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Meanings, Values, and Grading Practices in Estimating University Grades: An-Najah National University in Palestine as a Model

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Abstract: The research aimed to identify the assessment practices used in the grading process and meanings included in them and the values that are taken into account in estimating grades at An-Najah National University, and to compare them between the colleges of the university. The sample consisted of (301) faculty members. To achieve the objectives of the study, the researcher used a tool that consisted of nine evaluation positions. The results of the research indicated that the assessment practices differed in different faculties, and the score is closely related to the effort exerted by the student, and sometimes it is related to the values of compassion and mercy. and the course requirements must be fulfilled because it is an integral part of it. sometimes faculty members in some faculties appeal to the values of compassion and mercy in case the student's situation requires that, this is after examining the student's effort, economic status, or social circumstances. The research recommends that the process of converting raw score into letter grade should be clear for all faculty members, and they should be trained on it. The study also recommends re-conducting the survey in other universities, and linking the assessment practices, their meanings, and values with other factors such as the years of experience which the faculty member spent in education and the academic rank.

Keywords: Meanings and Values, Messick's Theory of Validity, Instructors Grading Practices, Letter Grading System

1. Introduction

Observing students' grades is considered to be one of the evaluation purposes in university teaching, and it can be said that these grades are a mirror that reflects their achievement level and the university's responsibility towards the students, and the effectiveness of teaching practices [14]. The grading practices at institutions of higher education differ on each institution according to its educational system, and its objectives. The matter goes deeper than that, it also differs depending on each department evaluation practices inside the same university, and it depends on the level of strictness for each faculty member inside the same department. It can also differ depending on the inconsistency of the practices of the same faculty member at the beginning of the semester than at the end of the semester, or from one semester to another [19]. Moreover, other study confirmed that the discrepancy in the grading systems in Jordanian universities may lead students of the same ability level to earn different marks according to the different grading systems, which affects the fairness and equity in higher education admission and employment decisions [1].

The marks students acquire in university serve as signals sent to the labor market regarding the quality of graduates, achievement levels, progress, and mastery [8, 9]. Furthermore, there are complaints that institutions and recruitment committees under-rely on university marks as indicators of academic achievement, and instead, they look at marks for certain tests, this results in reducing the credibility of the marks and the overall appreciation of students severely [18].

Thoendel, S has pointed out three consistent effects that arise when misusing the letter grading system; these three impacts are; reduce the student's interest in actual learning, increase the frequency of students choosing the easiest task, and lessen the quality of the student's thinking [21]. When evaluating and giving marks to students, experienced faculty members usually

depend on knowledge regarding the performance the student is expected to achieve [10]. McMillan, J has also highlighted one of the most challenging issues in grading, which is how to deal with non-achievement factors such as effort, work habits, and motivation. These are considered academic enablers that teachers tend to consider when grading as significant attributes for achieving the end result by students [12]. Randall, J., & Engelhard, G have concluded that grading relies primarily on the student's achievement, and in some cases, other characteristics such as motivation, behavior, and effort are taken into consideration [16].

Baron, P. A. B has pointed in his study that there is a lack of coherence in beliefs about the criteria of a grading scale, teachers often have different opinions about the purposes of grading, and fail to agree with their colleagues about the practice of grading [6].

Many Arab and foreign studies have been conducted on the subject of grading systems and evaluation methods, and these studies have varied in terms of the objective and the adopted grading system. Brookhart's study [7] aimed to identify the reasons behind teachers' decisions in assigning grades, and it concluded that teachers consider grades as a form of payment or reward given to students for their performance. The results of the study [5] showed that the meaning of the grade is closely related to the effort the student gives; in other words, the greater the effort given, the higher the grade assigned. Also, teachers are concerned about the values when assigning the grades, especially the value of fairness. The results of [18] indicated that faculty members depend on academic and non-academic factors in the grading process. It also indicated that the meaning of the grade is closely related to the student work; the mark the students get is their payment for the effort they gave, moreover, instructors were very attentive when assigning grades to the values of justice and fairness and the values of mercy and compassion. In the same context, in [6] examined the congruency in the meanings of grades between those who determine the grades and those who use the grades. Moreover, one of the most notable findings of the study was that there is a considerable agreement between them regarding the meaning of grades, despite the different beliefs about the grade.

Randall, J., & Engelhard, G have sought to clarify the meanings of grades, and the factors that teachers take into consideration when assigning the final grades. The results showed that supervisors abided by the official grading policy, and assigned grades based on achievement under various circumstances, and on non-achievement factors in some cases [16]. Sun, Y., & Cheng, L concluded that the meaning of grades is related to two concepts; judgment of students' work in terms of effort, fulfillment of the requirement, and quality, and judgment of students' learning in terms of academic enablers, (i.e. non-achievement factors such as habit, attitude, and motivation that are deemed important for students' ultimate achievement), improvement, learning process, as well as achievement [20].

