

INVESTIGATING FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR GRADE INFLATION IN COLLEGE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates factors responsible for grade inflation in college education. Grade inflation and grading leniency is something really dangerous in academia has been seen as a controversial issue in tertiary education because it could endanger the whole education process. Grade inflation cannot be viewed as an improvement in students' intellectual abilities rather than just a misleading thing which works as an ineffective tool for communicating students' real abilities. This an attempt to find out instructors' views about institutional, instructional, and pedagogical factors that contribute to grade inflation in college education and to provide insight s and strategies of dealing with this problem. 40 college instructors were surveyed and relevant literature with regard to different responsible factors related to grade inflation were reviewed and discussed. The findings from surveys have shown that instructors believed that institutional and instructional factors such as student evaluations are the main factor behind grade inflation. Some suggestions and recommendations were presented to solve this problem.

Keyword: grade inflation, college education, student evaluations, instructional factors, institutional factors

1. Overview

1.1 The Problem

Grade inflation is a sensitive topic in the tertiary education (Nagle,1998, p. 43).Research has shown that grade inflation has become as issue in tertiary education and study grades have been steadily increasing since 1960's (Astin, 1998 in Germain, nd,p.58).Grade inflation could be defined as '*oversupply of higher grades*' to students (Kassahun, 2008, p. 33). Grade inflation simply is "*an increasing proportion of excellent grades scored by college students without evidence of a concurrent increase in their actual performance*" (Kassahun, 2008, p. 33).This issue has been subject to debate for among practitioners and scholars for in all over the globe. Many scholars view it as an endemic problem due to its danger on the students' future which undermines the quality and credibility of higher education (Summerville et al., 1990; Shea, 1994; Mansfield, 2001; Winzer, 2002 in Kassahun, 2008). Boretz (2004) claims that the wide acceptance in academia of the phrase 'grade inflation' has damaged the academic ethos in general (p.46). Mansfield (2001) admits that giving A and A minus grades to 50% of the students seems unrealistic and show the grade inflation symptoms. This kind of assessment practices would never discriminate between the best from the very good, the very good from the good, and the good from the mediocre. Therefore, this kind of grade may pave the way for unwanted students to receive honor and this makes grades as meaningless (Summerville et al., 1990).Moreover, research has shown that student evaluations of faculty are considered to be one of the main factors responsible for grade inflation (Lichty et al., 1978; Zangenerhazadeh, 1988 in Kassahun, 2008, p. 34).Of course there are many other factors which could contribute to this problem. Therefore, this study attempts to investigate these major factors which might contributed to this problem by exploring faculty's views and suggestions to overcome this problem. The findings of these surveys are expected helps teachers and practitioners to adjust and verify their grading standards when evaluate their students. The paper argues that grading should be done in a way that which can discriminate between students on the basis of their performance variables and knowledge rather than on unethical basis.

1.2 Motivation & Significance

This is an investigative study which intended to review a number of studies on factors responsible for grade inflation and to survey teachers' perspectives and views about this problem and propose some solutions and procedures which could help in solving this problem. This study is motivated by the fact that grade inflation has become a prevalent phenomenon in English language teaching contexts particularly EFL and ESL ones. The findings of this study are expected to help teachers and provide insights to assessment practices and teaching as well.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to investigate factors that can contribute to grade inflation in an EFL context. The study aims to identify factors responsible for student grade inflation, to discover whether student evaluation to their teachers' teaching effectiveness is a major factor for grade inflation, and find out some solutions and procedures which could be used to overcome or at least or mitigate this problem.

1.4 Research Questions

1. Why do some instructors inflate their students' grades?
2. Do student evaluations to their instructors contribute to grade inflation?
3. What are the potential solutions to grade inflation problem?

2. Research Methodology

To realize the objectives behind this study; related literature has been reviewed. Further a questionnaire was distributed to EFL teachers to investigate their beliefs about factors responsible for grade inflation in their context and the possible procedures for solving this problem.

2.1 Participants

The participants of this study were 40 teachers from four institutions who have been teaching English as EFL/ESL for several years. These teachers were chosen randomly and on the basis of their availability and accessibility. These teachers are from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and they have been teaching English as EFL for a couple of years in Oman.

