



Exploring Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Academic Achievement under the Semester and Annual Systems: A Qualitative Study at the University of Zawia

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores teachers' perceptions of students' academic achievement under the semester and annual academic systems at the University of Zawia, Libya. It examines how teachers perceive both systems regarding students' achievement, understanding and retention of course content, motivation, examination preparation, support for struggling students, and their respective advantages and disadvantages. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with six university teachers from the Department of English at the University of Zawia. The data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and differences across participants' responses. Findings indicate that teachers generally perceived the annual system as more supportive of deep learning, long-term retention, revision, course coverage, and sustained support for struggling students. However, participants noted disadvantages, including postponement of studying, reduced motivation, forgetting course content, and the accumulation of material before final examinations. In contrast, the semester system was viewed as beneficial for continuous assessment, frequent feedback, regular study habits, early identification of learning difficulties, and monitoring students' progress. Nevertheless, its shorter timeframe was associated with teaching pressure, increased workload, limited opportunities for in-depth explanation and revision, and concerns about long-term retention. Overall, neither system was considered universally superior. The findings highlight the importance of balancing sufficient instructional time with continuous assessment when evaluating academic-system structures.

Keywords: Academic achievement; Annual system; Semester system; Teachers' perceptions; Higher education.

1. Introduction

Higher education plays an important role in students' academic and professional development by providing opportunities to acquire knowledge, develop critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, and prepare for future employment and participation in society. Academic achievement at the university level is influenced by several factors, including teaching practices, student engagement, motivation, assessment methods, and the organization of learning (Bostwick et al., 2022). The

structure through which teaching and assessment are organized may also influence students' academic experiences and outcomes. Research suggests that the organization of academic time can have measurable effects on student performance and progression

Universities use different academic calendar systems, including annual, semester, trimester, and quarter systems, to organize teaching, learning, and assessment. These systems differ in the length of instructional periods, course distribution, and timing of examinations, which may influence students' workload, engagement with course materials, examination preparation, and opportunities to receive feedback. Bostwick et al. (2022) demonstrated that changes in academic-calendar structure can be associated with differences in student grades, course-taking behavior, and graduation outcomes.

Among these systems, the annual and semester systems are particularly relevant to the present study. The annual system generally allows students to study courses over a longer period before completing major assessments at the end of the academic year. In contrast, the semester system divides the academic year into shorter instructional periods, with courses typically completed and assessed at the end of each semester. These differences may influence learning strategies, workload, examination preparation, and feedback opportunities. Akhund (2021), for example, found that students assessed under a semester-based examination system achieved significantly higher anatomy scores than those assessed under an annual examination system. However, such findings cannot automatically be generalized across disciplines and institutional contexts.

The semester system may promote continuous assessment, frequent feedback, regular study habits, and early identification of learning difficulties. However, its shorter instructional periods may increase the pace of teaching and learning and create additional pressure for students and teachers. Conversely, the annual system provides more time for course coverage, explanation, revision, and academic activities, but may encourage students to postpone studying and reduce opportunities for regular feedback.

Academic achievement is not determined by the academic calendar alone but results from the interaction of teaching quality, curriculum design, assessment practices, motivation, study habits, time management, and institutional conditions. Therefore, teachers' perceptions are particularly valuable when examining differences between academic systems. Teachers directly experience the effects of academic calendars on course coverage, assessment, workload, student participation, examination preparation, and support for struggling students. Their experiences can provide important insights into how academic-system structures may influence students' learning and achievement.

2. The Problem of the Study

The organization of the academic year is an important aspect of university education because it determines how teaching, learning, assessment, and other academic activities are structured. Changes in academic calendar systems may affect course delivery, the time available for covering course content, assessment practices, teachers' workload, and students' opportunities to engage with their studies. Previous research suggests that the organization of academic time can be associated with differences in students' academic performance and progression. For example, Bostwick et al. (2022) found that

transitions from a quarter to a semester calendar in four-year nonprofit institutions in the United States were associated with lower first-year grades, changes in course-load patterns, and lower on-time graduation rates. Similarly, Gibbens et al. (2015) reported a small but significant decline in biology students' performance following a transition from a quarter to a semester system. These findings suggest that academic calendar structures may have important implications for student outcomes, although their effects can vary across institutional and disciplinary contexts.

The relationship between annual and semester systems and academic achievement, however, remains inconclusive. Akhund (2021) found significantly higher anatomy examination scores among medical students assessed under a semester-based system than among those assessed under an annual system. However, because the study focused on a particular discipline and educational context, its findings cannot automatically be generalized to other settings. The differing findings in previous research therefore indicate the need to examine academic systems within their specific institutional contexts.

At the Faculty of Arts, University of Zawia, a significant change occurred in 2017 when the faculty moved from the annual system to the semester system. This transition involved changes not only in the scheduling of the academic year but also in course delivery, assessment procedures, workload, and the time available for teaching and learning. Although this transition has taken place, there is limited empirical understanding of how teachers perceive its implications for students' academic achievement.

Teachers are directly involved in course delivery, assessment, monitoring students' progress, and observing students' learning behaviors. Their experiences are therefore valuable for understanding how academic-system structures may influence achievement and the teaching and learning conditions associated with it. In particular, there is a need to explore whether teachers perceive differences in students' achievement under the annual and semester systems and how these differences may relate to teaching practices, assessment, workload, course coverage, student engagement, examination preparation, and available learning time.

Therefore, the problem addressed by this study is the limited empirical understanding of teachers' perceptions of the relationship between annual and semester systems and students' academic achievement at the Faculty of Arts, University of Zawia. By examining the experiences of teachers who have worked under both systems, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of their perceived advantages, challenges, and implications for students' academic achievement. The findings may contribute useful evidence for educators and university administrators when evaluating the effectiveness and suitability of academic systems.

3. Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do teachers perceive students' academic achievement under the semester system compared with the annual system at the Faculty of Arts, University of Zawia?
2. What differences do teachers perceive in students' learning, motivation, participation, and examination performance under the semester and annual systems?
3. What advantages and challenges do teachers associate with the semester system and the annual system in relation to teaching and students' academic achievement?
4. Which academic system do teachers perceive as more supportive of students' academic achievement, and what reasons do they provide for their perceptions?

4. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to explore teachers' perceptions of students' academic achievement under the semester and annual academic systems at the Faculty of Arts, University of Zawia. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Explore teachers' perceptions of students' academic achievement under the semester system compared with the annual system.
2. Investigate the advantages and challenges associated with the semester and annual systems in relation to teaching and students' academic achievement.
3. Explore teachers' perceptions of the effects of the two systems on teaching practices, course coverage, assessment, workload, and the time available for learning.
4. Identify which academic system teachers perceive as more supportive of students' academic achievement and examine the reasons underlying their preferences.

5. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore university teachers' perceptions of students' academic achievement under the annual and semester academic systems at the Faculty of Arts, University of Zawia. The study focuses on teachers who have experienced both systems and seeks to understand their perceptions of differences in students' academic achievement following the transition from the annual system to the semester system in 2017. More specifically, the study aims to examine teachers' perceptions of how the two academic systems influence students' learning and academic achievement and to identify the perceived advantages, disadvantages, and challenges associated with each system. It also seeks to explore teachers' experiences regarding teaching practices, course coverage, assessment, workload, student engagement, and the amount of time available for learning under the two systems.

By examining teachers' experiences and perceptions, the study seeks to provide a context-specific understanding of the relationship between academic calendar organization and students' academic achievement at the Faculty of Arts, University of

Zawia. The findings may contribute to the ongoing discussion about the effectiveness of academic systems and provide useful insights for university administrators, teachers, and policymakers when evaluating and developing academic practices.

6. Rationale for the Study

Although previous research has examined academic-calendar structures and student outcomes, much of the available evidence has focused on quantitative measures such as examination scores, grades, course-taking behavior, and graduation outcomes. For example, Akhund (2021) found higher anatomy examination scores among students assessed under a semester system, while Bostwick et al. (2022) demonstrated that changes in academic-calendar structures can influence several aspects of postsecondary student outcomes. While such studies provide useful evidence about measurable outcomes, they do not fully explain how teachers experience different academic systems or perceive their effects on students' learning processes.

The present study addresses this gap by focusing on teachers' perceptions and experiences at the University of Zawia. It examines how teachers perceive students' academic achievement under the annual and semester systems and how these systems may influence students' understanding and retention of course content, motivation, participation, examination preparation, and support for struggling students.

The study is guided by the recognition that neither academic system should be considered universally superior. The semester system may offer advantages through continuous assessment, regular feedback, and early identification of learning difficulties, whereas the annual system may provide greater time for deeper learning, revision, and sustained teacher support. Examining these contrasting perceptions can provide a more balanced understanding of the strengths and limitations of both systems. Accordingly, this study explores teachers' perceptions of students' academic achievement under the annual and semester systems at the University of Zawia.

7. Literature Review

This literature review examines university academic systems and their relationship with students' academic achievement, with particular attention to annual and semester systems. It reviews differences in academic time, assessment, learning, workload, and teachers' experiences and identifies the research gap addressed by the present study.

7.1 Context of the University of Zawia

The University of Zawia is a public university in Libya that includes the Faculty of Arts and its Department of English. The Department provides undergraduate education requiring sustained engagement with language skills, literature, reading, interpretation, and discussion. An important feature of the present context is the transition from the annual system to the semester system. Teachers who have experienced both systems can therefore compare differences in teaching time, course coverage, assessment, workload, student preparation, and perceived achievement within the same institutional setting.

The university also applies continuous assessment alongside theoretical and practical examinations, including midterm and final examinations. This context is particularly relevant because the organization and frequency of assessment represent important differences between annual and semester systems.

7.2 Annual and Semester Academic Systems

Universities organize teaching and assessment through different academic systems. The annual system generally organizes study across one extended academic period, with major examinations commonly conducted at the end of the academic year French et al. (2024). Its longer duration may provide more time for course coverage, revision, and sustained engagement with learning materials.

In contrast, the semester system divides the academic year into shorter instructional periods. Students complete courses and assessments within each semester, providing more frequent opportunities for feedback and progress monitoring (Klella & Al Garaghoolee, 2026). Therefore, the two systems differ mainly in instructional time, assessment frequency, workload, and opportunities for feedback, which may influence students' study habits and academic achievement.

7.3 Academic Systems and Students' Academic Achievement

Academic achievement refers to students' demonstrated knowledge, skills, and academic performance, commonly measured through examination results, grades, assignments, and other assessments (Karrar et al., 2026). Achievement is influenced by multiple factors, including motivation, study habits, teaching methods, attendance, time management, and learning conditions (Elyashiv, 2020). The organization of the academic system may also influence achievement by shaping instructional time, assessment practices, workload, and opportunities for feedback.

7.3.1 Semester System and Academic Achievement

The semester system is characterized by shorter instructional periods and more frequent assessment. Research suggests that these features may encourage continuous study, regular participation, and earlier identification of learning difficulties. Akhund et al. (2021) compared 748 medical students and found significantly higher anatomy examination scores among students assessed under a semester system than among those assessed under an annual system. The semester group achieved a mean score of 72.30%, compared with 64.36% for the annual group.

Frequent assessment may help students monitor their progress and adjust learning strategies. However, excessive assignments and examinations may also increase academic pressure and workload (Hmouma, 2024a). Bostwick et al. (2022) found that changing from quarters to semesters reduced the probability of students enrolling in a full course load, demonstrating that academic-calendar structures can influence students' academic behavior (Klella, 2026). Therefore, the effects of the semester system may depend on the interaction between assessment practices, workload, teaching quality, and institutional context.

