

EVIDENCE OF GRADE INFLATION: CAUSES, EFFECTS, AND SOLUTIONS AT HIGHER EDUCATION LEVEL

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Abstract

Grades are used as a standard and signaling mechanism to reflect students' learning outcomes in academic institutions throughout the world. Grades have also assumed a significant position in mirroring the students' achievement while employing or admitting them for higher education. However, recent research in the educational system has exposed a widespread phenomenon grade inflation that puts a direct strain on the credibility and accountability of academia's standards of excellence and their graduates. The main purpose of this study is to identify and investigate the understanding of University teachers and administrators about the situation of inflation and its effects on students and to find some solutions and measures to solve or at least reduce this problem. A survey research design was adopted to achieve the purpose of this study. Data were collected through a quantitative data collection process supported by a qualitative data collection process (open source). The survey questionnaire consists of three parts; the first is about identifying the factors/causes of inflation of grades, the second explores the effects of inflation of grades, and the last one includes solutions to reduce the level of inflation of grades. To achieve this goal, data is collected and analyzed using a variety of methods (quantitative technique supported by qualitative data analysis techniques). We deliberately invited all university teachers and administrators to participate in a four-part survey via email, resulting in 278 answers from the respondents through email. The responses collected were measured by descriptive and thematic techniques of analysis. The consequences of the research study specified that prevalent grade inflation is present at the higher education level due to issues ranging from visiting faculty and assessments by students. Reduced learners' efforts, ineffectual graduates of the university, difficulties for associates and justification for employment were identified as major consequences of grade inflation as a result of the study. The findings of the study also suggested that there is a need to adopt these potential solutions i.e., consistent monitoring of the institution, ranking standards should be increased, exterior grading mechanism, regular drill on assessment, evaluation policy should be clear, suitable organizational actions and criteria of assessment and teaching methods to abate grade inflation.

Keywords: Grade Inflation, Causes, Outcomes, Solutions, Higher education level

Introduction

Grading of students at higher education level is a problem which is under conversation for decades at higher education level and majority broadcasting in numerous states in the world (Baker, 2019; Caruth & Caruth, 2014; Reeves & Shuch, 2013; Johnson, 2021). Numerous republics stated that different educational institutes give greater grades to their learners as related to their predecessors for the similar eminence of effort that increase of grades (Tucker & Courts, 2010). Bachan (2017), said that the word "grade inflation" denotes the condition where students receive higher grades due to poor performance or students receive "A" and "B" grades very easily without requiring much effort and talent (Costal, Kunsel, & Sacket, 2016; Siddiqui, 2022). Kohn (2002) states that progress means an increase in the student's overall grade point average (GPA) without an increase in academic performance and progress, while Jaschik (2009) and O'Grady (2009) define GPA as getting higher grades without any significant improvement in

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the student's learning. The presence of inflation in higher education is considered difficult for many motives. Many researchers (Bachan, 2017; Popov and Bernhardt, 2013; Ray, 2014) believe that the phenomenon of high scores is simply a “problem” that does not lead to confidence and performance in higher education. And it is also a threat to the future of college graduates (Pattison, Grdsky, & Muler, 2013; Khan, 2023). Overall, higher education authorities have not been successful in reducing the rate of progression at universities (O'Halloran and Gordon, 2014). Inflated grades provide graduates with inaccurate information about their presentation (Anglin and Men, 2001; Haassel and Lourey, 2006; Lee, 2017; O'Halloran and Gordon, 2014). Employers view scores as a measure of a candidate's content understanding, abilities, and theoretical achievement in definite courses. The results may impact candidates' attitudes toward their work, their morality, and their future learning abilities (Aton and Penaluna, 2019; Hughes, 2011; Seifert, Pascarella, Goodman, Salisbury, and Blaich, 2010). Higher levels can also lead to serious problems and penalties for employers and the work place (O'Halloran & Gordon, 2014). They must face the problems of distinguishing between true results supported by learners' actual learning and false results caused by other factors. Inflation may also affect the admissions process to graduate and technical schools because these institutions receive less accurate information about the inflation rate of college graduates (Anglin & Men, 2000; Fedler, Counts, & Stoner, 1989; Langbein, 2008). Additionally, employers are losing confidence in school grades and starting to rely on other reliable measures (Langbein, 2008; Oleinik, 2009; Pattison et al., 2013). Another effect of raising the level, from the policymaker's perspective, is the destruction of education itself. It is dangerous because progress levels do not measure the costs and benefits of education (Diamond and Persson, 2016; Franz, 2010).

