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GRADING DISCREPANCY IN GLOBAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

This research paper explores the history, ideas and relevance of grading in the globalized world and discusses if grades are a proficient tool to measure proficiency in academic disciplines. It investigates finding based on a simple experiment, which shows grave differences in grading worldwide. The idea of grading was implemented in the eighteen century and this research explores if a system that is based on national measurement has relevance in the globalized world. This research examines the relationship between grades teachers give and proficiency scores given to the same students by external raters. This research found little comparison between teachers' grading system and student proficiency. The research concludes that the current grading systems are of little to no use in the general measurement of proficiency of academic disciplines. It is the recommendation of the research that new measures are implemented and a new system not only based on proficiency skills are used to measure academic excellence.

Keywords

Grades, Report Cards, Student Evaluation, Grading

1. Introduction

The word “grade”, used as a noun, is defined as a particular level of rank, quality, proficiency, intensity, or value if you look it up in a dictionary; it is often used in terms of value

on certain knowledge within a specific area (Durm, M.W, 1993). A person who does well in a certain academic discipline receives a high grade and one who does not receives a low grade. Grades are our definition of excellence and the combined average of our grades is compiled into our GPA, in America and Asia, and ECTS in Europe as a mark that defines our capabilities within our discipline. Our grades are therefore of immense importance for our future and our possibility to get a job within our interest area. Grades should also give employers a quick look into the abilities of a person's ability within a discipline.

Historian George W. Pierson of Yale University wrote that the first grades ever given was at Yale in the late 18th century by President Ezra Stiles. Pierson was though accredited as the first to register grades for students. Another historian, Bob Marlin, argued that the idea of grading students' quantitatively was invented by a teacher named William Farish and first used by the University of Cambridge in 1792. No matter who the first one was the practice of grading has become the cornerstones of education worldwide.

Grading is still a crucial feature of student's school experience. Therefore, it can be perceived as both fixed and unavoidable—without origin or evolution. The effect of this is that despite their limitations, all parties involved often accept grades quite uncritically.

Grading could be defined as the most fundamental facets of education worldwide. In hundreds of thousands of modern classrooms around the globe, grading is an accepted part of education. Tyack and Cuban (1995) called grading the 'grammar of schooling'. Through all levels, instructors spend long hours correcting exams and papers, and students get writing cramps trying to get the grades they need for future prosperity, while parents express a wide range of anxiety about the possible marks their children may earn. Grades are now such an important feature of young adults that we are now using short-hand references, like the grade point average and European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, so that our academic record is expressed with the precision of a single number and judged at a glance.

This research paper deal with the true relevance of grades in a globalized world, can an A in country X be considered an A in all other countries? Or is there an inaccuracy in the grading system in general. This research will also look at the relevance of grades based on how much emphasis is given on exams and not to relevant research throughout an undergraduate's studies. When grades are of such importance we must look at the weaknesses with grades. This research will look into how much personality matters in general grading. When looking at the purpose of grades the idea that grades given on other merits that academic achievement will be undermining

to the progress of grading and render it irrelevant. The larger question, for this research, must be if the role of grades is obsolete, or if there is still basis for grading. In general, the common census is that our current grading system is flawed. This research will look at the ideas and practices around the world to combat these flaws.

2. Literature review

Tyack and Cuban (1997) underlined that the comparison of students worldwide are poised by inaccuracies of interchangeable among sections of learners that are taking exams. Tyack and Cuban, as an example, cite the work of Iris Rothberg, where Rothberg proves that some international math and science grades in comparison shows an average score of 75 percent of the U.S. learner population of a certain age; differ with the upper 9 percent of learners in Germany. The upper 13 percent of learners in the Netherlands, and the upper 45 percent in Sweden (Tyack and Cuban 1997 p. 36). Tyack and Cuban claim that curriculum patterns for learners in the different countries that can differ the test scores. Certain groups of learners bring other levels of motivation to an exam: *"in some nations — Korea, for example — pupils are expected to uphold the national honor, whereas many U.S. youths regard the test as yet another boring set of blanks to pencil in on answer sheets"* (p. 36). Tyack and Cuban voices a certain level of concern about grading in general as the idea of a globalized system must have it merits in equality in the eyes of the grader but as grades becomes a foundation of funding a level of inaccuracy must be expected. This inaccuracy becomes the defining problems with grades as it hollows out the purpose of grades.