With regard to grading systems, Abu-awwad, F & Al-Anati, J extrapolated the grading systems of the top ten universities within the International Standard Classification (Shanghai) for the year 2015. The most notable conclusions of the study were the predominance of the letter grading system in universities except Oxford, which uses a percentage-based grading system, the lack of predetermination of the values of each letter in these universities, and the focus on the real evaluation of activities and tasks that apply content in meaningful purposes and benefit the student in his future work. Moreover, the assessment systems emphasize the use of quantitative and qualitative data, and diversification of examination formats [2].

Neigel, S analyzed gradebooks to triangulate teacher practices and perspectives regarding the meaning of student grades using Gap Analysis Framework, to determine teachers' practices and views on the meaning of grades using the Gap Analysis Framework, and the findings of this assessment revealed that teachers owned knowledge about assessment and the motivation to apply it, but faced organizational barriers implementing effective practices in the grading system [15]. Riley, T., & Ungerleider, C found that grading and the interpretation of grades are integral facets of teachers' work. However, professors find it difficult to explain the inferences drawn from grades and the decisions they make based upon grades [17].

Messick's Theory of Validity Applied to Grading

The meanings and values included in the mark are related to Messick's theory related to determining the validity of the interpretation of grades and their various uses [7, 13]. Messick's Theory is based on both meaning and values, and this is evident in determining the two facets of validity; the intended function of the score (interpretation and use), and the source of justification (based on the appraisal of evidence or consequence) [20]. And by crossing these two facets, the four categories of validity are determined:

1. Construct Validity: This is achieved when there is practical evidence for the interpretation of scores and finding meanings for them, the construct validity is considered to be the basis for different aspects of validity.
2. Relevance and Utility: This is achieved when the grades are related with the purpose for which they are used and their value appears in achieving it, and they are considered as evidence of the validity of the use, and the relevance and utility depend on the meaning of the score.
3. Value Implications: VI has a distinct role when the results of the interpretation are taken into account as indications of the interpretation validity, and it depends on the meaning of the score and the relevance of that meaning to the purpose for which it is used.
4. Social Consequences: SC has a significant role when the results and consequences of the use of grades are taken into account as indications of the validity of grades, and this depends on the meaning of the grade and its relevance to purpose and the consequences of interpretation and use [5, 18, 20]. Brookhart, S. M stressed that it is difficult to separate the interpretation

of grades and their uses, as the use function drives the interpretation function, and interpretation is the heart of the use. Thus, the two-dimensional Messick matrix can be collapsed into uni-dimensionality, this is when applied to teachers' reasoning about grades. This encourages the process of adding these justifications to a continuum whose value increases with the increase of validity meanings. The justifications in the first and second levels revolve around the meaning of the score in the first place, while the justifications in the third and fourth levels are related to the value assessments that respect the process of assigning grades or resulting from their use [7].

2. Study Procedures

2.1. Study Problem and Questions

Higher education in Palestine has recently witnessed an unusual growth in the number of universities and their ability to attract students [11]. Palestinian higher education institutions differ in terms of the used grading systems. The adopted system at An-Najah National University in Palestine is the letter grading system, and according to this system, each faculty member has to put a standard for each mark. The student's mark is measured based on his attainment of certain levels of knowledge, skill, or competence. The evaluation standards are predetermined and known by the student, this enables him to direct his efforts to obtain the mark to which he aspires [10]. Table 1 displays the classification of grades adopted by An-Najah National University.

Table 1. *The classification of grades adopted by An-Najah National University.*

Result	Letter value	Percentage	Letter grade
Pass	4.0	90-100	A
Pass	3.75	88-89.99	A-
Pass	3.5	85-87.99	B+
Pass	3.0	80-84.99	B
Pass	2.75	78-79.99	B-
Pass	2.5	74-77.99	C+
Pass	2.0	70-73.99	C
Pass	1.75	65-69.99	C-
Pass	1.5	63-64.99	C-
Pass	1.0	60-62.99	D
Fail	0.75	45-59.99	D-
Fail	0.0	0-44.99	E

Source [3].

Students are expelled from the program if they cannot raise their GPA to 2.0 or higher in medical and engineering programs, and to 1.70 or higher in the rest of the university's faculties [3]. This study highlights the comparison of practices used in the assessment of university grades and the meanings and values considered in the assessment process among colleges at An-Najah National University in Palestine. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. Do the meanings of the grades and the values that faculty members consider in the assessment process differ between the Humanities, Scientific and Medical colleges at An-Najah National University?
2. Do the grading practices adopted by faculty members in the assessment process for university grades differ between Humanities, Scientific and Medical faculties at An-Najah National University?

2.1.1. Study Objectives

This study aimed to compare the grading practices utilized by faculty members in the process of estimating university grades between the Humanities and Sciences faculties and the Health and Medical Sciences faculties at An-Najah National University. It also aimed to identify the meanings for the grades assigned and the values that faculty members consider in the assessment process, and to compare between the meanings of the assigned grade, the considered values, and the practices followed in the assessment process in each of the Humanities and Sciences faculties and the faculties and the Health and Medical Sciences faculties at An-Najah National University.

