

Direct Grading: A Model and Observations

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Abstract

Aiming to ensure comfortable and convivial atmosphere with no stress element for the students to entertain during the learning process with variant mechanics including internal and external, direct grading system, though Eurocentric, has been highly expected to be implemented in the higher education in India for the last few couple of years. The higher education scenario of the country has undergone radical changes and more of the kind is anticipated under Choice Based Credit and Semester System. The newly advocated system, CBCS, has grading as one of its far reaching components. In lieu of the traditional marking system, the evaluation assumes a more novel; highly acknowledged to be more creative and positivist, system of the direct grading starts from the evaluation of each component of learning. The evaluator awards various letter grades instead of marks. The question paper would carry weightage which is distinctly given over each question as per the nature of the question. Each grade has a number value to carry: eg: (Grade A= 4. B=3. C=2.D=1.E=0). At the end of the evaluation we calculate the Weighted Grade Point Average and the SGPA which ultimately leads to CGPA and the Final Grade. Each stage of the evaluation has to meet with the concerned formula which is prepared in advance. The paper will discuss the advantages and challenges of the Direct Grading System along with the discussion on the system itself.

KEYWORDS: Direct grading, weighted grade point average, SGPA, CGPA and Eurocentric.

Introduction.

Highly thought-provoking and action inviting remark of Mantz Yorke "assessment is the aspect of curriculum that stands in the greatest need of development" stems from his observation on what James said in his book that "assessment is possibly one of the least sophisticated aspects of university teaching and learning." James view is the apogee of the critiques on the traditional assessment methods of higher education prevalent through the contemporary academe. Academic intelligentsia across the globe have had their souls burning over the issue of assessment for it being highly conspicuous by lack of accuracy. The intellectual hypothesis that accuracy is mostly dubious in the traditional methods of assessment invoked the scintillating academicians of the last century to overhaul the lack in it. Many a change have been made on assessment and evaluation component of higher education over these years and the last of its kind is the grading system which has evolved out of the age old saying "marking is an imperfect art."

Grading System: Some Observations.

Grading enters the discourse on assessment as a preferable substitute for the traditional marking system which, it's generally asserted by modern academic scientists, carries much more malformation with it. The term grade is stimulated to have emanated from the

Latin word gradus which meant a step (Thanuja.K, 2012).Originally referred as a unit of "measurement of angles", the term grade gradually gained status of academic signifier as it started to be used to refer to "degrees of merit or quality" (Honby, A.S. 2010).Stemming from the modern Eurocentric academic discourses, grading is being given immense priority over the traditional system of marking with numerical signifiers. The importance of grading wins over marking for varied reasons. J.S. Rajput writes: "it, grading, considerably reduces the significance that is attached to the award of numerical marks which suffer from a number of imperfections like inter and intra-examiner variability, imperfection of tools, sampling of contents, sampling of objectives within the content, arbitrary time limits for answering individual questions in testing situations, inability of unpreparedness to display the best on the part of the child" (2003). In the traditional method of marking the assessment of quality seems to be highly subjective and thus invites distortions in evaluation is another challenge to be effectively addressed. Method of marking encompasses two elements the quality and range of an answer, which, academicians observe, makes evaluation a complex process. Moreover, as Rajput observes; "the employability of the scale (that runs from 0 to 100) used in the award of marks neither satisfies the criterion of absolute 0, nor that of absolute 100" (2003) also seeks 'more acceptable' solution in assessment. Above all the most attractive advantage attributed to grading is the argument that it reduces the traumatic experience of the learning mass as it only categorizes the learners on the grounds of their performance in lieu of classification based on the marks they are awarded. Grading is argued to make learning more a tension free experience.

However, grading system is not as exhilarating as an el classico for the evaluator, the teacher. It has to go through a number of complex stages to reach the judgment on the performance of the learner which determines and colours the imagined future of the latter. The capacity of the evaluator to grade with precision is skeptical though the system is thought to be more scientific in comparison with the traditional counterpart which now is beyond the pale. Grading system demands analytical and holistic assessment of the performance of the learned material from the evaluator.

System of grading prevails in many ways like, direct grading, indirect grading, relative grading and absolute grading. Relative grading, also called as non-referenced grading, is a method of assessment by which "the performance of each student is compared with that of his peers and graded to ensure normal distribution in performance assessment"(Kerala State Higher Education Counsel, 2003). It can be advocated for the assessment of a larger group where the assessment is made on the basis of a predetermined assumption that, for example, the best 10% of the cohort would be given A, next 30% grade B, following 20% be awarded with C, next 30% with D and last 10% with E. But it demands the failure of 10% always which is an extreme disadvantage. In absolute grading grades are awarded against the preconceived scale of grades with a fixed cut off. Here every student gets an opportunity to perform better as it avoids the notion of the compelled failure.