In a paper by Brookhart, S.M. Guskey, T.R. Bowers, A.J. McMillan, J.H. Smith, J.K. Smith, L.F. Stevens, M.T. Welsh, M.E. (2016) claiming that early 20th century studies generally condemned teachers' grades as unreliable. Furthering their argument by stating: "recent studies of the relationships of grades to tested achievement and survey studies of teachers' grading practices and beliefs suggest that grades assess a multidimensional construct containing both cognitive and non-cognitive factors reflecting what teachers' value in student work." Rendering the personality of the grader to important and filled with personal opinion rather than students' achievements.

On the other side Barnes, K.D. Buring, S.M. (2012) has a different approach to the grading difficulties, they claim that students' performance in any academic discipline is determined by their final grades. Grades are usually assigned using a 1 of 3 methods in the pharmaceutical faculty: *Plus/minus grading has been debated extensively over the last 20 years*

in the United States; US universities using plus/minus grading scales increased from 24% in 1982 to 56% in 2002. However, the type of grading scale used in doctor of pharmacy (PharmD) curricula, the impact of this scale on student performance and motivation, and student and faculty perception of grading scales have not been reported in the pharmacy education literature. Barnes and Buring are therefore suggesting a change in educational grading for doctors of pharmacy, an idea that might cast shadows on other disciplines as well as grading would lose its commonality and transparency.

The idea that improvement are gradual and defined by the grades of learners Guskey, T.R. & Yoon, K.S. (2009) take the stand that these are obsolete and abstract. By setting the premises of their research to 4 questions Guskey, T.R. & Yoon, K.S. (2009) find that progress is not measurable in the setting of grades or studying but from the practice of disciplines. The study, which is a build on of Yoon (2007), looks at the grader as the main problem.

3. Objective

One of the questions that come from this research is the relevance of grades. When we continuously find flaws in the grading systems around the world, why are they then in use? The answer could be found in common sense, as there does not seem to be an equivalent to grades. How are we to level students without them and how does the industry find its strongest candidates. This research will look at differences in grading and the possibilities for a new way of leveling learners.

4. Methodology

When this research claims to be a paper on grading discrepancy around the world it is meant to look into how grades are given and how they might not correspond with each other. In a globalized world the idea of centralization is a given as commodities must correspond in quality and idealism (Pollio,M & Hochbein, C. 2015) . If a student is a high scoring student in Ghana, the student should also be a high scoring student in the Netherlands. But how is that measured? With grading systems of different scales, that measure is highly improbable. The aim of this research is to try to find common ground in the global grading system. In the following section the grading system of several countries are outlined:

4.1 Grading System in the Netherlands

1 – 0-5% correct;

2 – 5-15% correct;

3 – 15-25% correct;

...

10 – 95-100% correct.

Additional decimals could be used (7.5 or 9.49, if your teacher is a sadist), or fractions, like + or -, which means a quarter.

Also, passing grades are as follows:

5.5: the passing border (5.4 is a fail);

6: if no decimals are used (5 is a fail).

4.2 Grading System in Spain

10 with distinction: "Matrícula de Honor" (Honorary);

9 – 10: "Sobresaliente" (Outstanding);

7 – 8.9: "Notable" (Remarkable);

5 – 6.9: "Aprobado" (Pass);

0 – 4.9: "Suspenso" (Fail).

These grades will be converted in the transcript of records according to this list:

"Matrícula de Honor": 4;

"Sobresaliente": 3;

"Notable": 2;

"Aprobado": 1.

4.3 The Grading System in Germany

1 or 1-: Very Good;

2+, 2 or 2-: Good;

3+, 3 or 3-: Satisfactory;

4+ or 4: Sufficient;

4-, 5+, 5, 5-: Below Requirements;

6: Fail.

4.4 The Grading System in Switzerland

6 – Excellent;

5.5 – Very good;

5 – Good;

4.5 – Relatively good (e.n.: also known as the passive-aggressive grade);

4 – Pass;

3.5 – Fail;

3 – Poor;

2.5 – Very poor;

2 – Extremely poor;

1 – No performance;

0 – Absence without good cause, cheating or attempt to cheat.