2.2 Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

The main method of data collection of this study was questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed by the researcher based on the reviewed of relevant literature to factors related to grade inflation. The questionnaire follows a 3-point-likert scales ranging from agree to disagree. It consists of four parts. Part one includes institutional factors responsible for grade inflation; part two centered on instructional factors; part three revolves round other significant factors such student evaluations to their instructors' teaching effectiveness as major contributing factor grade inflation, part four involves procedures for dealing with grade inflation and finally part five is open-ended which attempts to generate in-depth data from teachers to answer the study questions. The questionnaire was piloted and validated and some parts were modified and reworded. The questionnaire internal consistency was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha and it was found to be .710.

3. Theoretical Background

3.1 What is Grade Inflation?

The concept of 'grade inflation' has become increasingly common term in higher education with the past thirty years (Boretz, 2004, p.42). Grade inflation means *"an increase in grade point average without concomitant increase in achievement"* (Potter & Nyman 2001 cited in Boretz, 2004, p.42). This kind of increase is *"tied to social and moral decline"* (Eiszler 2002, p.447; McSpirit 2000a, 104 in Boretz, 2004, p.42). Research has shown that when student evaluations are higher when their grades are also higher (Eiszler, 2002, p.43 in Boretz, 2004, p.43). However, grade inflation is something *"very difficult to measure, since it presupposes that the students are measured along two measurement systems: one representing the grades, the other representing the underlying abilities that are graded"* (Wikstrom and Wikstrom, 2005, p.310).

3.2 Danger of Grade Inflation

Grade inflation has been seen as a controversial issue in tertiary education and it could endanger the education process because *"grade inflation has the potential to undermine the credibility of accounting education"* (Jr et al., 1997, p.273). Graduates who compete for scholarships, employment, or admission must have a real GPA above some threshold level in in order to get an opportunity to join one of the labor market or higher educational institutions. Moreover, accepting grade inflation as a practice would damage the academic ethos in general (Boretz, 2004, 46). The phrase "grade inflation" converts the knowledge or learning into a commodity with grade being the currency earned in exchange which has nothing to do with learning outcomes because institutional reputation and student proficiencies and competencies are the most important outcomes in the teaching–learning process(p.46). Most of employers and universities rely heavily on students' grades and information which transmitted by colleges as a credible signals of applicant ability when making hiring or admissions decisions (Wongsurawat, 2009, p.524). Employers use grades as an indicator of the candidate's level of knowledge, skill, achievement attained by student in a particular curriculum. Additionally, grades may reflect candidates' attitude towards work and its ethic and his ability to learn in the future (Jr et al., 1997, p.274). Therefore, the reliability of grades is something highly important

in employment, scholarships and admissions. Grade inflation was found to be high in Arts, English and Music Departments and low in Chemistry, Economics and Mathematics departments (Jr et al., 1997, p.274). Further, Stone (1995 in *ibid*) claims that grad inflation leads to budgetary waste as it allows too many students to enter and remain in publicly-funded institutions of higher education. In addition it leads to a fall in credibility of grades (Meng, 2000; Langbein, 2007 in Wongsurawat, 2009, p.525). Moreover, Krautmann (1990) asserts that "*grade inflation dilutes the signaling role of educational credentials in screening workers for labour market*" (p.59). Moreover, faculty members also can be harmed by grade inflation (Abbot, 2008, p.33). This can result in termination or any other unprofessional stigma.

3.3 *Factors Responsible for Grade Inflation*

Grade inflation is considered as one of the top ten unethical teacher behaviors which were provided by Crumbley and Smith (2009 cited in Crumbley, 2010) which are: 1) grade inflation; 2) reduce the course materials by dropping the most difficult parts; 3) give easy examinations (e.g. true-false; broad, open-ended questions; take home exams; and open book exams); 4) join the college party by giving classroom parties on student evaluation day; 5) giving out financial rewards such as establishing connections to potential employers; 6) spoon-feed watered-down material to students; 7) give answers to exam questions in advance-either pass them out in class or you want the students to work harder, put them on reserve in the library or on the internet; 8) Embarrassing students by calling on them in the classroom; 9) hand out sample of exams, or take your examination questions from the student's online exercises provided by the textbook publisher; and 10) grade on a wide curve (p.193). Therefore, grading leniency is something really dangerous in academia.