2.1.2. The Importance of the Study

This study acquires its importance from the importance of university grades; its significance lies in providing a more transparent view of the values and meanings involved in the process of estimating university grades in different faculties, and revealing the practices of faculty members utilized in estimating and assigning these grades in An-Najah University faculties**.** This offers an information base that clarifies the achievement and non-achievement factors that affect the process of estimating grades, and places it in the faculty members and decision-makers in universities. This enhances the credibility of the grades and justifies their use for various purposes.

2.2. Study Approach

This study followed the descriptive-analytical approach because it's suitable for the purposes of the study. Both qualitative and quantitative analysis methods were used for the study data.

2.3. Study Community

The study community consists of (622) faculty members who are at the head of their work at An-Najah National University for the academic year 2018/2019, distributed among all faculties [4].

2.4. Study Sample

The sample of the study consisted of 301 faculty members in various faculties of the university, and the sample was selected through the stratified random sampling method, the university was stratified according to the faculties mentioned in Table 2, then a simple random sample was selected from each faculty whose capacity is proportional to the number of faculty members in it of different academic ranks, using the

Sample Size Calculator Software available on the website (www.surveysystem.com) at a confidence level of (95%). The sizes of the stratified samples were calculated based on the faculties mentioned in Table 2, using R Studio by downloading the necessary packages (PPS, Sampling Survey Matrix, and Survival).

Table 2. *Distribution of sample members by university faculties.*

Number	College	Class
32	Humanities	Humanities faculties
45	Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences	
8	Faculty of Sharia	
15	Faculty of Educational Sciences and Teacher Preparation	
12	Faculty of Fine Arts	
11	Faculty of Law	
123	total	
37	Faculty of Science	Scientific faculties
66	Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology	
5	Agricultural Engineering	
108	Total	
63	Human Medicine and Health Sciences	Health and Medical Sciences faculties
7	Veterinary Medicine	
70	Total	
301	Overall Total	

It's noted from Table 2 that the sample size for the Humanities faculties is 123 members, the Scientific faculties sample is 108 members, and as for the Health and Medical Sciences faculties it consists of 70 members.

2.5. Study Tool

The study applied nine evaluation scenarios or situations, related to the grading process. The scenarios are divided into four groups: scenarios related to effort and ability (three scenarios), scenarios related to not fulfilling the requirements of the program (two scenarios), scenarios related to progress and improvement (two scenarios), and scenarios related to stress and social scenarios resulting in expulsion from the university (two scenarios). Each scenario includes two or three choices regarding the faculty member's attitude when facing these scenarios (Appendix 1). Each faculty member is required to justify his reasoning behind selecting the choice, this is done by answering the posed question, "Why did you make this choice?" This aims to determine the considerations taken into account by a faculty member in assigning grades. The responses to the posed question are answered by giving the value (1) for the response at the level of construct validity, the value (2) for the responses at the level of relevance and utility, the value (3) for responses at the level of value implications, and the value (4) for the responses at the level of social consequences.

Validity and reliability of the study tool

All evaluation scenarios were introduced to nine arbitrators specialized in measurement and assessment, Arabic language, or teaching in universities, this is to determine if the scenarios are suitable for the purposes of study. Furthermore, these scenarios have been modified to fit the letter grading system adopted by An-Najah National University, in addition to that, some language formulations have been modified based on the feedback provided by the arbitrators. The survey tool was applied to a sample consisting of 20 faculty members from different faculties, and then reapplied after two weeks on the same individuals, in order to ensure the stability of the survey tool. The resolution of responses to the posed question was measured using Spearman and Pearson correlation coefficients and Kappa coefficients, and for choices, the Kappa coefficient was used, moreover, all values were acceptable for study purposes. Table 3 displays the values of the Pearson, Spearman, and Kappa coefficients for each assessment scenario.

Table 3. *Values of Pearson, Spearman, and Kappa coefficients for each assessment scenario.*

Kappa coefficient value for choices	Kappa coefficient value for the posed question	Spearman	Pearson	The assessment scenario.
0.50	0.53	0.78	0.83	The first
0.58	0.59	0.94	0.92	The second
0.83	0.5	0.84	0.85	The third
0.74	0.75	0.92	0.91	The fourth
0.85	0.77	0.91	0.92	The fifth
0.68	0.76	0.95	0.95	The sixth
0.85	0.72	0.95	0.96	The seventh
0.89	0.66	0.77	0.83	The eighth
0.78	0.85	0.96	0.97	The ninth

2.6. Statistical Processing

The constant comparative method was used to analyze the qualitative responses to the open-ended question. This method includes examining all responses that give the same score value, examining them in comparison with each other, and classifying them within categories

or indicators that are symptomatic of the level of validity each represents according to Messick's theory. Frequencies were calculated for each of the choices and open question grades in each scenario. The table of correspondence for choices and scores was created, and the chi-square (χ^2) was used to examine the extent to which the values of the justifications for selection differ according to the choices adopted in estimating the scores.

