

DIFFERENCES IN GRADING PRACTICES OF PART-TIME AND FULL-TIME FACULTY: A DEPARTMENTAL STUDY AT ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

Amanuel Gebru*, Daniel Alemayehu**, Zewdu Teka***

Abstract: *Worldwide, the complete roster of teaching positions in higher education includes, among others, full-time and part-time positions. Higher education staff in these categories have differing levels of institutional and professional commitments. The fact that they work under different conditions and with different status types may suggest that testing irregularities and abuse of grading standards may occur. This study, which used the Wilcoxon Rank-sum Test to analyse the grades awarded to 9,320 (nine thousand and three hundred twenty) AAU students of 258 first year sections,, found inflationary tendencies in part-timer taught sections. It found that on both science and social science campuses and in both regular and extension divisions the numbers of As and Bs were significantly higher in part-timer taught sections than in full-timer taught sections. The implications for testing and standardization are discussed.*

INTRODUCTION

In many universities, half or even more of teaching staff are part-timers. In many Ethiopian institutions of higher learning, part-time faculty account

* Assistant Professor, Foreign Languages Department, AAU, P.O.Box 1176.

** Independent Consultant, P.O.Box 40519

*** Head, Department of ICT, General Auditor's Office.

for up to a third of the staff. In 1993 EC AAU had a full-time academic staff of 837 of which 82 were female (MOE 2001). While accurate data are unavailable of the corresponding number of part-timers, departmental records show that in some academic units offering common courses part-time staff constitute more than 50 %.

Manifestly, departments that offer service courses need more part-timers than others which do not. For instance, the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature (DFLL) hires more part-time faculty than the Department of Ethiopian Languages and Literature or the Department of Linguistics. The Department of Foreign Languages and Literature employs more part-timers notwithstanding the fact that it has the biggest staff size in the University. In 2001-2 alone the University had a first year population of over 3000 drawn from its ranks, Alemaya, Bahir Dar, Debu and Mekele universities (Awol, 2002). This unprecedented number of students led to the employment of considerable numbers of part-timers. In 1994 EC the sum of Birr 1,575,972 was expended in payments for part-timers. Of this, the amount expended by the Institute of Language Studies (ILS) was Birr 759, 343 (Tafesse, 2002). The corresponding expenditures of the Faculty of Business and Economics (FBE) and the Science Faculty were Birr 188,472 and 134,439 respectively. Earlier, in 1991 EC the amount paid to part-timers in the University as a whole was Birr 1,006, 524. In 1995 EC a short supply of part-time faculty was in evidence (Seime 2002).

Now, numerous questions remain unanswered about part-time faculty especially in the Department of Foreign Language and Literature. Apart from questions of instructional efficacy, there are issues of testing and assessment especially in the service courses of College English and Sophomore English which are offered to more than 10,000 students annually. Given the considerable competitiveness in the courses and the huge mass of students involved, it is important that grading disparities are studied and any significant discrepancies corrected. Nemser and Floden (1989) wonder that cultures of teaching do exist given the fact that teachers work under different conditions and with different employment status. It may as well be said that there are corresponding cultures of testing in view of the fact that instructors test and award grades under different sets of circumstances. But as Lortie (1973) would have said familiarity may have dulled our curiosity about part-timers and full-timers as testers.

To our modest knowledge, there is no other research in context which investigated the grading differences of full-time and part-time staff. As such, we believe that the study may contribute to a new, informed practice in Addis Ababa University with regard to the employment, supervision and evaluation of part-time faculty.

The Problem

With rising enrollments in Addis Ababa University, the number of students taking English as a Foreign Language (EFL) service courses had

substantially increased. This led to EFL instructors being stretched to the limit in their instructional loads. Even then, the departmental need for part-time faculty showed a considerable growth. As a result, EFL part-time faculty in 2003 accounted for about 50% of the total, specifically in the service courses College English one, College English two and Sophomore English.

