The grading system guidelines for Open University

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Abstract

This research aimed at suggesting the grading system guidelines for Open University, by studying into the concept related to grading, and by interviewing teachers from Open University and the experts related to the measurement and evaluation of the study. The findings are applied to prepare for the grading system guidelines for Open University. It was found from the research that the three-level grading criteria have their own distinctive points that are consistent with the management of teachings and learning in the open system, reducing errors of the approximation into the study result of the students. There are 8 levels of grading criteria, with the distinct points that are consistent with grading system of general universities; the students of moderate and high performance level would be motivated in studying.

Keywords: Grading System; Open University.

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1. Introduction

The learning management in collegial level must have standard measurement and evaluation. The educational evaluation in distance learning system in each subject can be divided into 2 types including (1) formative evaluation with the goal to make students have chance in knowing their own basic knowledge, to have beneficial information for their preparation before starting study in each unit, and to check the understanding in the subject; and (2) summative evaluation with the goal to decide that whether each study would pass or not in various subjects and how good they are; this kind of evaluation is very important in ensuring that the student is really of high quality. The grading system is very important following from the educational evaluation, which is to consider the outcome and to compare such outcome with the criteria used in grading, in order for the consideration on the minimum standard and to identify the level of performance of the students. The good evaluation criteria must be accepted and fair and can identify the behavioral level of the students correctly and with good standard. If the standard is set very high, there may be a problem of having no resource to make everybody achieve such high level of criteria; however, if the standard is set too low, there may be a problem of quality because too low standard does not have "power" in predicting behavior, as presented by Jamornmarn (2001) in that the grading principle consists of 4 aspects as follows: (1) the grading shall be on basis of fair on part of the giver and the receiver, (2) the grading shall be on basis of criteria such as objective of learning, (3) the grading shall rely on reliable data that is accurate, (4) grading should be on basis of 3 factors that are knowledge in the contents of the subject, the ability compared with normal group, and the progress compared with oneself before and after studying into such subject.

Kanchanawasi (2009) presented the guidelines in evaluation and grading as follows: (1) factors that are used for grading should consist of main factors of ability and knowledge or skill of the learners under the aim of the learning and the supplementary factors such as the participation in activity, the attitude towards learning, the responsibility, the main factor must be the most important factor used in grading, and the supplementary factor is only the element to be considered in case the main factor is incomplete; (2) tools used for evaluation shall be of good quality, measurable, covering the matters to be evaluated, several tools should be used many times and at many periods, and there should measure in objective scoring; (3) criteria used in trading must be appropriate with nature of the subject and shall be clearly identified, and such criteria must be consistent with the evaluation plan and the learning activities; (4) the decision must be fair, transparent, and can explain the learners and those concerned to accept it with principle and reason. The use of discretion must be fair as Cross (1995) and Ariasian (2000) refered in Wiratchai (2003), related to the good grading guidelines as follows: (1) the grading must be consistent with objective; (2) the collection of information related to the performance must consists of many methods and many sources; (3) the collection of information related to the learners' performance must be continuous for the whole learning period; (4) the learners and those concerned perceive the form of grading as from starting point of the learning; (5) the grading should separate the report in grades in cognitive and objective; (6) in grading, the information obtained from accurate and reliable evaluation is used; (7) significant information on performance/ learning outcome must be weighed more significant than the insignificant information; (8) the grading system must be used with all learners equally and fairly; (9) the passing scoring should be based on key knowledge of the subject; (10) in the grading on cut points, there should be principles and performance/ learning outcome of the learners and standard criteria, it is not necessary to always use normal curve.

The learning evaluation of open University focuses on summative evaluation as the main one since learners have to learn via distant learning media, without class, so the formative evaluation is hard to do. So, the grading of open University must be careful in order to control standard to be not too high or not too low, and to be consistent with characteristics of the learners. There are many methods or concepts of grading, depending on the philosophy of each performer including those who believe that grading should be on the basis of expectation or criteria that all learners should get A if such learner can achieve specified criteria, grade would signify the success in such subject; but for some, they believe that grade is the indicator of knowledge and skill of the learners compared with others who study together. Therefore, the distribution of Grade A, B, C, D depend on the percentage of learners by

comparing with all learners (Jagtrimongkon, 2013). In theory, the thoughts of teachers in the first group is called absolute marking system or grading on basis of criteria, and the second groups' thought is called relative marking system on basis of group. Wijit-Wanna (2012) presented that the grading system of open University should have grade level to encourage students who get high score and there should not be regrade in order to be consistent in practice.

