context and without consideration of the down side. While there may be some interesting success stories at several Universities elsewhere in the world, the case for block scheduling has not been established through serious, long-term scientific studies here in Ethiopia. The case for block scheduling is very weakly treated and, in some cases, is contradicted by scientific studies. It seems to have fared no better than the so called traditional teaching in general and task-based/interactive–teaching in particular, in the College as far as what we can learn from our observations over the last eight to nine years of implementing the Modular curriculum through block scheduling.

Uninformed pedagogical practice may result in the development of negative attitudes and cultivate reluctance and minimize the motivation to teach and learn. Black (1999) states that investigating what attitudes, beliefs and opinions groups of subjects with common traits hold, is of value because these attitudes will influence behavior. Information about preconceived ideas gained by surveying the attitudes of instructors and students have concerning practices of block teaching in the CHLSJC could shed light on how best to integrate modes of teaching and learning in the College so as to ensure successful or relatively good quality teaching and learning or positive pedagogical practice. Negative attitudes could have detrimental influence on the quality of teaching and

learning. For this reason, this study could add value by giving an insight into the instructors' and students' views on the practice of block teaching in the College.

Previous study conducted by Solomon, Ayalew and Daniel (2011) examined *Academic Staff's Views and Practices of Modular Course Delivery in the Graduate Programs of Addis Ababa University (AAU)*. We can deduce from the title of this research that the researchers believe modular curriculum is implemented in the University. The researchers suggested changing the attitudes of instructors without having empirically valid evidence from outputs of experimental or quasi-experimental research on which mode, or method of teaching results in better learning or achievement? They seemed to be a preacher of the need to jumpon the bandwagon. Another descriptive study was also conducted by Bineyam (2014) on a block teaching postgraduate health professionals' curriculum, in the College of Health Sciences, School of Medical Laboratory Sciences (SMLS), AAU. The study aimed to assess the value of online discussions in supporting students' engagement and interaction with their peers and teachers in a block teaching. He concluded that blended use of online discussion and face-to-face classroom teaching supports students' engagement and interaction with their peers and teachers, especially in the absence of enough qualified staff to provide guidance for students individually. He also asserted that online discussion could be a valuable addition to an intensive block teaching postgraduate curriculum where learners are engaged in full work load with academic exercises that may limit interaction with their peer and teachers. Gizat (2014) specifically assessed practices and challenges of modular programs in the College of Education and Behavioral Studies, AAU. The findings reported indicate lack of clarity in the modularization of master's program, resources (library and course materials) not up to the expected level, practices not in harmony with the module delivery guideline, courses not covered in given time and poor assessment strategy. However, majority of the respondents' attitude towards the practice of modular curriculum was reported as positive. Another study by Abatihun (2019) on *Modular/block teaching: Practices and Challenges at higher education Institutions of Ethiopia* indicated variations in practice across the universities sampled. The qualities taken positively were that modular/block teaching helping students to concentrate on one subject at a time while lack of emphasis on practical skills, separation of theory from practice, difficulty of implementing active learning due to limited time given were identified as drawbacks. What is deduced/implied from the works of these authors cited is modular instruction is practiced in our country and also they attracted several researchers in Addis Ababa University due to challenges and predicaments faced in process.

Besides, the block schedule is a dominant image/representation of modular curricula in the CHLSJC, AAU. Mostly, the block classes are run either between 8:00-12:00 am or 1:00pm - 5:00pm in the College. Also, there is no as such tailor-made material on desk or distributed among students as it is common in many western and Asian Universities; rather the students look for materials on line and hard-copy books in the libraries of the University/ College being guided by the course description and outline of the Units of the course. In many cases, the materials students are required to read are traditionally known as handouts and reference books in the various fields of specializations, namely Linguistics, and Applied Linguistics, Literature, Folklore, ELT, Communication, Journalism, Research Methods, Pedagogy.

The research problem investigated was: What are attitudes of instructors and postgraduate students towards block teaching in the implementation of modular courses under the postgraduate programs of the CHLSJC?

More specifically, the study investigated the following research questions:

- What is students' attitude towards the block mode of attending postgraduate classes?
- What is instructors' perception of and attitude towards their students' readiness to pursue postgraduate education?
- What do instructors and students think about availability of resources to run postgraduate classes?
- What problems do students and instructors attribute to block scheduling?

The main aim of this study is to examine College of Humanities, Language Studies, Journalism and Communication (CHLSJC)'s Postgraduate instructors' and Postgraduate students' attitude towards practices and perception of block scheduling in ensuring effective learning various subjects. The study aimed to provide a comprehensive assessment of the CHLSJC's employment of the block delivery mode that challenges the previous delivery of teaching (traditional scheduling) in the landscape of practicing modular education. The study could be of value for program evaluation and improvement in postgraduate programs of the University in general and the CHLSJC in particular. Knowing how instructors and students feel about teaching and learning in block scheduling will benefit other College/University administrators and the faculty.

In this paper, an attitude has been operationally defined as an individual's psychological positioning to evaluate an object, person, place, thing, issue or anything he/she comes across. Individuals show likes, dislikes, pleasant, unpleasant, favorable or unfavorable evaluation towards everything that a person experiences, thinks, observes, imagines. The definition, therefore, emphasizes that attitude predisposes one

to make a preferential response. An attitude is not a single predisposition but a set of interrelated predispositions focused on an attitude object or situation. It is a relatively enduring organization of interrelated beliefs that describe, evaluate, and advocate action with respect to an object or situation, with each belief having cognitive, affective, and behavioral components (Albarracín, Johnson, and Zanna, 2005; Wood, 2000; Eiser, 1996; Gordon, 1991; Jones, 1997).

Attitude is likely to affect education/ classroom practice; positive attitudes are closely and positively related to motivation to work with, willingness to learn, and to teach students of diverse backgrounds and needs. Attitudes influence decisions, and guide behavior. Students' and instructors' attitudes towards block teaching or a particular mode of delivery is likely to be fundamental to enhancing both teaching and learning. Changing students' negative attitudes towards learning is a process that involves determining the factors driving the attitude and using this information to bring about change. A positive learning attitude requires motivation and gratification. Students' attitude towards learning affects not only the amount of education but their desire for education (Kurgat, 2014). Indicators of the effectiveness of teaching and learning in employing block teaching could be the adoption of a more positive attitude towards block teaching.

Perceptions are defined as "an individual's or group's unique way of viewing a phenomenon that involves the processing of stimuli and incorporates memories and experiences in the process of understanding" (McDonald, 2012). The three essential attributes of perception are (a) a sensory awareness or cognition of the experience, (b) personal experiences that create a lens for interpreting and understanding a phenomenon, and (c) comprehension that can lead to a response (McDonald, 2012). Perception is the awareness, comprehension, and interpretation of a stimulus, and a prerequisite to the formation of an attitude toward such stimulus; for example, perceptions of good command of English or perceptions of good performance in mathematics (e.g., whether they are achievable) influence people's attitudes toward them (e.g., fear and avoidance).

Review of Related Literature

Block scheduling: an overview

Block scheduling is a restructuring of the day into classes much longer than the traditional 50-minute period. Block scheduling organizes the day into fewer, but longer, class periods to allow flexibility for instructional activities. Block scheduling elongates classes into larger "blocks" of time, usually 90 minutes or more, that meet less frequently (O'Neil, 1995; Zepeda and Mayers, 2006).[2] Hackmann (2004) reported that block scheduling is implemented for numerous reasons,

[2] *In the CHLSJC, for instance, a typical module has 20 periods a week and about 75-80 periods a month; a period consists of 50 minutes.*

which include course flexibility, enhancing the quality of educational experiences for students, improving instructional strategies, providing more time for learning, improving the school climate, stimulating curriculum changes, and addressing staffing needs.

Studies have shown both advantages and disadvantages of block scheduling. The literature elaborates many advantages that block scheduling offers. These benefits include: reducing the number of classes, assignments, tests, and projects that students must complete; teachers also benefit from increased instructional time due to the extended periods of time (Rettig and Canady, 1997); promoting smaller learning communities, providing teachers with more time that allows and encourages the use of active teaching strategies and greater student involvement ,and allowing students variable amounts of time (Zepeda and Mayers, 2006); students having extra concentrated time to study fewer subjects and receiving more individual attention from teachers (Queen, 2000). Gruber and Onwuegbuzie (2001) also noted that the greatest advantage found in block scheduling is an improvement in the school climate. Longer time blocks allow for in-depth study, such as individual student projects, peer collaboration, and one-on-one work between teachers and students (O'Neil, 1995; Eineder and Bishop, 1997). According to a study conducted by Rettig and Canady (2003), schools operating under block scheduling for five or more years had a number of positive outcomes: reduction in management problems, class tardiness, stress in teachers and students due to fewer classes, and time lost to administrative duties in the classroom. The findings also indicated teachers using technology more often and students engaged in more active learning strategies, more time available for student support and extended learning and additional learning time for students if they are at-risk of failing key courses. Hackmann (2004) also indicated that surveys show block scheduling improves teacher morale, increase student satisfaction, and enhance quality of the relationship between teachers and students.

