# REVIEW OF THE EVALUATION POLICIES IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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#### **Abstract**

The evaluation and grading of pupils in primary and secondary schools is one of the most important teaching-learning activities in a majority of the primary and secondary learning institutions, not just Europe but globally. Most nations have independent grading policies specific to their own schools. The topic on evaluation, grading, and reporting student learning has generated controversy across the globe, with parents, teachers, students and school administrators all agreeing that it is necessary to develop a better reporting system, however, there is no consensus on what form the changes should adopt (Guskey & Bailey, 2001). Even among teachers, there is no consensus on what kind of grading and reporting is best and should be adopted (Russell, 2006). Teachers have made efforts to develop grading policies that give an accurate picture and offer a fair report; however, the methods they use vary from one teacher to the other, even with those teaching the same grade in the same school (Tight, Mok, Huisman & Morphew, 2009). The attempted reforms on grading and reporting systems are met with protest from one group or another, even when the same parties have been involved in the development of the envisaged changes (Cormack, 2006). The 1-5 grading system has been discredited for offering subjective evaluation outcomes that do not help the teachers or the pupils. It only creates unnecessary competition among the pupils. In spite of the importance of evaluation and grading for primary and secondary schools, there are different grading systems applied especially in Europe. This paper will conduct a thorough review of the 1-5 grading policy. In addition to investigating and discussing the application of the 1-5 grading policy, the alleged weaknesses and disadvantages of the 1-5 grading policy will also be analyzed, and then some recommendations will be given for a better grading policy that include the 1-6 grading policies.

**Keywords:** Evaluation, grading, policy, teaching, learning.

#### Introduction

The topic on evaluation, grading, and reporting student learning has generated controversy across the globe, with parents, teachers, students and school administrators all agreeing that it is necessary to develop a better reporting system, however, there is no consensus on what form the changes should adopt (Guskey & Bailey, 2001). Even among teachers, there is no consensus on what kind of grading and reporting is best and should be adopted (Russell, 2006). Teachers have made efforts to develop grading policies that give an accurate picture and offer a fair report; however, the methods they use vary from one teacher to the other, even with those teaching the same grade in the same school (Tight, Mok, Huisman & Morphew, 2009). The attempted reforms on grading and reporting systems are met with protest from one group or another, even when the same parties have been involved in the development of the envisaged changes (Cormack, 2006). The 1-5 grading system has been discredited for offering subjective evaluation outcomes that do not help teachers or pupils. It only creates unnecessary competition among the pupils.

Grading in education system is the act of giving standardized measurements of distinguished levels of achievement in a course of study. Grades are usually accorded in letters like, A, B, C, D, E or F. They can also be assigned as a range like from 1 to 6 or as a percentage of a total number of correct out of the possible total, like out of 30 or 100. The grades can also be assigned as descriptors like, excellent, good, fair, poor and fail (Milanovic & Weir, 2004).

Most nations have independent grading systems specific to their own schools. In some nations they average all grades from all current classes. This results in making a grade point average commonly known as GPA. The grading system that goes from 1-5, is the most widely used in most European nations. This type of evaluation system faces a lot of demerits; it does not show the progressive performance of the pupil and also it is not most reliable as per the CFER requirements (Milanovic & Weir, 2004).

### The functions of sound grading reporting systems

Thus, grades represent the learning outcome at a given stage in the learning experience, may it be at primary or secondary level (Tight, Mok, Huisman & Morphew, 2009). Therefore, the main role of grading and reporting is to communicate irrespective the format that is applied, the purpose is to offer high-quality information to stakeholders in a manner that it is understood and used effectively. It has been observed that grading and reporting, in offering the outcome of the learning process, become a significant part of the teaching process (Guskey & Bailey, 2001). If grading and reporting exercises are carried out well, it provides crucial information to parents, teachers, students, as well as other interested parties in enhancing learning and teaching (Tight, Mok, Huisman & Morphew, 2009).

It is the process that certifies that the learning goals have been attained, identify areas that need remedial action and provide a basis for improvement. It is clear that good reporting is

hinged on good evidence; thus, the usefulness of the information provided depend on the quality of the evidential information that informs it. Thus, all efforts at making reporting acceptable cannot compensate for shoddy work, which reflects inadequate and unreliable information on student learning (Guskey & Bailey, 2001). In order to improve on the grading and reporting systems, there is a need to develop a comprehensive reporting system, which captures the complex goals and offers more detailed evidence about students learning (Stecher, 2002). Thus, a simple report card cannot achieve to convey the myriad information required, rather, what is required is a multifaceted communication system that relies on multiple types of information to the interested audience, perhaps in multiple formats. The 1-5 grading system does not meet these parameters.