There were some controversial of grading system concepts for open University as above. This research aimed to suggest the appropriate grading system to be guidelines for open University in order to present the information to control grading system standards of open university.

2. Method

The research starts from that the researcher studied into the concept related to grading under the educational evaluation principle and traditional grading of open universities in various countries and the interview with the experts concerned with educational evaluation in open university in order to prepare the guidelines for grading system of open university provided in detail.

2.1. Research process

- Study into concepts, procedure, and methods

- The researcher studied into the concepts, procedures, and methods concerned with grading from articles, documents to draft the appropriate grading system.

- Interview teachers in open university

- The researcher interviews three teachers from open university in Thailand; the interview is related to grading system as currently done by such university.

- Interview the experts concerned with measurement and evaluation of education of open university

The experts who provide information consist of three professors in the point related to the background and principle in specify grading system of open university in Thailand, initiated as from the time when the university is founded until now. Designing grading system from information collected in the study in Item 1) – 3).

2.2. Participants

Participants consist of 3 teachers in open university and 3 former experts in educational evaluation in open university.

2.3. Tools used in the research

Interview form for teachers in open university and experts. The interview form were improved by three measurement and evaluation experts.

2.4. Data collection

Interview teachers of Open University in Thailand concerned with grading that is currently used, past performance, satisfaction for the use of such grading system compared with the old grading system.

An interview with the experts concerned with educational evaluation of open university related to background, principle in specifying the grading system of the university as from the establishment of the university until now.

2.5. Data analysis

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Analyze the teachers' answers and educational evaluation experts concerned by content analysis using MAXQDA Program.

3. Results

It was found from the interview with teachers in open university and the experts concerned with educational evaluation in the following sections.

3.1. Results of operations in accordance with the current open university's grading system

The researcher interview the teachers from open university without entrance examination. In the past, 3 levels (G, P, F) of grading were used, now it is 8 levels (A, B$^+$, B, C$^+$, C, D$^+$, D, F). The conclusion of interview in various points is as follows:

3.1.1. Results of the use of 8-level grading criteria

It was found from the consideration into the results of the use of 8-level grading criteria that most students pass the examination in low level that is D$^+$, D, thus making most students' grade become lower than 3-level criteria, which is only "passing level". However, the students at present who had studied when the old system was used would obtain higher score. The 8-level criteria can identify the ability of learners in more details, this is beneficial for students who have quite high score, that is almost G score but still get P grade in 3-level system.

3.1.2. Difference between the use of old criteria and the new one

The experts stated their opinions in that most students who got lower grade than previous grade because most students had low score; the old grading system would help students in this group get Grade P is 2.25, but the 8-level grading system at present makes the students in this group to obtain Grade D or D$^+$ equal to 1.00 and 1.50 score, respectively. However, the grading system in new system is dominant in that the students who are good would have higher GPA, and the weak students would get lower GPA. The university has provided opportunity for students to regrade in the subject that students get D or D$^+$ in normal semester, however students would not be entitled to receiving honor. Students who get F would be able to re-exam. Although students who get D or D$^+$ require to regrade in such subject, such students would not get above C or C$^+$ depending on the discretion of the teachers; the university does not clearly specify maximum level.

There are points to consider concerned with conditions in regarding for students who get D or D$^+$ and who are not satisfied with the grade shall re-register again; however, students who get F are entitled to re-exam. This makes some students who get D or D$^+$ require Grade F to re-exam, depending on the discretion of each teacher; this is the point of not equal right as it should be.

3.1.3. Satisfaction of teachers and students

The teachers provide their own opinions and observing students' satisfaction with new grading system; most of students are satisfied with the old grading system. The first teacher stated that since there is consistency with being Open University without chance to collect score during the semester like other universities, therefore, the decision of learning outcome is only the summary. So, it should be deciding on pass or not pass and it should encourage the students who have high score to get G in order to maintain the standard of the grade in Open University, which is hard to really evaluate the learners' performance.

The second teacher was more satisfaction with the traditional grading system as well because of scoring students in the traditional grading system is easier, and with less error. The new grading system of 8-level would provide score which is hard to group the students under the more detailed scale. The

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third teacher provided opinions in the satisfaction point in that grading under new system can provide grade to students in more details; so, students would know the level of performance to be improved or developed.

3.1.4. Guidelines in changing grading criteria

In changing grading criteria, there would be comparing with the old grading system. The students who enroll to study after the announcement of the use of new grading system would be decided in terms of grade by new system. Students who enroll to study before the announcement of new grading system, there shall be adjustment of grade by comparing from P equal to 2.25 compared to C^+ equal to 2.50 and the university would explain on this. Since the grading of the university would depend on the teacher of the subject, the teacher then shall consider and understand this.