Carroll (1994) found statistically significant improvement in student achievement in block scheduled class (at school). Seventy percent of students in a Maryland study had a positive attitude toward block scheduling and preferred it over a more traditional, 45 minute period schedule (Guskey, 1995). In a study at the Watauga High School in Boone, North Carolina on mixing block and traditional scheduling, Childers and Ireland (2005) found that most students have less homework each night because of a lighter course load. They also found that it helped at risk students because it allowed them to focus more on academics because they had fewer courses. A California high school reported that block scheduling had significantly improved the school climate and slightly improved student attendance and grade point averages (Shore, 1995). According to Gruber and Onwuegbuzie

(2001), restructuring of the school day into blocked periods of 90 minutes increased student satisfaction. Zepeda and Mayers (2006) found a decrease in student anxiety because students had fewer subjects to study for. Decreases in discipline referrals and dropout rates with an increase in attendance and grade-point averages have also been found to result from block scheduling (Gruber & Onwuegbuzie, 2001).

Block scheduling has also disadvantages/problems as the literature discusses. One of the most frequent attacks on block scheduling is the reduction in instructional time per class. Time in the classroom is wasted when there is limited use of instructional strategies. Teachers often overuse lectures (Queen, 2000). The overuse of lectures causes students to complain about classes being boring. The attention span of students is greater if teachers use a variety of active learning strategies (Rettig & Canady, 1997). Adams and Salvaterra (1998) examined the changes in teacher's pedagogical techniques and activities when classes changed from the traditional yearlong 42 or 50 minute class to the semester long 90 minute class. They found problems in instruction and student learning when there has been no change in their teaching habits. In a block schedule, students may have a hard time retaining what was taught. It is often difficult/ challenging to match schedules and courses when students transfer from a traditional schedule to a block schedule. According to Gruber and Onwuegbuzie (2001), a commonly-cited disadvantage of the block scheduling is that missing a 90-minute class is equal to missing two class periods on the traditional schedule. Block scheduling poses problems with repetitions and drills needed daily for formulas, concepts, and language skills. Students study subjects on alternating days and lose the benefit of daily repetition (The Center for Educational Reform, 1996). The Center for Educational Reform (1996) indicates there is little evidence that schools in the US have seen significant gains on achievement test scores as a result of block scheduling. The testing data for block scheduling is slim. Standardized tests do not indicate increased student achievement under block scheduling. A study by Trenta and Newman (2002) showed that there have been no significant improvements or there has been a significant decline in student achievement.

According to Queen (2000), some teachers stress the importance of providing course sequencing in block schedules because of possible retention loss when there is too much of a time gap between classes. Teachers worried that this could affect student achievement. Block scheduling will not be effective if students are not provided with a balanced schedule (Rettig and Canady, 1997). In Nelson, British Columbia, (Reid, Hierck, and Veregin, 1994) the high school failure rate actually increased in English, history, and geography after the implementation of the block schedule. Students at this school also complained of added stress from missed classes and

from the necessity to cover a large amount of material in a shorter period of time. Students in a study by Reid (1995) reported that block scheduling did not have a major impact in overall academic achievement.

What we can conclude from the many studies and evaluations reviewed above on the specific impact of block scheduling on student learning and learning environment is still controversial as the research findings are mixed. Some studies have found evidence of improved student achievement and some came up with contrasting findings. These contrasting reports light up the need for further research into the attitudes and effectiveness of block scheduling.

Massed practice versus distributed practice: an overview

On the other hand, a much related concept to what is entertained above, scheduling effect on learning and achievement, is also available on the literature. It is known as spacing effect which refers to two main ways of studying a subject namely massed practice 'running work periods very close together with either no rest at all or very short rest intervals in between' and distributed practice 'spacing short rest intervals of work apart with longer periods of rest' (Schmidt, 1991). Many experimental/empirical studies are conducted in the academia elsewhere on the impact of massed and distributed practice on learning and achievement. So, in response to the question of which type of practice/teaching is more effective in achieving learning outcomes or bringing about desirable changes in relation to the very nature of courses, studies have shown contradicting/mixed results in much similar terms with studies on scheduling effect.

Many studies have shown that distributed practice leads to better retention than massed practice (Goossens, Camp, Verkoeijen, Tabbers, Bouwmeester & Zwaan, 2016). In primary school level, Toppino and DiGeorge (1984), Toppino, Kasserman, and Mracek (1991) have found out the beneficial effect of distributed practice in primary school children learning pictures; similarly, Toppino and DeMesquita (1984) have found out the beneficial effect of distributed practice in learning words; Cahill and Toppino (1993), Rea and Modigliani (1987) and Toppino (1993) have found out the beneficial effect of distributed practice in primary school children learning a combination of pictures and words. Bloom and Shuell (1981), and Bahrick, Bahrick, Bahrick, and Bahrick (1993) have demonstrated that distributed practice enhances foreign vocabulary learning in undergraduate students. Patac (2013) analyzed massed and distributed programs learning mathematics, specifically in some topics in Algebra. The result shows that there was a significant difference between massed and distributed teaching program as to the mathematics achievement of the students with different mathematical ability as above average, average, and below average. Shea, Lai, Black, and

Park (2000) reported that distributing the practice on weekdays enhances learning and improves subjects' performance in delayed learning test. Moreover, Seabrook, Gordon, Brown, and Solity (2005) suggested that increasing lessons and sessions distribution degree leads to a significant enhancement in teaching efficiency.

Most of the available studies reviewed above on spacing and scheduling effect (just to mention, but not exhaustive) were conducted at elementary and high school level elsewhere abroad. In the Ethiopian context, these impacts in learning the various fields of sciences and Social Sciences at school level remain uncertain. In relation to scope of the present study, the question remains though whether these results on block scheduling versus traditional scheduling or mass versus distributed practice can be translated to College of Education in our country or in Addis Ababa University. Which is more beneficial, which has well-supported superiority over the other in actually improving the performance and achievement of students? Thus, the need to conduct similar studies in our own context at College level being essential, we can draw valuable lessons from the review of studies conducted on scheduling and spacing effect on learning, though. The findings on the effect of scheduling type on learning are mixed (inconsistent findings) while the findings on spacing effect on learning appear to be consistent being much in favor of distributed practice. If this conclusion might hold true in our context, the full block/block mode at work in our College is not compatible with ensuring effective learning.

Methods

The study adopted the mixed methods design. There is a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods aimed at providing a complete understanding of the research problem. Methods of data collection consisted of questionnaires, interviews and the researcher's observation and insights. The study conducted a survey to seek information on the participants' attitudes and perceptions. Postgraduate instructors, postgraduate students, and coordinators of programs/Department heads and Officers (Teaching-Learning Support Unit and Quality Assurance Unit of the University) constituted the target population. The students and instructors belong to four Departments and one School. There are about 48 staffs fully involved in the Postgraduate programs of their Departments and their sister Departments. About 355 Postgraduate students were enrolled (up to the 2011 E.C academic year) in the various programs of the CHLSJC.

The author conducted the survey through two sets of questionnaire which were composed of multiple closed-ended as well as several open-ended questions. Semi-structured interview was also conducted with head of Departments, and/or Program coordinators, and senior instructors and Officers. The interview was carried out for the sole purpose of

supplementing the quantitative and qualitative data from the filled-in questionnaires. The researcher's own observations were also utilized as an instrument of data collection.

The researcher selected all senior postgraduate students of the College who have completed course work and are engaged in the various phases of the research from proposal writing to data collection and write up phases. These students are believed to be able to assess and evaluate their learning experiences in the various postgraduate programs of the CHLSJC. The questionnaires were distributed amongst all of the Departments and the school. The personnel (Secretaries and program coordinators) in charge of the registration in the respective departments and one school assisted the researcher in distributing and collecting the filled out questionnaire. Many students however did not return the questionnaire during the registration day or after. And some questionnaires were carelessly filled out and hence were rejected. A total of 102 copies of the questionnaire were properly filled out and returned from the senior postgraduate students, yielding a 29% response rate (DALLF=16, DAOLLF= 3, DFLL=27, DLP=16, SJC, 40). Out of the 48 staffs fully involved in the postgraduate programs of the College, 30 instructors (from all of the Departments and the SJC) filled out the questionnaire and returned. Hence, 62.5% of the staff returned the questionnaire and participated in the survey. The study used a combination of stratified, convenient and simple random sampling techniques[3] to get a representative sample from the universe (355 students and 48 teaching staff, respectively).

