

Equity in Admission: Comparative study of secondary data in high school curriculum valuation

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Research Aim and Objectives

Education is an essential integrated part of society which corroborate knowledge, moral and integrity of an individual. A comparative study about university students engaging in academic misconduct in United States and United Arab Emirates by Williams et. al. (2014) reported that 70% and 73% of business faculty students respectively have engaged in some academic misconduct activities. Even though the study considered business students only; the figure 73% evokes the importance of considering proper valuation and set standard criteria to be identified for recruiting well-informed students about academic integrity along with outstanding academic performance to university programs. Furthermore, Tabsh et al. (2015) posited in his study about the responsibility of universities to ensure academic integrity along with student success in academic performance. Academic dishonesty, specifically in undergraduate programs has become a significant issue (Tabsh et al., 2015). As such a student's journey to university starts from admission; thus, it is essential for equity to be present in admission process ensuring equitable caliber students are enrolled who demonstrate ethical and outstanding success in their undergraduate programs in a seemingly equal footing.

The pathway of high school to university is a crucial journey that differs world wide in terms of different pre-university curriculum adopted by different countries across the globe. Each curriculum entails distinctive course content, structure and assessment criteria defining an individual's credentials through certification. Gudo and Olel (2011) postulates in their study the admission equivalency associated challenges encountered due to globalization and cross-border mobility of students across the globe. This provides the platform for evaluating with the use of secondary data in understanding how universities across United Arab Emirates equalize high school qualification for admitting students. Aidoo-Buameh and Ayagre (2013) suggested in their study, the absence in the consideration of quality of students taking admission in university, as a factor attributing evaluation of student performance at undergraduate levels; and this sets the platform of this research. Additionally, the correlation of admission criteria to academic performance leading to instances of academic misconduct is an over-reaching objective of this research.

Methodology with Data collection methods

This study is based on secondary data and uses qualitative coding analysis method. Accessing secondary data from open sources, mainly university websites, data of five universities was obtained. Local universities across the Emirates have been chosen, which are accredited by the Ministry of Education – Higher Education Affairs of United Arab Emirates. The admission criteria to undergraduate programs have been extracted and those data have been coded for qualitative analysis (table 1). Simultaneously, a theoretical research of curriculum structure has been reviewed to juxtapose the following three curriculums: UK curriculum [Ordinary (O), Advance Subsidiary (AS) and Advanced (A) Level], Indian Curriculum [Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE Grade -12)] and Worldwide International Baccalaureate Diploma (IB).

The research methodology revolves around understanding the above-mentioned curriculums in evaluating the basis of set admission criteria for each curriculum. UK curriculum comprising of three different levels pursued from Grade – 10 to 13 in high school enables students to choose preferred number of subjects of their choice in each level. Usually, students opt to pursue a greater number of subjects in O’Level compared to AS and A Level. A grading scheme of (A* to G) is followed in UK curriculum (Department for Education, 2020). Comparatively, student’s graduation from school with Indian Curriculum (CBSE) usually pursues minimum of 5 subjects with a percentile grading scheme for each subject out of 100 (CBSE Research & Development Unit, 2012). Furthermore, the IB Diploma programme incorporates 6 subject groups equally divided into higher and standard level categories along with core components: theory of knowledge (TOK), extended essay, creativity, action and service (CAS). A point system grading scheme is implemented in IB along with multiple requirements for awarding of Diploma. The highest point awarded is 45 in IB (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2020).

Results and Discussions

Achieve (2007), a non-profit organization based in United States of America evoked the necessity of standardization of pre-university qualification to be modified and aligned with university academic requirements. The organization holds seminars and summits bringing multiple stakeholders (corporate CEOs, school and university leaders, governors etc.) under one umbrella representing the necessity of educational level alignment. Achieve (2007) evaluated the components of university admission test and standard placement test where the prior portrayed more effectiveness in student appraisal for admission generally. However, both the form of tests lacked elements of Achieve’s criteria. This initiative of Achieve (2007) portrays the importance of proper benchmarked scrutinization of admission process and how the juxtaposition is established among different curriculums as stipulated in table 1 (below).