7.3.2 Annual System and Academic Achievement

The annual system provides students with a longer period to study course content, develop understanding, and revise before major examinations. Its extended instructional period may support continuity in learning and provide greater flexibility in organizing academic activities (Benarose & Hmouma, 2026).

However, the concentration of major assessments at the end of the academic year may create considerable examination pressure. French et al. (2024) highlighted disadvantages associated with high-stakes examinations, including stress, limited feedback opportunities, and the potential encouragement of surface approaches to learning. Students may also receive fewer opportunities to identify weaknesses and improve before final assessments.

Evidence comparing the two systems also suggests possible differences in achievement. Akhund et al. (2021) found higher examination performance under the semester system, although the findings were limited to medical education and cannot automatically be

generalized to other disciplines. Overall, the annual system offers advantages related to instructional time and continuity but may face challenges related to delayed feedback, examination pressure, and the concentration of assessment.

7.4 Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences

Teachers play a central role in implementing academic systems because they are directly involved in teaching, assessment, curriculum delivery, and monitoring students' progress (Klella & Mrghem, 2024). Their experiences can provide important insights into how academic structures influence teaching time, course coverage, workload, assessment practices, and student engagement (Ibrahim et al., 2026).

Research on educational reform emphasizes that teachers' perceptions are influenced by institutional conditions and implementation processes. Avidov-Ungar and Arviv-Elyashiv (2020) found that teachers' perceptions of educational reform were related to institutional readiness and support mechanisms. Similarly, Orafi (2008) emphasized the importance of teachers' experiences in understanding how educational practices operate in particular contexts. Rahimi and Alavi (2017) also found that teachers' previous experiences and practical concerns, including time and resources, influenced their perceptions of educational change.

Teachers can therefore help explain how and why different academic systems may influence student learning and achievement. Their observations of students' attendance, motivation, participation, preparation, and responses to assessment provide contextual information that may not be evident from examination scores alone (Avidov-Ungar & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2020). Teachers' perspectives are also important because changes in academic systems may affect workload, grading, course preparation, and other professional responsibilities.

7.5 Research Gap

Previous research has examined the relationship between academic-calendar structures and students' academic achievement. Akhund et al. (2021), for example, found higher anatomy examination scores under a semester system than under an annual system (Hmouma et al., 2026). However, this study focused on medical students and quantitative examination results rather than teachers' perceptions of student achievement across different academic systems.

Research has also demonstrated the importance of teachers' experiences in understanding educational reform and curriculum implementation (Avidov-Ungar & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2020; Orafi, 2008; Rahimi & Alavi, 2017). Nevertheless, relatively limited attention has been given to teachers' perceptions of differences in students' academic achievement under annual and semester systems, particularly within the context of the University of Zawia.

The present study addresses this gap by examining the experiences and perceptions of teachers who have worked under both academic systems. It seeks to provide context-specific evidence concerning the perceived strengths, challenges, and implications of annual and semester systems for students' academic achievement.

8. Research Methodology

8.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design using a qualitative descriptive approach. This design was appropriate because the study aimed to explore and describe teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding students' academic achievement under the annual and semester academic systems. Qualitative descriptive research is suitable for providing clear and direct accounts of participants' experiences while remaining close to their own perspectives (Sandelowski, 2000). Similarly, Kim et al. (2017) emphasize that qualitative description is useful for providing comprehensive summaries of experiences in everyday language. The approach enabled the researcher to identify common perceptions concerning students' academic achievement, learning, assessment, motivation, attendance, and workload without imposing a complex theoretical framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research is particularly appropriate when the purpose is to understand participants' experiences within their specific contexts

8.2 Research Setting

The study was conducted at the Faculty of Arts, Department of English, University of Zawia, Libya. The Department of English was selected because its teachers had direct experience with teaching, assessment, and monitoring students' academic progress under both the annual and semester systems. This setting was particularly appropriate because teachers who had experienced both systems could provide direct comparisons based on their professional experiences, including differences in teaching time, course coverage, assessment, workload, and students' academic achievement.

8.3 Participants and Sampling

The participants were six teachers from the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Zawia. All participants had teaching experience under both the annual and semester academic systems. Participants were selected through purposive sampling because the study required individuals with specific knowledge and experience relevant to the research questions. Purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research to select participants who can provide rich and relevant information about the phenomenon under investigation (Palinkas et al., 2015). The inclusion criteria required participants to be teachers in the Department of English, have experience teaching under both academic systems, and be willing to participate voluntarily (Hmouma, 2024b). The purpose was not to obtain a statistically representative sample but to collect detailed accounts from teachers with direct experience of both systems.

8.4 Data Collection

Data were collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the six participating teachers. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they provide a flexible framework while allowing participants to describe their experiences and opinions in their own words (Kallio et al., 2016). Each interview lasted approximately 20–30 minutes and was conducted individually at a convenient time. The interviews focused on teachers' experiences of the annual and semester systems and their

perceptions of how these systems influenced students' academic achievement. Before the interviews, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the voluntary nature of their participation. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. With their permission, interviews were audio-recorded, and written notes were taken to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the collected information. Follow-up questions were used when clarification or further explanation was required.

8.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were considered throughout the study to protect participants' rights, privacy, and confidentiality. Participants received information about the purpose of the study and their role before providing informed consent. Participation was voluntary, and participants had the right to decline questions or withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by replacing participants' names with codes such as T1, T2, and T3. Interview recordings, notes, and transcripts were stored securely and were accessible only to the researcher. The collected information was used solely for academic purposes. These procedures reflect fundamental ethical principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and protection of participants in qualitative research (Orb et al., 2001). Relevant institutional permission was obtained before conducting the study. Overall, appropriate ethical procedures were followed to ensure that participants' rights, privacy, and well-being were protected throughout the research process.

9. Data Analysis

The data collected through the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. This method was appropriate because the study aimed to identify and describe recurring patterns in teachers' perceptions and experiences of the annual and semester academic systems. Thematic analysis provides a systematic process for identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is also flexible and appropriate for studies that seek to describe participants' experiences while maintaining a close connection to their accounts.