Thus, grading is a professional exercise which involves the collection and collating of data regarding the pupil's attainment or performance over an academic term or semester (Russell, 2006). Through the grading process, several types of information that measure the pupils' performance are converted into marks or grades which offer a summary of accomplishment in reference to set criteria; hence, the grades are sets of numbers or letters that are designated to represent different levels of attainment or performances, such as A, B, C, D, and F, or 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 (Wikström, 2005). Reporting assumes the medium of communicating the judgments symbolized by the figures adapted for this purpose, to students, parents, and other interested parties (Stecher, 2002).

Grading and reporting processes have been an integral part of education systems for a long time, and have not changed much, however, development in education necessitate a review of the practice of grading systems and reporting pupils learning, and reflectively design well thought out systems that reflect the changes in curriculum and learning processes (Guskey & Bailey, 2001).

## Criticism of the grading systems

Teachers and scholars in education have observed grades have for long, and they have been seen as the epitome of unreliable measurement (Tight, Mok, Huisman & Morphew, 2009). Thus, what one teacher may consider as the determinant of pupils grades could differ significantly from the criteria followed by other teachers. Teachers are expected to be skilled in communicating evaluation results to the stakeholders; thus, they should have enough knowledge of the results of the evaluation, what they mean as well as being able to interpret them in such a manner that other people can easily understand them (Russell, 2006).

The validity of grades as the mode of communication of students learning outcomes depend on the quality of evaluation information on which the grades are based on, and the laid down procedures that govern the grading process (Tight, Mok, Huisman & Morphew, 2009). It is imperative that once the valid results from the individual classroom examinations have been obtained, the examiner has to know how to glean the grades from that information, by recognizing the importance for consistency in the evaluation data, and appreciate inconsistency

as a red flag for a problem so that they can offer mitigating efforts. It is obvious that poor classroom evaluation data only leads to the teacher making erroneous communication in respect of the student performance (Stecher, 2002). The 1-5 grading system is, therefore, subjective and burdensome to both the learners and teachers respectively

Assessment can be described as the collecting concrete evidence of the student or pupil learning so that a judgment can be made regarding the pupils level of achievement at a given point in time (Guskey & Bailey, 2001). Once the evaluation has been done, the outcome need to be presented to the stakeholders regarding the learning efforts of the student and progress made thereof. This is achieved through a report form. The fundamental aim of the assessment exercise and reporting is to assess the needs and areas of improving the pupil's learning. The evaluation process should provide information regarding the pupil's knowledge and understanding of the outcomes as stated on the syllabus (Tight, Mok, Huisman & Morphew, 2009). Assessments also provide information that appertains to the particular learning which is of interest to the party carrying out the assessment.

The accuracy of the assessment should be guaranteed by the provision of evidence that accurately shows the individual pupil understanding, skills, and knowledge (Russell, 2006). Meaning, the evaluation process, must be dependable and reliable, since the process consistently measures the pupils learning outcomes. The focus on evaluation is to establish where the pupil stands in the learning activity and consequently capture this information in the form of a grade that forms the report (Wikström, 2005).

The statement on assessment is contained in the curriculum of every subject, and it outlines the diagnostic, formative, summative and evaluative roles of the assessment (Tyler, Taylor, Kane & Wooten. 2010). The curriculum recommends formative classroom-based evaluation and its usability in providing necessary feedback to inform the actions needed to move the pupil to the next stage in learning. The tools and method of evaluation recommended in the curriculum range from less structured, informal methods such as observation to formal structured methods like standardized tests (Stecher, 2002).

In most schools, grades are used to communicate with students, parents and guardians about the pupil's performance. Grades also help teachers communicate with each other, providing data that are easily understood about the pupil's performance (Aaronson, Barrow & Sander, 2007). They are meant to be a concrete evaluation of the pupil's knowledge and understanding of the content taught in class (Rothstein, 2010). The best known and widely used grading system uses a scale of five either in numerical or alphabetical order, i.e. A-F or 1-5 to represent pupil's achievement (Tyler, Taylor, Kane & Wooten. 2010). Alternative grading systems are the 4.0 and mastery types of grading systems. In the letter or numeral grading system, the students can earn A, B, C, D or F grades, or 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 (Tyler, Taylor, Kane & Wooten. 2010).

There are several approaches to grading pupil's performances, but the two commonly used carry with them particular assumption regarding the social role of education. These

assumptions are implicit but not consciously recognized (Tight, Mok, Huisman & Morphew, 2009).