There are often two common forms of grading employed by teachers to grade their student in higher education institutions which are 'percentage grading' (criterion based), and 'grading on a curve' (norm referenced). The former one, the instructor fixes the learning outcomes and standards to be achieved by students. This method is criticized for being driven by the instructor's bias. Since the instructor develops the test there is no system to guarantee that the test is too difficult or too easy for the standard and level of the course, so that a disproportionate number of students may achieve very high or very low grades. The latter which is class-curve grading system is considered as 'less evil' (Hanna and Cashin, 1998 in Kassahun, 2005, p.36), because the spread and distribution of marks awarded by instructors may be wide or narrow but they will fit a normal distribution of a curve. This system is criticized of being fostering unhealthy competition among students and encourages cheating. Therefore, this grading system has been phased out or modified in many countries, leading to the problem of grade inflation (Kassahun, 2008, p.36).

3.3.1 *Institutional and Instructional Factors*

Research has shown that besides grading leniency, workload such course difficulty, workload and pace can affect student evaluations to their teachers and teaching effectiveness (Marsh & Roche's, 2000 in Centra, 2003, p.498). Further, Nagle (1998) claims that academic pressures to conduct research and publish may also contribute to grade inflation and this is it could be one of the institutional factors that cause grade inflation. Further research has shown that part-time or adjunct staff members who lack formal training on how to grade tend to inflate their student grades than permanent and full-time members because they assume that lenient grading would guarantee good student evaluations to their teaching (Basinger 1997; Nagle, 1998; Hardy 1997; McSpirt 2000a; Lanning and Perkins 1995; Landrum 1999; Gibson 2000; Potter and Nyman 2001; Eiszler 2002; Alper 1993 in Boretz, 2010, p.43). Further, other researchers have found that an instructor's grading policy and course difficulty can be significant and contributing factors in determining students' ratings and scores for their instructors' teaching effectiveness (Crumbley et al. 2010, p.190).

Moreover, instructional practices have been identified as the possible causes of grade inflation problems in the academia. Using "mastery learning" model of teaching and fixed criterion-referenced grading systems rather than curved-based or norm-referenced approaches have contributed to the problem of grades

inflations (Lanning & Perkins 199; Basinger 1997; Geisinger & Rabinowitz 1980; Olsen 1997 in Eiszler, 2002, p.485). Moreover, Foster and Foster (1998 in Eiszler, 2002, p. 486) assert that the use of part-time and adjunct faculty could be a contributing factor to grades inflation and this may be due to the ignorance to the system

Besides, Stones points out that the tendency of some of the institutions to use the policy which views a "student-as-customer" is more likely to contribute to grades inflation. Further, other scholars believe that leaving the use of student evaluations of faculty in personnel decisions is also considered to be a contributing factor for grades inflation (Goldman, 1985; Lanning and Perkins, 1995; Weller, 1986; Zirkel, 1999 in Eiszler, 2002, p.486). Additionally, Gohmann and McCrickard (2001) examined the relationships between grades inflation and the new faculty or less experienced ones and between tenure and grade inflation. They found that there was a correlation between lenient grading and the new faculty and they found that more experienced faculty grade better than less experiences ones. Moreover, they found that Untenured faculty tend to grade harder that tenured ones. Further, Sonner (2000 in Kezim et al., 2005, 359) conducted a study at a university level about grade inflation and he found that class size, subject, and class level were correlated with grade inflation.