This staff mix was raised as a constraint in the Department's efforts to raise students' English language proficiency levels (DFLL, 1999). While the instructional efficacy of part-time faculty is a researchable issue, there is an equally important concern constantly raised by faculty. This is precisely the issue of standards in the testing and assessment in the service courses which became all the more serious, given the sizable number and status of part-timers who are institutionally independent and potentially less answerable for their grading responsibilities.

The fact that over half the faculties in the service courses have been part-time testers means that these courses have had the greatest potential for test irregularity and abuse of grading standards. Given the considerable number of students instructed by part-timers, the discovery that most requests for remarking came from such part-timer taught students is not altogether surprising. In 1998, examination scripts of several first year sections taught by part-timers were remarked by full-timers. Interestingly, the remarking produced significant differences. In the first term of 2001, all 26 requests for remarking in College English alone came from part-

timer taught sections. In 2002, a whole part-timer taught section was regraded because of irregularities reported by students. All these instances as well as many more unvoiced cases point to a major grading problem involving part-time staff. With regard to smaller tests, in earlier years, a workshop in the training of markers showed certain disparities in the assignment of marks although these disparities were not as grave as had been feared. The workshop was not comparative of the two categories of staff of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature (Teshome, 1998). In view of their differing employment status, we hypothesized that a comparison of the grades of part-timers and full-timers might produce a difference.

Certainly, the issue may not be one of testing incompetence. EFL part-timers in the Department are often full-timers elsewhere as are full-timers in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature in other colleges. Also, the Staff Affairs Committee of the Department which is charged with academic employment, decides through a proper transcript analysis, that part-time faculty are knowledgeable, competent and instructionally effective. Axiomatically, part-timers are also trained testers, engaged in testing and grading proficiency (the minimum requirement for part-time employment being an MA in EFL). Yet teaching is riddled with practical judgments that are also reflective ones even if only in the most fleeting sense (Louden, 1991b). Inherent in teaching is the making of discretionary judgments in situations of unavoidable uncertainty.

These judgments need to be an accurate, objective representation of a competency in a language-testing situation. But there are significant problems in language testing, viz. objectivity even in the presence of standardization sessions for markers. There could be issues going beyond actual testing. Considering the possibility that EFL part-timers may have just pecuniary goals in the main, not instructional motives, their judgments may be doubted. Teaching is a moral craft as should equally be testing, but teacher credibility could not be taken for granted when EFL part-time teachers¹, apprehensive of sustainable employment in AAU, award generous grades in return for liberal ratings which entitle them to a renewal of part-time employment. On the other hand, with part-time EFL employment plentiful elsewhere, as new colleges continue to open, part-time faculty may also fail to professionally and accountably execute their marking and grading assignments. Overstretched with such pecuniary oriented duties, they may also fail to mark and return papers in good time denying learners good backwash (Saleemi, 1989). Other part-timers may come from outside of academia and may be marginally involved in matters of professional English Language Teaching. Arguably, a letter grade may be a function of instructor employment status, not a correlate of student competence, which would make sense. The experiences of other colleges with regard to part-timers also lend support to the proposition that they may be halfhearted about their part-time duties and not much concerned about their judgments (Solomon, 2002; Abdurazak, 2002).

Synopsis of Relevant Studies

The complete roster of teaching and/or research positions found in various institutions includes a variety of permanent, temporary, full-time and part-time positions (Knowles, 1970: 50). Workload research in academia has come up with a comprehensive understanding of the stresses and strains of faculty. The definitional range of faculty workload includes:

1. teaching time – time spent on all instruction-related tasks, such as classroom instruction, preparation for delivery of lectures, assignments, exams and grading.
2. student interaction – time devoted to contact with students irrespective of subject matter of discussion.
3. research, scholarship and creative activity – time given to professional and scholarly pursuits other than particularly related to individual growth.
4. professional development – time devoted to reading professional literature, attending scholarly meetings, and taking part in professional discussions.
5. institutional service – time spent on meetings, managerial roles, and pertinent non-instructional tasks (IEHE, 1977: 4421).