The two approaches to grading are the norm-referenced grading system and the criterion-referenced grading system (Wikström, 2005). In norm-referenced grading system, the grade is determined by how well the pupil performs in comparison to others in the class (Tight, Mok, Huisman & Morphew, 2009). Thus, since the highest grade will be awarded to the best performing student, the pupils actively compete with each other for the few desirable grades (Rothstein, 2010). Most standardized tests fall in this grading system. In contrast, criterion-referenced grading, the pupil's performance is measured against a fixed standard so that the pupils grade reflect the degree the pupil can demonstrate particular levels of knowledge irrespective of the performance of the rest in the class (Aaronson, Barrow & Sander, 2007). The norm-referenced grading system is designed to identify which pupil has learnt the most and those who have learnt the least but does not indicate whether the pupil has learnt enough. In contrast, the criterion referenced grading system show whether the students have learnt enough, although, it may not indicate which student has learnt the most (Tyler, Taylor, Kane & Wooten. 2010).

## Disadvantages of the 1-5 grading and reporting system on pupil evaluation

The 1 to 5 grading and reporting system has one (1) as the lowest grade and five (5) being the best performance (Tight, Mok, Huisman & Morphew, 2009). This is a norm-referenced grading system which demands that the distribution of grades should follow a normal distribution, with the average grade being three (3) with a standard deviation of one (MacCann, Gardner, Reynolds & Wild, 2009). The problem with this norm-referenced system is that it is difficult for a teacher to judge the students in relation to the national norm (Stecher, 2002).

The other disadvantage is that the system is susceptible to manipulation especially where the marking of the examination is at the hands of the subject teacher (Rothstein, 2010). The anticipated retribution is enough incentive for examination malpractices. The 1-5 range does not offer enough information that would guide the teacher and parents on the consequent intervention since the areas that needed intervention were not clearly communicated in the grades scale (Guskey & Bailey, 2001). The system is restrictive, and many critics have observed that it created more competition among the pupils instead of forging cooperation among the learners for a more rounded learning experience and outcome (Tyler, Taylor, Kane & Wooten. 2010).

### **Grading systems in European countries**

In the Czech Republic, a five point grading system is used. The grading scale is used in both secondary and primary schools. For further differentiation of the marks, according to (Milanovic & Weir, 2004), plus and minus signs are used. For example '2+' is an equivalent of

'B+' in the USA. Half intervals are also used like '2-3' as a representation of a grade halfway between 2 and 3.

In Finland, the grading system is not common for all the educational systems. Historically, the grading systems in both secondary and primary schools have a scale of 0 to 10. All the grades lower than 4 are always regarded as the failing grades. The grades 5 to 10 are referred to as the succeeding grades (Milanovic & Weir, 2004).

In France primary and secondary school grades either range from 0 to 20 or from 0 to 10. The failing grade comes with a mark attained below the average. This can be a mark below 10 out of 20 or 5 out of 10. In the secondary schools in France a grade between 8 and 10 is given an oral exam to try improving it to the pass mark. A grade between 10 and 12 is regarded as a simple pass and is not awarded any grade; a mark between 12 and 14 id given a grade of 'rather good'; between 14 and 16 the grade is 'good'; above 16 the grade is 'very good'. A mark above 18 is given a special grace by the examiners in France (Amaral, 2009).

In Germany the grading system used ranges from 1 to 6. The grades range from 1 referred to as very good to 6 referred as insufficient. The grading system is comprehensive for all the Germany primary and secondary schools. However in German Gymnasium schools use 0 to 15 grading scale to prepare pupils for university education. This grading scale has no points being the worst grade and 15 points being the excellent grade. In the United Kingdom the grading system used runs from 1-5. The education compulsory level runs up to the age of fourteen. During this period the pupils are assessed as per the level set by the national curriculum. The levels apply to the essential subjects and they range from level 1to level 8. After each key level the pupil is expected to have moved to a certain standard. In the secondary schools they are divided into two; GCSE and Advanced level. The GCSE grades from A-G, in Advanced level it grades from A-E, in both U is not classified it is regarded as fail (Amaral, 2009).

In Hungary the grading system used is a five point scale. The system has been in use since 1950. The grades range from 1 being a fail, 2 sufficient, 3 satisfactory, 4 good and 5 excellent. The pass mark ranges between 50 plus 1 or 60 depending on the exam. The grading system is used entirely from primary school to university. However in elementary schools the grades are modified by the teachers by the addition of a plus or minus sign (Huemmert, 2011).