3.3.2 *Student Evaluations to their Teachers Factor & Significant Others*

Student evaluation teaching forms are usually used for administrative control but this has caused grade inflation, coursework deflation and as result decrease students teaching (Crumbley et al., 2010, p.187). Student evaluation to teaching were criticized for measuring student satisfaction instead of the quality of instruction because they do not put into account other factors which may affect the course being taught such as grades given (Zimmerman, 2002 in Crumbley et al. 2010, p.188). The relationship between student evaluation of teaching (SET) and expected grades has been controversial issue within the literature (Isely & Singh, 2005, p.29). But, most higher education institutions rely heavily on student evaluations to make tenure, promotion and salary increments in the United States (Ellis, et al. 2003, p.36). However, research has shown that student evaluation to their teachers is considered to be the main factor which correlated with grade inflation. But correlation high grades and high student evaluations remains controversial (Abbott, 2008, p.33). Many scholars expressed their concerns and fairs about the use of student evaluations to measure instructor's teaching performance which may reward faculty members who routinely give the highest grades to their students (Carney, Isakson & Ellsworth, 1978; Hocking, 1976; and Winsor 1977 in Ellis et al., 2003, 35). Moreover, a positive correlation has been found frequently between students' grades that they receive and the ratings they give to their instructors (Aigner, & Thum 1986; Anikeef, 1953; Bausell & Magoon, 1972; Brown; 1976; Chacko, 1983; Ditts, 1983; Doyle & Whitely; 1974; DuCette & Kenney, 1982; Greenwald & Gillmore, 1997; Hockings, 1976; Kau & Rubin, 1976; Kennedy, 1975; Krautmann & Sander, 1999, Mehdizadah, 1990, Nelson and Lynch, 1984; Nichols & Soper, 1972; Remmers, 193; Riley & Ryan, & Lifshitz, 1950; Scwab, 1975; South, Hill and Marrison, 1979; Stumpf & Freeddman, 1979; Genehzadeh, 1988 cited in Ellis, 2003). All these findings are consistent with the hypothesis that "*instructors can "buy" better evaluation through more lenient grading*" (Krautmann, 1999, p.59). All these studies have shown that there is a significant relationship between the grade given (or anticipated by students) in a particular course and the ratings given by students to the faculty who taught the course. Student evaluation to their teachers has been viewed as a double-edge sward because instructors who are strict graders particularly those who give of As are being penalized for their rigor in terms of the average student evaluations they receive (Ellis, 2003, 39). Moreover, recent research has shown that teachers who are strict graders facilitate student learning more than do instructors who grade leniently (Bonesronning, 1999 cited in Ellis, 2003). If instructors who use rigorous and reliable grading standards to foster their

student learning are being penalized in their course evaluations. Additionally, Schneider (2013) reports admits that universities faculty members place significant weight on student evaluations and they often report that they usually inflate their student grades to avoid teaching controversial materials in order to get higher evaluations from their teachers (2013, p.122).

Moreover, research findings have shown that without adjusting and varying the grading standards, instructors who often give As & Bs would benefit from the average ratings they receive (Schneider 2013). Further grade inflation cannot be viewed as an improvement in students' intellectual abilities rather than just a misleading thing which works as an ineffective tool for communicating students' real abilities (Abbott, 2008; Wongsurawat, 2009, p.523). Using student evaluation to evaluate teaching is something controversial because there is no one correct or magic way of teaching (Joyce and Weil, 1996, p.59). It was believed that the most significant factor affecting student evaluations was the amount of things learned in class but likability issue dominated the scene and all student evaluations might overlook instructional issues and focus on non-instructional ones (Marsh 1993, p.982 in Germain, n.d, p.59).