3. Study Results

First: Do the assessment practices used by faculty members in the process of estimating university grades differ between Humanities, Scientific faculties, and Medical faculties at An-Najah National University?

Table 4 presents the distribution of assessment practices in the evaluation scenarios related to effort and ability according to each faculty.

Table 4. *The distribution of assessment practices in evaluation scenarios related to effort and ability according to each faculty.*

sig	χ^2	Percentage	Total	Faculty			The assessment practice	Scenario
				Medical	Scientific	Humanities		
0.005	14.7	86%	243	67	90	86	A	
		6%	16	0	4	12	B	The first
		8%	23	2	10	11	C	
		100%	282	69	104	109	Total	
0.004	11.22	59%	168	29	70	69	A	
		41%	117	40	35	42	B	The second
		100%	285	69	105	111	Total	
0.014	12.43	93%	265	69	100	96	A	
		5%	13	0	4	9	B	The third
		2%	6	0	1	5	C	
		100%	284	69	105	110	Total	

The results of the chi-square (χ^2) in Table 4, indicate that there is a variation in the adopted grading practices for each faculty through the three scenarios.

Table 5, presents the distribution of assessment practices in evaluation scenarios related to not submitting the assignments of the course according to each faculty.

Table 5. *The distribution of assessment practices in evaluation scenarios related to not submitting the assignments of the course according to each faculty.*

sig	χ^2	Percentage	Total	Faculty			The assessment practice	Scenario
				Medical	Scientific	Humanities		
0.17	6.46	16%	46	12	14	20	A	
		67%	188	50	67	71	B	The fourth
		17%	48	7	25	16	C	
		100%	282	69	106	107	Total	
0.001	17.95	83%	232	67	80	85	A	
		16%	45	2	24	19	B	The fifth
		1%	3	0	0	3	C	
		100%	280	69	104	107	Total	

The results of the chi-square (χ^2) in Table 5, indicate that there are no differences in the grading practices of different faculties in the fourth scenario, while the results of the chi-square (χ^2) indicate the difference in grading practices for each faculty in the fifth scenario.

Table 6, presents the distribution of assessment practices in evaluation scenarios related to improvement according to each faculty.

Table 6. *The distribution of assessment practices in evaluation scenarios related to improvement according to each faculty.*

sig	χ^2	Percentage	Total	Faculty			The assessment practice	Scenario
				Medical	Scientific	Humanities		
0.78	0.51	57.80%	159	38	58	63	A	
		42.20%	121	30	48	43	B	The sixth
		100%	280	68	106	106	Total	
0.35	2.074	86%	242	63	89	90	A	
		14%	39	6	16	17	B	The seventh
			281	69	105	107	Total	

The results of the chi-square (χ^2) in Table 6, indicate that the grading practices did not differ on each faculty in the sixth and seventh scenarios.

Table 7. *The distribution of assessment practices in evaluation scenarios related to expulsion from the university according to each faculty.*

sig	χ^2	Percentage	Total	Faculty			The assessment practice	Scenario
				Medical	Scientific	Humanities		
0.004	10.9	49%	139	45	50	44	A	
		51%	143	23	57	63	B	The eighth
		100%	282	68	107	107	Total	
0.031	6.97	96%	272	68	103	101	A	
		4%	12	1	2	9	B	The ninth
		100%	284	69	105	110	Total	

The results of the chi-square (χ^2) in Table 7, indicate that the grading practices differ on each faculty in the eighth and ninth scenarios.

The results of the chi-square (χ^2) test analysis revealed that there is variance in the grading practices in different faculties in most of the evaluation scenarios at the level of significance ($\alpha = 0.05$), and the grading practices did not vary among each faculty in the fourth scenario which is related to not fulfilling some of the course requirements.

Assessment practices vary from one faculty to another and from one instructor to another, these differences occur for reasons such as, when teachers give the student the due grade without increase or decrease, they examine the student's achievement in the course as the main factor when assigning the grade, in addition to monitoring the quality of the work done, and the effort spent. On the other hand, the student is given the due grade as a matter of commitment to the university's evaluation systems. Moreover, instructors who raise the student's grade to the passing grade consider the grade as a tool that performs an effective role in motivating and encouraging students, especially students with low capabilities. As for the students with high capabilities, they tend to only encourage without raising the grade assigned, this is also the case for students with medium capabilities.

As for situations like not fulfilling the requirement of the course, the assessment practices do not vary in each faculty in the fourth evaluation scenario, while the practices vary in each faculty in the fifth evaluation scenario at the level of significance ($\alpha = 0.05$) In the fourth evaluation scenario, the student did well in exams but did not fulfill the course requirements (submitting the required repost or assignment or completing the practical part), thus despite the effort spent in the exams, 67% of the faculty members' assessment practices tend to give the student a score of zero in the assignment, and consider that the assigned grade is equal to the sum of the points obtained in the other course requirements.