The categories may suggest the need for assistive part-time faculty. Studies also indicate that universities facing budgetary constraints are resorting to part-time faculty. Research also indicates that part-time faculty have different reasons for choosing part-time². A Canadian survey revealed two significantly different part-time college faculty groups: those

with full-time non-academic jobs (34.5%) and those with only part-time employment (65.5%) (Rajagopal and Lin, 1996). Those with full-time nonacademic jobs and those hired part-time are likely to need on the job assistance. Because of this awareness institutions often involve part-timers in workshops. For instance, an instructional skills workshop designed to promote good teaching practice among part-time academics showed a positive correlation between participation in the workshop and giving post-tests at the end of class and encouraging students to prepare for classes and exams (Mattice and Richardson, 1993). In a study among others of equivalency testing, Richards (1996) showed that 84% of all paid adult education instructors were also part-time testers.

Lee (1997) showed that part-time faculty are not closely tied to the campus. The report also reviews the frequency of part-time employment in higher education in the context of concerns about the culture of the institution. Also Rajagopal and Farr (1992) revealed that part-timers have degraded and deprofessionalized academic functions which may suggest that part-timers have certain professional deficiencies. Despite their numbers part-timers may not have their deserved place in the scholarly community of higher education. At California State University almost half of all English teachers are part-timers (Flachmann, 1993). In a study that compared the working conditions of part-time English teachers at Birmingham Young University (BYU) and Utah Valley Community College (UVCC) revealed 71% of BYU and 46% of UVCC respondents

felt that they were not respected and valued by the administration (Pollington, 1992).

There is no local literature or research on the subject and the consulted international printed and electronic sources in the main do not touch on specifically the subject of the difference in the grading behaviours of part-timers and full-timers. However, Jackson (1986) has addressed the subject directly and Rabalis and Perrit (1983) have proposed modules to bridge the operational gap between part-timers and full-timers. One of these modules concerns among others issues of grading and testing. The second module also deals with testing, test construction and recommended practices in testing and grading procedures. This module ideally fits in with the operations of instructional part-timers in the Ethiopian postsecondary environment.

The Courses

College English One and Two were offered in the first and second semesters to all regular and extension, social science and natural science students of Addis Ababa University. They had three credits each. We selected these courses because they provide the most ideal and biggest data set for a comparative study of full-time and part-time staff in the University.

In the extension program, the courses were offered in the second semester in the College of Social Sciences, Faculty of Business and Economics and

the Technology Faculty. Each course had a program coordinator working at the same time as the chairperson of the respective exam setting committee. The College English coordinator, together with the test committee, would set aural tests (worth 10 marks), a mid-semester test (worth 25 marks) and a final exam (worth 55 marks). The spoken and written tests each worth 10 marks were developed, administered and graded by each course instructor who was supposed to follow the marking guidelines in the course books. The final scale was set by the exam setting committee which decides on the cut-off points suggested by individual instructors. Instructors were advised to stick to the normal grade distribution curve in the award of grades.

The Data

The data were obtained from a random sample of 258 first year sections of 9,320 students. The College English II scores were obtained from the available files of 1996-97 (110 sections); 1997-1998 (69 sections) and the College English I scores came from 1997-98 (79 sections). The sections were regular and extension, science and social science, and full-timer taught and part-timer taught. The grade report sheets contained information pertaining to the program (regular or extension), faculty (campus), semester, academic year and status of instructor (part-time or full-time), and grades awarded. Files which did not indicate information relating to the program (extension, regular, faculty, academic year, and/or semester) were excluded. Scores from sections taught by post-graduate students were excluded to eliminate extraneous considerations.

