Academic Grading System In Ethiopia - Boon Or Bane?  
With Special Reference To Dilla University

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Abstract:
The paper focuses on the effectiveness of academic grading system in Dilla University, Ethiopia. The grading system is taken from western countries which students are finding it difficult, in coping up with the standards prescribed therein. The study also proved that the students need for a change in the grading system. The students want a better model of grading system, which will be helpful to them.

Keywords: Academic grading system, knowledge, skills, national wealth.

Introduction

The educational system is the key for social economic, cultural development of the people in any country. The people with knowledge, skill, positive attitude, contribute to the wealth of the nation. The balanced application of, three types of knowledge that is – the knowledge gained through books, journals, internet; and the second, the knowledge gained through intellectualization- by discussion brain storming sessions etc, and third the, knowledge gained through experience, learning by doing, brings transformation in the behavior of the people, paving way for growth.

Skill development i.e conceptual and problem solving skills – professional skills – the human relation skills of the people are important to add value to the national wealth.

In order to impart the knowledge and develop the skills, the people should be committed and willing to learn. The Learning should not become a ritual. Learning should bring relatively permanent change in the behavior of the people. Learning environment should be created to make the people to commit and acquire knowledge, skills, which is the source of national wealth. There may be infrastructure, capital, natural resources but without the commitment of the people who have knowledge, skills, abilities and positive attitude, it is very difficult to produce the wealth of the nation.

Education should develop the competitive learning capabilities of the people. Is it possible to measure and quantify the competitiveness and learning capability of the people? The answer is Yes. It can be measured based on the behavioral change and their contribution to the productivity and national wealth. The grading system that is, awarding marks in schools and colleges is one of the techniques to measure and quantify the performance. Some of the tools used to measure the performance are, the, IQ-EQ-SQ. The IQ measures the intellectual capabilities with which speed of mental activity is measured. EQ measures, emotions,- anger, hatred, greed and balancing the relationships. SQ enhances the inner strength which develops compassion, empathy, sharing and caring.

Now whether the western academic, grading system adopted in Ethiopia is standard one? The answer is affirmative. But the question is whether the student community at large are capable of reaching that standard? The answer is negative. The learning capabilities and knowledge skills of the student community in Ethiopia are at the grass root level. It is very difficult for them to reach those standards for various reasons.-

1. The student from primary to higher school are taught in their mother tongue.
2. The Parents are not in a position to support their education because of poverty.
3. The Infrastructure is in-adequate, to educate the students in the English medium.
4. The teachers are not trained to impart knowledge.

With this back ground how students reach high standard, with more than 10 grades, where the margin in between the grades is very narrow. The students are forced to acquire higher grades by hook or crook without the real capabilities, knowledge, skills, positive attitude. As a result they are suffering...
from stress and strain affecting their performance. The students are ‘some how’ getting the marks and grades by threatening, pleading and pressing the teachers. What is the use of getting higher marks/grades without acquiring knowledge? Will these students contribute to the growth and development of the nation. Further students do not have commitment, discipline and positive attitude to learn. Students attend the class without books, pens; sit in the class indecently, opening shirts in a sleeping postures; attend mobiles inside the class. But all the students demand A+ grade only. This is an irony. Is the grades alone measure the performance of the students? There are entrepreneurs and business men who have succeeded in life without having higher grades. They were showing poor performance in the college, but have become successful people in the business. But in Ethiopia, students believe that the grades are the only way to success. This misconception is creating pressure on them. Thanks to the UNDP, Ethiopian Government is recruiting Indian teachers, whose expertise is not properly utilized by this students community.

Model on Relationship between education and national wealth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WELL STRUCTURED EDUCATION SYSTEM</th>
<th>ENHANCED KNOWLEDGE, SKILL AND RIGHT ATTITUDE</th>
<th>SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT</th>
<th>GROWTH OF NATIONAL WEALTH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOT WELL STRUCTURED EDUCATION SYSTEM</td>
<td>NO KNOWLEDGE, NO SKILL AND NO RIGHT ATTITUDE</td>
<td>NO SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT</td>
<td>NO GROWTH OF NATIONAL WEALTH</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Literature Review

The process of assigning grades – or merely judgments of aptitude – has assuredly been in existence as long as formal education, but has likely evolved most rapidly over the past century and a half with the development of higher education. According to an article by Richard Boyd, the preferred method of grading during the colonial days was an oral examination that required the college student to exhibit a “level of intellectual rigor and moral rectitude appropriate to the college graduate.” Both Yale and Harvard were among the first higher education institutions in the early years of America to set in place grading policies for their students as a way to make a distinction between levels of mastery. While the system started at Yale as a basic four tiered system, Harvard borrowed the Yale system and gradually made the scale more elaborate. Other higher education institutions also continued to adopt and adapt the grading scales of other institutions, which eventually developed into the 100-point scale and later the associated letter grades that is widely used today (Boyd 2006). This is almost the system used in Universities in Ethiopia.