The author designed two sets of questionnaire for the instructors[4] and

[3] *The postgraduate programs of the CHLSJC are run under four departments and one school; the stratum includes Ethiopian language programs (Amharic: TEAM, Folklore, Literature & Afan Oromo: Teaching Afan Oromo, Folklore, Literature), Foreign Language Programs (English: TEFL, Literature, Applied Linguistics & Communication), Linguistics and Philology (Experimental Phonetics, Theoretical or Structural Linguistics, Documentary Linguistics, Philology), Journalism and Communication (Public Relation and Strategic Communication, Media and Communication Studies).The questionnaires distributed were in harmony with the number of students enrolled in each &every program of the college. Hence, the leading number of postgraduate students selected were from the SJC, followed by the students from the DFLL, then the DLP, DALLF, DAOLLF, respectively, based on data collected from the College's registrar office and the respective Departments and the School. Every area of specialization (given in bracket in the preceding lines) and population size was strictly observed in the selection. The distribution of the questionnaire was held through the assistance of the students' advisors, in the office of the Associate Dean for PG programs, in the program coordinators' office of each department and the school, the College's registrar office and in some cases anywhere& anytime in the campus as found convenient. Any students who are found in the venues stated in any time of work / official time based on their own convenience are given the questionnaire to fill out.*

[4] *Statistical Reliability check was not conducted on the instructors' response to questionnaire as their number was relatively small. How consistent the respondents were was mechanically checked-it was easily visible; face validity and content validity was also conducted through expert judgment (by the randomly selected senior instructors)*

students based on the literature review and the author's observations and insights. Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree and strongly disagree) types of items were used to elicit responses on the attitudinal statements. Reverse coding[5] technique was employed to enter and analyze data. The basic assumption behind attitude scales is that it is possible to uncover a person's internal state of beliefs, motivation, or perceptions by asking them to respond to a series of statements (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996). The questionnaires have also open-ended items eliciting information on the respondents' attitudes towards the benefits and disadvantage of the full block/block postgraduate classes and suggestions. Before any analysis was conducted, the draft questionnaire to be filled out by the students was pilot–tested. Twenty-two postgraduate students filled out the questionnaire and the computation to determine reliability of the responses indicated low level of consistency (Cronbach alpha = 0.678). So, the item which resulted in the most inconsistent response of the students was excluded. Also, two statements on availability of resources (library and internet) were reorganized into a 'Yes-No' question format. In the final analysis, the Cronbach alpha calculated for the responses of 102 students on 13 items of the questionnaire eventually turned out to be = 0.807. This result is considered high enough to judge the data generated with instrument as reliable.

In sum, the quantitative data were analyzed by the use of descriptive and inferential statistics. The qualitative data from the open-ended items of the questionnaire, the semi-structured interview and the researcher's observation were thematically categorized and analyzed.

Findings and Discussion

Instructors' perception of their students' readiness to pursue postgraduate studies

As can be seen in Table 1, the Likert Scale features elicited "Strongly disagree" and "Disagree" to 50% or more of the instructors on background qualities of their Postgraduate students:

- being skilled enough in their subject matter (22: 73.33%)
- having basic knowledge (20: 66.70 %)
- having basic skills (19: 63.33 %)
- being knowledgeable enough in their subject matter (16: 53.33 %)
- being motivated enough (15: 50 %)

The statement to receive a greater percentage of disagreement over the many background qualities of the postgraduate students is '*skilled enough in their subject matter to work on their own'*.

[5] *Positively stated statements are coded as follows: Strongly Agree = 5; Agree = 4; Neutral = 3; Disagree = 2 & Strongly Disagree = 1 while the negatively stated statements are coded as : Strongly Agree = 1; Agree = 2; Neutral = 3; Disagree = 4 & Strongly Disagree = 5.The instructors' questionnaire does not have negatively stated statements in the Likert scale items.*

No one of the statements related to the background qualities of the postgraduate students received a greater percentage of "Strongly Agree" and "Agree"; no single statement received a favorable response by at least 50% of the respondents.

Likert-type items fall into the ordinal measurement scale; thus *mode* or *median* are recommended to measure central tendency. The results of the survey are presented in Table 1, and are grouped into five clusters of measurements (five–point scale) in relation to the 5 statements characterizing state of preparedness of postgraduate students in terms of perceived availability of *basic skills and knowledge to take care of own learning*, *being skilled and knowledgeable enough regarding subject matter knowledge* and *being motivated enough to work on their own*.

As we see from Table 1, excepting the item on having basic knowledge to take care of own learning, the other items characterizing state of preparedness of postgraduate students had *median* and *mode* 2 indicating that each characteristic was considered as important, but are lacking. The item on postgraduate students *having the basic knowledge to take care of their own learning* had *mode* 1 and *median* 2, showing a strong tendency towards perceiving the characteristic as lacking, but is very important.

In Table 1, the association between characteristics of state of preparedness of the students with expressions of agreement and disagreement is displayed using chi-square test. A greater variation in the 3 nominal categories of responses (Agree, Disagree and Neutral) is observed among the several characteristics of perceived postgraduate students' state of preparedness on namely *having the basic skills to take care of their own learning*, *having the basic knowledge to take care of their own learning*, *being skilled enough to work on their own*, *being knowledgeable enough to work on their own* and *being motivated enough to work on their own*. The findings clearly determined a marked association between perceived state of preparedness of postgraduate students on *being skilled enough to work on their own in connection with subject matter knowledge* [χ^2 (1,30) = 21.080, p < 0.001] with higher degree of disagreement. Also, perceived state of preparedness of postgraduate students on *being knowledgeable enough to work on their own regarding subject matter knowledge* is associated with high degree of disagreement [χ^2 (2,30) = 7.200, p = 0.027].

As can be concluded from the Table that most of the instructors' perceive the postgraduate students lack basic skills. The basic skills include students' ability to read and understand English (listening and reading skills), the ability to express themselves in the medium of instruction, such as English, French, Amharic and Afan Oromo for various academic purposes. In this regard, majority of the instructors also do not believe that their students own basic knowledge needed for

independent learning. The normal practice and assumptions in the College, wherein students apply for a postgraduate Program in a much related area with their first and second degree background, is the master's/PhD programs are an extension of those fields with intent of specializing in the areas in deep learning and teaching. With regard to the ability to utilize subject area knowledge for autonomous learning, however, the majority of the instructors indicated that their Postgraduate students lack subject area knowledge. The instructors' response to the open- ended questions of the questionnaire and the senior instructors' response to the interview also corroborate the perceived lack or poor readiness of the students for a Postgraduate class. Many of them indicated that the students are not well prepared for the fast pace of learning and mastering heavy load of information required in a Postgraduate course. The instructors appear to firmly believe that as a mirror reflection of the actual situation in the country, i.e., the much compromised/falling quality of education, the Postgraduate students have a lack of readiness to cope up with subject matter. They contend that the students are "ill prepared" for the program of study. In the question of the level of students' motivation to pursue their Postgraduate studies, most of the instructors indicated the students desire to learn and work hard is very weak; however, about 32% of the instructors indicated that the students have the motivation to learn and work hard. The issue of motivation is raised to the instructors with the firm belief of the researcher that motivation is an essential variable in learning at various levels. Higher education succeeds or fails in terms of student motivation and that the product of teaching is an intrinsically motivated learner (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Many of the instructors pointed out the students generally lack the desire to work intensively despite demands of postgraduate courses for highly motivated and committed learners. Some instructors stated the fast pace of learning and mastering heavy load of information is found to be more stressful and frustrating by many of their students.

In brief, these responses to the close and open-ended items of the questionnaire and program coordinators,' Department heads' and senior instructors' response to the interview indicate the majority of the respondents perceive the desirable background qualities of their postgraduate students negatively. The instructors seem to have a strong conviction and predominant view thereof that the students lack readiness for the requirements and demands of postgraduate programs. The apparently positive responses are on availability of library and online (internet) resources. Findings from the quantitative and qualitative analysis revealed that in terms of the students' background, the instructors' views are characterized by a dominantly emerged negative theme, i.e., unpreparedness or ill-preparedness.