However, there are some suggestions in the literature which could make student evaluation more focused and reliable. Firstly, training students on how to rate their instructors to reduce the halo effects and leniency and reduce psychometric errors on student evaluation of their instructors' performance and students need to be encouraged to separate the quality of instruction from the grade they expected to receive in class. Secondly, balancing and weighting items within the form which could affect rating. Thirdly, involving faculty in creating evaluation forms this may reduce skepticism and improve their reliability. Finally, some suggested that replacing student evaluation forms by teaching portfolio which could be updated and used annually (Cook, 1989; Marsh 1993 in Germain, n.d, p.61). However, if some scholars like Arreola (2007) asserts claims that student evaluations can offer slightly valid and reliable assessment teaching that "properly constructed, appropriately administered, and correctly interpreted (p.98). He expressed his concerns about homemade student evaluation forms of their low and dubious quality, the lack the universal accepted definitions and the necessary characteristics of a good teaching and teaching excellence, they lack understanding of psychometric analysis that underlies student evaluations to their teachers (Arreola, 2007 in Schneider, 2013, p.124). Additionally, (Sproule 2008 in Schneider, 2013, p.124) criticizes student evaluations as a practice for being poisonous to the teaching environment, inaccurate, easily to be manipulated, lack of psychometric sense and reliability and validity. All these are considered to be as disadvantages of student evaluations besides their impact on grade inflation. However, it is important to use student evaluation by keeping in mind "*good teaching is hard to measure doesn't mean that we should give up trying to assess it*" (Schneider, 2013, p.128). Marsh & Roche (2000) point out that the most effective ways for faculty members to get student high evaluations are to offer them demanding and challenging learning materials, to help them to master the materials and to encourage them to value and appreciate their learning (p.226). Further, Centra (2003) believes that small classes with fewer students more than 15 get higher evaluations than do larger classes (p.498). Further, student sometimes use these evaluations to threaten their instructors by giving them low rates or scores and they will complain about their instructors' teaching effectiveness to intimidate and force them to accept their late assignments, sloppy work, and all forms of excuses (Shapiro, 2002 in Crumbley et al. 2010, p.188). Therefore, Crumbley et al. (2010) recommends that instructors should be punished for unethical teaching techniques they use to "cook" their student evaluation scores by inflating grades. Appropriate actions must be taken by administrators against all faculty members who inflate their students' grades or decrease the course materials in order to escape low scores in their student evaluations (i Crumbley et al. (2010).

4. Results & Discussion

This study is proposed to answer some questions related to grade inflation in college education particularly in EFL classroom.

The primary limitations of this study are the number of the participants, methods used for data collection questionnaires only. The research questions are: why do some instructors inflate their students' grades?

Do student evaluations to their instructors contribute to grade inflation? What are the potential solutions to grade inflation problem? Based on the questionnaire quantitative and qualitative data which were collected from college instructors, the data were presented in tables (1-4) and discussed below.

Q	Agree		Uncertain		Disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	22	55	12	30	4	10
2	26	65	10	25	2	5
3	10	25	22	55	4	10
4	24	60	10	25	4	10
5	27	68	7	18	2	5
6	26	65	10	25	3	8

Table 1: Institutional Factors

This table (1) shows instructors' beliefs about institutional factors that responsible for grades inflation. For question 1, whether the grading systems which offered by this particular institution can cause grade inflation or not, 22 instructors believed that the grading systems themselves can lead to grade inflation, 12 instructors were 'uncertain', and only four instructors 'disagreed'. This is supported from relevant literature which believes that instructional practices have been identified as the possible causes of grade inflation problems in the academia. Using "mastery learning" model of teaching and fixed criterion-referenced grading systems rather than curved-based or norm-referenced approaches have contributed to the problem of grades inflations (Lanning & Perkins 199; Basinger 1997; Geisinger & Rabinowitz 1980; Olsen 1997 in Eiszler, 2002, p.485). Moreover, an instructor said: "*clearer and strict assessment policies should be provided*". Another instructor added: "*the loose policy of some institutions which demand teachers to help low achievers may tempt teachers to inflate grades to avoid any trouble with administration*".

Regarding question 2, 26 instructors 'agreed' that the administration demands and expectations contribute to the problem of grade inflation, ten instructors were 'uncertain', and five instructors 'disagreed' with the statement. Concerning question 3, whether the mismatch between student coursework and final exam grades result in grade inflation or not, ten instructors believed that it can lead to grade inflation, 22 instructors were 'uncertain', and only four instructors 'disagreed'. As for question 4, whether low performed instructors tend to inflate their students' grades to avoid problem, 24 instructors 'agreed', and ten were 'uncertain', and only four 'disagreed'. This is consistent with Gohmann and McCrickard (2001) who examined the relationships between grades inflation and the new faculty or less experienced ones and between tenure and grade inflation. They found that there was a correlation between lenient grading and the new faculty and they found that more experienced faculty grade better than less experiences ones. For question 5, 16 instructors' believed that some instructors' drive to please their students causes grade inflation, seven instructors were 'uncertain', and only two 'disagreed'. Finally, question 6, whether instructors inflate their students' grades to escape their negative evaluations, 26 instructors 'agreed', ten instructors were 'uncertain', and three 'disagreed'. It is quite evident the vast majority of teachers believe that student evaluations are the main