This adopted practice is a way to show that the grade assigned represents in a way the student's achievement during the course in the first place, in addition to emphasizing the importance of fulfilling the course requirements as they are an integral part of the course and the final grade. Furthermore, the practices of the faculty members who raised the final grade for the student either by excluding the points for the requirements from the total sum, or by giving the student's half of the points for the required assignment, their actions can be because these instructors observed the effort the student gave in the exams, also they believe the student with great abilities that's why this should be considered when assigning the final grade. In the fifth evaluation scenario, which is if the student exams' scores were average in addition to not fulfilling the course requirements, in that case, the faculty members practices differ from one faculty to another; 83% of the faculty members adapted practices tend to give the student a score of zero in the requirement that he did not fulfill, and thus the final grade will be the sum of the exams and requirement scores, this is applied in Medical faculties in particular and the rest of the faculties in general. Besides, some faculty members in the Humanities and Scientific faculties tend to raise the student's points to the passing grade to help him avoid failure in the course because of not fulfilling all the course's requirements. This act is because the instructors follow this practice. After all, the teachers consider the effort paid by the student, i.e. the student with average abilities did not give much effort in the exams nor did he fulfill the course's requirements. The practices of the faculty members show that they measure in both scenarios the student's effort, i.e. if the student fulfilled the requirements of the course, and the scores he obtained in the exams, this means that they evaluate the students based on their abilities. This explains why there is a variation in the adopted assessment practices, since the final grade depends on the student's abilities; for example, the hard-working student was assessed based on his achievement first, then some faculty members tried to help the student to keep a good mark in the course. As for the average student, he was assessed based on the effort spent in the course, and since he did not spend enough effort, the final grade will be equal to the sum of all scores.

The variations in assessment practices in most scenarios are due to the difference in the practices adopted by faculty members in each faculty, and the nature of the courses taught in this faculty. The courses in Humanities faculties focus on the theoretical part, and consider the practical part as a chance for the student to raise the final grade. In other words, they focus on the achievement, then the effort spent, and then the attendance, and lastly completing the activities related to the source. On the other hand, in Scientific faculties, especially engineering, and faculties of Health and Medical Sciences, the courses are more focused on the practical part, and the practical part is seen as a complementary part in the course, and the student cannot pass the course without completing it. In these faculties, the focus on the student's achievement is equal to the focus on the requirements he has fulfilled. Scientific faculties, especially Engineering, and Health and Medical Sciences faculties aim to teach the student the necessary skills to be an effective member of the community, who is capable of serving his country and its citizens. The results presented in the survey agree with many

previous studies, including, Sun, Y., & Cheng, L indicated that the grading practices at institutions of higher education differ on each institution according to its educational system, and its objectives [20]. The matter goes deeper than that, it also differs depending on each department's evaluation practices inside the same university, and it depends on the level of strictness for each faculty member inside the same department. It can also differ depending on the inconsistency of the practices of the same faculty member at the beginning of the semester than at the end of the semester, or from one semester to another. Moreover, students' grades are considered to be one of the evaluation purposes in university teaching, and it can be said that these grades are a mirror that reflects their achievement level and the university's responsibility towards the students, and the effectiveness of teaching practices [14].

Second: Do the meanings of the grades and the values that faculty members consider in the assessment process differ between the Humanities, Scientific and Medical colleges at An-Najah National University?

Table 8, presents the results from the qualitative analysis of teachers' justifications in the first and second levels in Humanities, Sciences, and Medical faculties, according to Messick's theory of validity.

Table 8. *The results from the qualitative analysis of teachers' justifications in the first and second levels in Humanities, Sciences, and Medical faculties, according to Messick's theory of validity.*

Examples of responses	responses	Response group	Level
1) I assign the student's grade without change since it's difficult to give extra points within the university grading system. 2) I keep the student's grade as it is because the university system doesn't allow teachers to raise the grade. 3) The student's grade is restricted to academic achievement according to the university grading systems.	330	The assigned grades are obtained with achievement measures to the university grading and assessment systems	
1) The student puts a lot of effort into exams. 2) The grade is an assessment of the quality of the student's performance. 3) The student was given a score of zero in the assignment he did not submit.	612	The grade means the quality of the work and is the payment for the work achieved	1
1) Practical assignments are part of the course and are included in the final grade. 2) The final grade is the sum of the student's sub scores.	173	The mark is a calculated value	
1) The student showed an improvement in the grades achieved. 2) Performance improvement in the final exam is of great importance between exams.	73	The grade means improvement in performance	
1) The student did not make any use of the opportunities available to him to prove his ability. 2) The student did not fulfill the necessary effort to reach the required grade.	120	Internal evidence interpreting the meaning	2
1) Exam conditions do not serve the student. 2) Certain circumstances have affected the student and are among the reasons for his low grade.	31	External evidence interpreting the meaning	

It is noted from Table 8 that the grade has multiple meanings, it means the quality of the work and the volume of effort expended in the first place, and it is thus the payment for the work performed. The grade means the academic achievement as determined by the University's grading systems, and thus serves as a compilation of the grade of various assessment factors. The grade also represents the improvement in the student's performance. Internal and external evidence are displayed, which serves as explanations and justification for these meanings. The university faculty member often views the university grade as a form of payment, as it reflects the level the student deserves in return for the work, the effort, and the progress and improvement that he has achieved. Some consider the university grade as the quantitative representation of achievement.