Grading is the process of a teacher’s arriving at and recording a summarizing, Symbolic remark on the academic performance of his or her students. Grading should express neither approval nor disapproval of students as persons. …the purpose of a grading system is to give the teacher a regular way to transmit to students, and to other persons who may be concerned with the intellectual development of students, value judgments made by the teacher.” (“Grade Inflation” 2000)

Consequences

It would be worthy to put down the point on impact on this kind of grading:
1. Grades tend to reduce students’ interest in the learning itself (Kohn, 1993)
3. Grades tend to reduce the quality of students’ thinking. (Butler, 1987; Butler, 1988; Butler and Nisan, 1986).
4. Grades encourage cheating (Anderman et al., 1998; Milton et al., 1986;)
5. Grades spoil teachers’ relationships with students (Kirschenbaum et al., 1971, p. 115)
6. Grades spoil students’ relationships with each other. (Johnson and Johnson, 1989; Kohn, 1992)

Grades followed in Dilla University Ethiopia.

Grading for P.G Course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>SCORE RANGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>[95 - 100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>(90 - 95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>(85 - 90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>(80 - 85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>(75 - 80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>(70 - 75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>(65 - 70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>(58 - 65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>(50 - 58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>&lt; 50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grades for Undergraduate Course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>SCORE RANGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>90—100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>85--89.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>80--84.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>75--79.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>70--74.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>65--69.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>60--64.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>50--59.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>45--49.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>40--44.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fx</td>
<td>30--39.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>&lt;30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.G</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Statement of the problem:**
The western academic grading system adopted in Ethiopia is not adding value and creating stress and strain on the students. The students are getting grades without really acquiring knowledge. Awarding grades without knowledge and skill will not contribute to the growth and national wealth. The teachers are facing the challenging tasks, in awarding grades for the students who do not possess the skill and knowledge, based on the pressure and threat of the students. To analyze the problem, the following objectives are formulated.

1. To study effectiveness of the existing western grading system.
2. To understand the capabilities, knowledge, skills of the students.
3. To assess, whether the students are awarded grades, based on the skills, knowledge.
4. To know, by only acquiring grades, helps students in getting employment and add value to the wealth of nation.
5. To explore the possibilities of providing additional facilities and support like books, internet, coaching, guidance, to the students to improve knowledge.
6. To assess the possibilities to provide training to the teachers particularly locals teachers with enhanced salary, perks etc. to prepare the students to face the challenges.
7. To explore the possibilities of introducing new grading system similar to that of India to reduce stress and to enhance the knowledge.
Hypothesis:
1. H0: The existing western grading systems do not help the student community in Dilla university, Ethiopia.
   H1: The existing western grading systems help the student community Dilla university, in Ethiopia.
2. H0: The students are getting the grades without knowledge and skills.
   H1: The students are getting the grades acquiring the knowledge and skills.
3. H0: Students are not working hard to get the grades.
   H1: Students are working hard to get the grades.
4. H0: The present grading system is not adding value to their career and national wealth.
   H1: The present grading system is adding value to their career and national wealth.
5. H0: The present grading system is not creating stress and strain on the students.
   H1: The present grading is creating stress and strain on the students.
6. H0: The students need not be given any additional facility and support to achieve the grades.
   H1: Students do need additional facility and support to achieve the grades.
7. H0: The local Teachers need not be trained and rewarded extra to motivate the students to acquire the knowledge.
   H1: The local teachers need to be trained and rewarded extra to motivate the students to acquire the knowledge.

Scope of the study:
The study is focused in Dilla University in Ethiopia to understand the impact of present western grading system on the student community.

Data sources:
Data is collected from secondary and primary sources. Primary data is collected from using structured questionnaire and secondary data is collected from books, journals internet. etc.

Sampling Techniques:
Stratified random sampling is used to conduct the study from the respondents. In order to study the problem from all the stakeholders three types of questionnaire was prepared, one for students, one for teachers and another one for academic administrators.

Sampling design:
The sample chosen include the students, teachers and academic administrators in Dilla University.

Sampling size:
50 undergraduate students and 25 Post graduate students, 10 teachers handling undergraduate subjects, 10 teachers handling post graduate studies and 5 academic administrators which makes sample size to 100.

