



## Comparative Reflections on the 4-Point-Grading System as a Viable Tool for Revamping the Polytechnic Education in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** *The Nigerian polytechnic, which keeps gasping for remedial interpolation, propounds the need for progressive assessment with the view to curtailing every inadequacy inhibiting its efficacy, especially in this post-pandemic era where global economies are recuperating every from the tremor of the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, this study pragmatically discovered a delinquency through which the polytechnic has been draining and shortchanging itself. Findings from this study established that, judging from the existing grading scheme used in Nigerian polytechnics (the 4-point-grading structure), there is a need for its urgent review, especially the Lower Credit and Pass classifications at both ND and HND levels, as the students with Pass are discriminated against speciously on the contextual assumption of a 5-point grading system instead of the unified 4-point system. In close comparison with the previously adopted 4-point grading structure for degree classification in Nigerian universities, before reverting to 5 points in 2018, this study maintained that the students indexed as pass in the Nigerian polytechnics' 4-point grading system are above-average students that deserve to be reabsorbed into the HND program after Industrial Training without any chauvinism. This study recommended, among others, the need for immediate review of the polytechnic's existing Standardized Unified Classification of Grades by NBTE and other stakeholders by imbibing the previously used 4-point grading scheme deployed by the university sub-sector or adopting 5.0 to be on the safe side, in order to inhibit further haplessness of the ill-treated Pass students, through which the sub-sector has been shortchanging itself.*

**Keywords:** Grading System, NBTE, Technical Education, TVET, University Education

### Introduction

According to certain theories, education is the cornerstone of a healthy society (Abulencia, 2021), the best legacy (Darker, 2017; Kupoluyi, 2022), and the basis for both national and international progress (Aliogo, 2022). Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) was founded only on the transfer of scientific and vocational information, both of which are essential for national development (Peakng, nd; Zite and Deebom, 2017). The advancement of technology, which has been embraced globally as a sustaining requirement for economic progress (Missra, 2020; Wardynski, 2019), has further facilitated the sustainability of TVET, a crucial tool for national development (UNESCO, nd). There are three different tiers of Tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria: universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education. However, in adherence to the context of this study, the polytechnic and the university subsectors would be put into comparative analysis to decipher a blemish defacing the polytechnic educational system.

The polytechnic system aims to provide practical learning experiences to young individuals, equipping them with technical skills in management through practical modules. This leads to the students' earning certificates like

National Diploma (ND), Higher National Diploma (HND), and other professional diplomas, meeting societal needs and contributing to the country's development. However, the current state of the polytechnic system requires assessment and improvement to overcome limitations that affect its effectiveness. Various studies have looked into enhancing technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and polytechnic education in Nigeria. One aspect that hasn't been sufficiently addressed is the grading system used in polytechnics. This study compares the 4-point grading structure in polytechnics with the 4-point grading structure initially adopted by universities in 2017, before they reverted to a 5-point grading structure in 2018 under the National Universities Commission's directive. The study advocates for a review of the diploma classification in polytechnics nationwide to ensure fair treatment of high-achieving students and their seamless integration into further education and the workforce, similar to practices in the university sector. The terms grading scheme, grading structure, and grading system are used interchangeably in this study to mean the same thing.

*The Nigerian University System vs. the Nigerian Polytechnic*



Currently, almost every year, all the polytechnics in Nigeria usually have only 10% of the JAMB applicants to scuffle for, in order of applicants' predilection, and that really speaks volume. However, one of the reasons why most applicants may not prefer polytechnics is more parental influence than the students' factor. And one of the panaceas is the need for sensitization to be deployed across all mainstream media. Some parents are still living in the past century. Similarly, considering this famous song:

*"unifasiti dara, ibi tawon omowe wa, ibe lomo mi yo lo..."*

(Translation: University is exceptional; a hub for intellectuals, that is where my child will be enrolled...)

The psychological impact of the song on the parents cannot be quantified. Hence, to break those psychological constraints, it will take consistent sensitization and public awareness of the good phases of the polytechnic. Consequently, the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP), and other stakeholders must rise to the task if the polytechnic must have more than 10% applicants. The parents must be made to understand that the polytechnic education is as significant as that of the university, as it has been seen that few polytechnics in the country have been converted to universities and are now offering full-fledged degrees. Though this has raised dust and eyebrows from the polytechnic's stakeholders, it should be bravura to the polytechnic that its relevance is felt, and it will further put into perspective the need for the dichotomy to be permanently inexistent.