Method

The statistical analysis of the data and the interpretation of the results of the analysis are based on non-parametric statistical methods for two samples.

The usual two-sample situation in which the researcher has obtained two samples from two different populations and wishes to use a statistical test to see if the null hypothesis that the two populations are identical can be rejected. Here the most interesting difference is in location. The null hypothesis is formulated as "there is no difference between full-timers and part-timers in the award of grades to college English students". For the purpose of the analysis we used the non-parametric test that is known as Wilcoxon Rank Sum Test.

The Wilcoxon Rank Sum test is used to check for the existence of a difference in the medians of two populations. In the present study we consider the College English grades students were awarded by full-timers and part-timers to assess whether there is a difference in the median grade. That is, we try to test the null hypothesis of identical distribution with the alternative that X and Y populations are the same except in a shift in the (unknown) amount of θ (the median).

Let $X_1 \dots X_m$ be a random sample from some unknown continuous distribution F and $Y_1 \dots Y_n$ be a random sample from some unknown continuous distribution G.

Then $G(x) = P(Y \leq x) = P(X \leq x - \theta) = F(x - \theta)$.

This means that $X + \theta$ and Y have the same distribution or that X is distributed as $Y - \theta$. When $\theta < 0$, the median of the X population is larger than the median of the Y population, and when $\theta > 0$ the vice versa.

Furthermore, we assume that X_1, \dots, X_m and Y_1, \dots, Y_n are independent. Under this assumption the population has the same shape and the amount of difference in location is θ .

Therefore the test problem at a pre-assigned level of significance α becomes

$$H_0 : G(x) = F(x) \quad \text{against } H_1 : G(x) = F(x - \theta)$$

or equivalently

$$H_0 : \theta = 0 \quad \text{against } H_1 : \theta \neq 0.$$

Where H_0 and H_1 stand to represent the null and alternative hypothesis respectively.

Many of the non-parametric statistics for a general location problem use rank statistics since the ranks of X 's relative to the ranks of the Y 's provide information about relative size of the population medians.

In order to construct the test statistic we mix the observations of X and Y variables and give ranks of the combined sample data. Then we take the sum of the ranks of Y variable from the newly formed sample of size N

($=n+m$). As the value of this sum could take any value, and therefore prove unpredictable it is a random variable (Eshetu, 1998).

In testing a hypothesis the value which a test statistic takes (based on sample observation) is used as a yardstick to check if the null hypothesis cannot be rejected with a high degree of probability. Normally in statistical tests the most commonly used probabilities of sureness are as high as 90%, 95%, 99%, (i.e. $\alpha = 0.1, 0.05, 0.01$) (Eshetu, 1998).

While testing for the difference in location, the sum of the ranks of the Y observation will be compared with tabulated values of the Wilcoxon rank sum test to reach a decision whether or not to reject the null hypothesis under the given level of significance α . The tabulated values are functions of m, n and the level of significance α .

Let the rank of x_i be R_i , the rank of y_i be Q_i and let R_i^* stand for the rank in a pooled sample. Therefore the rank sum of y's will be

$$W = \sum_i^N c(i)R_i^*$$

$$\text{Where } c(i) = \begin{cases} 1, \text{ if } R_i^* \text{ is from Y} \\ 0, \text{ otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

Since W is random, its expectation and variance under the null hypothesis are:

$$E(W)_{H_0} = \frac{n(N+1)}{2}$$

$$V(W)_{H_0} = \frac{mn(N+1)}{12}$$

In the presence of tied observations, the expectation remains the same but the variance becomes,

$$V(W)_{H_0} = \frac{mn}{12} \left[N+1 - \frac{\sum_{j=1}^r t_j(t_j^2 - 1)}{N(N-1)} \right]$$

Where r is number of tied groups and t_j is the size of j^{th} group.

If m and n are small, then the null hypothesis will be rejected if the calculated value $W \notin [w_{\alpha/2}, w_{1-\alpha/2}]$ where $w_{\alpha/2}$ and $w_{1-\alpha/2}$ are read from tables.