Rationale and Purpose of Study

In the last few years, Pakistan give a momentous extension in the amount of higher education institutions. When the literature is examined, it is seen that there are many researches and information regarding inflation of grades in higher education, but the main focus of the research is generally on one or two factors such as the existence of inflation of grades, the impact of inflation of grades or the effect of inflation of grades just give little knowledge about causes and solutions (Diamond and Persson, 2016). Most studies only investigate the presence of score increase (Ayappan, Raaj, and JF, 2019; Ray, 2014; Yang and Yip, 2003). Various studies discuss the reasons and significances of inflation of grades (Boretz, 2004; Donaldson & Gray, 2012; Rosenbluh & Levinson, 2015; Hu, 2005). The background shows that the level of inflation exists but all these studies fail to provide a consensus and agreement on the factors leading to the level of inflation, its consequences and solutions, especially in the context of Pakistan. Experiences working in a public university, knowledge of classroom teaching and student assessment, and discussions with professionals provide the researcher with opportunities to analyze and deeply understand the existence of the rate of inflation of grades, its causes and consequences, and solutions to reduce inflation of grades. Previous studies, researchers' personal observations, and interviews with stakeholders give the claim that inflation in grades occurs at high levels of education. Therefore, higher educational institutions in Pakistan need to used approaches and change the procedure of assessment to overcome the delinquent inflation in grades at higher education level.

Objectives of the study

This study is planned to attain the subsequent aims.

1. To examine the factor and reasons responsible for grade inflation at higher education level as perceived by teachers and administrators at higher level
2. To investigate the results of inflation of grades at higher education level and labor market as viewed by administrators and teacher.
3. To recommend possible answers to overwhelmed or diminish the problem of inflation in grading existing state as viewed by administrators and teachers at higher education level.

Methodology, Population, and Sample

The central target of this research study is to identify and scrutinize the factors/reasons that cause to obtain high grades by the students at the higher education level and sort out the solutions and methods to solve or at least reduce this problem. To attain this goal, survey research method (Dulock, 1999; Ponto, 2015) was used in this study. As a research study, the researcher asked survey and open ended questions for analyzing the views of teachers and administrators. Random sampling technique (simple random sampling) was used to select 9 universities out of 35 public sector universities of Punjab to ensure accurate representation of the population. A total of 2,825 respondents from a total population of 4,656 in 9 public universities of Punjab were surveyed by searching the teachers physically and official email addresses of university administrator and teachers on higher education websites. After 2-3 reminders through email in 7-day intervals, a total of 278 surveys were received from 72 chairmen / administrators and 204 teachers of universities. The respondents send their responses through their email. The response rate was approximately 31.56%, which is a reasonable rate for a voluntary survey.

Data Collection Techniques

A questionnaire having four (04) sections and two (02) open-ended questions was generated for the study to gathered data (Rahi, 2018). The five-point Likert scale was used in all stayements. The questionnaire was used to obtain teachers and administrators opinions about causes, effects and solutions to minimize the undesirable results of inflation of grades at the higher education level.

Analysis of Data

To draw conclusions, the data collected from the survey were analyzed and presented in tabular form. The data analysis is divided into three portions. The first portion presents the findings of the study on the factors of inflation of grades based on the opinions of teachers and administrators of higher education level in Pakistan. The second portion explores the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the effects of inflation of grades towards higher education institutions. In the third and final portion, the views of university teachers and administrators on solutions to improve the inflation are examined in three dimensions. The

collected data was analyzed by using descriptive (Mean and Standard deviation), 95% confidence interval and thematic analysis.