Table 1: Instructors' perception of students' state of preparedness for postgraduate education

S.N.	Statements	N	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Median	Mode	Pearson χ^2 value	D f[a]
			No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%				
1	Our students have the basic Skills to take care of their own learning.	30	1	3.33	9	30	1	3.33	14	46.66	5	16.66	2	2	2.13	1
2	Our students have the basic Knowledge to take care of their own learning.	30	2	6.66	7	23.33	1	3.33	10	33.33	10	33.33	2	1	3.33	1
3	Considering their subject matter knowledge, the postgraduate students are skilled enough to work on their own.	30	1	3.33	2	6.66	5	16.66	17	56.66	5	16.66	2	2	21.08**	2
4	Considering their subject matter knowledge, the postgraduate students are knowledgeable enough to work on their own.	30	1	3.33	3	10	10	33.33	13	43.33	3	10	2	2	7.20*	2
5	The postgraduate students are motivated enough to work on their own.	30	2	6.66	8	26.66	5	16.66	13	43.33	2	6.66	2.5	2	5.00	2

*p < .05. **p < .01.

[a] *The chi-square test was conducted by reducing the five point Likert scale data to nominal levels of* ***Agree*** *(Strongly agree + Agree) vs* ***Disagree*** *(Strongly disagree + Disagree).*

Postgraduate students' and instructors' attitude towards the block mode of attending / teaching postgraduate classes students attitude towards the block mode of teaching

As can be seen in Table 2, the Likert Scale features elicited "Strongly agree" and "Agree" to 50% or more of the students on qualities of the block mode:

- enabling much quicker completion/coverage of courses (70, *68.65*%)
- putting the instructors and the students under pressure (68, 66.66%)
- promoting cooperative and student centered learning (63, 61.76%)
- giving room for flexibility by taking the nature of courses into account (57, 55.91%)
- finishing a number of courses in few months as the only good quality (54, 52.94%)

The only item to receive a greater percentage of Agreement over the many qualities of the block mode is quicker completion/coverage of courses. There is no item to receive even 50% of Disagreement over the many qualities of the block mode. The results of the survey are presented in Table 2, and are grouped into five clusters of measurements (five - point scale) in relation to the 13

statements characterizing block-scheduling.

As we see from Table 2, item no 8, 12, and 13 had mode less than 3, indicating that each characteristic of block-scheduling has additional positive features, not pressurizing classroom actors and considerate of learner motivation. Item no 1,2,3,5,6,7,9,10,11 had mode 4, indicating that each statement was considered as an important characteristic of block-scheduling. Excepting item 8, 12 and 13, every characteristic of block-scheduling had mode or median 4 and/or 3, showing a strong tendency towards considering each characteristics of block - scheduling important.

To investigate the association between the various characteristics of block-scheduling with expressions of agreement, a chi-square test was performed. Table 2 shows the Pearson chi-square results and indicates that the 102 students are significantly different in their attitude towards block-scheduling, in their response to the 13 statements at $p<0.05$ level of significance. The information in Table 2 shows the difference in attitudes of students that various characteristics of block-scheduling received is evident for every item investigated. *Item-1* had 57 Agree and 31 Disagree, *item-2* 63 Agree and 27 Disagree, *item-3* 46 Agree and 36 Disagree, *item-4* 46 Agree and 35 Disagree, *item-5* 47 Agree and 29 Disagree, *item-6* 70 Agree and 19 Disagree, *item-7* 35 Agree and 46 Disagree, *item-8* 54 Agree and 27 Disagree, *item-9* 44 Agree and 36 Disagree, *item-10* 47 Agree and 33 Disagree, *item-11* 47 Agree and 30 Disagree, *item-12* 68 Agree and 17 Disagree and *item-13* 46 Agree and 27 Disagree out of the 13 statements put in three nominal categories as 'agree, disagree and neutral' of the overall qualities of block-scheduling of postgraduate Modular courses in the CHLSJC. The chi-square test showed a substantial difference in the percentage of agreement and disagreement from the 13 statements (items). The nominal category 'Agreement' had the more frequent response than the nominal category 'Disagree,' except in the case of *item 7*.

In Table 2, the association between characteristics of block - scheduling with expressions of agreement and disagreement is displayed using chi-square test. The result shows that expressions of agreement and disagreement has significant association with all characteristics of block-scheduling.

The chi-square test in Table 2 also shows significant relationship with the negative characteristics such as putting both instructors and students under pressure, finishing a number of courses in few months as the only good quality, not considering the students' ability, background and motivation and having favorable attitude. It means that eight characteristics of block-scheduling namely giving room for flexibility, promoting cooperative and student

centered learning, giving students more time to think and engage in active learning, allowing enough interaction between teachers and students, promoting more focused and more structured learning, enabling much quicker completion/coverage of courses, giving enough time for students to work on content, and student happiness in covering courses in one month are favorably viewed (at < 5%, & 10% level of significance) and while the remaining five characteristics of block-scheduling are unfavorably viewed (at < 5%, 10% and 20% level of significance) characteristics.

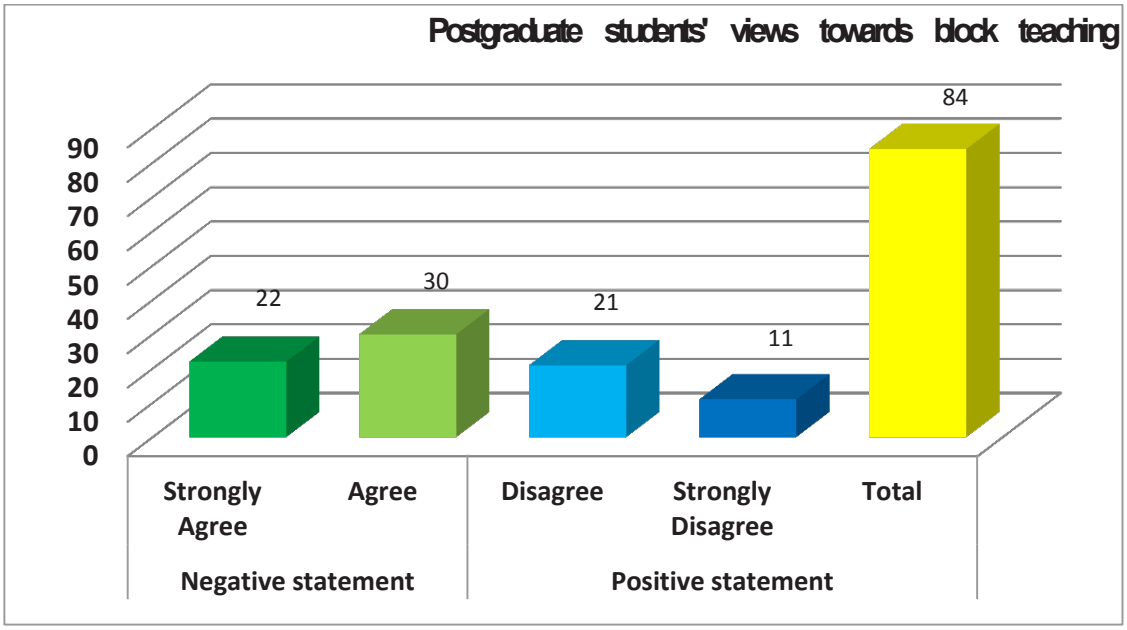
A greater variation in the 3 nominal categories of responses (Agree, Disagree and Neutral) is observed among the many characteristics of block–scheduling on namely enabling much quicker completion/coverage of courses, putting both instructors and students under pressure, promoting cooperative and student-centered learning and giving room for flexibility at < 0.05 level of significance. The findings clearly determined a marked association between the positive characteristics of block-scheduling namely enabling much quicker completion/coverage, promoting cooperative and student-centered learning and giving room for flexibility and higher degree of agreement. Also, negative characteristics of block-scheduling namely putting both instructors and students under pressure, is associated with higher degree of disagreement. Overall, the results when using these sample data are strong enough to conclude that there is a statistically significant relationship between the characteristics of block-scheduling and the three nominal categories of responses. As measured by the 13 characteristics describing block-scheduling, the students exhibited unfavorable attitudes towards block-scheduling of postgraduate courses. Eight positively stated statements elicited 31.74% respondent disagreement and in 5 negatively stated statements elicited 51.37% respondent agreement. Therefore, 83.11 % (31.74+51.37) of the students i.e., (32 students + 52 students = 84 students) have negative views. As dominantly reflected in the 8 statements out of the 13 Likert scale items on block teaching, most of the respondents or majority of the respondents about 83.11% or 84 students expressed negative/unfavorable attitude towards the various qualities of block teaching from their learning experience/observation in the various postgraduate programs of the CHLSJC, under its Departments and one school. The bar graph below displays the unfavorable views of the postgraduate students towards block teaching in the CHLSJC, AAU:

Table 2: Attitudes towards the block mode of running Postgraduate classes

S. N	STATEMENTS	N	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Median	Mode	Pearson x^2 value [df = 2) a
			No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%			
1	The block mode gives room for flexibility by taking the nature of courses into account.	102	15	14.71	42	41.20	14	13.73	22	21.60	9	8.82	4	4	27.588**
2	The block mode of postgraduate classes promotes cooperative and Student centered learning.	102	17	16.66	46	45.10	12	11.80	18	17.65	9	8.82	4	4	40.412**
3	The block mode of postgraduate classes gives students more time to think and engage in active learning.	102	16	15.70	30	29.41	20	19.61	25	24.51	11	10.80	4	4	10.118**
4	The block mode of postgraduate classes allows enough interaction between teachers and students.	102	8	7.84	38	37.25	21	20.60	21	20.60	14	13.73	3	4	9.235**
5	The block mode of postgraduate classes promotes more focused and more structured learning.	102	11	10.80	36	35.29	26	25.50	20	19.61	9	8.82	3	4	7.588*
6	The block mode of postgraduate classes enables much quicker completion/ coverage of courses.	102	28	27.45	42	41.20	13	12.75	13	12.75	6	5.90	3	4	57.706**
7	The block mode of postgraduate classes gives enough time for students to work on content.	102	12	11.80	23	22.55	21	20.60	27	26.50	19	18.63	4	4	9.235**
8	The only good thing the block mode has is finishing a number of courses in few months.	102	24	23.53	30	29.41	21	20.60	20	19.61	7	6.86	3	2	18.176**
9	Students are happy to cover the courses in one month as it gives them time for other purposes.	102	11	10.80	33	32.35	22	21.60	23	22.55	13	12.75	3	4	7.294*
10	The block mode does not consider the students' ability.	102	21	20.60	26	25.50	22	21.60	30	29.41	3	2.94	3	4	9.235**
11	The block mode does not consider the students' background (previous learning experience, preferred style of learning, general and (subject matter knowledge).	102	17	16.66	30	29.41	25	24.51	23	22.55	7	6.86	3	4	7.824*
12	The block mode puts both the Instructors & the students under pressure	102	29	28.43	39	38.23	17	16.66	17	16.66			3	2	51.000**
13	The block mode does not consider the students' motivation.	102	22	21.60	24	23.53	29	28.43	27	26.50			2	2	6.412*

***P < .05. ** P ≤ .01.**

[a] the chi-square test was conducted by reducing the five point Likert scaled at a to nominal levels of agree (strongly agree + agree) vs disagree (strongly disagree + disagree).



The students' attitude towards the block teaching mode is also elicited from the open ended items of the questionnaire on the question of the benefits, limitations and challenges of the full block/block post graduate classes based on their experience and observation in attending the postgraduate classes, PhD and MA SJC, in their respective Departments and school. The respondents' views on the benefits of the full block postgraduate classes can be thematically categorized into the headings: time and coverage of courses, method of teaching and assessment, planning and management, motivation and confidence, competence and professionalism, work environment and personal. Majority of the respondents (63) stated their learning experience in the block mode as characterized by problems of utilizing time. It is taken as incompatible with the students pace of learning manifested in the duration of time taken to think, analyze, and internalize subject matter. The time is unequivocally described as too short, not allowing, sufficient reading deep learning, exercising, presenting, discussing and reflecting by the majority of the students. They directly associated the shortage of time with the block schedule which in turn resulted in shallow coverage of courses and readings in a rush and hit climate of the four weeks modular block mode of delivery. They also indicated that some of the courses are too vast to cover in one month's or fewer weeks' time. Such courses demand more than the allotted duration, to think and internalize, but due attention is not given e.g. Quantitative Method in Research Methods course. In other words, inadequate time is allocated to deal with contents of courses. Even if some of the modular courses are not too vast, the time is very short to cover/work,

to learn, exercise, present, discuss and reflect. Students won't get adequate time to analyze things according to their own pace; everyone is expected to perform within the same amount of time; there is insufficient time to do further reading and complete assignments on courses. They said that the block schedule does not give them time to cover courses, read and have concrete knowledge on the course; many important topics/issues remain untreated as a result. They have also linked overlapping course works due to a shortage of time: One respondent said, "*before we finish our assignments and presentations for a course, the other modular course begins ...*". Not few students fail to complete and submit assignments according to the given schedule. Some of the respondents also stated that the time allocated does not make them focus on what they learn except rushing to present their assignments. Another response given was not only that the time is short but that the time table is tense, as a result active teaching and learning is compromised; One respondent said "*Course coverage in one month or less does not necessarily benefit the learners, but the instructors*". This student seems to have in mind instructors who are engaged in some kind of part-time job. The respondents indicated that without having enough knowledge and understanding about a certain course, they started taking another course.

According to some respondents, issues worth discussing are left out or nor properly addressed due to the rush situation to complete the course as the next course is at the door. On the other hand, a couple of respondents stated that the block mode is in favor of content coverage, it is not quality based. Some respondents also stated few of the instructors complete offering the courses. Some instructors do not stick to the contents of the course and teach what they are already familiar with; in other words, there is a lack of up to-date preparation on the part of instructors. Some respondents even question relevance of some contents of the course they took and argue that revision is necessary. Still a similar point is made on course relevance stating that assignments and project works are not designed to support their future research works. Many of the students (72) expressed their attitudes towards block teaching in terms of quality of instruction and learning (method of teaching and assessment). They indicated that the teaching and learning of the modular courses in general lacks depth; it is done at a very superficial level, not thorough or deep. Several students pointed out that the PhD courses lack depth and are rather shallow; very familiar concepts/ topics are entertained; and they do not fit the postgraduate level- they are not deep and, up to the standard learning. Several students/respondents argued there is no deep learning, rather superficial learning took place. Many respondents stated that there is poor structuring/organization of courses compounded with rapid coverage of courses. Instructors rush to cover courses in one month and in the case of

the SJC even in two weeks. They base their assessment practices on the rush and the pressures associated. Several students in this regard indicated that there is an unrealistic and invalid practice of assessing the students work. For instance, most assessments are group-work oriented and they do not measure the actual skill and knowledge of each individual student; that is to say, assignments are done in group and the contribution of each individual student in the assignment is not checked. In short, there is an indiscriminate assignment of assessment scores. Some of the respondents associated lack of flexible classes with the block schedule describing it as teacher- centered and unattractive course delivery.

The other problem widely expressed and shared by many of the respondents (58) is related to planning and management. The respondents indicated that though a course is scheduled to be completed in a month or so, two or more courses come together/ overlap in real practice. One respondent stated an instance of overlapping course works: before we finish our assignments and presentations for a course, the other begins. Some respondents also stated a prevalence of lack of proper coordination by instructors and co- instructors. Several respondents indicated that there is an inappropriate course instructor assignment in terms of teaching and their experiences; still some respondents stated some instructors are not good models. A couple of respondents even blamed their instructors as they overloaded them with assignments rather than focusing much on developing practical knowledge. Another instance of lack of preparation is pointed out as some instructors finish the class while talking about irrelevant issues and criticizing others. These findings are consistent with Gizat's (2014) study on the CEB, AAU, postgraduate students. He reported that courses were not covered in a given time and practices were not in harmony with the module delivery guideline.

There are also responses which I roughly thematically categorized as confidence and motivation. The students (30) indicated that there is lack of instructor commitment; many of the instructors are not motivated to teach and consult. According to some students' comment the instructors are too busy with other things which they have not specified. Several respondents indicated that courses are not explained better by their instructors assigned to teach the postgraduate courses in the block schedules. Long instructor absenteeism is also stated as a manifestation of poor level of motivation and perhaps irresponsibility. A small number of respondents (26) also indicated their experiences and observations in terms of instructor competence and professionalism. Some of the respondents also indicated that certain instructors have inconsiderate behavior. That is to say, they did not treat them in a professional manner by counseling and advising them. Several respondents also stated that less competent and poor

capacity instructors are assigned to teach postgraduate courses.