On the other hand If $(m,n) \rightarrow \infty$, the normalised Wilcoxon rank sum statistic will be

$$W^* = \frac{W - E_{H_0}(W)}{\sqrt{\text{var}_{H_0}(W)}} \sim N(0,1)$$

Thus the decision to reject the null hypothesis will be based on the comparison of W^* with the tabulated z -value. The null hypothesis will be

rejected if the calculated value of $W^* \notin [z_{\alpha/2}, z_{1-\alpha/2}]$ or if the p-value is less than the level of significance.

Results

The Wilcoxon rank sum test produced the following results as summarized in the following tables. With all four research questions, the alternate hypothesis that there is a grading difference between part-time and full-time instructors is consistently proved.

Wilcoxon Rank Sum Test Results

Given $H_0: x < Y$ or $H_0: x - Y < 0$

$H_1: x \geq Y$ or $H_1: x - Y \geq 0$

Category A

X	Y	P-value
Full-timers semester I (all)	Part-timers semester I (all)	0.9856
Full-timers semester II (all)	Part-timers semester II (all)	1

The null hypothesis $H_0: x < Y$ is accepted demonstrating that full-timers in both semesters awarded grades less generously than part-timers (who gave more As and Bs).

Category B

X	Y	P- value
Regular Division semester I full-timers	Regular Division semester I part -timers	.3975
Regular Division semester II full-timers	Regular Division semester II part -timers	.9949
Extension Division semester I full-timers	Extension Division semester I part -timers	.5578
Extension Division semester II full-timers	Extension Division semester II part -timers	.5760

As the values demonstrate, in both regular and extension programmes, full-timers awarded grades less liberally than part-timers.

Category C

X	Y	P- value
Full-timers (overall)	part-timers (overall)	0.2733
Full-timers in Regular Division	Regular Division semester II part -timers	0.2522
Full-timers in Extension Division	part-timers in Extension Division	0.1032
Extension Division semester II full-timers	Extension Division semester II part -timers	.5760
Full-timers on Social Science Campus	part-timers on Social Science Campus	0.4345
Full-timers on Science Campus	part-timers on Science Campus	0.4674

The P-values indicate that full-timers in general graded students less generously. This was consistently true in both regular and extension divisions as well as science and social science campuses.

Category D

X	Y	P- value
Social science semester I full-timers	Social science semester I part-timers	0.9023
Social science semester II full-timers	Social science semester II Part-timers	0.5591
Science semester I full-timers	Science semester I part-timers	0.5500
Science semester II full-timers	Science semester II part-timers	0.9879

The semester -based test of difference showed that in general in both semesters part-timers gave more As and Bs in the Social Science College and Faculty of Science.

Discussion

The results of the grade analysis consistently indicated that in all academic units and programs part-time faculty gave higher grades than full- time staff. The findings of the present study are consistent with the findings of Jackson (1986) who found that part-timers at Fayetteville Technical Institute assigned higher grades than full-timers.

The grading patterns observed in this AAU study may suggest that part-time staff have certain deprofessionalized academic functions (Rajagopal and Linz, 1992). Their assignment of grades appears to show their lower levels of accountability to the employing institution as well as their professional compromises engendered perhaps by overriding financial concerns. It would appear that they awarded generous grades in exchange for ratings which were in the period the data was collected decisively important for continuity of part-time employment ; a single semester's below average ratings would lead to contractual termination of part-timers while full-timers would be given a second chance.

While students may be unaware of the difference between faculty employed as full-time and part-time (Lundy and Warner, 1987) the findings show their being taught and graded by either can have an important effect on students personally, academically and in later years professionally. This effect may also extend to the employing institution's erosion of evaluative competency and integrity despite its efforts in and stated commitment to quality assurance in instruction.