Following the interviews, the audio recordings were reviewed and transcribed, and the written notes were compared with the recordings to ensure completeness. The researcher repeatedly read the data to become familiar with the participants' responses. Relevant statements were then assigned initial codes related to academic achievement, understanding and retention, motivation, participation, examination preparation, academic pressure, teacher support, workload, and teachers' preferences.

Related codes were grouped into subthemes and broader themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The themes were subsequently reviewed against the interview data to ensure that they accurately represented participants' views and addressed the research questions. Similarities and differences among teachers were also considered. Finally, selected quotations were used to illustrate important findings, with participants identified through codes such as T1, T2, and T3 to maintain confidentiality.

9.1 Main Themes and Subthemes

Main Theme	Key Subthemes	Related Questions
Theme 1: Time and the Learning Process	Time availability, time pressure, workload, revision time, teacher intervention	Q1, Q2, Q3, Q5, Q6, Q8, Q9, Q10
Theme 2: Depth, Understanding, and Retention	Deep understanding, detailed coverage, revision, connections between topics, retention, forgetting	Q1, Q2, Q3, Q5, Q8, Q9, Q10
Theme 3: Assessment, Feedback, and Academic Support	Continuous assessment, feedback, monitoring, early identification, correction, sustained intervention	Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8
Theme 4: Motivation, Engagement, and Student Self-Regulation	Motivation, participation, examination orientation, procrastination, preparation, time management	Q4, Q5, Q7, Q10

Table 1: Thematic Categories

9.2 Theme 1: Time and the Learning Process

Time was the most prominent issue in the teachers' responses. Participants generally perceived the annual system as providing greater time for teaching, course coverage, revision, and student support. T1 described it as providing "more time for deep coverage," while T3 emphasized the additional time available for completing course requirements and revision. T4 and T6 similarly highlighted the benefits of extended time for teaching activities, marking, and student support.

In contrast, the semester system was associated with limited instructional time and greater pressure. T1 noted that the semester could pass quickly, while T3 and T6 emphasized difficulties in covering and explaining difficult content in depth. However, teachers also noted that excessive time under the annual system could encourage procrastination. T2 and T4 observed that students might delay preparation when examinations were far away.

Overall, teachers viewed time as a central factor influencing learning. The annual system was associated with greater flexibility and sustained learning opportunities, whereas the semester system was associated with greater pressure but a more continuous academic pace.

9.3 Theme 2: Depth, Understanding, and Retention

Participants generally associated the annual system with deeper understanding, detailed explanation, revision, and retention. T1 and T3 emphasized the opportunity to explain content in greater depth, while T4 highlighted repeated revision. T5 associated the longer period with better connections among lessons and stronger retention.

Conversely, some teachers perceived the semester system as encouraging shorter-term, examination-oriented learning. T2 noted that some students might focus on passing examinations rather than fully understanding the material, while T5 suggested that students could forget material after completing a semester.

Nevertheless, teachers recognized that the annual system could also create boredom, delayed preparation, and possible forgetting. Thus, the annual system was viewed as providing greater opportunities for deep learning and retention rather than guaranteeing them. Overall, the teachers perceived the annual system as more supportive of sustained understanding, while the semester system was viewed as more suitable for faster coverage of limited content.

9.4 Theme 3: Assessment, Feedback, and Academic Support

Continuous assessment and monitoring emerged as important perceived strengths of the semester system. T2 and T5 emphasized that frequent tests and quizzes provide regular feedback and help teachers monitor students' progress. T3 noted that the semester system allows learning difficulties to be identified earlier, while T6 emphasized opportunities for students to recognize and correct weaknesses.

However, teachers distinguished between identifying difficulties and having enough time to address them. T1 viewed early identification as an advantage of the semester system, whereas T2, T3, T5, and T6 emphasized that the annual system provides more time for sustained intervention and improvement. T4 similarly suggested that both systems allow teachers to identify students' levels, but the timing and opportunity for intervention differ.

9.5 Theme 4: Motivation, Engagement, and Student Self-Regulation

Teachers' views concerning motivation were mixed. T1, T4, and T6 did not consider motivation to be directly determined by the academic system. Instead, T2 and T4 emphasized individual factors such as effort, readiness, preparation, and organization. However, participants identified several indirect relationships between academic structure and motivation. T3 suggested that frequent deadlines under the semester system could create frustration, while T2 noted that the annual system allowed more time for classroom activities that could encourage participation. At the same time, T2, T4, and T5 observed that the longer annual period might encourage procrastination and reduce students' sense of urgency.

Overall, motivation appeared to depend on an interaction between academic structure and individual student characteristics. The academic system may influence motivation indirectly through assessment frequency, deadlines, workload, classroom activities, and opportunities for participation.

10. Findings of the study

This section presents the findings obtained from the thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with six teachers (T1–T6) from the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Zawia. The findings are organized according to the ten research questions (RQ1–RQ10). The analysis focused on teachers' perceptions of students' academic achievement under the annual and semester systems, particularly in relation to time, understanding and retention, assessment, feedback, motivation, examination preparation, student support, workload, and the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the two systems.

RQ1: How do teachers perceive students' academic achievement under the annual and semester systems?

The participants generally perceived the annual system as more supportive of students' overall academic achievement, particularly because it provides more time for teaching, learning, revision, and student support. T1, T3, T4, T5, and T6 emphasized the importance of sufficient time for completing course requirements and developing students' understanding.

In contrast, the semester system was perceived as providing a more continuous academic structure through regular assessment and monitoring. However, participants

frequently associated its shorter timeframe with greater pressure, faster course coverage, and fewer opportunities for detailed teaching and revision.

Overall, teachers did not consider either system universally superior. Rather, they perceived the annual system as stronger in terms of sustained learning and support, while the semester system was seen as stronger in terms of continuous monitoring and assessment.

RQ2: How does the amount of instructional time affect students' learning under the two systems?