4.5 The Grading System in the U.K.

First-class honours – typically 70% or higher;

Second-class honours, upper division – typically 60 – 69%;

Second-class honours, lower division – typically 50 – 59%;

Third-class honours - typically 40 – 49%;

Without honours - awarded an ordinary degree, sometimes known as a "pass".

4.6 Grading System in Australia

HD (High Distinction, not high definition), which means 85% or above;

D (Distinction; stop giggling), which means 75 to 84%;

Cr (Credit), equal to 65 to 74%;

P (Pass): equal to 50 to 64%;

F (Fail): equal to 49% or under, which means: get out!

Australia, has also adopted United Kingdom's marking system, which translates to:

H1 (First Class Honours): 80% or above;

H2A (Second Class Honours – A Division): 75 – 79%;

H2B (Second Class Honours – B Division): 70 – 74%;

H3 (Third Class Honours): 65 – 69%;

P (Pass): 50 – 64%;

N (Fail): below 50%.

In Australia you can also encounter special grades, like:

NGP (Non-Graded Pass), for when it's important to have a quality grade, not quantitative;

NGF (Non-Graded Fail), for when it's important to have a quality grade, not quantitative;

F1 (Pass Conceded): if your grade is between 53 and 55%.

The most common formula for an Australian GPA is: Sum of (grade points x course unit values) / total number of credit points attempted, with the grades being converted in numbers like this:

High Distinction = 7;

Distinction = 6;

Credit = 5;

Pass = 4;

Fail level 1 = 1;

Fail level 2 = 0.

As a quick and easy guide, GPAs mean:

High Distinction: 4.0

Distinction: 3.0

Credit: 2.0

Pass: 1.0

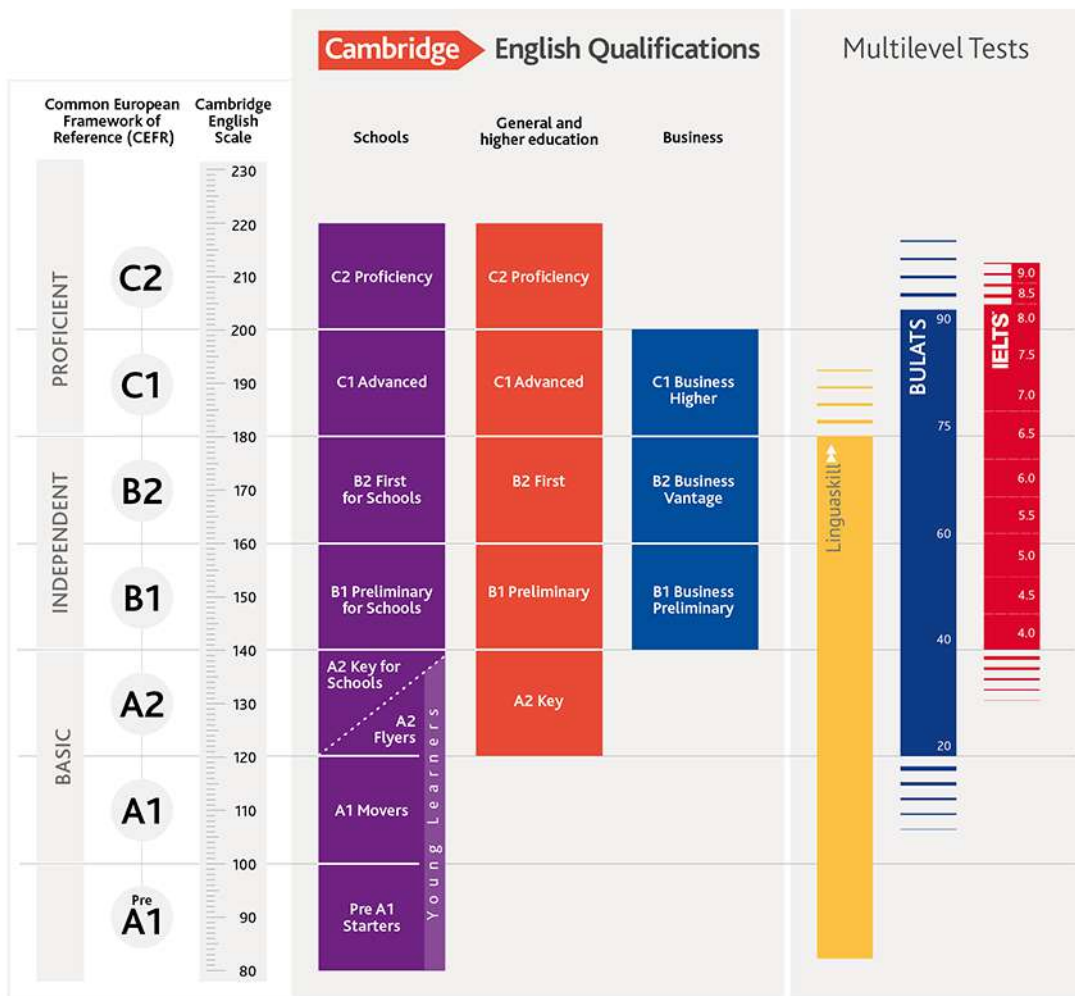
For each of the six countries their system makes sense and is easily applicable to their entrance requirements and job opportunities, but how does these grades work in comparison to each other. The above section is also only an outline of six countries, in total there are around 196 countries with their own grading system. The consensus that commodities should correspond across borders can therefore not be applied for grading.