Portion one: Findings of Factors of inflation of grades Based on respondent's Opinions

This part contains the views of teachers and administrators composed through an online survey that studied factors of inflation of grades at higher education level. For this resolution, this portion consists of four parts, i.e., institutional, teaching and pedagogical, excellence and quality, and exterior factors. This section contains some factors that were predominant in the literature. All the items of factors are monitored on a 5-point Likert scale. The factors of inflation of grades are also examined using rank-order and open-ended questions.

Table 1 offers the opinions of teachers and administrators about the institutional factors contributing to inflation of grades at the higher education level.

Table 1: Respondents' Opinions about Institutional Factors causing Inflation of grades

S. #	Statements	M.	SD	95% CI	
				LL	UL
1	Lack of credibility of grading system	3.98	0.78	3.89	4.07
2	Administration's high demands and expectation	3.76	0.87	3.66	3.86
3	Mismatch between course work and final exam.	3.57	0.93	3.46	3.68
4	Teacher's negligence about grades	3.60	1.03	3.48	3.72
5	Newly recruited teachers impress the employers	3.55	1.08	3.42	3.68
6	Promotion of teachers is connected with inflation of grades	3.40	1.13	3.27	3.53
7	Teachers' intemperate towards learners	3.72	0.93	3.61	3.83
8	Relation of grades with merit- based scholarships	3.50	0.99	3.38	3.62
	Overall	3.64	0.99	3.49	3.75

Table 1 discloses that the average scores of most institutional factors are among 3.5 and 4.00. This shows that all institutional factors affect inflation of grades. Overall, the mean score of 3.64 shows that respondent were in favor that these were the causes of inflation of grades. Additionally, the overall confidence lower limit (LL) is 3.49 and the upper confidence limit (UL) is 3.75. The overall variance is 0.23 which displays 95% of confidence interval that accurate average value 3.64 among 3.49 and 3.75. Similarly, the total SD value is 0.99 which shows that the most of respondents agree that institutional factors are the most important factor in the inflation of grades.

Table 2 offers the opinions of teachers and administrators about the excellence and quality factors paying to inflation of grades at higher education level in Pakistan.

Table 2: Respondents' Opinions regarding the Quality Factors Causing Inflation of grades

S. #	Statements	M	SD	95% CI	
				LL	UL
1	Impractical performance dealings of examination	3.78	0.91	3.67	3.89
2	Deficiency of teachers' training in Evaluation	3.83	0.93	3.72	3.94
3	The student's assessment of the teacher's presentation	3.75	0.95	3.64	3.86
4	Fewer awareness about the reliable grading system	3.58	1.05	3.46	3.70
5	Deficiency of quality education	3.80	1.01	3.68	3.92
6	Instructors 'behavior concerning negative evaluation	3.79	0.97	3.68	3.90
	Overall	3.76	0.89	3.65	3.87

Table 2 shows that average scores of quality factors lies among 3.5 and 4.00. Overall, the average score of 3.76 shows that teachers and administrators at the higher education level approve that the aforementioned excellence and quality factors cause inflation of grades. Additionally, the overall confidence lower limit (LL) is 3.65 and the upper confidence limit (UL) is 3.87. The total variance is 0.23 which displays 95% of confidence interval that accurate average value 3.75 among 3.65 and 3.87. Similarly, the total SD value is 0.89 which shows that the most of respondents agree that Quality factors are the most important factor in the inflation of grades.

Table 3 shows the opinions of teachers and administrators about educational and pedagogical factors contributing to inflation of grades at higher education level in Pakistan.

Table 3: Respondents' Opinions about the Educational and Pedagogical Factors Causing Inflation of grades

S. #	Statements	M	SD	95% CI	
				LL	UL
1	Fail of teacher out of university	3.49	1.08	3.36	3.62
2	A simple type of test used which provide grades	3.66	0.95	3.55	3.77
3	Low-slung performance of instructors	3.74	1.00	3.62	3.86
4	Indemnification of student's achievement	3.64	0.97	3.53	3.75

5	Preservation of students	3.80	0.98	3.68	3.92
6	Accomplish the courtesy of the administrator	3.58	1.07	3.45	3.71
7	Enrollment is increased due to indulgent grades	3.75	1.03	3.63	3.87
	Overall	3.59	1.01	3.44	3.88