Very few of the respondents (8) indicated problems pertaining work environment. The work environment challenges stated include students' load of work associated with assignments given by the instructors and the fact that each student has to fulfil the various assessment requirements including exam within the set time. Several respondents also stated that both students and teachers are under pressure due to a less amount of time allocated for course coverage i.e. they are under stressful situations. Few respondents (7) had what can be labeled as a very personal view: the block mode is against the time of the student for other life demand. The demands are very likely related to part-time jobs to survive or tackle their economic problems. Some students commonly used the phrase 'other purposes' perhaps to obfuscate the real reasons as they know they are sponsored fulltime - learners expected to concentrate on their studies.

Overall, what is elicited from the close-ended and open-ended questions of the questionnaire on the majority of students' experiences and observations of the full-block/block postgraduate classes of the CHLSJC is predominantly negative views characterize their responses, while the apparently positive responses are on coverage of content and method of teaching. The researcher's experiences and observations of the same over the last many years, as instructor and associate dean of the Postgraduate programs of the College corroborate the same.

Instructor's attitude towards the block mode of teaching

The instructors' attitude towards the block teaching mode is mainly elicited from the open- ended items of the questionnaire and the responses to the interview conducted on the question of the benefits, limitations and challenges of the full block/block post graduate classes. The respondents' views on the benefits of the full block postgraduate classes can be thematically categorized into the headings: method/methodology, motivation (learner and instructor), time and course coverage, nature of the block mode of teaching, resource, poor learner background and personal. In relation to method/ methodology, the respondents pointed out that utilization of combined modes of delivery such as lecture method plus independent student learning (students taking responsibility for their own learning - as it demands them to read a lot), cooperative and student centered learning, gives students more time to think and engage in active learning/rigorous independent learning, fits students who prefer fast-paced atmosphere of learning. Some respondents stated that the full-block class allows instructors to work with students all along the learning spectrum. Few instructors indicated the advantages of the full-block class in terms of focus. That is, it promotes more focused learning – more structured and engaging. The advantage identified in terms of time

and course coverage relates to time management i.e.- much quicker completion of courses, more devotion time for a subject, and enabling course coverage within 3 or 4 weeks. Only one respondent stated that the mode gives enough time for students and teachers to work on content, and another instructor stated that the mode gives instructors adequate time for preparation. The instructors' apparently positive attitude was limited to aspects of method of teaching and utilization of time and course coverage.

However, in contrast to the number of instructors who expressed their positive attitudes towards the aspects of block scheduling stated above, the great majority of the instructors expressed their negative attitudes towards various aspects of the block mode. The respondents' negative views/attitudes towards of the full block postgraduate classes can be categorized in to five major headings as motivation, time and course coverage, the block mode, personal, resource and poor learner background. Most of the respondents pointed out that the block classes have problems associated with time and course coverage, and the nature of the block mode itself. They outlined problems such as shortage of time to cover content/portions or chapters, to do assignments in depth, to conduct continuous assessments and paper presentations. Some of the views relate to insufficiency of time to internalize contents of a course or mastery of the subject matter. One month is not enough for some courses as complex subject areas offer too much to teach and for the students to understand and articulate well in a single month. Some instructors also indicated that it is difficult to teach and learn a course in one month or three or four courses in 3-4 months.

The other limitation widely expressed and shared by many of the respondents is related to the very nature of the block mode of postgraduate classes. Many of them stated that the mode does not give room for flexibility by taking the nature of courses into account. A few number of respondents stated the fact that all of the courses regardless of their differences are offered in one and the same mode. Various interactive platforms are absent aside from face to face learning. Some other respondents stated admission requirements for postgraduate classes, lack of academic freedom, existence of static pedagogical system that is not evolving with time and the grading system (encourages inflations of grades) as a problem. It is taken as a very superficial approach/ treatment of courses; it is taken as a partial approach to the learning approach. Some respondents stated the mode does not consider the actual situation, i.e., the much compromised quality of education, and students' lack of readiness to cope up with subject matter. It is rather taken as ill conceived. Some respondents stated that the full block does not allow enough interaction between teachers and students and it does not give opportunity for testing what is learnt in a real life experience. It puts the instructors and the

students under pressure. The system does not give enough time for instructors to know their students' capacity and provide feedback accordingly. Some other respondents stated admission requirements for postgraduate classes and lack of academic freedom as well.

The student related problems stated were related to their poor ability/capacity, inadequate command of English, lack of background /basic knowledge and skills, lack of preparedness, and plagiarism. There are also problems which can be sub-categorized into motivation, such as not wanting to sit for exams, no interest in facing challenges of doing research, low culture of writing papers, no/lack of effort to gain knowledge and skills, very poor readiness, not taking care of their learning, scared and lack confidence, lacking commitment, less student involvement and mere interest in getting certificates. The limitations in terms of motivation also indicated that the students generally lack the desire to work intensively despite the demands of postgraduate courses for highly motivated and committed learners. Some respondents said that the fast pace of learning and mastering heavy load of information is found to be more stressful and frustrating by many students. Some respondents also stated that the block classes are tedious hectic and boring for some students. Even some respondents stated that the staff is not prepared to work accordingly and the apparently saved time is used for other purposes instead of the academic ones. There is poor level of commitment be it in teaching, advising and conducting research. There is also lack of flexibilities in adopting various methodologies of teaching and research, lack of enthusiasm to improve expertise and gain timely knowledge and appropriate skill in subject matter. An individual respondent even went to extent of questioning the mode- why should students be forced to complete a course in less than a month- which used to be normally completed in 4 months?

Few respondents have also pointed out what can be labeled as personal needs such as economic problems forcing students to work in other institutions or engage in a number of other activities to generate income for survival; consequently, they do not work as expected. The instructors also would have time for other money – making purposes which include part-time teaching in other institutions. The block mode is thus likely to be abused due to its demand for staying in class or in campus for long hours. Several other respondents also have given what can be taken as a very personalized reason including instructor happiness after covering the course, and no academic advantage or strength, but for the teachers, it is just a relief.

A couple of respondents stated limitations in terms of resources. They stated that it is so tight to give courses in the University with scarce resources (internet access to journals) and there are not enough materials and other resources for students to work independently.

Several instructors said that they do not see the strength of the full-block mode of running the postgraduate classes. The only good thing they stated is instructors can finish a number of courses in few months. Many respondents stated that the block classes do not have advantages at all for the full block mode, from practice, does not consider the students' ability and background; even some appear to have regretted-full block shouldn't have been applied taking into account existing situation. Overall, the majority of instructors' attitude towards the block teaching mode in their respective Departments is negative and characterized by reservations of various kinds.

Findings of the present study on the CHLSJC instructors' attitude is much in agreement with the findings from Solomon and et al. (2011, p.102) study. They reported that many instructors of Addis Ababa University tend to see the block teaching in particular as less productive; excessively regimental and very much limiting in content, depth of analysis, ease of learning, cultivation of creative thinking and enhancement of knowledge. Abatihun's study (2019) on other Ethiopian institutions of higher education practices and challenges has also similar findings. He reported that both instructors and students identified difficulty of implementing active learning due to limited time in the employment of Modular/Block teaching.

Table 3: Modes suggested for Postgraduate Classes

Mode	PhD		MA	
	N	**Per cent**	**N**	**Per cent**
Full - block	7	23.33	3	10.00
Partially block	9	30.00	10	33.33
Semester - based	14	46.70	17	56.70
Total	30	100.00	30	100.00

The respondents were finally asked to suggest a mode of scheduling based on different modes which have been in use /are in use in the University in general and the CHLSJC in particular. These are full-block, partially-block and Semester-based (traditional) modes. The respondents also put forward reasons to justify their suggestion. It demands them to make some kind of evaluative judgments on the block mode of teaching considering assumed qualities of block scheduling outlined in the closed -ended items of the questionnaire and their own insights as well.

Table 3 summarizes the sampled instructors' suggestion on modes of running postgraduate courses for two groups, PhD and MA students. Nearly an equitable proportion of the sampled staff suggested the semester-based mode for the PhD classes while most of the respondents suggested the same for MA classes. Very few respondents suggested the full-block mode of running the postgraduate classes for the MA classes while there are some who suggested the same for the PhD classes. The Modes of running postgraduate classes are distributed in to three for the PhD group, the semester based mode being in the lead followed by the partially-block mode. It seems that the sampled staff believes in having various modes of running postgraduate courses for the PhD with a heavy reliance on the semester-based one. Data from the open–ended items of the questionnaire, interview and the researcher's observation corroborates the finding in that respondents from the SJC indicated that they also depend on staff from abroad to run their PhD classes so much that they arrange the block schedule to the convenience of the visiting scholars/professors taking even a maximum of two weeks, not four weeks.

