

On the Revision of the Grading System

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The Background

The grading system has been in vogue internationally for a long time. In our country also the Institute of Education and Research (IER) of Dhaka University has been using this system. In essence, the system consists of dividing successful candidates of a certain examination into odd number of groups (3 or 5) based on the Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) of the marks obtained by all the candidates. The Median Group is termed B that contains most of the successful candidates. The examinees obtaining the Mean±SD fall into this largest group. The examinees obtaining Mean + 1SD to Mean + 2SD fall in a better category named A. If some candidates obtain more marks, i.e. more than Mean + 2SD would constitute a superior group called A+. On the backward direction from the Median Group, some examinees may obtain marks in between Mean - 1SD and Mean - 2SD, their category may be called B- (B minus) and the lowest category (called C) of passed candidates may obtain marks from Mean - 2SD to Mean - 3SD. The candidates obtaining less than Mean - 3SD are unsuccessful. It is obvious that if we could follow this norm, very few candidates would fail in the examination!

The above calculation using the marks obtained by all the examinees is very complex and we just avoided this. In Bangladesh, we started using the grading system for SSC candidates from the year 2001. There were innumerable criticisms, especially from the parents' side on the newly introduced system. But the criticism subsided to some extent in the two years time. The SSC passed students of that year are sitting for their HSC this year. So they are now ready to be graded in their way and not in the traditional Division system.

The News

It was published in some national dailies of Bangladesh on January 3, 2003 that the Grading System for SSC and HSC (to be introduced from this year) has been revised by the Ministry of Education.

The news read, 'The new grading system will have an additional letter grade of A- (minus). Unlike in the existing system, a student with an F, (below pass mark) in any subject cannot enroll in higher studies. The highest grade point average (GPA) re-

mained the same at 5.'

The news added, "... the new system will have a difference of 20 marks from 80 to 100, putting students at A+. There will be a 10 marks difference in every letter grade after the A+ grade. Students will get letter grade A by securing marks between 79 and 70. A new category of A- will be introduced for students obtaining marks between 69 and 60. Grade B means a student has received marks between 59 and 51. Grade C between 49 and 41. Grade D between 40 and 33 and Grade F means below 33."

In fact the Ministry has taken two decisions-1) Division of the existing Grade A (marks 60-79) into two, namely Grade A: 70-79 and Grade A- (60-69); 2) Students obtaining any F grade (even in one subject) would be deterred

Curriculum Wing of NCTB collecting views of teachers and students from at least 10 areas of the country during the latter half of the year 2002.

The decision on shutting the door of higher studies for failed students (even in one subject) is also welcome. The provision of entering higher grades before passing the lower grades was totally illogical and was only a means of earning more money by examination boards.

Alternative Proposals and Explanations

As regards the naming of the new grade A-, I have an alternative proposal. We may use a plus sign instead of a minus. The letter may be B and the Grade B+. In that case we shall have two grades

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from entering higher studies-to HSC for SSC examinees and to Degree course for HSC examinees.

Wise Decisions

Both the decisions are welcome, because both are on logical grounds. It is obvious that Grade D has only 8 marks range (33-40), the marks range of Grade C is 10 (41-50), and that of B is 9 (51-59). But Grade A had marks range of 20 (60-79) and A+ had the range of 21 (80-100).

Since a very few students obtain grade A+, this need not be divided. But there were many students falling in Grade A and there was no grade difference between 60 and 79. This was a sheer injustice to the students obtaining higher marks in grade A (especially over 70). So the division of Grade A is most welcome. Actually such was the outcome of the nationwide survey conducted by the curriculum developers (I was a member of that team) of the

under A (A+ and A) and two under B (B+ and B).

My second proposal is deletion of grade D. Now Grade D means obtaining marks in the ranges 33-40. If a student obtains only 33, the meaning is he/she learnt only 1/3rd of the full course. If he/she secures 40 marks out of 100, the meaning is that he/she knows at least 2/5th of the prescribed course. That is the present pass mark is very low and it is below standard. If we survey the pass marks in some other countries, we may find that this is not below 40 and in some it is 50 or even 60.

In my interviews with students in some areas including Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Kushtia and Khulna, students were found agreeing to the proposal of elevating the pass marks from the present 33 to 40. But they raised the question of awarding less, than deserving marks.

Our examiners should develop some more objectivity in marking, meaning not regarding marks as

their parental properties. To illustrate this statement we may observe that in some arts subjects the examiners cannot award more than 70 marks showing the cause that the matter might be 'better described'. Even if we give the examiner an opportunity to answer the question, he/she would fail to reach the student's standard even. Then on what logic the examiner equates 100 to 70? (Since he/she regards the highest possible mark as 70 instead of the prescribed 100).

So my proposal is as follows. Grade A+ may have the marks range of 20 instead of the present 21. The range may be 80-99. No student knows any matter 100%. So none should be awarded full marks even in Mathematics. The provision for awarding 100% marks has also a difficulty in preparing OMR sheets that contain 3 digits in the 'marks obtained' column. The printing of an extra unnecessary column costs much since OMR sheets are prepared in large numbers. Not only that the examiners are required to fill up the extra left side column by zero (always!).

Each of the Grades A, B+, B and C may have equal range of 10 marks. A: 70-79, B+: 60-69, B: 50-59 and C: 40-49.

The elevation of pass marks may have the benefit of equalizing the range in grades (except A+), have odd number (5) of grades in successful candidates having a middle group (B+) and may develop a good national image in the International arena. The only risk is the possibility of some students' movement that can easily be stopped by explaining that examiners will award more marks (logically, not by grace) than before.

As regards the inclusion of the marks obtained in the fourth subject in grading, my opinion is that this cannot be done (grading is on 1000 marks, partial marks cannot be included in grading). The way of solving the problem may be different. Now I am only pointing my fingers to a system that should have 'more compulsions' than 'options' (deletion of additional subject by making them compulsory for the group!) that may be elaborated later on.

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