Table 3 discloses that the average scores of educational and pedagogical factors lie among 3.5 and 4.00. Overall, the average score of 3.66 displays that teachers and administrators at higher education level temperately agree that the aforementioned factors cause increase of grades. Additionally, the overall confidence lower limit (LL) is 3.54 and the upper confidence limit (UL) is 3.78. The total variance is 0.24 which displays 95% of confidence interval that accurate average value 3.59 among 3.44 and 3.88. Similarly, the total SD value is 1.01 which shows the majority of participants agree that educational and pedagogical factors are the most important factor in the inflation of grades.

Table 4 shows the opinions of teachers and administrators about exterior factors contributing to inflation of grades at higher education level in Pakistan.

Table 4: Respondents' Opinions about the External Factors Causes Inflation of grades

S. #	Statements	M	SD	95% CI	
				LL	UL
1	External pressure on stake holder	3.55	1.05	3.43	3.67
2	The fame of indulgent Grade	3.79	0.94	3.68	3.90
3	Requisite for arrival in future Life.	3.73	0.92	3.62	3.84
4	The pressure of Students' on teachers	3.44	1.13	3.31	3.57
5	Evasion of complaints	3.60	1.02	3.48	3.72
	Overall	3.63	1.03	3.52	3.75

Table 4 discloses that average of external factors exist among 3.50 to 4.00 .Total average score 3.63 displays that lecturers are moderately agree that the aforementioned factors causes increase of grades. Additionally, the overall confidence lower limit (LL) is 3.52 and the upper confidence limit (UL) is 3.75. The overall variance is 0.22 which displays the 95% of confidence interval which is accurate mean value 3.65 among 3.52 and 3.75. Similarly, the total SD value is 1.03 which shows that the majority of participants agree that External factor are the most important factor in the inflation of grades.

Investigation of Respondents' Opinions about Aspects of Inflation of grades based on Rank-Order Data

Table 5 shows the teachers' and administrators opinions regarding the characteristics based on rank-order, which lead to inflation of grades at higher education level in Pakistan.

Table 5: Respondents' Opinions about the factors/causes of Inflation of grades based on rank-order

Rank	Causes of Inflation of grades	f	%
1	Fewer material to study	67	24.48
2	Stress-free material to study	45	15.77
3	Easier contact to erudition material	36	13.51
4	Usage of informative technology	38	13.37
5	To reimburse student for low eminence	32	11.21
6	Indulgent marking	24	9.05
7	Efforts of the instructor	17	6.67
8	Teacher Assessment	17	5.94

Table 5 displays the overall respondents' opinions about the reasons of inflation of grades. The outcomes of the study reveal that mostly respondents were in favor that students have less material to study and its percentage is 24.48. The results of the study also reveal that mostly respondents were not in favor that teacher assessment is important and its percentage is 5.94.

Investigation of perceivers' Opinions about the Influences of Inflation of grades over Open-Ended questions

First main theme emphasized from teachers is that the level of inflation increases due to the increase in the number of visitors to teachers, and the salary and job security of visitors will vary from program to program.

Second important factor that appeared by the opinions of university instructors was inclement of instructors towards learners, concern for their learners' inspiration, life prospects and attitude.

Third significant factor underlined by the respondents of the study was that learners have to face excessive and extreme communal and paternal burdens to get high scores.

The fourth point noted by teachers is the main effect of the level of inflation entering universities and is associated with increased competition between universities. Teachers believe that the biggest contribution to inflation is education. Colleges appear to be stepping up to attract more students with financial and financial constraints.

The sixth important factor in the inflation level for teachers is the use of certain standards designed and developed by schools in grading rubrics. For example, use of additional equipment in the measurement system.

Seventh theme was that instructors ensure inflation of grades because of their poor performance and weedy students may attain good job occasions in their professional life.

The final theme was related to learner's assessment of instructors. A teacher can get beer comments from learners by giving high grades and scores. Therefore learners' assessment of teachers is a big cause of inflation of grades at university level.