From a pragmatic and logical perspective, the university system is a flexible system that protects its products at all costs, in contrast to what is prevalent in the polytechnics. Exempli gratia, the university's third-class students can still be reabsorbed for a postgraduate diploma and, from there, proceed to any length. But on the contrary, the polytechnic wants its own Pass students to have their faces submerged in shame, which is worrisome. *Ceteris paribus*, the polytechnic should know that the peak of its pedigree as an institution is when it produces Pass students that could still compete with their university peers, not churning them into haplessness. The logical implication of the polytechnic spitting at the Pass students is that they are in no way different from the withdrawn students because, after the formality of the convocation, the Pass students would join other withdrawn students to be stuck academically, which is quite vicious. From the academic's perspective, the flexibility of the university is well operationalized in such a way that a Bachelor's degree holder can deliver lectures to potential bachelor's degree

students, likewise Master's to Master's and PhD to PhD. In contrast, in the polytechnic, a Higher National Diploma (HND) holder is seen as not viable enough to lecture potential HND students; only a bachelor's degree may be allowed. The HND holders were even once not considered core teaching staff in the polytechnic. Forgetting so soon that, in not all cases, students only relied on what the lecturers taught them during the fifteen or more weeks of lectures from experience, towards the examination period, the majority of the students (if not all) usually rely heavily on 'night class', evening scheduled tutorials, et al., organized for them by better hands in their classes to augment the teachings they had been exposed to. Therefore, if better hand(s) in National Diploma (ND) 1 would teach their colleagues seamlessly; same with better hands in ND 2, not exempting the better hands in HND from teaching co-students and other students in lower classes effortlessly, the question is: why should HND graduates be injected into the polytechnic system with the panel they have to face for screening cum interviews, but after passing the interviews they end up being exposed to unfair indiscriminatio? The belittlement facing the polytechnic graduates in their territories is really worrisome, to the extent that some technologists may have spent years in the polytechnic and do not have an office to themselves. They are constrained to remain in the studios, laboratories, factories, et cetera, where heat extractors are deployed to pacify the heat in them, or nothing of such at all. Yet, these same professionals are expected to invent for patenting as well as publish or perish. Meanwhile, in the university, they have a strategic way of pairing the least experienced teaching staffers (graduate assistants) with the most experienced staffers so they can tap into the Experience of their senior colleagues before the experienced get statutorily retired at 70.

#### *Statement of Problem*

Over the years, some students with National Diploma (ND) certificates carrying Pass grades have been hapless returning to some Nigerian polytechnic institutes to commence the second phase of the sub-sector, which is the Higher Nation Diploma (HND), which will see them become full graduates and inoculated into the workplace as part of other national development mandates. While those who graduated with a pass at the HND level have been rendered hapless as a result of the chauvinism they face at work and even the impossibility for them to find a second chance to regurgitate their real potential through further educational pursuits, Hence, some of the HND graduates with a pass grade ended up imbibing penury jobs



or embracing other disparities of fate that come with the pass grade. Consequently, this study probed the 4-point grading system of the polytechnic in comparison with that of the 4.0 point grading system deployed by the Nigerian universities before reintegrating the 5 point grading system in 2018. Hence, this study discovered that the grading system employed by the polytechnic educational sub-sector has erroneously classified its above-average students as pass students, thereby translating to the fact that the polytechnic system has been shortchanging itself by hunting against its above-average students that were supposed to have been in lower credit and have the opportunity of being reintegrated into the polytechnic system for further education and global and national usefulness.

*Theoretical Framework*

This study was partly anchored in constructivism theory. The approach known as constructivism contends that instead of simply absorbing information, students actively create new knowledge. People construct their own representations and incorporate new information into their prior knowledge as they experience the world and reflect on those experiences (schemas). This theory was propounded by Jean Piaget in 1972. And one of its major components is reciprocal teaching and learning, which allows pairs of students to teach each other (Buffalo, nd). This facet of the theory further projects the part of this study that maintained that students do not only rely on what they were taught by their lecturers during the semester, but they go further by adopting several other means through which learning could be made easy for them. Part of the mechanisms used by the students is the night class that they usually organize towards the commencement of examinations.