Time emerged as one of the most important factors in the teachers' responses. Participants generally viewed the annual system as providing greater flexibility for teaching and learning. T1 described the annual system as providing "more time for deep coverage," while T3 emphasized the additional time available for completing assignments and revising before examinations. T5 similarly noted that teachers could explain materials in greater detail and conduct projects without rushing.

The semester system, however, was associated with greater time pressure. T3 and T6 indicated that the shorter period could restrict opportunities for detailed explanation and revision. T2 also reported that teachers could feel they were "running out of time" when attempting to complete lessons and activities.

Nevertheless, teachers recognized that additional time could have a negative effect when students used it to postpone studying. T2 and T4 observed that students might delay preparation when examinations were far away. Thus, instructional time was perceived as beneficial when used effectively but potentially problematic when it encouraged procrastination.

RQ3: How do teachers perceive students' understanding and retention of course content under the two systems?

Most participants associated the annual system with deeper understanding and stronger retention. T1 linked the shorter semester period to difficulties in developing sufficient understanding and retention, while T3 emphasized the importance of longer-term study for building students' academic background.

T4 and T5 similarly perceived the annual system as more suitable for detailed explanation and repeated revision. T5 also suggested that some students under the semester system might focus on passing examinations rather than developing long-term understanding and could forget material after completing the semester.

However, the annual system was not viewed as guaranteeing retention. T3 noted that the extended period could sometimes lead to boredom and memory loss. Therefore, teachers generally perceived the annual system as providing greater opportunities for deep learning and retention, while recognizing that effective learning also depends on students' study behavior.

RQ4: How do teachers perceive students' motivation and participation under the annual and semester systems?

Teachers' perceptions concerning motivation were mixed. T1, T4, and T6 questioned whether motivation was directly determined by the academic system. They suggested that motivation is also influenced by individual characteristics and broader factors.

Nevertheless, participants identified several indirect relationships between academic structure and motivation. T2 reported that the annual system provided more opportunities for classroom activities that could motivate students, whereas the shorter semester period could restrict such activities. T3 suggested that frequent deadlines could sometimes frustrate students and reduce motivation.

The annual system also presented a motivational disadvantage. T2, T4, and T5 observed that students might become relaxed and postpone studying because they had a long period before the final examination. T5, however, suggested that some students might feel satisfied with the semester system because they complete one academic period and move to the next. Overall, motivation was perceived as an interaction between the academic system, assessment practices, classroom activities, deadlines, and students' individual self-regulation.

RQ5: How do teachers perceive examination preparation under the two academic systems?

The participants identified differences in examination preparation between the two systems. Under the semester system, students were perceived as preparing more regularly because they faced frequent tests, quizzes, and examinations. T5 described regular assessment as encouraging continuous study and providing opportunities for revision. However, the shorter semester period could also increase pressure. T2 and T3 indicated that students and teachers might struggle to complete the required material before examinations.

Under the annual system, students had more time to prepare and revise. T3 and T4 emphasized the opportunity for repeated revision before the final examination. However, T1, T2, and T4 noted that students might postpone preparation until the end of the academic year, resulting in a large amount of material to study at once. Thus, the semester system was perceived as encouraging regular preparation, whereas the annual system provided more time for extended preparation and revision but could encourage delayed study.

RQ6: How do teachers perceive assessment and feedback under the annual and semester systems?

The semester system was viewed as having a clear advantage in terms of continuous assessment and feedback. T2 emphasized the frequency of tests and quizzes, which provided students with more regular feedback. T5 similarly associated regular assessment with continuous study and monitoring of progress.

T3 highlighted the ability to identify learning difficulties at an early stage, while T6 noted that students could recognize and correct weaknesses during the academic year.

The annual system, in contrast, was perceived as providing fewer opportunities for frequent formal assessment. However, teachers considered its longer timeframe advantageous for responding to identified difficulties. Overall, the semester system was perceived as stronger for continuous assessment, feedback, and monitoring, whereas the annual system was perceived as providing more time for students to respond to feedback and improve.

RQ7: How do teachers perceive support for struggling students under the two systems?

A particularly important finding was the distinction between identifying students' difficulties and intervening to address them. The semester system was perceived as more effective for early identification because students were assessed more frequently. T1 and T3 emphasized that teachers could identify struggling students relatively quickly.

However, T2–T6 generally perceived the annual system as providing greater opportunities for sustained intervention. T3 explained that teachers had more time to listen to students' difficulties and develop plans to address them. T5 similarly noted that students had more time to overcome their difficulties. T6 stated that the annual system made it more possible to “fix the problem.”

T4 provided a balanced view, suggesting that both systems allow teachers to identify students' levels, but the main difference concerns when and how teachers can intervene. Therefore, the findings suggest that the semester system supports early identification, whereas the annual system supports sustained intervention and remediation.

RQ8: What are the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the semester system?

The teachers identified several advantages of the semester system:

- frequent assessment and feedback;
- regular monitoring of students' progress;
- early identification of learning difficulties;
- smaller amounts of material for individual examinations;
- opportunities to correct weaknesses;
- encouragement of regular study.

T2 emphasized frequent feedback, T3 highlighted early identification of difficulties, T5 associated regular assessment with continuous study, and T6 emphasized opportunities for correction. However, participants also identified several disadvantages. These included limited instructional time, increased teaching pressure, frequent deadlines, workload, reduced opportunities for detailed explanation, and limited time for revision. T2 associated frequent assignments and examinations with frustration and stress, while T3 and T6 emphasized difficulties in achieving depth within the shorter period. Overall, the semester system was perceived as beneficial for continuous assessment and monitoring, but challenging in relation to time, workload, pressure, and depth of learning.

RQ9: What are the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the annual system?

The strongest perceived advantage of the annual system was its greater amount of instructional time. T1 emphasized deep coverage and detailed explanation, while T2 and T5 highlighted opportunities for classroom activities, projects, and connections between topics. T3 and T4 emphasized the additional time available for revision and improvement. T6 described this as “time richness.”