Portion Two: Respondents' Opinions about Effects of Inflation of grades

This portion emphasis on the quantitative investigation of the information to inspect the teachers' and administrators opinion about the effects of inflation of grades. This portion contained seven items. These items were specially concentrated to effects produced due to increase of grades at the higher education level. For the expressive examination of information mean, SD, and 95% CI were premeditated. Table 6 displays the inclusive views of up teachers and administrators about effects of inflation of grades at higher education level in Pakistan.

Table 6: Respondents' Opinions about Effects due to Inflation of grades

Sr. No	Statements	M	SD	95% CI	
				LL	UL
1	Decrease in student's achievements	3.73	0.85	3.63	3.83
2	Problems for colleagues	3.79	0.91	3.68	3.90
3	Reduce students' efforts	3.89	0.91	3.78	4.00
4	Grades show students' potential	3.45	1.04	3.33	3.57
5	Incompetent graduate from University	3.88	0.93	3.77	3.99
6	Employees became suspicious	3.80	0.85	3.70	3.90
7	Justification for employment	3.70	1.01	3.58	3.82
	Overall	3.69	0.91	3.54	3.87

Table 6 discloses that the mean scores of all items lies between 3.5 and 4.00. Total mean score 3.69 displays that teachers and administrators at higher education level reasonably approve that the aforementioned effects occur due to inflation of grades. Additionally, the overall confidence lower limit (LL) is 3.64 and the upper confidence limit (UL) is 3.87. The overall variance is 0.23 which displays 95% of confidence interval that shows accurate mean value 3.69 among 3.54 and 3.87.

Portion Three: Respondents' opinions about Conceivable Solutions to Overwhelmed Inflation of grades

This portion indicates the opinions of teachers and administrators got done with online survey that were examined on three proportions about conceivable solutions to reduce inflation of

grades at higher education level. For finding the conceivable solutions of inflation of grades quantitative and qualitative data gathering technique is used. In order to find the best solutions to the inflation rate, we completed a survey containing the three-dimensional opinions of school administrators and teachers. First, participants' opinions were evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from agrees to disagree regarding solutions that would reduce progress. Second, examine participants' opinions about the best solution to reduce promotion by decision level (e.g., from first to seventh place). Third, open-ended question was used to survey participants about their views on the best solutions to reduce progression. Collected data was examined by the use of descriptive examination and inferential examination. Thematic examination was performed for open responses.

Investigation of Respondents' Opinions about Conceivable Solutions to Overwhelmed Inflation of grades through Likert scale

Table 7 displays respondents' opinions about possible solutions to decrease the inflation of grades at higher education level in Pakistan.

Table 7: Respondents' opinions about possible Solutions to Decrease the Inflation of grades

Sr. No	Items	M	SD	95% CI	
				LL	UL
1	Analysis and revision of distribution of grading system	3.89	0.82	3.88	4.08
2	Proper guidance new Staff regarding the grading	3.91	0.81	3.82	3.98
3	Proper training on methods of assessment	3.92	0.89	3.82	4.02
4	Use of moderation as an external evaluation method	3.77	0.96	3.66	3.77
5	Suitable managerial actions for staff	3.78	0.99	3.67	3.81
6	Emphasis on programmed performance standards.	3.87	0.93	3.76	3.87
7	Keep rigorous grade criteria	3.76	0.92	3.65	3.96
8	Flawless policy regarding students' assessment	3.85	0.91	3.77	4.01
9	Reliable and excellence evaluation criteria	3.98	0.87	3.88	4.08
10	Implementation of the rubrics	3.84	0.96	3.73	3.95
11	Consistent review from peers	3.87	0.92	3.76	3.97
12	Actual measures of evaluation	3.94	0.91	3.81	4.05

13	Application of bench Marking	3.84	0.94	3.75	3.97
	Overall	3.88	0.96	3.78	3.88

Table 7 demonstrate that the mean scores of all items lies between 3.5 and 4.00. Overall, mean score 3.89 displays that administrator and teachers at higher education level reasonably agree that the aforementioned solutions are the finest conceivable solutions to decrease inflation of grades at the university level. Additionally, the overall confidence lower limit (LL) is 3.77 and the upper confidence limit (UL) is 3.99. The overall variance is 0.23 that displays 95% of confidence interval that accurate mean value 3.88 among 3.78 and 3.88.