According to the patterns observed, a full-timer taught student or section is judged stringently while its part-timer taught counterpart is graded liberally distorting the true measure of the students' ability and causing, in the past years, for instance, an unfair placement of a student in to unselected departments.

In view of the considerable size of the part-time faculty in certain AAU departments of 50% (although this figure may now have changed), it is very difficult to overlook the subject of grades assigned by part-timers and their consequences. It is equally difficult to disagree with Hartleb and Vilter (1986) who indicate that the large scale employment of part-timers is institutionally seriously costly pointing to such possibilities as part-timers' lack of the requisite time to review their work and to participate in important departmental meetings which in our case are exclusive of part-timers. However such meetings may be made more inclusive and involve discussions on standardization of testing, which as the data show, appear to be more important to part-time instructional staff. If brought from the marginal to the mainstream, they may feel institutionally important and contribute in a similar manner as inner staff. As Leslie and Gappa (1993: 289) indicate, “ institutions that employ part-time faculty strengthen themselves when they adopt a positive, fair and investment-oriented stance toward their part-time faculty”.

In a practical move to offset effects as observed in this study, Harvard University ³ has of late resisted the employment of part-timers in the English Language Program in its Division of Continuing Education (Newman, 2000) while nationally in the US there are “more than a quarter million part-time faculty employed in colleges and universities” (Gappa 1984: p.6). While AAU has been hiring part -time staff to meet exponential growth rates in enrollments, it seems to have paid little heed to the issue of quality (teaching and grading) by part -timers. It seems that

the need for part-time faculty may continue at least for some years. It is important therefore that part-timers should be integrated and supervised more closely giving them a sense of belonging and asking of them the same degree of professional accountability as full-time staff.

In this regard, the guidelines of the Modern Language Association (1985) on the employment of part-time faculty may be worth noting. The MLA suggests that each department should develop a long-range plan that clarifies the use of part-time faculty in terms of departmental needs and goals. If there is a recurrent need for part-timers, academic divisions should establish a cadre of permanent part-timers who receive incentives that enhance professional development. They should be hired and reviewed according to processes comparable to those of full-time staff. They should also receive adequate introduction to their teaching assignments, departments and institutions.

Beyond the assignment or misalignment of grades, MLA warns that an unplanned and excessive use of part-time staff invites student dissatisfaction and threatens the quality of teaching. However differences in the quality of instruction delivered by full-timers and part-timers have been inconclusive (California Community Colleges, 1987) with some studies reporting a difference (Spangler, 1990) and others failing to confirm the differences.

Several approaches to staff development for part-time staff have been forwarded because “too often colleges fail to integrate part-time faculty into their institutions” (Banachowski, 1997:6). Staff development has been conceptualized as a set of in service workshops that complement the part-timers’ subject expertise with pedagogical and other skills. A model may be presented that deals with testing , covering topics such as testing objectives , test construction, recommended practises in testing and grading procedures.

The grading discrepancies observed would warrant the conclusion that AAU DFLL (Department of Foreign Languages and Literature) needs to design an instructional support program for its part-timers to help them conduct their testing and grading duties more professionally and in accordance with procedures in place. Clearly, their numbers and duties are too important to ignore.

Notes:

1. Until the late 1990s, a single semester of below average student ratings was enough to disqualify a part-time instructor in the department from continued employment. Part-timers are no longer rated for their effectiveness of delivery of instruction which may have an impact on the quality of their duties to the university.
2. Gappa (1984) mentions the motives of part-time faculty as personal satisfaction, enhancement of one’s nonacademic career and economic.

A related study by Tuckman and Tuckman (1978) also identified seven categories of part-timers. There seems to be no relevant Ethiopian study.

3. Williams (1985:38) has made an extensive study of the literature on part-time faculty. He concludes that "the problems inherent in employing large numbers of part-timersoutweigh the advantages" and suggests that improved in-service activities are needed to ensure instructional quality.

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