3.1.5. Considerations in changing grading

Considerations in changing grading system: The experts stated that if there would be improvement, then it should be on the standard of grading. If the students getting F, then they must re-register, and result of the examination as mentioned shall be taken for calculation for GPAX as well. That the Open University has different form of learning management, therefore, the evaluation and grading criteria does not have to be adjusted to consistent with that of the closed university. So, the grading criteria of Open University should not be too detailed because there is limitation that cannot be evaluated comprehensively. If 3-level is too rough, there might be A, B, C, D, and F so that the grading system would not be too rough as in the old grading system.

3.2. Result of analysis into the dominant point and limitation of 8-level and 3-level grading system

The analysis into the dominant point and limitation of grading criteria of 8-level (A, B^+, B, C^+, C, D^+, D, F), which is compared with 3-level (H, S, U) grading system as currently used, under the interview with the experts, can be concluded as in Table 1.

Table 1. Result of the dominant analysis and limitation for the grading system classified under the criteria

Issues	Dominant point	Limitation
3-level grading Consistency with general context of the university	Consistent with distant learning management since the score collection during study is difficult to be done, focusing on deciding the result at the end of semester, which is possible that the result would have much error. Grading by a few scales would help reduce error.	Grading is different from general closed university; students with quite high performance would be at disadvantage in closed system since they would be classified as moderate level while students in closed system would be classified as in high level, this leads to competitive disadvantage.
Consistency with level of performance of students	Students with moderate and low performance would be beneficial in that grade of these students would be classified as at moderate level.	Students with moderate to high performance would lack motivation in studying and preparing for exam since it is hard to score to get H.
8-level grading Consistency with general context of the university	Consistent with grading system of general closed university	Learning management and basic learning of students is different from general closed university.
Error in the estimation of level of performance of students	The learning level ranking of students are more detailed.	There are more error sources in estimating learning level under the number of grade scales
Consistency with level of performance of students	Students with moderate to high performance would have motivation in studying because they have more chance to be ranked higher level.	Students with moderate to low performance would lack motivation in studying and preparing for exam since they get very low grade, and intend that they had better get F. They can re-register since the outcome of F is not taken to be calculated for GPAX

4. Conclusion

8-level grading would cause the score range to have more frequency and be consistent with the grading system of most universities, that would be beneficial in transferring results between institutes and job application of students. However, when comparing with open university, there has been adjustment to be 8-level; the effect is that, most students would pass at low level, because in the traditional grading system, they would not pass and would have to re-exam, but when the new grading system is used, the students would pass but at level C, D$^+$ and D that would get no more than 1.5; if such score range is grading, then the students would get very low GPA and would have no motivation in the study. The mixed grading system would make score range to be more flexible under the characteristics of subject, however, the students who pass in the low level would be at disadvantage, that is, from the old system this group would receive S equal to 2.30, but if new grading system is applied, they would get C equal to 2.00 and this group is the majority of students since most subjects use criteria of 3 and 4.

According to the result of the research, it can be seen that each grading system has its own dominant point and limitation. In order to change the grading system, the consideration should be done from the number of students who are at disadvantage compared with the students who are at advantage. According to the comparison of 8-level grading and 3-level grading, it can be seen that in 3-level, there are minor number of students who are at disadvantage, that is, the group that gets high score would receive S which is the same level as the students with low score but pass the criteria who are major number of students at advantage. The first-system grading and second-system grading would have fewer students who are at advantage than those who are at disadvantage, that is, those who get high score would get higher rank but there are not many of them, compared with students who get low score but passing the criteria who are in the group of major number of students at disadvantage.

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The adjustment of any one kind of grading system then should be done by considering the grading system that makes those who are at advantage in the current system would be advantage ad well, and those who are at advantage would still not be at disadvantage; for example, the grading system under the research of Wijit-wanna (2012) presented that there should be 4 ranks that are H, S^+, S and U, with score of 4.00, 3.00, 2.30, and 0.00 respectively; and with score ranges as follows: 76%-100% get H, 70%-75% get S^+, 60%-69% gets S, and 0%-59% gets U. Wijit-Wanna (2012) presented that in difficult subject, the passing criteria should be specified at 50%, that is, students who get score of 50%-59% would get S and students who get score of 60%-75% would get S^+, and there should not be regrade in order to be consistent in practice and so that it would not affect the operation in many divisions.

Acknowledgements

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