Most popularly known modes of grading are indirect grading and direct grading. Indirect grading is a method of assessment where the marks awarded by an evaluator are ultimately converted into a predetermined letter grade using absolute standards. This method is simple and easy, yet has the traditional element of the unscientific system of marking in assessment. Most of the higher education institutions in India, ever since the

grading system was recommended by NPE in 1986, follow Indirect grading for its lack of complexities.

The mostly advocated and fruitful method of grading under grading system is Direct Grading. Direct Grading is the method of assessment by the individual evaluator/ teacher by giving grades in place of marks to each individual questions/answers. Here the assessment of quality and range are segregated. The first step of assessment begins with the teacher evaluator's assessment of quality of the performed material based on which letter grade is awarded to it: each letter grade would have a numerical value. Depending on the range of the question weightage is given. The numerical value of the given grade will be multiplied by weightage of the question involves the second step. The sum of this is called weighted grade point. The third step is the calculation of the sum of these weighted grade points. The final step is to calculate the grade for the particular course for which the teacher evaluator takes recourse to the arithmetic process of division of the sum of the weighted grade points by the maximum weightage of the question paper for the course. This will decide the grade for the course obtained in the external and the Grade will bear its weighted grade point also.

This weighted grade point will merge with the weighted grade point for the Continuous Internal Assessment which requires to have been done before the end semester examination. The sum of the weighted grade points for both Internal and External shall constitute the Grade and Weighted Grade Point Average for the Course. With a definitely determined formula the SGPA, Semester Grade Point Average is calculated. The SGPAs shall be multiplied by credits for each semester and the sum of the value thus obtained will be divided by sum of the total credits for the programme to arrive at the Cumulative Grade for the programme and its grade point. The Cumulative grade is extracted from a 7 letter scale.

University of Calicut: A Model

Established in 1968 "to nurture excellence in education and research in its catchment areas of Northern Kerala, historically consigned to the periphery of Kerala's academic map", University of Calicut, "the largest residential cum affiliating University in Kerala" (www.universityofcalicut.info), is the second University to be set up in Kerala under the State Universities Act. The University, with 30 post graduate departments and about 400 colleges affiliated to it with an intake capacity of more than 100000 students a year has been a highly promising knowledge foundry over these years since inception. Its contribution toward the social, cultural and political development of the northern part of Kerala can never go into oblivion as it continues to be a hub of production and dissemination of knowledge with uncompromising "emphasis on fostering quality-human resource and promoting productive research that benefit both local communities and wider humanity"(ibid).

The University of Calicut is always 'sensitive' to the global trends in education from time to time and ready awake to the directives of the NPE and other national and state bodies. It always tries to make its aims satiated by altering with necessary addition and inevitable omissions time demands for its heterogeneous dependent learning community. It is one of the first State Universities to semesterize its academic programmes and prevailed to be one of the few universities in the country to implement direct grading system in the correct sense. Having started to offer it's under graduate courses under CBCSS in direct

grading since 2008-2009, it offers the post graduate courses also under the same modern academic mechanism from 2010.

Aiming at ensuring quality standards par with the global standards The University of Calicut practices the direct grading in all of the under graduate, post graduate and the research courses. The university direct grading seems to be exemplary of its kind. The University Ordinances related to the implementation of Direct Grading as part of CBCSS states: ‘The evaluation scheme for each course shall contain two parts; (a) internal evaluation and (b) external evaluation. 25% weightage shall be given to internal evaluation and the remaining 75% to external evaluation. Therefore the ratio and weightage between internal and external is 1:3. Both internal and external evaluation shall be carried out using Direct grading system.’ The internal and external assessments are done separately.