The annual system was therefore associated with:

- greater instructional time;
- deeper course coverage;
- detailed explanation;
- repeated revision;
- greater flexibility;
- sustained teacher support;
- opportunities for students to improve.

However, participants also identified disadvantages. T1 referred to pressure during the final examination period because students must prepare a large amount of material. T2, T4, and T5 associated the long period between assessments with procrastination and reduced urgency. T3 mentioned possible forgetting, while T6 noted that students who fall behind may not identify their weaknesses early enough. Thus, the annual system was perceived as advantageous for depth, continuity, flexibility, and support, but problematic in relation to procrastination, delayed feedback, retention, and end-of-year examination pressure.

RQ10: Which academic system do teachers perceive as more beneficial for students' academic achievement overall?

Across the ten interview questions, most participants expressed a general preference for the annual system, particularly regarding deep understanding, retention, course coverage, revision, and sustained support. The greater availability of time was repeatedly identified as the main reason for this preference. Nevertheless, participants recognized important strengths in the semester system. Its frequent assessment, feedback, monitoring, and early identification of difficulties were considered valuable for supporting students' progress.

The findings therefore do not support the conclusion that one academic system is superior in every respect. Instead, teachers perceived the two systems as offering different advantages. The annual system was viewed as more supportive of depth, continuity, retention, flexibility, and sustained intervention, while the semester system was viewed as more effective for continuous assessment, feedback, monitoring, and early identification of learning difficulties.

11. Discussion

The present study explored teachers' perceptions of students' academic achievement under the annual and semester academic systems at the University of Zawia. The findings indicate that teachers did not perceive either system as universally superior. Rather, the two systems were associated with different advantages and limitations. The

annual system was generally perceived as more supportive of extended learning, detailed coverage, revision, deeper understanding, retention, and sustained intervention with struggling students. In contrast, the semester system was perceived as advantageous in relation to continuous assessment, regular feedback, monitoring, early identification of learning difficulties, and smaller amounts of content for individual examinations. Across these findings, time emerged as a central factor linking the academic system with teaching practices, student learning, assessment, and academic support.

11.1 Time as a Central Factor in Teaching and Learning

One of the strongest findings of the present study is the importance teachers attached to the amount of time available for teaching and learning. Participants repeatedly associated the annual system with greater flexibility and sufficient time to cover course content, explain difficult topics, conduct activities, provide revision, and support students who experience difficulties. Conversely, the semester system was frequently associated with time pressure, rapid course progression, increased workload, and reduced opportunities for detailed teaching. This finding is consistent with the literature reviewed in the present study, which identifies the organization of the academic calendar as a factor that can influence students' workload, study habits, and learning opportunities. The semester system divides academic activities into shorter periods and therefore creates more frequent academic deadlines. The literature also suggests that academic-calendar structures can influence students' course-taking behavior and perceived workload (Bostwick et al., 2022). The teachers' accounts in the present study provide a qualitative explanation of how such structural differences may be experienced in classroom practice.

However, the findings also complicate the assumption that greater amounts of time necessarily lead to better academic outcomes. Although participants generally valued the additional time provided by the annual system, some also identified possible disadvantages associated with having a long period before the final examination. T2, T4, and T5 suggested that students may postpone preparation or become less concerned about deadlines when examinations are distant. This suggests that time availability is beneficial when it is used productively, but excessive flexibility may also reduce students' sense of urgency. The finding therefore extends the literature by suggesting that the effect of academic-calendar structure may depend not simply on how much time students have, but on how that time is structured and used. The semester system provides tighter academic cycles that may encourage regular engagement, while the annual system provides greater temporal flexibility but requires students to regulate their learning over a much longer period. This interpretation is particularly relevant to the University of Zawia context, where the nature of courses may differ across departments. For English-language courses, participants perceived extended periods as particularly important for reading, discussion, interpretation, language development, projects, and revision.

11.2 Depth, Understanding, and Retention

A second major finding concerns the perceived relationship between the academic system and the depth and durability of learning. Most participants associated the annual system with deeper understanding and stronger opportunities for retention. Teachers explained that the longer period allows them to explain difficult topics in greater detail, provide repeated opportunities for revision, undertake projects, and help students understand connections between different topics across the academic year.

This finding is consistent with the general argument in the literature that longer periods of engagement with course content may provide opportunities for students to develop understanding rather than simply complete individual assessment requirements. The participants' responses also support concerns identified in the literature regarding highly assessment-focused learning. French et al. (2024) reported that high-stakes examinations may encourage surface or strategic approaches to learning, particularly when students focus on examination performance rather than deeper learning. This issue was particularly evident in the present study. T2 perceived students under the semester system as sometimes becoming concerned primarily with examination dates and studying to pass rather than understanding the material. Similarly, T5 perceived a tendency toward short-term examination performance and subsequent forgetting. These perceptions suggest that frequent assessment, although potentially useful for monitoring progress, may also encourage students to prioritize immediate assessment outcomes.

At the same time, the present findings provide an important qualification. Participants did not regard the annual system as automatically guaranteeing retention. T3 noted that the extended period may sometimes result in boredom or memory loss, while T2, T4, and T5 identified procrastination and delayed preparation as potential consequences of having a long period before the final examination. Thus, the advantage of the annual system appears to lie in the opportunities it creates for deep learning rather than in the duration itself. This distinction is important. More time can enable deeper learning, but it must be accompanied by appropriate learning activities, revision, feedback, and student self-regulation.

11.3 Assessment, Feedback, and Academic Support

The findings concerning assessment provide one of the clearest areas in which the semester and annual systems differed. Participants identified frequent assessment as a major strength of the semester system. Tests, quizzes, and examinations were perceived as providing regular feedback, encouraging continuous study, and allowing teachers to monitor students' progress. This finding is consistent with the literature reviewed in the present study. Akhund et al. (2021), for example, found higher mean anatomy examination scores among students assessed under a semester system and suggested that more frequent assessment and changes in examination structure may contribute to improved performance. The literature also emphasizes that assessment can contribute to learning when students receive information about their weaknesses and have opportunities to respond to feedback.