Table 4 below summarizes the sampled students' suggestion of the modes of attending postgraduate courses for two groups, PhD and MA students of the College. It demands the students to be evaluative and decide on the basis of the repertoire of information in the close-ended and open ended items of the questionnaire.

Out of the 102 students sampled for the study 69 students were enrolled in the various MA programs while the remaining numbers of students were enrolled in the PhD programs of the College.

The PhD students were asked to suggest modes of attending postgraduate classes not only for their level group, but also for the MA group whereas the MA students were asked to suggest the same for the same group only. Majority of the students suggested the semester-based scheduling for the MA classes. The partially - block schedule is selected by many. Very few students suggested the full-block mode. In contrast, out of 33 PhD students, most of the students suggested the partially-block mode. The PhD group does not appear to be keen on the semester-based schedule; though it may be taken as negligible, frequency of the partially - block is higher than the semester-based mode. The full - block mode is the least suggested mode by both the PhD and MA students, however.

In sum, what can be inferred from the students' suggestion is that the partially block one for the PhD students and the semester-based scheduling for the MA students is favored. The full-block mode is the least suggested by both groups of postgraduate students. However, the PhD students' suggestion does not appear to be consistent with their responses discussed in 5.2.1. Taking the various qualities of block scheduling and learner background into account, the students

predominantly expressed their unfavorable attitude. This is much in harmony with most of the instructors' suggestion for the semester-based mode by taking the qualities of block-scheduling and the basic assumptions in to account. Therefore, the students' suggestion summarized in Table 4 cannot be taken as trustworthy or dependable. It would rather gleam light on one essential construct i.e., motivation.

Table 4. Modes suggested for Postgraduate Classes

Mode	**PhD**		**MA**	
	N	**Per cent**	**N**	**Per cent**
Full - block	7	21.21	3	10.00
Partially block	15	45.45	10	33.33
Semester - based	11	33.33	17	56.70
Total	33	100.00	30	100.00

Having identified the dominantly unfavorable attitudes towards the block modes of postgraduate classes by this group of students in the close-ended and open-ended items of the questionnaire, one would not normally expect the group not suggest the Semester-based mode as their most favored one. It appears like the students have '*I know limitations of block/ full block classes but I do not go for the semester-based one…; I have rather another serious need*' state of mind. Based on the author's observation and qualitative data from the interview, economic problems and the much associated one, housing problem, drives them to work in other institutions or engage in a number of other activities to generate additional income; the block-mode, therefore, appears to be rightly convenient for this purpose. The response of one of the PhD students corroborates this conclusion: '*Many Postgraduate students are married and have work and are engaged in other activities. So, the block mode is suitable for such students as it demands them learn continuously for a short period* [6] *of time…*'.The PhD students' suggestion appears to justify the plausibility of Kaplan and Kaplan's (1989, p. 10) argument that preference 'suggests the decorative rather than the essential, the favored as opposed to the necessary.' These days it is quite common to come across the observation that not few postgraduate students asking or negotiating with their instructors for convenient classroom time. The main reason for rearranging class time is usually overtly or covertly expressed- the part time job for survival. The same holds true on the part of the instructors.

[6] As has already been stated, the block classes are run either between 8:00- 12:00 am or 1:00 pm-5:00 pm. The students are engaged in some kind of part-time work alternately when there is no class. So, the phrase 'short period' refers to a single shift class not whole day class.

In contrast, the instructors' suggestion does not make a distinction between PhD and MA classes. Only some of the instructors suggested the partially block class. These instructors are mainly from the SJC where in there is an apparent shortage of manpower and hence reliance in visiting foreign instructors/professors. It seems that the sampled instructors believe in having various modes of running postgraduate courses for the PhD groups with a heavy reliance on the semester-based one. Very little number of the instructors suggested the full-block mode.

The view of instructors and students on availability of resources to run postgraduate classes

Instructors' view

As can be verified from the responses summarized in Table 5 here under, the instructors from the various Departments of the CHLSJC have two different positions with regard to availability of sufficient resources for running and attending postgraduate courses as elicited from the two Yes - No type questions set:

Table 5. Availability of Resources as Evaluated by Instructors

Statement	N	Yes		No		Not sure	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Sufficient library resources are available for postgraduate students.	30	13	43.33	9	29.99	8	26.66
Sufficient online (internet) library resources are available for postgraduate students.	30	16	53.33	8	26.66	6	20.00

Not few number of instructors indicated reservation and rejection. There is no unanimous agreement on the availability of library and internet (online) resources. The sum of the two categories of responses on the sufficient availability of library resources is greater than the affirmative response. Nevertheless, most of the instructors indicated that the internet resources are sufficiently available. 47% of the instructors indicated a lack of sufficient internet resources (about 27%) and remained uncertain (20%). Most of these instructors were from the SJC.

A look into the instructor's response to the open-ended questions does not indicate the magnitude of the problem as only couple of instructors stated limitations in terms of resources in very general terms "It is so tight to give courses in the University with scarce resources (internet access to journals) and there are no adequate materials and other resources for students to work independently". Some instructors stated problems, such as lack of enough working space, and subscribed journals.

Students' view

Two 'Yes - No' questions were set on the availability of sufficient resources for postgraduate students. As can be verified from the responses summarized in the Table 6 here under, most of the students from the various Departments of the CHLSJC have negatively responded to the statement on sufficiency of library and online (internet) resources. Not little number of the students had affirmative response, though, on availability of the resources.

Table 6. Availability of Resources as Evaluated by Students

Statement	N	Yes		No		Not sure	
		n	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**
Sufficient library resources are available for postgraduate students.	102	34	33.33	50	49.02	18	17.65
Sufficient online (internet) library resources are available for postgraduate students.	102	31	30.39	49	48.04	22	21.57

Only twenty-nine respondents replied to the open-ended items of the questionnaire. These respondents indicated in general terms problems related to availability of resources of various kinds for postgraduate classes. Their report indicates that there is lack of adequate and appropriate places for reading and accessing online information. They also pointed out that there is shortage of reference materials in the library; the books available are not updated, either. Some of the respondents also indicated that there are insufficient online library resources. A couple of them also said that the online library resources are insufficient and some instructors are unwilling to share materials. These findings concur with Gizat's (2014) findings on the CEB, AAU, postgraduate students' view on availability of resources. He reported that resources were not up to the expected level (library and course materials).

Based on the researcher's observation, the problems indicated by these respondents relate very likely to some disciplines or specific programs which should not be generalized to all postgraduate students of the CHLSJC. It applies to Postgraduate students of the School of Journalism and Communication (SJC) and to some extent the Department of Afan Oromo Language, Literature and Folklore which has launched an MA and /or PhD program and some new MA programs relatively recently. Several postgraduate students in Afan Oromo stated lack of reference materials in their fields of specialization written in 'qube' or the Latin script. An interview held with some of their instructors indicated that they basically use reference materials and

publications written in the English language like the other Departments and they expect their students to review and translate the ideas into Afan Oromo.

This task obviously demands a good command of English in general and academic reading and writing skills in particular which many of the instructors of the college contend that many postgraduate students are lacking. Otherwise, majority of the students from the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, The Department of Amharic Language, Literature and Folklore and The Department of Linguistics and Phonology did not question the adequacy of resources meant for postgraduate students. It is also the researcher's conviction that relatively speaking resources are available; if students could not find books and journals on their hard-copies, their softcopies are found available on line. The University library is working hard in these regard towards availing up-to-date and adequate number of resources being dependent on reported needs of the various Departments and their instructors. The most serious problem rather, in the eyes of the researcher, is the lack of motivation of the students to trace resources and negligence on the side of Departments or schools in closely working with the main Library towards the provision of sufficient and up-date reading resources and communicating the same to their students.

The uncertainty indicated in the Table 6 might also be a reflection of lack of commitment and dedication as a postgraduate student is normally expected to visit libraries and access online resources so much that he/she is able to decide on the availability of resources in 'Yes' or 'No' terms.