**Methodology**

This study materialized using content analysis to comparatively evaluate the existing unified 4-point grading system of a typical polytechnic in Nigeria and the newly adopted 4-point grading scheme by the National Universities Commission in an attempt to unravel the self-inflicted dearth the polytechnic system is plagued with. The author’s experience, observations, literature review, and the use of existing data that analyzes the degree grade classification found on a university’s website and the diploma grade classification found on NBTE’s website vis-à-vis the student handbook of the Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro, were all used to conduct this study.

**Results**

Analysis of. Table 1: The Standardized Unified Classification of CGPA used by Nigerian Polytechnic

FINAL CGPA	CLASS OF DIPLOMA
3.50 – 4.00	Distinction
3.00 – 3.49	Upper Credit
2.50 – 2.99	Lower Credit
2.00 – 2.49	Pass
0.00 - 1.99	Fail

Table 1: Diploma Classification of a typical Nigerian Polytechnic Source: The Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro student handbook

Fig. 1 shows that the existing CGPA and Class of Diploma classify 3.50 – 4.00 as Distinctions, 3.00 – 3.49 Upper Credit, 2.50 – 2.99 Lower Credit; 2.00 – 2.49 Pass while 0.00 – 1.99 Fail (Withdrawn).

Analysis Table. 2: The Percentage breakdown of the standardized unified classification of diploma used by Nigerian Polytechnic

Score (in %)	Grade	Grade Point	Final CGPA	Class Degree
100-80	A	4.00	3.50 – 4.00	Distinction
79-70	AB	3.50	3.00 – 3.49	Upper Credit
60-69	B	3.00	2.50 – 2.99	Lower Credit
59-50	BC	2.50	2.00 – 2.49	Pass
49-40	C	2.00	0.00 – 1.99	Fail

Table. 2: ND/HND Diploma Classification of a typical Nigerian Polytechnic Source: NBTE

The plate 2 above gives the percentage breakdown of the polytechnic’s classification of diploma. With 100-80 classified as A (Distinction); 79-70 classified as AB (Upper Credit); 69-60 classified B (Lower Credit); and 59-50 classified as BC (Pass) and 49-40 classified as C (Fail)

**Analysis Table 3: The Newly Introduced Standardized Unified Classification of CGPA by NUC**

CGPA	Class of Diploma
3.5 – 4.0	First Class Honours
3.0 – 3.49	Second Class Honours (Upper Division)
2.0 – 2.99	Second Class Honours (Lower Division)
1.0 – 1.99	Third Class Honours

Table. 3: Diploma Classification of a typical Nigerian Polytechnic Source: www.guardian.ng



Table. 3 shows that the previously adopted degree classification system for all universities previously deployed in 2017/2018 academic session (Lawal, 2018) by the National Universities Commission which was later dropped a session after, classified 3.50 – 4.00 as First-Class Honours; 3.00 – 3.49 as 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Honours (Upper Division); 2.0 – 2.99 Second Class Honours (Lower Division); while 1.00 – 1.99 as 3<sup>rd</sup> Class Honours. While any student below 1.00 is considered volatile for academic breeding.

From the figures above, Figure 1 shows that the average (50%) was wrongly set at 2.50 instead of 2.0. Hence, the below-average classification (less than 50%) should have rather started from 1.99 and below. Therefore, the Pass classification (2.00–2.49) in table 1 should have been the Lower credit in alignment with what is reflected in the newly deployed 4-point grading scheme by the universities. In the given information, the evaluation metric used to derive the percentage is the grading scheme for classification. The classification is based on a 4-point grading system, where the average is 2.50. The classification ranges are defined based on this grading system. For example, anything below 50% (which corresponds to a grade of 2.0 or lower) is considered below average. The Pass classification is defined for scores between 2.00 and 2.49. These ranges and classifications are used to determine how the percentage corresponds to different grades and classifications in the grading scheme.

## Discussions

From the foregoing, it is crystal clear that the polytechnic has been shortchanging and draining itself over the years by sweltering the students with Pass, using the former reality of the university's 5.0 at the detriment of the polytechnic's reality of 4 points. With a 5-point grading system, students who scored 2.0–2.49 are below average; hence, it would be highly justified if students with such grades were blindly not considered. But using the 4-point grading structure, which is the polytechnic's current grading pattern, those Pass students the polytechnic is spitting at scored a BC CGPA (above average) and consequently should be considered for admission into HND without any iota of chauvinism.