In Italy the grading system is the same for both the secondary schools and primary schools. The grading scale ranges from 1 to 10. However in many secondary schools the grading system varies between 2 and 8, this happens as the teachers try to apply their own custom but the interval remains to be 1 to 10. The modification of the grades is done by the addition of symbols like pus and minus signs. The fail grade referred to as insufficient starts at 5 and below, grade 6 is referred to as sufficient and grade 10 excellent (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2004).

In Norway in primary schools no official grades are awarded. However teachers give comments on the performance of the students at the end of every academic term. Lower and upper secondary school grades are awarded. They take a grading scale of 1to 6. Grade 6 is regarded as the highest grade and 2 being the lowest passing grade.

In Sweden, the current system emphasizes on goals in terms of norms and values as well as individual students development of their personal competencies (Rothstein, 2010). The students are measured on goals related to knowledge which are given as facts, understanding, proficiency and familiarity; thus, the grading is done on goals to aim for and goals to achieve (Christie, 2005). The grades awarded are Pass (G), meaning the student has achieved the goals on a given subject, Pass with Distinction (VG), which means the student has achieved all the goals and satisfies the requirement for the award of Pass with Distinction (Wikström, 2005). The last award is a Pass with Special Distinction (MVG), which indicates that the student has achieved all goals appertaining to the particular subject and satisfies the parameters for the award of pass with special distinction (Wikström, 2005).

In the Netherland, the grading system follows a scale of one to ten with numeral one being the lowest and numeral ten being the best grade; the pass mark stands at six for a single subject, but if it is on the school leaving assessment, where six or more subjects are tested, five and four are condoned if the student compensates by scoring high grades on other subjects (Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in higher education, 2013). The grades from one to four are rarely awarded which is the case with nine and ten. The average grades awarded are six and seven the distribution of the grades are as follows 10= 0.1 percent, 9=2.4 percent, 8=12.5 percentage 7= 34.3 percent, 6=38.5 percent, 5=10.5 percent, 4=1.4 percent, 3=0.08 percent, 2=0.01 percent, and 1=0.0 percent (Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in higher education, 2013).

The grading culture in the Netherland is that the top grades are rarely given in spite of the actual performance of a given class (Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in higher education, 2013). This system dates back to the nineteenth century, and it was decided then that the grade ten should only be given in cases of absolute perfection.

In England, National Curriculum, as defined in the Education Act of 1988 defines what primary schools are and set out the subjects to be covered as well as formulating the assessment criteria (Taylor & Tyler, 2011). The curriculum set out the achievement targets which delineate the understanding, knowledge and skills which the students with different abilities and maturities are supposed to attain the end of each stage (Cormack, 2006). The curriculum also clearly sets out the skills, matters and processes which are learnt by children of different maturities and ability at each stage. Most schools in Great Britain and Australia still follow the 1-5 reporting format which does not tell a lot on the learning outcome of the affected learner (MacCann, Gardner, Reynolds & Wild, 2009). The Ministry of Education have, however, made massive reforms in curriculum development and suggested wide ranging measures that are meant to improve both pedagogy and assessment of the pupils outcomes in a more progressive manner than previously practiced (Guskey & Bailey, 2001).

# Analysis of grading systems

The various grading systems used by different nations have either positive or negative effects to the pupils. The sole purpose of having a grading system put in place is to encourage the pupils to study more and create competition among them. The grades a pupil gets should only reflect his or her ability in a certain course. According to (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2004), in primary and secondary schools grading systems should favor the pupils to proceed to the next level and not hinder them.

Most of the grading system used in countries in Europe like Hungary and Finland, act as terminators rather than promotes of the pupil education. The act of having discarding grades that starts very high discourages the pupils. As in Finland the discarded grades start from grade 4 where the scale runs up to 10. According to (Cenoz, 2008), this is unfair to the pupils as their desire to proceed to the next level is inhibited.

A grading system should not bear numerous grade scales and have least which are considerable. The grading scale in Italy is composed of ten grades. However only six of these grades are considered to pass the rest is failing. Such a grading system not only discourages the students in their studies but also offers unnecessary scale for use. A good grading system should have the least number of grades and most of then be viable grades. Similar evaluation policy is found in the Czech Republic (Cenoz, 2008).

In Germany, the evaluation policy in place also does not favor the average students. The act of having the least pass mark was set very high makes the system uncompetitive. The systems least pass mark is from fifty. This makes pupils who still have the ability to study to be left out of the system. A good system should not concentrate the sufficient grades on the top but rather on the minimal marks thus to encourage the pupils in their studies. Consequently this leads to a high transition rate of the pupils to the next academic level.