Problems attributed to block- scheduling

As discussed in 4.2.1 and 4.2.2, based on data from interview and the researcher's observation, the following problems are attributed to block-scheduling in relation to implementing modular courses:

- Many students are not intellectually ready; their prior knowledge is poor. They have poor background in area of specialization. They are relatively immature or had narrower experience of the subject/ subjects. There is poor retention of content. Many students do not make sufficient progress towards actualizing the learning outcomes. A period of consolidation of knowledge is necessary.
- In contrast to the traditional/semester-based scheduling, we did not see improved student-instructor relationship. Their relationship is limited to negotiating perhaps mode of assessment, and class meeting time. Planning and teaching methods are up to the instructor based on the brief modular course guideline. The frequency of meeting students is decreased as the students are given independent reading /library work or assignments to be followed by presentations after a certain number of days. There is poor counseling and

consultation. Hence, interactive platforms are limited.

- Well-designed and structured modules are not available. In many of the Departments, modules are not designed; instructors lack the motivation to do so as development of modules need time and more expertise. Remunerations for module development as such do not exist as the University or Ministry of Education seem also to have the position that it is part and parcel of the duty and responsibility of instructors. Many of the instructors are not enthusiastic about the position of the Ministry of Education, however.
- There is no choice of modules and work according to the individual pace of students- all are supposed to run in the same pace and hence self -pacing is challenged. Slow and fast learners are on the same bandwagon. Instructors do not get to know their students individually. The block – mode does not give enough time for the instructors to know their students well; the moment they are to know them; the time expires; the students need to take the next modular course.
- Theory is not turned into practice. Contents in the modules are not explored in more depth. There is superficial treatment of content. Important topics remain untreated. There is poor structuring of courses and rapid coverage. There is poor teaching and learning efficiency. There is lack of incremental learning; an inability to connect discrete areas of knowledge.
- Low learner motivation. Many students did not make appropriate efforts to do well on the various subjects, but they expect higher grades. Self-discipline is lacking to pursue sufficient independent study. Students are not committed enough.
- Low instructor motivation. Instructors had 'slack' time; instead of devoting the allocated time to students' needs, it is easily taken up by the instructors' other activities; Class –time is abused; absenteeism is quite common while making up missed classes is found to be difficult.
- Instructor incompetence and lack of professionalism.
- Students not happy with timing and contents. Many students question the relevance of content of the modules. There is no satisfaction in learning gains. The lack of satisfaction is both integrated with the intensive classes and content covered.
- Poor quality of educational experience. Unlike the much emphasized advantage of block teaching in allowing concentrated work, topics are not explored in greater depth. Hence, it is difficult to ensure mastery of subject. All of the courses are offered in the same mode - block schedule regardless of their nature. Monotonous and boring mode of delivery; no greater variety of relevant content, method, strategy of teaching and scope to include innovation or new aspects. Students

who are comfortable with the traditional/semester-based class, may not be comfortable with the block class will be forced to attend. Power point presentations by the teacher and students dominantly observable. The pedagogical system is static; dynamisms not significantly observable, such as technology applications in teaching and learning (digital learning and teaching, video conferencing, utilizations of other instructional media); lecturing, the white–board, and power point presentations are dominant.

- Shortage and poor utilization of time. Inadequate allocation of time to some courses. The shortage of time does not allow having various tasks and activities and covering the courses as desired.
- The block-mode puts many students under pressure. The modular routes did not reduce the stress.
- Unrealistic and invalid practice of assessment. In many instances, grades awarded are used as a cover up of abuses, and incompetence.
- Poor planning and management. Students did not focus their attention in their studies and free-ride on others especially in small group and pair works which dominantly characterizes assignments and/or tasks. There is lack of careful planning of courses.

In sum, modules are taken in shorter periods, and hence are associated with block scheduling; but modular courses are not always time shortened. The analysis of the qualitative data revealed embedded in their descriptions of problems of block-teachings are modular courses and their implementation. Despite the attitudes of the instructors and students not favorable toward block-scheduling, it emerged that many of the problems, and challenges identified are related to courses taught and other details of related factors. It is found to be almost impossible to divorce the discussions on block-scheduling from the modular courses. They go together. The staffs and instructor's views indicate that the problems on block-teaching cannot be entangled from practicing modular education in the College.

Conclusions

The majority of students and almost all of the instructors in this survey are not in support of the block schedule and suggested the semester-based schedule as a good way to achieve student-centered instruction, convenience, and deep-learning in the context of implementing the Postgraduate modular curricula. The block mode is taken as incompatible with the nature of courses by being inflexible and the same across all types of courses and learner characteristics. It is taken as a very superficial approach to learning. The instructors' apparently positive attitude was geared towards some aspects of method of teaching, utilization of time and course coverage. What seems to be affirmative attitude on the part of the students is on coverage of content and method of teaching. The students

contented that the block mode resulted in very shallow, superficial learning lacking depth and flexibility. So, if the various Departments and the SJC of the CHLSJC maintain block scheduling without modifications for sequentially taught subjects, it could be detrimental to having good quality teaching and learning towards realizing the learning outcomes of the various postgraduate modular courses.

These findings imply the need for flexibility in contrast to the apparent the same-size-fits-all approach to offering postgraduate courses in the College. The findings from the current survey gleamed light on the need to question feasibility of introducing the block –mode of teaching in the College based on the instructors' perception of the students' state of preparedness. Most of the instructors contend that block-scheduling is laid on a much compromised existence of the desirable qualities of a postgraduate student. Implied in the inherent qualities of a modularized curriculum is the prior knowledge state of students being taken into account at a reasonable level. Seen in this regard, therefore, the findings of the present study do not support the adherence to the block schedule as if it is compatible with the perceived readiness of postgraduate students and in terms of realizing learning outcomes.

Block-scheduling is found to be convenient for itinerant instructors who are engaged in some kind of part-time work. It seems to have mutual benefits to the Ministry of Education and Addis Ababa University in tackling staffing problems. It is also found to be convenient for postgraduate students who are engaged in part-time jobs for survival. In general, for the introducers of block-scheduling considering good quality teaching and learning being driven by the 'less is more' motto or philosophy as an important goal, block scheduling plans do not appear to offer a better option than the traditional, semester-based practice.

Modularization, as a reform to postgraduate courses, cannot be disentangled from the implementation of block teaching in the CHLSJC. The theorized benefits of block-teaching, which include student-centered and personalized learning as well as enhanced mastery of content/ deep learning, or resulting in substantial, meaningful learning appear to be in contrastive terms with the effort to actualize the competence -based learning outcomes.

One may raise a plausible question of whether it makes a difference if the modality of offering postgraduate courses is changed. The thing is the block mode seed is not sown in a fertile ground as beautifully expressed and attractively justified in the 'less is more' philosophy and the extant literature. The block-teaching mode does not demonstrate its superiority to the traditional /semester-based mode of teaching and learning in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in the views of the instructors and students. It is right that we approach block- scheduling with caution and

demand factual data of its success instead of remaining on the bandwagon. Findings of the present study gleamed Less Is Not More if not least.

Recommendations

There are a number of specific recommendations which need to be observed in making use of block-schedules within the context of the employment of modular courses in the Postgraduate programs of the CHLSJC:

i. The observed and reported background problems of the students rather justify a relatively distributed practice for better retention or mastery of subject matter compounded with an introduction of well- planned, managed and compulsory bridge course in the College.
ii. Measures need to be employed to maintain quality, such as ensuring there is not a loss of opportunity for reflection, discussion, analysis of material and feedback. Instructors also need to ensure that the block-teaching doesn't lead to superficial treatment of content.
iii. The most commonly suggested schedules of postgraduate course ought to be in place if the current modular curricula of the CHLSJC are informed by the discussions in the literature review. It is highly desirable that block scheduling needs to be modified based upon the very nature of courses and taking note of staffing needs in the Departments. The semester-based scheduling need to be the dominant mode of scheduling, though.
iv. Students in the SJC may need to have full block classes as a dominant mode of delivery since the school still depends on Foreign /visiting professors. But, the block-class needs careful planning, supervision and timely assessment during the academic year. This also applies to other Departments of the College.
v. As already indicated the findings do not support loyalty to only block-scheduling. The present study ought to be augmented by further research on the specific impact of scheduling on student achievement. Thus, an experimental study should be conducted on (a) the impact of block scheduling in teaching and learning a particular subject (b) the impact of block scheduling in teaching and learning contrasting subjects, such as skills-based and non-skills based courses; (c) the impact of scheduling effect (block scheduling versus semester-based scheduling) on students' performance and achievement.

A difficult choice has to be made, though - remaining on the bandwagon of block-scheduling for it is found to be convenient in addressing staffing concerns and survival needs, or reinstating the semester-based schedule for it is perceived to be better for quality teaching and learning. The question is which mode of scheduling and method of teaching enable actualizing the competence - based learning outcomes of the modular courses. Block-scheduling alone is not the answer either.

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