Investigation of Respondents' Opinions about the Conceivable Solutions to Decrease Inflation of grades by Rank-Order

Table 8 displays the opinions of teachers and administrators about the possible solutions by rank-order, which diminishes the bad concerns of inflation of grades at higher education level in Pakistan.

Table 8: Respondents' Opinions about Possible Solutions to Decrease the Inflation of grades by Rank -Order

Rank	Solution	F	%
1	Consistent observing mechanism	74	27.23
2	Sustaining demanding grading standards.	47	16.57
3	Exterior grading regulator	46	15.99
4	Training for making assessment	36	13.76
5	Clear assessments Policy	32	10.72
6	Suitable administrative activities	24	8.39
7	Assessment measures and instruction methods.	19	6.75

Table 8 displays the overall teachers and administrators opinions regarding the answers to decrease inflation of grades by rank-order. The consequences of the study reveals that the highest ranking solution was Consistent observing mechanism and the slowest ranking was Assessment measures and instruction methods.

Investigation of Respondents' opinions about possible Solutions to Decrease the Inflation of grades by Open-ended questions

This portion emphasis on the examination of Open-ended responses to scrutinize the opinions of teachers and administrators on the good solutions to disrupt or reduce the bad impact of the promotion level. Thematic analysis was used in the investigation of the data, and thematic analysis technique was used in the analysis using qualitative open-ended questions. Six points were developed as the basic solution to reduce the negative impact of inflation.

Teachers who first say the answer to the question of raising grades is the use of numerical rubrics. The second point that emerges as a solution to phase swelling is phase accuracy. A third inflation of grades solution to improving grades is an academic evaluation rubric. The fourth

important issue expressed by teachers is that more grades should be given from the GPA program.

Fifth main theme that arisen as the solution for inflation of grades was a teaching programs for teachers. Teachers should be given information about insolences, actions, and abilities they need to do their job efficiently in the classroom for the moral development of their learners.

Sixth significant solution emphasized by the teacher was that at higher education level there should be appropriate arrangement of teachers' assessment by students.

Conclusions

The following conclusions are drawn from the research results.

1. The main findings reveal the views of teachers and administrators perception about reasons for inflation of grades. The consequences shows the reasons of the inflation of grades consist of four parts: Institution characteristics, education and training, quality and other factors that determine the promotion rate at the university. Analysis of open responses showed that higher grading was common in universities due to the presence of visiting teachers, inadequate teachers for students, and concerns about student motivation and behavior.

2. The next result is determined according to the results of the research conducted by looking at the opinions of university teachers on the outcome of the inflation of grades. The results showed that six of the seven statements, "student effort, unskilled graduates, poor job performance, and declining tuition," were the outcomes of inflation of grades.

3. The final result touches on the views of university teachers and administrators regarding solutions to reduce the rate of inflation of grades at university level. The results of the study show that the solutions taken by changing and criticizing the delivery marks product and its reliability and maintaining the level of the quality assessment model and receiving the highest approval are important to reduce the inflation of grades at higher education level. Moreover, analysis of open questions showed that there are 6 main points to solve the inflation of grades; these are use of rubrics, dynamic grading systems, evaluation of academic recommendations, and creation of rankings instead of GPA, teacher training programs, regulations for teachers' student evaluation, use of pass/fail grades.

Recommendations for Future Research

This section offers suggestions for future research and evaluation. Based on the results of this research, the following recommendations were made:

1. According to the results of this study, students achieve high grades, so this study needs to be repeated for undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral students in all universities in Pakistan. This will help to evaluate the present condition of the grading system of the universities.

2. This study includes a survey of students to understand their views on grading and other grading related issues in higher educational institutions, So that the problem of students should be solved.
3. Similar studies should be conducted regularly in various institutions in Pakistan and results should be linked and compare with other school communities, teaching professionals, teachers and administrators.
4. The study also suggest that it is important to consider the views of other groups and senior leaders who have trust and influence in setting laws, standards and benchmarks.

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