The present study supports this perspective but also adds an important teachers' perspective. Participants did not view assessment only as a mechanism for producing grades. T3 and T6 described the semester system as useful for identifying learning difficulties at an early stage, while T2 and T5 emphasized feedback, monitoring, and regular study habits. Thus, continuous assessment was perceived as having a diagnostic and developmental function, not merely an evaluative one. However, the findings also reveal an important limitation. Frequent identification of difficulties does not necessarily mean that teachers have sufficient time to address them. T1 considered the semester system advantageous because teachers can identify struggling students quickly. In contrast, T2, T3, T5, and T6 emphasized the greater opportunities available under the annual system for students to improve once difficulties have been identified. T4 summarized this issue by questioning not whether teachers can understand students'

difficulties, but when and how they can intervene. This distinction represents one of the most significant findings of the study:

- The semester system may facilitate early identification of academic difficulties, whereas
- the annual system may provide greater opportunities for sustained intervention and improvement.

The finding complements French et al. (2024), who emphasize the importance of assessment and feedback for learning but also identify limitations associated with assessment concentrated in high-stakes examinations. The present findings suggest that the issue is not simply the frequency of assessment. Rather, assessment is most useful when feedback is followed by sufficient time and opportunity for students and teachers to act upon it. Therefore, the two systems appear to provide different forms of academic support. The semester system offers more frequent information about students' performance, whereas the annual system offers a longer period in which identified problems can potentially be addressed.

11.4 Motivation, Engagement, and Student Self-Regulation

The findings regarding motivation were more complex than those concerning time, learning, and assessment. Unlike the participants' relatively consistent preference for the annual system in relation to depth and learning time, teachers did not agree that the academic system directly determines student motivation. Several participants viewed motivation as primarily related to individual student characteristics, including readiness, effort, preparation, and time-management abilities. This perspective is consistent with the broader literature reviewed in the study, which identifies motivation and study habits as factors influencing academic achievement rather than treating academic-calendar structure as the sole explanation for student performance.

Nevertheless, the findings indicate that the academic system may influence motivation indirectly. T3 associated frequent deadlines under the semester system with frustration and reduced motivation. T2 explained that the annual system provided more opportunities to use classroom activities to engage students, whereas the compressed semester made such activities more difficult to implement. At the same time, T5 suggested that students might feel satisfied with the semester system because they complete one academic period and move on to the next. These findings demonstrate that the relationship between academic structure and motivation is not linear. The semester system may create pressure through frequent deadlines, but the same deadlines may encourage regular study. The annual system may provide freedom and flexibility, but that freedom may also encourage procrastination and reduced urgency.

This finding is particularly important because it suggests that student motivation should not be interpreted simply as a consequence of the annual or semester system. Instead, the systems create different conditions within which students exercise self-regulation. Students in the annual system may need to manage their learning over a longer period, whereas students in the semester system may need to manage frequent and closely spaced academic demands. Consequently, the present findings suggest that students' self-regulation and study habits may mediate the relationship between academic-calendar structure and achievement.

11.5 The Annual and Semester Systems as Different, Rather Than Simply Better or Worse

Taken together, the findings challenge a simple assumption that one academic system is inherently superior to the other. Although most participants expressed a general preference for the annual system, their responses also identified meaningful advantages of the semester system. The annual system was perceived as providing:

- greater time for teaching and learning;
- deeper coverage of difficult content;
- more opportunities for revision;
- greater continuity between topics;
- more time for projects and classroom activities;
- greater opportunities for sustained intervention with struggling students.

The semester system, by contrast, was perceived as providing:

- more frequent assessment;
- regular feedback;
- continuous monitoring;
- earlier identification of learning difficulties;
- smaller amounts of material for individual examinations;
- opportunities for students to identify and correct weaknesses.

At the same time, each system contained potential disadvantages. The semester system was associated with rushing, workload, stress, limited depth, and possible short-term learning. The annual system was associated with procrastination, reduced urgency, possible forgetting, and heavy examination pressure at the end of the academic year. This pattern is broadly consistent with the literature reviewed in the present study. Akhund et al. (2021) provide evidence that semester-based assessment can be associated with higher examination performance, whereas French et al. (2024) highlight concerns about high-stakes examinations and the limited feedback opportunities associated with heavily concentrated assessment. The present study adds to these findings by showing how teachers in a specific university context interpret the processes behind these potential advantages and disadvantages. Rather than identifying a universally superior system, the findings suggest that the effectiveness of each system depends on what aspect of learning is being considered.

11.6 The Importance of Context in Interpreting Academic Systems

The findings also support the importance of considering institutional and disciplinary context when evaluating academic systems. Previous research has produced different findings concerning semester and annual systems, and Akhund et al. (2021), for example, examined medical students rather than students in an English-language context. Their finding of higher performance under the semester system therefore cannot automatically be generalized to the University of Zawia or to English studies. The present participants repeatedly emphasized the nature of English courses as an important consideration. They perceived courses involving drama, novels, speaking, interpretation, and other extended forms of engagement as requiring sufficient time for explanation, discussion, practice, and revision. This suggests that the suitability of an academic system may depend partly on the learning objectives and pedagogical demands of particular disciplines. This contextual dimension also aligns with the literature on teachers' experiences of educational change. Avidov-Ungar and Arviv-Elyashiv (2020) emphasize the importance of implementation conditions and teacher experiences, while Rahimi and Alavi (2017) and Orafi (2008) highlight the influence

of teachers' beliefs, practical conditions, and contextual factors on educational implementation.