Table 9, presents the results from the qualitative analysis of teachers' justifications in the third and fourth levels in Humanities, Sciences, and Medical faculties, according to Messick's theory of validity.

Table 9. *The results from the qualitative analysis of teachers' justifications in the third and fourth levels in Humanities, Sciences, and Medical faculties, according to Messick's theory of validity.*

Examples of responses	Number of responses	Response group	Level
1) Achieving justice and equality among students. 2) He deserves the grade for not submitting the assignment. 3) Adhere to clear and stated foundations of the grading system. 4) Taking into account individual differences in the evaluation criteria.	753	Fairness, justice, and commitment values	3
1) I helped the student because he executed a notable effort. 2) I raise the grade because it's close to the passing score. 3) I don't give zero as a grade for the assignments because this is cruel and unjust.	32	Values of compassion and mercy	
1) To encourage the student and acknowledge his efforts to improve his learning in the future. 2) To increase the student's motivation and acknowledge his improvement. 3) Expulsion from the university is more harmful than adding five grades.	251	Results related to the student's university education	
1) So as not to disturb the student's self-confidence. 2) To be able to carry the responsibility. 3) Expulsion from the university has a negative impact on the student and community. 4) To have an active role in the community and ensure good results.	167	Results related to the student as an individual in the community	4

It can be seen from Table 9 that faculty members at An-Najah National University consider a set of values in their assessment practices. They appeal to the values of honesty, justice, and commitment in the first place, through their pursuit of equality between students, adherence to the agreed assessment criteria, and diversification in assessment criteria while considering individual differences between students. The faculty members also consider the values of mercy in some cases, which they attribute to the social consequences of the grade and its use, whether at the individual or community level. That's because they are well aware of the consequences of being expelled from the university, and at the same time, they are conscious of the consequences of weak educational outcomes for the community. Table 10, presents the distribution of the justifications for the assessment practices in the evaluation scenarios related to effort and ability according to each faculty.

Table 10. *The distribution of the justifications for the assessment practices in the evaluation scenarios related to effort and ability according to each faculty.*

sig	χ^2	Total	Level of justification				Faculty	Scenario
			SC (4)	VI (3)	RU (2)	CV (1)		
0.368	6.52	109	10	29	6	64	Humanities	
		104	5	20	4	75	Scientific	
		69	4	19	1	45	Medical	The first
		282	19	68	11	184	Total	
		100%	7%	24%	4%	65%	Percentage	
0.594	4.61	111	30	34	12	35	Humanities	
		105	21	36	12	36	Scientific	
		69	11	20	9	29	Medical	The second
		285	62	90	33	100	Total	
		100%	22%	32%	12%	35%	Percentage	
0.471	5.59	110	7	31	7	65	Humanities	
		105	4	32	4	65	Scientific	
		69	3	21	0	45	Medical	The third
		284	14	84	11	175	Total	
		100%	5%	30%	4%	62%	Percentage	

The results of the chi-square (χ^2) in Table 10, indicate that there is no variation of the justifications for each faculty through the three scenarios. Table 11, presents the justifications for the assessment practices in evaluation scenarios related to not submitting the assignments of the course according to each faculty.

Table 11. *The justifications for the assessment practices in evaluation scenarios related to not submitting the assignments of the course according to each faculty.*

sig	χ^2	Total	Level of justification				Faculty	Scenario
			SC (4)	VI (3)	RU (2)	CV (1)		
0.189	8.74	107	1	62	10	34	Humanities	
		106	6	58	6	36	Scientific	
		69	5	30	5	29	Medical	The fourth
		282	12	150	21	99	Total	
		100%	4.30%	53.20%	7.40%	35.10%	Percentage	
0.01	16.78	107	7	55	12	33	Humanities	
		104	1	64	8	31	Scientific	
		69	5	24	6	34	Medical	The fifth
		280	13	143	26	98	Total	
		100%	5%	51%	9%	35%	Percentage	

The results of the chi-square (χ^2) in Table 11, indicate that there is no variation of the justifications for each faculty through the fourth scenario. The results of the chi-square (χ^2) indicate that there is a variation of the justifications for each faculty through the fifth scenario. Table 12, presents the justifications for the assessment practices in the evaluation scenarios related to improvement according to each faculty.