* Pasolea, A.M (2017): 8 University Grading Systems Around the World that May or May Not
<https://www.mastersportal.com/articles/2291/8-university-grading-systems-around-the-world-that-may-or-may-not-be-weird.html> et al.

By having 25 university English teachers from 9 countries correct and grade an English essay of a university student on the three little pigs, this research seeks to determine if there is a discrepancy in how grades are dealt and if teachers are really qualified to determine the level of students globally.

The premises of the experiment was to have the English teachers grade a paper from a student who was placed as a A2 CEFR English proficiency (Common European Framework of reference for languages see fig 1) on a scale from 1 to 5. 1 being a low score and 5 the highest.

Figure 1. Grade comparison from various grading systems and CEFR.



* <http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-tests/cefr/> et al.

The teachers were as follows:

Denmark: 4 teachers

Thailand: 6 teachers

USA: 1 teacher

Brasil: 2 teachers

India: 2 teachers

Hungary: 3 teachers

Netherlands: 2 teachers

China: 2 teachers

England: 3 teachers

Each teacher were given the above-mentioned essay, which they had to correct and grade on the 1 to 5 scale and add comments about the quality of the essay.

4.7 Findings

In the below findings are stated the grade and the comments given by each teacher.

4.7.1 Danish teachers

Table 1. Grades by Danish teachers.

	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4
Grade	3	3	2	3

Quotes from Teachers:

* T1: *“The student has a lively imagination and writes quit well.”*

** T2: *“Although the students lack of English skills the reader can gather a fine understanding of the content.”*

***T3: *“The student clearly has very little proficiency in English.”*

****T4: *“Well written, with many mistakes but great interpretation skills.”*

4.7.2 Thai teachers

Table 2. Grades by Thai teachers.

	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5	Teacher 6
Grade	1	3	3	2	4	2

Quotes from Teachers:

**T1: "Very poor"*

***T2: "I like the essay it is funny and I can feel the student enjoyed writing it."*

****T3: "Yes, the three little pigs is a funny story."*

*****T4: "The student needs to learn more grammar."*

******T5: "This student is not good at writing but has great skills as an independent thinker."*

******T6: "I did not like this essay."*

4.7.3 USA teacher

Table 3. Grades by USA teachers.

	Teacher 1
Grade	2

Quotes from Teachers:

**T1: "I found it very hard to read as the essay was littered with grammatical mistakes. I wanted to give 1 but when I finished I found that the student was actually implementing a lot of skills".*

4.7.4 Brazilian teachers

Table 4. Grades by Brazilian teachers.

	Teacher 1	Teacher 2
Grade	1	1

Quotes from Teachers:

**T1: "I found a big waste of time, horrible essay."*

**T2: "I'm not sure why a student at university level would write an essay of this topic. The student seems to be completely without basic skills in English and should focus on grammar and writing skills."*

4.7.5 Indian teachers

Table 5. Grades by Indian teachers.