11.7 Contribution of the Present Study

The present study contributes to the existing literature by providing context-specific qualitative evidence from teachers at the University of Zawia concerning the perceived relationship between academic-calendar structure and student achievement. A particularly important contribution is the identification of time as a connecting mechanism across several dimensions of the learning process. The findings suggest a chain in which the amount and organization of time influence teaching pace and workload, which in turn affect opportunities for explanation, revision, assessment, intervention, and ultimately students' perceived learning and achievement. The study also identifies a distinction between early identification and sustained intervention. The semester system was perceived as providing mechanisms for identifying difficulties relatively quickly through frequent assessment, while the annual system was perceived as providing more time to respond to those difficulties. This distinction is not adequately captured by simply comparing examination results between the two systems.

Finally, the findings demonstrate that teachers' perceptions do not support a simplistic annual-versus-semester dichotomy. Instead, the systems appear to involve a trade-off between flexibility and continuity on the one hand, and frequency of monitoring and assessment on the other. This suggests that improvements in academic achievement may depend less on choosing one system categorically and more on incorporating effective features of both systems.

12. Conclusion

This study explored teachers' perceptions of students' academic achievement under the annual and semester systems at the University of Zawia. Based on the thematic analysis of interviews with six university teachers, the findings indicate that the two academic systems offer different advantages and challenges rather than one system being universally superior. The most prominent issue emerging from the participants' responses was time. Teachers generally perceived the annual system as providing greater time and flexibility for teaching, learning, revision, detailed explanation, project work, and teacher intervention. The longer academic period was also associated with deeper understanding, stronger opportunities for retention, and greater opportunities for struggling students to improve. Consequently, most participants expressed a preference for the annual system when considering students' overall learning, depth of understanding, and sustained academic support. However, the findings also demonstrated important advantages of the semester system. Frequent examinations, quizzes, assignments, and other forms of assessment were perceived as providing students with regular feedback and allowing teachers to monitor progress and identify learning difficulties at an earlier stage. The smaller amount of material covered for individual examinations was also viewed as potentially making examination preparation more manageable. Thus, the semester system appeared to provide stronger mechanisms for continuous monitoring and early identification of academic difficulties.

At the same time, the semester system was perceived to create significant challenges. Its shorter timeframe was associated with rushing, increased workload, examination pressure, reduced opportunities for detailed explanation and revision, and concerns about students' long-term understanding and retention. In contrast, the annual system was associated with procrastination, reduced urgency, delayed feedback, the accumulation of large amounts of material, and considerable pressure during the final

examination period. An important finding was that teachers did not perceive academic achievement as being determined by the academic system alone. Students' preparation, motivation, time-management skills, individual differences, course characteristics, assessment practices, and teachers' ability to provide support were also perceived as influential factors. This suggests that the effectiveness of an academic system depends not only on its formal structure but also on how teaching, assessment, feedback, and student support are organized within that structure.

Overall, the findings suggest that the annual system was perceived as more supportive of depth, continuity, retention, flexibility, and sustained intervention, whereas the semester system was perceived as more effective for continuous assessment, regular feedback, monitoring, and early identification of students' difficulties. Therefore, rather than concluding that one system is inherently better than the other, the study highlights the importance of balancing sufficient learning time with effective continuous assessment and feedback. For the University of Zawia, consideration of these complementary strengths may help inform future decisions concerning the organization of academic study and assessment.

13. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Ensure sufficient instructional time for courses requiring depth and extended learning.
Academic planning should consider whether the duration allocated to a course is sufficient for teachers to explain difficult material, conduct meaningful activities, provide revision, and allow students to develop a deeper understanding of course content.
2. Strengthen continuous assessment and feedback within the annual system.
If the annual system is retained, more regular formative assessment should be incorporated throughout the academic year. This could help reduce the problem of students receiving limited feedback until the end of the year and enable teachers to identify learning difficulties earlier.
3. Avoid excessive assessment and academic pressure under the semester system.
Where the semester system is used, the number and timing of assignments, tests, and examinations should be carefully coordinated to avoid excessive workload and pressure on both students and teachers.
4. Provide early academic support for struggling students.
Universities should establish mechanisms through which students experiencing academic difficulties can be identified early and provided with appropriate support, regardless of the academic system in operation.
5. Consider the nature of individual courses when organizing academic periods.
The findings suggest that not all courses require the same amount of instructional time. Courses involving extensive reading, interpretation, discussion, practical work, or language-skill development may require greater flexibility and sufficient time for learning and practice.
6. Promote formative assessment rather than relying heavily on final examinations.
Regular low-stakes assessments, feedback, classroom activities, and opportunities for revision could help students monitor their own progress and address weaknesses before major examinations.

7. Address procrastination under the annual system. If the annual system is maintained, students should be encouraged to follow structured study schedules throughout the academic year rather than postponing preparation until the final examination period.
8. Support teachers in managing academic workload. Academic administrators should consider teachers' workload when designing assessment schedules and academic calendars. Teachers need sufficient time to prepare lessons, conduct activities, mark assignments, provide feedback, and support struggling students.
9. Develop students' time-management and self-regulation skills. Since participants emphasized the importance of individual preparation and time management, universities could provide guidance on study planning, examination preparation, and the effective use of available academic time.
10. Consider a balanced approach to academic organization. Rather than viewing the annual and semester systems as completely opposing alternatives, the University of Zawia could consider combining some of their strengths, for example, maintaining sufficient time for deep learning while incorporating regular formative assessment and feedback.

13.1 Recommendations for Further Research

Further research could extend the findings of this study by examining students' perceptions alongside those of teachers. A study involving a larger number of participants from different faculties could also determine whether perceptions vary according to discipline or course type. Future research could additionally compare actual academic achievement data under the annual and semester systems rather than relying exclusively on teachers' perceptions. Quantitative examination results, course grades, retention rates, attendance, and other academic indicators could be combined with qualitative interviews to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of academic-system structure. Finally, longitudinal research could examine students' performance over several academic years to determine whether the perceived advantages and disadvantages identified by teachers are reflected in students' actual learning outcomes.

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