Table 12. *The justifications for the assessment practices in the evaluation scenarios related to improvement according to each faculty.*

sig	χ^2	Total	Level of justification				Faculty	Scenario
			SC (4)	VI (3)	RU (2)	CV (1)		
0.094	10.84	106	24	29	3	50	Humanities	
		106	28	21	3	54	Scientific	
		68	14	13	8	33	Medical	The sixth
		280	66	63	14	137	Total	
		100%	23.60%	22.50%	5%	48.9	Percentage	

sig	χ^2	Total	Level of justification				Faculty	Scenario
			SC (4)	VI (3)	RU (2)	CV (1)		
0.387	6.33	107	10	33	1	63	Humanities	
		105	9	32	0	64	Scientific	
		69	5	14	2	48	Medical	The seventh
		281	24	79	3	175	Total	
		100%	8.50%	28.10%	1.10%	62.30%	Percentage	

The results of the chi-square (χ^2) in Table 12, indicate that there is no variation of the justifications for each faculty through the sixth and seventh scenarios.

Table 13 presents the justifications of assessment practices in evaluation scenarios related to expulsion from the university according to each faculty.

Table 13. *The justifications of assessment practices in evaluation scenarios related to expulsion from the university according to each faculty.*

sig	χ^2	Total	Level of justification				Faculty	Scenario
			SC(4)	VI(3)	RU(2)	CV(1)		
0.301	7.22	107	58	21	8	20	Humanities	
		107	60	13	6	28	Scientific	
		68	32	8	7	21	Medical	The eighth
		282	150	42	21	69	Total	
		100%	53.20%	14.90%	7.40%	24.50%	Percentage	
0.061	12.037	110	22	23	5	60	Humanities	
		105	17	23	2	63	Scientific	
		69	24	9	4	32	Medical	The ninth
		284	63	55	11	155	Total	
		100%	22.20%	19.40%	3.90%	54.60%	Percentage	

The results of the chi-square (χ^2) in Table 13, indicate that there is no variation of the justifications for each faculty through the eighth and ninth scenarios.

The results of the analysis of the chi-square test (χ^2) revealed that there is no variance in the justifications among the different faculties in most of the evaluation scenarios at the level of significance ($\alpha = 0.05$); in other words, the meaning and values which the faculty member considers in estimating the grade do not differ according to the faculty in most evaluation scenarios. However, there is a variation between the meanings and the values considered in the process of estimating the grade, and between the Humanitarian, Scientific and Medical faculties in the fifth scenario which is related to not fulfilling the course's requirement of not doing certain course requirements at the level of significance ($\alpha = 0.05$). Furthermore, the results in Table 11, related to the scenario of not fulfilling some of the course requirements, indicated that the justifications did not vary based on the nature of each faculty at the level of significance ($\alpha = 0.05$) in the fourth evaluation scenario. in other words, the faculty members resort to the values of justice and fairness when assigning the grade for the student who did not complete the course requirements; the reason behind that, is that they tend to assign the grade based on the quality of work and effort spent, and in order to achieve justice and equality among students when fulfilling the course requirements. While in the fifth evaluation scenario, that is when the students got an average score in exams and did not submit the required requirements, in that case, most of the faculty members in Medical faculties consider that fulfilling the requirement of the course is a basic condition to pass, their justifications is that the meaning behind the assigned grade is represented in the effort spent and the quality of the work performed. While most of the faculty members in the Humanities and Scientific faculties appeal to the values of justice, fairness, compassion, and mercy in their justifications. They also consider the social consequences the student will face because of the assigned grade, and its effect on the student in case of failure in the course which will be mostly negative. This result matches with Sawalmeh, Y who indicated that the meaning of the grade is closely related to the student work; the mark the students get is their payment for the effort they gave, moreover, instructors were very attentive when assigning grades to the values of justice and fairness and the values of mercy and compassion [18].

These results can be explained, that according to the faculty members especially in the faculties of Health and Medical Sciences, it's very important to fulfill the course requirements as they are an integral part of the course, and even if there is an improvement in the student's performance it's still not enough to pass the course without completing these requirements These findings are consistent with several studies including, Sun, Y., & Cheng, L concluded that the meaning of grades is related to two concepts; judgment of students' work in terms of effort, fulfillment of the requirements, and quality, and judgment of students' learning in terms of academic enablers, (i.e. non-achievement factors such as habit, attitude and motivation that are deemed important for students' ultimate achievement), improvement, learning process, as well as achievement [20]. Also Riley, T., & Ungerleider, C showed that teachers abided by the official grading policy, and assigned grades based on achievement under various circumstances, and on non-achieving factors in some cases [17].

4. Conclusions

After examining and discussing the results, I conclude that the assigned grade is closely related to the effort the

student spent in the course, and the course requirements must be fulfilled because it is an integral part of it. Moreover, it's observed that sometimes faculty members in some faculties appeal to the values of compassion and mercy in case the student's situation requires that, this is after examining the student's effort, economic status, or social circumstances.