factor in grade inflation. This corroborates with findings in relevant literature which has shown that the most significant factor affecting student evaluations was the amount of things learned in class but likability issue dominated the scene and all student evaluations might overlook instructional issues and focus on non-instructional ones (Marsh 1993,p.982 in Germain, n.d, p.59).

Q	Agree		Uncertain		Disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
7	9	23	24	60	7	18
8	15	38	21	53	1	3
9	14	35	18	45	7	18
10	13	33	22	55	5	13
11	16	40	18	45	3	8
12	25	63	7	18	6	15

Table 2: Instructional & Pedagogical Factors

This table (2) illustrates some instructional and pedagogical factors that can contribute to grade inflation in college education and particularly in an EFL context. Regarding question 7, whether course demands and difficulty can cause grade inflation or not, nine instructors 'agreed', 24 instructors were 'uncertain', and seven instructors 'disagreed'. This is consistent with other researchers' findings who have found that an instructor's grading policy and course difficulty can be significant and contributing factors in determining students' ratings and scores for their instructors' teaching effectiveness (Crumbley et al. 2010, p.190). For question 8, 15 instructors believed that teachers inflate their students' grades to escape complaints from their students and parents, 21 instructors were 'uncertain', and only one teacher 'disagreed'. This is supported by the fact that students sometimes use these evaluations to threaten their instructors by giving them low rates or scores and they will complain about their instructors' teaching effectiveness to intimidate and force them to accept their late assignments, sloppy work, and all forms of excuses (Shapiro, 2002 in Crumbley et al. 2010, p.188). Concerning question 9, 14 instructors 'agreed' that some instructors inflate grades to attract and retain students, 18 were 'uncertain', and seven 'disagreed'. Regarding question 10, 13 instructors believed that high grades may allow them to stay in favor with administrators, 22 instructors were 'uncertain', and five 'disagreed' with the statement. As for question 11, 16 instructors 'agreed' that student evaluation can cause grade inflation, 18 instructors were 'uncertain', and only three instructors 'disagreed' with the statement. Finally, question 12, 25 instructors believed that lack quality teaching leads to grade inflation, seven instructors were 'uncertain' and only six instructors 'disagreed'. It is quite obvious that the majority of instructors assume that quality teaching could reduce grades inflation. It could be argued that training teachers on how to grade their students appropriately could help and solve the problem. An instructor believes that *"instructors being affected by each other's grading"* and some of them *"favoring some students because of their personalities and they assess them based on their personalities more than their performance"*. This could be one of the factors that can lead to grading leniency.

Q	Agree		Uncertain		Disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
13	24	60	8	20	7	18
14	27	68	5	13	2	5
15	20	50	11	28	8	20
16	24	60	12	30	3	8
17	15	38	23	58	2	5
18	22	55	16	40	0	0
19	14	35	19	48	6	15