The grading system 1-5, from the analysis of the various European countries' grading system is not suitable. Ewers (2009) argued that, the system of grades 1-4 does not show the progressive performance of the pupil. The system only shows the performance of the performing student thereby leaving out the rest. This grading system too does not give the teacher the opportunity to monitor the pupil. This makes the system not fit for the secondary and primary school's evaluation.

An evaluation policy that serves a variety of purposes should be adopted in both secondary and primary schools. The policy should be able to convey the information about pupils' academic achievement to both the parents and interested parties. According to (Ewers. 2009), the policy should not be terminative but provide information to the pupil for self-assessment. The policy should be capable of selecting and categorizing pupils to fit in various education programs. The policy should also be able to provide rewards and incentives to encourage the pupils in learning.

The discussed grading systems for various European countries do not meet these standards. This makes them unfavorable to pupils in those nations. An effort to develop a more comprehensive and competitive evaluation policy is then necessary. The policy should address

all the drawbacks of the old systems and at the same time achieve the goals and objectives of a competitive education (Milanovic & Weir, 2004).

## **Recommended evaluation system**

Change is always difficult especially in education because much as the grading and reporting systems in place are grounded on tradition rather than informed by compelling evidence of achievement (Cormack, 2006). Many schools, in indeed, many countries continue to use certain practice that have not been well thought out or empirically evaluated but, rather, because it is more comfortable to continue with what has always been done (Guskey & Bailey, 2001). Thus grading and reporting is a professional engagement which involves the collection and analysis of evidential information on the pupil's attainment and performance over a determined period. It is noted that grading has been an integral part of delivery of learning experiences, but, when other aspects of education have been reformed, grading still retain the archaic forms (Ballou, 2009). However, recent development in research has shown that it is imperative to make monumental changes on grading and reporting issues to disseminate the correct performance information in an informed system without ambiguity and misunderstanding (Cormack, 2006).

The need to focus on grading has been aroused by several developments in education in the recent past (Ballou, 2009). There is an increased emphasis on education standards coupled with performance-based evaluations since education professionals are interested with more than instructions that concern themselves with basic skills, rather, they want students to get involved with authentic problem solving activities that engage them in thinking, analyze, plan, integrate and construct (Cormack, 2006). Educators have discovered that the traditional marking system cannot fulfill the demands of the new curriculum adequately (Guskey & Bailey, 2001). This gave rise to calls for the designing of a more appropriate grading and reporting systems that can deliver the required information on the progress of the learning process and offer the opportunity to develop the necessary mitigating strategies (MacCann, Gardner, Reynolds & Wild, 2009).

The 1-6 recommended grading system is designed to place equal value on the attainment and learning growth for all the students, including the low achieving learners. It has meaning to both the pupil and the teachers. This system emphasizes the longitudinal pupil-level growth as the main indicator of the institution achievement (Guskey & Bailey, 2001). The formula used to arrive at the 1-6 grading is based on point system weighting student academic learning and growth equally. The description of grades to be as follows: 1 = fail, 2 = satisfactorily, 3 = good, 4 = very good, 5 = excellent, 6 = outstanding. This grading formula shows a clear picture of pupil's attainment and also shows the areas where immediate remedial action should take place.

The academic attainment component, described as the composite score, of the grade system makes the school accountable for pupil's proficiency on the administered assessment. The percentage of pupil's proficiency is worked out by dividing the number of pupils passing the assessment in a given year by the total number of pupils taking the test. The purpose of the

growth component is to recognize the academic development of the pupils in a school or municipality, even when the pupils have arrived at grade-level proficiency. Each school should use a pupil-level growth measure known as Student Growth percentiles, which describe every pupil's academic achievement compared to the other pupils who started from the same academic point (Guskey & Bailey, 2001). Involving the longitudinal pupil growth component is important since it offers recognition of the effort of the low achieving pupil to gain a footing from one year to the other. The total grade is arrived at by adding the composite score and the growth score to arrive at a possible total that would lie somewhere between 0 and 100 points.

The system uses the three year average to allow for school to build a trajectory that reflects the academic gains and growth through comparable data. This grading system offers more information on the learning and academic development in more detailed format as well as allowing for comparative data that inform on the direction that intervention will take. This affair and accurate grading system compared to the 1-5 system which only offers academic evaluation without consideration of the holistic pupil development in learning.

#### Conclusion

In conclusion the evaluation system to be applied should be education goals considerate and at the same time pupils friendly. In my point of view, the grading system that uses 1-5 grades should be discarded in the schools. This grading system fails to progressively show the performance of the pupil to the teacher. The adoption of 1-6 evaluation system will ensure the students are easily monitored by the teacher. This system will also enable the pupils not be detached from education due to heightened grade levels.

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