Analysis tools
The analysis is done using SPSS chi square, t-test

The Limitations of the study.
   a) The respondents’ awareness may be biased.
   b) The time, money constraint.
   c) The study is limited to Dilla only.
   d) The findings are based on the limited sample size.

Analysis
Since it is an unequal variables that is getting analyzed we have used t-test assuming unequal variances

Hypothesis 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesized Mean Difference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the table it is inferred that ‘tstat’ value is lesser than ‘tcritical’ hence we have to accept ho hypothesis i.e is western grading systems do not help the student community in Ethiopia.

Hypothesis 2.

When we were analyzing the second hypothesis we found out (Table 2) that ‘tstat’ value is lesser than ‘tcritical’ so we have to accept the hypothesis that students are getting the grades without knowledge and skills.

Hypothesis 3

For the third hypothesis i.e to test if the students were working hard to get their grades, it has got a negative results which means students are not working hard to get these grades (As seen from table 3) While testing the fourth hypothesis it was found that students are sad with the present grading systems since ‘tsat’ value from the analysis is found to be lesser than ‘tcritical’.

Majority of the students (73%) of the students need additional support from teachers and 65 % of teachers have stated that additional training is required before handling class for local teachers.

Whether asked the question that if parents support in their education, majority said the parent support, but of out of those who are having a negative response, 26% said it is because of poverty and 65 % said because they are uneducated. From this what we infer is that those who are getting educated now will not be in the uneducated class after some years when they become parents. So after some time because of these educated parents things will be better.
82% of the students believe that there is no good library in the university and 61% of the students want internet in their library. Even though 44% of the students ignore it even if they get lower grade than expected but there are 27% of students who would like to give complaint and 15% who wants to threaten the teacher. 44% of the students blame themselves for scoring lesser grades. Out of the 18% of students who are not happy with the subject content, 12% of the students commented the reason as the teacher is not qualified and is without real practical knowledge.

52% of the students are not happy with the grading systems followed and the main reason for that being lack of proper practical or lab knowledge given to them.

92% of students have taught in Amharic or local language from grade 1-12 which has created problems for them to understand their subjects in English once they come for graduation and professional courses. Majority of the students are spending only 1-2 hours daily on academic subjects which will not enhance their knowledge and skill. Where as in other countries students spend more than 5-10 hours on studies. 81% of the students bring mobile phones to the classroom which is distracting their studies. Thought the majority of the students say that they bring pen, text book, note book to class, majority of the teachers say that they don’t bring text books and pen as claimed by the students. Out of the 15% of the students who don’t understand the English of the expatriate teaching staff, 11% of student claim the teacher is of high standard and 4% claim it because of the difficulty in understanding the accent of the teacher. 38% of the students feel that there is lack of infrastructure in the class room.

85% of the students want a change in the present grading system followed by the university and out of this 81% of students are happy to adopt the Indian system of academic grading.

So far the administrative authorities have not conducted a research on this area as admitted in the questionnaire, though there is a need to conduct such study to understand the real effectiveness of grading system on the student’s community. Even though the authorities comment that they have provided the infrastructure facilities for the students, but majority of the students contradict and say there is no as such any facilities. Even though the administrative people say that students are happy with the present grading system, but 85% of the students are not happy and they are sad and they want a change.

**Recommendation**

From the findings it is very clear that there is a urgent need for conducting research into the effectiveness of academic grading system in Dilla University. Administrative authorities need to understand the need for providing good library facility along with internet, support the students in providing books and stationery. As per the students there is a serious lack of infrastructural facilities in class rooms. Since the students have been taught in the lower grades in their mother tough or Amharic, students lack fluent understand of English. Therefore there is a need to conduct orientation in english before they start each semester for a minimum of 15-20 days. Since the students demand and threaten teachers for marks, it would be better to introduce central valuation system including internal and external teachers from other universities for transparent and justifiable evaluation to satisfy the students. If the students need to review the marks there should be an opportunity for them to go for revaluation on payment of reasonable fees to the university as it is done in Asian or European. Today’s students are tomorrows wealth of nation, so they need to be provided with up-to-date technology when they are getting educated. So university needs to put a special eye on improving the lab and its facilities.

Majority of students feel sad and they is a need for change in the present grading system followed in Dilla University which may be deliberated upon, the change may be introduced to help the students community. It would be highly recommended that students need to prepare themselves before coming to class for which a session may be allotted like ‘Library hour’ in the curriculum itself.

**Conclusions**

This study of effectiveness of grading system of Dilla University has proved beyond doubt that the current grading system is not helping the student’s community and the students are unhappy and the
students expressed there is a need for change. Therefore it is high time that the authorities focus on in-depth research and introduce a system which will be helpful and supportive to the student’s community.

References