Table 3: Significant Others

This table (3) displays some other significant factors which can contribute to grade inflation beside the previously discussed and reviewed factors. Concerning question 13, 24 instructors believed that lack of appropriate training on how to grade students an appropriate way can lead to grade inflation; eight instructors were 'uncertain', and seven 'disagreed'. For question 14, whether grade inflation can be caused by the type of test used or not, 27 instructors agreed that the type of test can cause grade inflation; five instructors were 'uncertain', and only two instructors 'disagreed'. It could be argued that the type of test used is something highly important which can discriminate between high and low achievers. As for question 15, 20 instructors believed that student pressures on their instructors can cause grade inflation, 11 instructors were 'uncertain', and only two instructors 'disagreed'. Question 16, 24 instructors believed that because of some unrealistic performance measures, 12 instructors were 'uncertain', and three 'disagreed'. Regarding question 17, whether grade inflation can be linked to promotion and contract renewal or not, 15 instructors 'agreed', and 23 instructors were uncertain, and only two 'disagreed' with the statement. For question 18, 22 instructors 'agreed' that the use of student evaluation to teaching effectiveness is a contributing factor of grade inflation, 16 instructors were 'uncertain', and no instructor 'disagreed'. This is supported from relevant literature which has shown that student evaluation to their teachers is considered to be the main factor which correlated with grade inflation. But correlation high grades and high student evaluations remains controversial (Abbott, 2008, p.33). Finally, question 19, 14 teachers believed that newly recruited instructors tend to inflate their student grades to impress their administrators, 19 instructors were 'uncertain', and six 'disagreed'. This corroborates with Gohmann and McCrickard (2001) findings who examined the relationships between grades inflation and the new faculty or less experienced ones and between tenure and grade inflation. They found that there was a correlation between lenient grading and the new faculty and they found that more experienced faculty grade better than less experiences ones.

Q	Agree		Uncertain		Disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
20	29	73	8	20	2	5
21	26	65	12	30	0	0
22	25	63	13	33	0	0
23	32	80	6	15	0	0
24	28	70	8	20	2	5
25	33	83	4	10	0	0

Table 4: Possible Solutions for Grade Inflation Problem

This table (4) shows some of the possible solutions which instructors believed that could help in dealing with grade inflation problem. As for question 20, 29 instructors 'agreed' that external and internal grading control systems such as benchmarking, moderation, double marking, verification and monitoring mechanism could help to solve grade inflation problem, eight teachers were 'uncertain', and two 'disagreed'. It is quite evident that the great majority of instructors believed that internal and external control systems are important in solving this problem. Regarding question 21, 26 instructors believed that if teachers always adhere to rigorous grading standards, this will help in solving the grade inflation problem, 12 instructors were 'uncertain', and no one 'disagreed'. Concerning question 22, 25 instructors believed that having regular training on assessment and grading-related issues could help in solving the problem, 13 instructors were 'uncertain', and no one 'disagreed'. It could be argued that training on assessment-related issues is something of utmost importance for all teachers to avoid grading leniency and inflation. As for question 23, 32 instructors 'agreed' that having a clear policy with regard to student evaluations to their instruction could help in solving grade inflation problem, six instructor were 'uncertain', and no one 'disagreed' with the statement. Question 24, 28 instructors believed that appropriate administrative actions against instructors who inflate their student grades should be taken, eight instructors were 'uncertain', and only two instructors 'disagreed'. This is supported by Crumbley et al. (2010) who recommend that instructors should be punished for unethical teaching techniques they use to "cook" their student evaluation scores by inflating grades. Appropriate actions must be taken by administrators against all faculty members who inflate their students' grades or decrease the course materials in order to escape low scores in their student evaluations. Finally, question 25, 33 instructors believed that credible and quality assessment criteria and teaching techniques could help in solving grade inflation problem; four instructors were 'uncertain', and no one 'disagreed'. Moreover, an instructor said: *"appropriate administrative actions should be taken against instructors who inflate their marks"*.

Some instructors believed that that there are other factors which could cause grade inflation such as *"some teachers might not follow the assigned marking criteria for marking ss papers. It could be also related to time devoted to finishing marking". But this can be overcome by benchmarking and giving enough time to finish marking just 2 days are not enough'*. Furthermore, an instructor added: *avoiding rechecking of papers... fear of confronting student and explaining to them their point of weakness" can be of the factors. Pleasing students and administration, competition among instructors to attract more students in their sections and the desire to appear as lenient instructors with those courses are known by students as the most favorite.*