The study recommends that the mechanism for converting the student's percentage into a symbol or letter should be clear to faculty members in all faculties, and they would be trained on how to apply it. Also, the faculty members must be provided with a list containing the students' names who are on the verge of getting expelled from the university at the beginning of each semester, this is to allow them to take the necessary measures and help these students. The study also recommends re-conducting the survey in other universities, and linking the assessment practices, their meanings, and values with other factors such as the years of experience which the faculty member spent in education and the academic rank.

Appendix

Scenarios related to the effort spent:

The first scenario: The provided information about Ahmad indicates that he possesses high academic abilities. Through your evaluation of his performance in the course, it was seen that his performance exceeded the average score for the students of the course, but still, his performance did not represent his best abilities. In other words, the effort he spent was in the minimal, but because of his high abilities, his work in the course looked well. In this case, you will:

1. Give Ahmad a grade based on the quality of his work compared to others and overlook the lack of the spent effort.
2. Lower Ahmed's grade because he didn't put too much effort into the course.
3. Raise Ahmad's grade to encourage him to work harder in the future.

Why did you make this choice?.....

The second scenario: The provided information about Ahmad indicates that he has low academic abilities. Through your evaluation of his performance in the course, it was seen that he is putting great effort into the course, as he submits all the assignments on time, and often visits the office before the exam in order to ask for help regarding what is difficult for him in the study subject. But his final grade in the course was D, In this case, you will:

1. Give Ahmad extra points until he reaches the passing grade since he gave so much effort in this course.
2. Keep Ahmad's grade the same.

Why did you make this choice?.....

The third scenario: The provided information about Ahmad indicates that he has average academic abilities. Through your evaluation of his performance in the course, it was noticed that he did not put much effort into completing the assignments, so he could do better than that, and as a result, he got a C in this course. In that case, you will:

1. Give Ahmad the grade that represents the quality of his work without paying attention to the amount of effort spent, and therefore he will get a C.
2. Give Ahmad a higher grade to encourage him to spend more effort.
3. Give Ahmad a lower grade because he did not spend much effort in the course.
4. Why did you make this choice?.....

Scenarios related to not fulfilling some of the course requirements:

The fourth scenario: Exams make up 70% of the course grade, and the research report (or practical test) makes up 30%. Ahmed got a score of 80% in the exams, but he did not submit the research report despite your constant reminders. In this case, you will:

1. Exclude the points from the assignment when calculating the final grade, and give Ahmad an 80 in this course.
2. Give Ahmad a zero for not submitting the research paper, therefore his final grade will be 56.
3. Give Ahmed half the points of the research report and therefore his final grade will be 71 in the course.

Why did you make this choice?.....

The fifth scenario: The first test makes up 15% of the course grade, 15% for the second test, 50% for the final exam, and 20% for submitting the assignments. Ahmed got a score of 8 in the first test, 12 in the second test, 35 in the final test, but he did not submit any assignments despite your constant reminders, in that case, you will:

1. Give Ahmed zero points for not submitting the assignments and therefore his final grade will be 55 in the course.
2. I exclude the assignment's score from the overall grade, therefore his grade will be 69.
3. Consider that Ahmad got a full score in the assignments, and thus his final grade will be 75.

Why did you make this choice?.....

Scenarios related to improvement:

The sixth scenario: The first test makes up 25% of the course grade, 25% for the second test, and 50% for the final exam. Ahmad got a score of 8 in the first test, 12 in the second test, and 35 in the final test, in this case, you will:

1. Give Ahmad a grade of 55 based on the sum of all the points he acquired.
2. Give Ahmad the passing grade "60" because there was an improvement in his performance.

Why did you make this choice?.....

The seventh scenario: The first test makes up 25% of the course grade, 25% for the second test, and 50% for the final exam. Ahmad got a score of 15 in the first test, 20 in the second test, and 45 in the final test, in this case, you will:

1. Give Ahmad a grade of 80 based on the sum of all the points he acquired.
2. Give Ahmad 85 points because there was an improvement in his performance.

Why did you make this choice?.....

Scenarios related to being expelled from the university:

The eighth scenario: Ahmed is threatened with expulsion after his GPA went under 1.69, his final grades in all the courses were submitted except for the course you are teaching. To avoid suspension, it appears that he needs to get at least 60 points in your course. However, his final grade was 55, in this case, you will:

1. I will give Ahmed 55 points for it's the grade he deserves.
2. I will give Ahmad 60 points in the final grade so he won't be expelled from the university.

Why did you make this choice?.....

* In Medical and Engineering faculties the student is threatened with expulsion for a low GPA of 1.99.

The ninth scenario: Ahmed is threatened with expulsion after his GPA went under 1.69, his final grades in all the courses were submitted except for the course you are teaching. To avoid suspension, it appeared that he needs to get at least 70 points in your course, however, his final grade was 55, in this case, you will:

1. I will give Ahmed 55 points for it's the grade he deserves.
2. I will give Ahmad 70 points in the final grade so he won't be expelled from the university.

Why did you make this choice?.....

* In Medical and Engineering faculties the student is threatened with expulsion for a low GPA of 1.99.

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