Internal Evaluation is based on "the predetermined transparent system involving periodic written tests, assignments, seminars and attendance." The Continuous Internal Assessment has various components to which are given weightage as:

	Component	Weightage
A	Assignment	1
B	Seminar	1
C	Attendance	1
D	Test paper	2

The external evaluation is done on a ‘well-defined scheme of valuation’ in a centralized valuation camp. The performance of the learner is assessed, in the stream of direct grading, on a 5 – point scale. The 5 point scale with the letter grades and their values and indication to the performance is as follows:

Letter Grade	Performance	Grade Point	Grade Range
A	Excellent	4	3.50 to 4.00
B	Very good	3	2.50 to 3.49
C	Good	2	1.50 to 2.49
D	Average	1	0.50 to 1.49
E	Poor	0	0.00 to 0.49

The separately graded Internal and External is combined by way of taking the weightage for the two components into consideration. If a learner has secured grade A for each of the five components of Internal then the internal assessment grade for the learner shall be the total of the weighted grade points divided by the weightage i.e. $20/5=4$.

Components	Weightage	Grade	Grade point	Weighted grade point
Assignment	1	A	4	4
Seminar	1	A	4	4
Attendance	1	A	4	4
Internal Test1	1	A	4	4
Internal Test2	1	A	4	4
Total	5			20

Internal grade: sum of weighted grade points/ sum of weights; $20/5= 4$ so grade is A. (3.50 to 4.00 is A) in the 5 point scale.

The weighted grade point for internal is multiplied by its weightage whereas the grade point for external is multiplied by its weightage and the sum of both of which is divided by total weight to consolidate the Course Grade Point Average.

Exam	Weight	Grade	Grade point	Weighted grade point
External	3	A	4	12
Internal	1	A	4	4
Total	4			16
Grade of a course	Sum of weighted grade point/ sum of weights i.e., $16/4=4$ the grade is A (3.50-4.00 is A)			

An aggregate of grade C is requisite for a pass in the course as well as the award of the degree. After the successful completion of a semester, Semester Grade Point Average (SGPA) of a student is calculated as shown below:

$$SGPA = \frac{P_1 + P_2 + \dots + P_n}{C_1 + C_2 + \dots + C_n}$$

Course code	Credits	Overall grade	Overall WGPA	Credit points
01	4	A	4	16
02	4	A	4	16
03	4	A	4	16
04	4	A	4	16
Total	16			64
SGPA (sum of credit points /sum of credits) $64/16=4$ (Grade A)				

Next step of the assessment and certification of quality of performance following SGPAs, at the end of the programme, is the calculation of Cumulative Grade and Cumulative Grade Point Average. For the calculation of CGPA the formula given below is used.

$$CGPA = \frac{(SGPA)_1 S_1 + (SGPA)_2 S_2 + \dots + (SGPA)_4 S_4}{S_1 + S_2 + S_3 + S_4}$$

Each Semester Grade Point Averages shall be multiplied by total number of credits of the semester. The sum thus accumulated is called the credit points. These credit points shall further be divided by the number of credits for the programme. Example is given here:

Semester	SGPA	Credits	Credit points
I	4	16	64
II	4	16	64
III	4	16	64
IV	4	16	64
Total		64	256

CGPA	Sum of credit points/total credits 256/64=4 Programme Grade is A
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"The CGPA of a student determines the overall academic level of the student in a programme and is the criterion for ranking the students." CGPA is the signifier to the overall academic quality of a student. Based on CGPA the Cumulative Grade, Grade for the programme, is awarded to the learner on a 7-point scale given below:

CGPA	Overall Letter Grade
3.80 to 4.00	A+
3.50 to 3.79	A
3.00 to 3.49	B+
2.50 to 2.99	B
2.00 to 2.49	C+
1.50 to 1.99	C
1.00 to 1.49	D

On this scale the learner requires to obtain a Cumulative Grade of C for the successful completion of the programme.

Conclusion.

As the model shows, the system of direct grading is highly dynamic and demands the teacher evaluator to be dynamic, disciplined and systematic. It is considered to be more scientific as compared to the traditional marking system. Since the system is a product of the Eurocentric discourse of education, it aims at the universalization. The distance between European and the oriental systems of education is expected to be reduced by the Choice Based Credit and Semester system of which Direct Grading is an integral part. Despite the multitude of merits attributed to it, it is not as easy as indirect grading where mark is converted to grade based on the percentage of mark a learner secures. The system of direct grading has a number of complex methods in it which the evaluators, learners, parents and the administrative brains of the institution must have to internalize with no gaffe of any nature. It requires much pre implementation workshops and deliberations to equip the human force that may involve in it to avoid any slip which would amount the system to have deformity beyond repair on time. If we have enough patience to do the ground work requisite for the implementation of grading system it will prove highly good as the system of "Grading, as opposed to the marking system, is globally accepted. It is evident that it removes unhealthy competition among 'a textbook bound society" (Rajput. J.S)

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