5. Conclusions & Recommendations

Grade inflation may be caused by many factors. However, some factors which are prevalent in relevant literature with regard to institutional, instructional, and other factors which contribute to grade inflation were discussed and reviewed. Based on these surveys' findings, it could be argued that both institutional, instructional factors such as grading systems used, student evaluation, lack of training on assessment clear policies can be the major factors behind grade inflation. Therefore, the study recommends that student evaluation forms should be used to improve instruction rather than to threaten teachers so to inflate their students' grades. Because students sometimes use these evaluations to threaten their instructors by giving them low rates or scores and they will complain about their instructors' teaching effectiveness to intimidate and force them to accept their late assignments, sloppy work, and all forms of excuses (Shapiro, 2002 in Crumbley et al. 2010, p.188). (Sproule 2008 in Schneider, 2013, p.124) criticizes student evaluations as a practice for being poisonous to the teaching environment, inaccurate, easily to be manipulated, lack of psychometric sense and reliability and validity. Therefore, teachers should be involved in developing these student evaluation forms and should be focused on instructional issues and they should be administered in the right time and the right place by the right person. Moreover, using external grading control system such as benchmarking, moderation, double marking and monitoring also could help to solve the problem. Furthermore, training teachers on assessment-related issue such as grading, benchmarking and moderation could help in avoiding grade inflation. Additionally, actions should be taken against instructors who inflate their grades deliberately. In this regard an instructor said: *"legal measures should be taken against instructors who fail to interpret the reasons of the mismatch between grades and if it appeared that they have inflated the results deliberately"*. This study has several limitations which deem to be mentioned. First, the sample size, only 40 instructors were involved in the study. Second, only surveys were used, using other methods may yield better results. Finally, students and other factors were overlooked and beyond the scope of this study.

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Appendix A:

Investigating Factors Responsible for Grade Inflation in College Education

This questionnaire intends to investigate factors responsible for grade inflation in college education. The questionnaire seeks to elicit your views and beliefs about some factors that might contribute to grade inflation phenomenon. The study attempt to answer some questions which are: why do some teachers inflate their students' grades? Do student evaluations to their instructors contribute to grade inflation? What are the possible solutions to grade inflation problem? I hope you will be kind enough to answer all the questions to the best of your knowledge and ability to help us create awareness against the danger of grade inflation on our students' future. You may be assured that your responses will be regarded as confidential information and will be used only for research purposes.

		Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
A. Institutional Factors				
1.	The grading systems which lack credibility could lead to grade inflation.			
2.	The administration's high demands and expectations contribute to grade inflation.			
3.	The mismatch between student coursework and final exam grades result in grade inflation.			
4.	Low performed teachers tend to inflate their students' grades.			
5.	Instructors' drive to please their students causes grade inflation.			
6.	Faculty members inflate their students' grades to escape their negative evaluations.			
B. Instructional and Pedagogical Factors				
7.	Course demands and difficulty leads to grade inflation.			
8.	Teachers inflate their students' grades to avoid complaints from their students and parents.			
9.	Faculty members inflate grades to attract and retain students.			
10.	High grades may allow instructors to stay in favor with administrators.			
11.	The use of student evaluations of instructors leads to grade inflation.			
12.	Lack of quality teaching leads to grade inflation.			
3. Significant Others				
13.	Teachers' lack of formal training on how to grade their students in an appropriate way leads to grade inflation.			
14.	Grade inflation is sometimes caused by the type of test used.			
15.	Grade inflation is caused by student pressures on their teachers.			
16.	Grade inflation is caused because some performance measures are unrealistic.			
17.	Grade inflation is caused because it is linked with contract renewal and promotion.			
18.	The use of student evaluation to teaching effectiveness has been a contributing factor of grade inflation.			
19.	Newly recruited teachers tend to inflate grades to impress their administrators.			
4. The problem of grade inflation can be solved by having...				
20.	External grading control systems such as benchmarking moderation, double marking and monitoring mechanisms.			
21.	Instructors who always adhere to rigorous grading standards.			
22.	Regular training on assessment and grading-related issues.			
23.	Clear policy and purpose with regard to student evaluations to their teachers.			
24.	Appropriate administrative actions against teachers who inflate their students' grades.			
25.	Credible and quality assessment criteria and teaching techniques			
26.	In your opinion, what are the other factors responsible for students' grade inflation?			
27.	In your opinion, what are the potential solutions to this problem?			
28.	Any comments or further suggestions? _____			