In respect to the above analysis, if a student has a 2.49 out of a 4-point CGPA, there is no mathematical formula or equation that can be used to calculate the success rate of such a student that will be less than 50%. Which sparks up the question: Does it mean students with over a 50% pass mark are nonentities and not absorbable or viable for the polytechnic system, just as we have it in Nigerian

universities? With the facts above, it is conspicuous that the polytechnic system has been shortchanging itself with thousands (if not millions) of students whom it has wrongly been categorizing as pass and barred from gaining admission to continue the educational drillings at HND level.

*Ceteris paribus*, with the above findings, the Pass students don't even need any top-up mandate or extra year of industrial training to be reabsorbed. Students that may be considered for extra-year industrial training are those with a CGPA within the range of 1.00–1.99, classified as third class in the university. Hence, these are the caliber of students that are to be classified as pass students in the polytechnic system, and even with their grade, just like the university sector, the polytechnic should also deploy a strategic means of reabsorbing the students for a second chance.

The neglect of the above-average students that have been wrongly classified as pass is a massive loss of both revenues and meaningful human resources who could have been exposed to further education and eventually become meaningful economic tycoons and industry changers. The students could have also helped broaden the horizons of most industries, but as a result of the negligence, those students were detrimentally constrained to be penury workers. Hence, the loss is not only to the polytechnic; it is a massive loss to the nation; perhaps the cause of the economic backwardness Nigeria has been identified with for years is the financial constraints dwindling the exploits of the polytechnic.

## Conclusion and Future Works

It has been established in this study that the polytechnic system has been shortchanging itself by erroneously using 5.0 in lieu of 4.0 to disdainfully dispose of its above-average students with over 50% pass marks. Since 2.49 of 5.0 is below average, while 2.49 of 4.0 is above average, Hence, it would be justifiable, on the premise of 5.0, if the polytechnic had decided not to reabsorb students with less than 2.50 for HND.

Consequently, the polytechnic must, as a matter of urgency, review the existing unified grading pattern and adopt the 4-point grading scheme newly exemplified by the university sub-sector. The study revealed that those students that were withdrawn should have been in Pass, while the students wrongly indexed as Pass should have been lower-credit students. The distinction and the Upper Credit classification are not erroneous. The erring facet begins from the lower credit downward. 2.0–2.99 should



have been Lower credit, while 1.00–1.99 should have been Pass and less than 1.00 withdrawn.

With the deficit in existence, the best approach the polytechnic can employ to revamp its wrongly classified Pass students is to ensure the public awareness means for admission (JAMB brochure, newspapers, audiovisual, etc.) are tailored towards not using at least lower credit as its least requirement but rather using the grade point technique. By using at least 2.00 as the minimum requirement. This will give open arms to the average students with a 2.00 and above classification that the polytechnic system wrongly classified as pass.” And it will further return all the huge numbers of above-average students with 2.00–2.49 wrongly barred by the existing perspective of not admitting Pass-classified students back to the polytechnic system, and that will eventually improve the number of HND applicants and be an added advantage to regurgitate the revenues generated through tuition fees, acceptance levied, hostels, et al. for the polytechnic system that is currently battling with inadequate funds.

This great discovery is a giant stride synonymous with solving a national problem affecting the polytechnic system nationwide. The discovered meagerness has been one of the factors inhibiting the productivity of the polytechnic systematically. For example, the students that were erroneously marred from proceeding to HND indiscriminately could have been an added avenue for generating more funds. Conclusively, the polytechnic too should introduce a top-up or Conversion equivalent program for its ND students with 1.99–1.00 grade points, as exemplified by the university’s deployment of a postgraduate diploma for its third-class students.

Lastly, if we must have the polytechnic graduates be proud of themselves, it has been established in this study that the maltreatment and belittling facing them must be curtailed as a matter of urgency. This will bring an end to the ever-increasing number of HND graduates losing focus all in the name of striving for conversion from technologists to lecturers in order to be meaningful and command respect from their junior colleagues, students, and contemporaries. The solution is not to reinstate a dictum to stop any technologist from converting; the panacea will be to attenuate all forms of maltreatment and avail them of the same privileges accrued to their contemporaries in the lecturing cadre. For example, there should be no reason why a Chief Technologist should not be integrated into the academic board vis-à-vis an Assistant Chief Technologist contesting for the position of HOD and equals in the polytechnic. In the polytechnic system, the technologists should be envied to the extent that some lecturers coming

from the university subsector should be striving to also re-enroll at the polytechnic for HND. This is how the image of the polytechnic can be regurgitated as meaningful and enviable.

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