In the context of the UAE, like Achieve (2007), Commission for Academic Accreditation and the Ministry of Education monitors the integrity, standard, assessment, certification and qualifications provided by private and public accredited universities. As such the entry

requirements for admission to both type of universities is set and monitored by the above-mentioned bodies (Godwin, 2006). However, the in-depth analysis of how the entry requirements are set remains undefined which may contribute towards poor academic performance and engagement in academic misconduct by students coming from multi-curriculum pre-university backgrounds. Godwin (2006) has posited more is needed to monitor and assure quality of education provided by private high schools in UAE. This furthermore demonstrates the inequality present in student's pre-university knowledge and as such the question arises on the process of equalizing different curricula.

Comparative analysis of five local accredited universities in UAE stipulated in (table 1) show that the entry requirements for undergraduate university programs for each curriculum is based on distinctive grades. Across the universities, the entry requirements for UK curriculum remained consistent as opposed to CBSE and IB curriculum. However, IB Diploma of 24 points remained consistent among 4 out of 5 universities. In contrast to UK and IB curriculum, CBSE (Grade-12) portrayed fluctuations in grade requirement for admission to different universities. The range of grade requirement varied from 50% to 70%.

However, the question arises how this comparison has been established. Qualitative analysis using coding of curriculum content, structure, examination and grading of each curriculum portrayed distinction and individuality across them. Therefore, this further stimulates the condition that there is inequity in admission portraying the absence of academic integrity value integrated in admission process across universities. Where some curricula impose academic writing and academic English as courses part of the syllabi, others do not; but when admission criteria are checked, this is not one of them.

An empirical study of the importance of high school grades over placement tests such as SAT towards determining college graduation, GPA, etc. depicted in the research of (Gala et al., 2019) indicates the importance of equalizing different curriculums for the basis of university admission. The question arises is that there are insufficient research and thought towards the base line criteria which compares, for instance, 70% CBSE Grade – 12 grades is equivalent to IB points: 24. How two completely distinctive curriculum grade margins are equivalent for students to pursue admission for same program? This question further provides platform to evaluate the unfairness and unawareness present in valuation of high school curriculum assessment for admission purposes across the universities which could be setting students to disadvantage in the classroom.

Moreover, the absence of consideration of curriculum contents, structure, style of examination and learning outcomes depicts the importance of identification of structured valuation guidelines towards setting admission criteria. A possible and quick solution could be implementation of worldwide standardized placement examination, but this test only evaluates the cognitive ability of a student which is insufficient for student appraisal for admission (Gala et al., 2019).

Conclusion

The qualitative analysis of five local accredited universities in the UAE, highlighted the existence of possible inequality in equalizing high school degrees from different syllabi. The results portrayed the importance of proper curriculum valuation of different high school curriculums as a basis of admission to universities. The existence of complete distinctive components in terms of structure, content, marking criteria, examination methodology raises the question of equity present in admission process, thus further raising question on student readiness for tertiary classrooms. There exists no research on this topic; thus, creating the platform of further investigation and possible solution in bringing about equity in admission.

This study is the first such attempt, paving way for possible solutions and equivalent benchmarked criteria for valuation of high school curriculum enabling effective establishment of integrity among students from multiple pre-university curriculum background through transparent, standardized entrance requirement.

Table 1: Comparative data of admission requirements across universities based in United Arab Emirates.

Serial no.	Emirate	University	UK Curriculum [O Level, AS Level & A Level]	Indian Curriculum [CBSE Grade – 12] overall score	IB Diploma
1	Dubai	A	Combination of O Level: 5 subjects As or A Level: 2 subjects with a minimum of C grade for each subject.	70%	24 points
2	Dubai	B	Minimum 7 subjects with grade: 3 B's and 4 C's from - (O) Levels, AS Levels and/or A Levels.	55%	26 points
3	Abu Dhabi	C	Five (5) subjects in the O level with minimum grade E or above in each subject. Two (2) subjects in Advance Subsidiary Level with min. D or above in each subject. One (1) subject in the Advanced Level with min. D or above.	50%	24 points
4	Sharjah	D	The highest 7 grades obtained will be considered as follows: A minimum grade of C in 5 O-Level subjects, and minimum grade of D in 2 AS-Level subjects or A minimum grade of C in 6 O-Level subjects and a minimum grade of E in one A-Level subject.	70%	24 points
5	Fujairah	E	(7) seven subjects at O' level with a minimum grade of C in each subject. If a subject is taken at the AS Level or A Level the required minimum score is reduced to D and E	55%	24 points

Source: (Official Websites of five Universities, which are open sources of information to public)

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