	Teacher 1	Teacher 2
Grade	1	2

Quotes from Teachers:

**T1: "I see quit a lot of students at this level and the student must be classified as an absolute beginner and should not be writing essays at this stage."*

***T2: "The essay is full of mistakes, I am not sure where to start with this, but there are areas where the students show some skills."*

4.7.6 Hungarian teachers

Table 6. Grades by Hungarian teachers.

	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3
Grade	3	2	2

Quotes from Teachers:

**T1: "Many basic problems in this essay, but as it is not a native speaker who wrote this I do recognize that it is a hard topic and from that point I give it a 3."*

***T2: "It was quit horrible."*

****T3: "without a doubt a highlight of my day, this was very entertaining reading but not what I would expect from a university student."*

4.7.7 Dutch teachers

Table 7. Grades by Dutch teachers.

	Teacher 1	Teacher 2
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Grade	3	3
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Quotes from Teachers:

*T1: "The student is not very good in English, but show incredible skills in evaluating."

**T2: "I was impressed with the way the story was interpreted and the links to time period."

4.7.8 Chinese teachers

Table 8. Grades by Chinese teachers.

	Teacher 1	Teacher 2
Grade	4	5

Quotes from Teachers:

*T1: "very nice"

**T2: "I think it has grammar problems but it is easy to understand and well written."

4.7.9 English teachers

Table 9. Grades by English teachers.

	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3
Grade	2	1	1

Quotes from Teachers:

*T1: "The student is clearly not proficient in English and has very poor writing skills."

**T2: "The worst essay I've ever read."

***T3: "Well, I'm not sure where to start; I wish I could have given a 0."

5 Discussion

In the experiment, the result speaks for itself. Grades were given from a 1 to a 5 and even though there is a slight consistency in that most teachers marked the essay a 2 or 3, that in its self

is concerning. There seems to be a slip in formula when it comes to grading. Finkelstein IE. (1913) is very clear on this in his comment on grades:

“When we consider the practically universal use in all educational institutions of a system of marks, whether numbers or letters, to indicate scholastic attainment of the pupils or students in these institutions, and when we remember how very great stress is laid by teachers and pupils alike upon these marks as real measures or indicators of attainment, we can but be astonished at the blind faith that has been felt in the reliability of the marking systems.”

Finkelstein, view is based on the fact that as a society we put our trust in a grading system that is in its core flawed and without merits in a globalized world. We can ask questions like if the ability to spell is a necessity today as it is done primarily by computers, then is that a skill that needs to count in the grading scheme or if we grade in order to show proficiency in a discipline or do we grade to show progress. Two areas that can be hard to evaluate.

With the result of the experiment above, we can show that the skill of grading is selective. Each teacher grades from what they find important and not from a set centralized scheme that outlines what a score is. This might be easier with the construction of a rubric, but then again the rubric is based on the teachers’ ability to interpret curriculum into outcome. With class sizes as they are how can we make sure that the individual has meet the rubric of comprehending without the time to evaluate the individual?

Johnston, H. (2011), outlines some practices that support grading; start the conversation, determine the audience, establish standards-based rubrics, eliminate toxic grading practices, allow re-dos and updating of assessments, don’t penalize practice and focus on demonstration of learning, not task completion. All valid areas of consideration when grading but largely unused by the teaching community. Johnston’s points are a step in the direction of centralization but must be implemented globally in order to have an effect.

6 Conclusion

As the world moves closer and closer, the idea of a metric that measures proficiency must be implemented in order to clarify what the proficiency is. The findings in this research suggest that such does not exist and grades given in one particular country in no way guides any suggestion of proficiency in other countries. The emphasis on getting the best grades are watered out because of the divide in standards around the world. As labor must be considered a commodity so must proficiency in the variety of disciplines. But the placement of proficiency is almost non-existing in the current academic climate. This research recommend that the

university community start to take grading up in global forums. Globalization is not a new idea and cannot at this point not be ignored. The free flow of commodities are a reality but the proficiency of the skill sets needed is as of now non-existing.

The conclusion of this research is therefore that grading is of no value in our world today, and can easily be exchange with other measurements that declare academic proficiency in the disciplines the students are studying.

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