

# Practices and Challenges of Supplementary Exam in Selected Colleges of Haramaya University, Ethiopia

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## Abstract

Supplementary assessment particularly re-exam in the context of Ethiopian universities was introduced with the principle of improving academic achievement of failing students with score near to passing marks. Besides, using more extended type of grading system having plus and minus signs that provide more broader and detailed view about students performance rather than using the traditional five point scale grading (A, B, C, D, and F) is prominent feature of higher institutions. Case study method was utilized to look the trends of re-exam in Haramaya University. The subjects of the study were college deans, instructors, students, registrar data managers and their respective heads. To incorporate instructors and students in to the sample, purposive sampling was used. Available sampling technique was utilized to include registrar data managers and their heads. Questionnaire, semi structured interview and document review sheet were used to collect the necessary data. The finding of the study showed that, instructors were not sufficiently providing tutorials for their students before allowing them to sit for re-exam. Additionally; belittling, absence of fixed schedule (date and time) for re-exam, low instructors readiness & their bad perception towards re-exam due to the absence of incentives were found to be the major challenges that affect the practices of re-exam. The relationship between study year level and the number of students who scored FX grade ( $r = -0.92$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) was negative and significant.

**Keywords:** FX; Grade; Re-exam; Supplementary assessment;

## 1. Introduction

Supplementary exam is a kind of assessment designed to give students an additional opportunity to demonstrate their satisfactory attainment of specific learning outcomes on courses were they performed low but with good standing (Curtin University, 2015; Australian Catholic University, 2017).

Universities in different countries are currently providing supplementary exam for low achieving students having scores close to passing marks. For example, according to University of Tasmania (2004), Curtin University (2015), Australian Catholic University (2017) and Wollongong University (2017) a student who received final course result between but including 45% and 49% can be eligible for supplementary assessment.

The rule of offering supplementary assessment in McGill University is slightly different from the above universities. Meaning, any student who scored marks either near to passing mark or totally failing marks will be allowed to take supplementary assessment in McGill University. Here is the university assessment policy statement approved by senate on February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

*A student who has received a grade D, F, G or U in a course may apply to undertake supplemental assessment and students registered for supplemental assessment must have access to all the relevant course materials (McGill University, 2011).*

Moreover, Ethiopian universities started to offer a supplementary exam which is local named as re-exam after the harmonization of curriculum at national level (MoE, 2012). The detail of point scale including scale for offering re-exam is explained in table 1 below.

**Table: 1- Grading Scale of Ethiopian Higher Institutions at Undergraduate Programs**

Raw mark interval	Corresponding number grade	Corresponding letter grade	Status description	Class description
[90, 100]	4.0	A+	Excellent	First class with great distinction
[85, 90)	4.0	A		
[80, 85)	3.75	A-		
[75, 80)	3.5	B+	Very good	First class with distinction
[70, 75)	3.0	B		
[65, 70)	2.75	B-	good	First class
[60, 65)	2.5	C+		
[50, 60)	2	C	Satisfactory	Lower class
[45, 50)	1.75	C-	Unsatisfactory	
[40, 45)	1	D	Very poor	
[30, 40)	0	FX	*Fail	Lowest class
<30	0	F	Fail	

Source: MoE (2012)

From the data in table 1, it is apparent that a student will be offered a grade of “FX” if he/she scores row

marks greater than or equal to 30 and less than 40. According to MoE (2012) and article number 116.1.4 of Haramaya University (HU) senate legislation (HU, 2013), student must sit for re-exam with minor support within two weeks time after the beginning of subsequent semester if he/she score “FX” in course/s he/she registered. This means, if the student scored “FX” in first semester of the academic year, she/he will sit for re-exam in the first two weeks of the second semester of the same academic year. Or if the student scores “FX” in the second semester of certain academic year, he/she will sit for re-exam on the first two weeks of the next academic year.

Even though the practice of supplementary assessment or remedial exam is common in many universities including Ethiopian Universities, no empirical studies have addressed its practices and challenges that both instructors and students face while practicing supplementary assessment. In faintly similar to the present study, a small number of experimental studies conducted by Jacob and Lefgren (2002), Lavy and Schlosser (2005), and Battistin et al. (2010) on the impact of remedial education in upper primary schools of Italy, Chicago public schools and Israel respectively indicated that both remedial exam and remedial education like summer school increased the academic achievement of students. Collectively, these studies evidenced about the effectiveness of remedial education showing that research on the present area of study is scarce. That means, the practice of providing tutorial for students that are eligible for re-exam and its challenges are not well investigated in the context of higher institutions in general and Ethiopian Universities in particular though the term “minor support” in policy document (MoE, 2012) and (HU, 2013) indicates the provision of tutorial for student who scored “FX” and re-exam remains a strategy to improve their academic achievement. The specific objective of this research is therefore to;

1. Explore the extent to which instructors provide tutorials for “FX” scoring students
2. Investigate the major challenges that both instructors and students face while implementing re-exam
3. Test whether association exists between study year level of students and scoring FX grade

## 2. Review of Related Literature

### Concept of Supplementary Education

Supplementary education is the provision of educational opportunity for children and young people in a setting outside mainstreaming education (Badwal, 2009). According to British Educational Research Association (2012), supplementary Education is an education provided outside the school hours either to reinforce or support the regular education offered in the mainstream education system or to compensate for educational disadvantages. Supplementary education may exist in different forms like individual or group tutoring, summer schooling, weekends, evenings or after school. In the context of this research, supplementary assessment refers to re-exam that is offered to students who scored FX grade as a result of scoring total marks between [30 to 40) out of 100 in his/her continuous assessment.

### Characteristics of Supplementary Education

According to Badwal (2009), one of the characteristics of supplementary education is it run after school time. Meaning, supplementary education is mainly conducted in the evenings, at weekends and summer vacations. The second characteristic of supplementary education is that, it is managed by local community groups and relies on volunteers for staffing and financial contributions. Regarding this, scholars like (Dierkes, 2011) said supplementary education is not restricted to be offered by professional teachers but it is also provided by other professionals like engineers, accountants, parents of students, university students, and other voluntary personnel’s. Moreover, Badwal (2009) summarized the following as additional characteristics of supplementary education;

- Operate in community venue. For instance, youth club, a place of worship, mainstreaming school or community center
- Offer range of learning opportunities including national curriculum subjects, cultural studies, and mother tongue classes
- Rely on good will of dedicated, committed, often unpaid staff who work with few resources

### Benefits of Supplementary Education

In the context of the present research area, supplementary exam or re-exam is introduced with the aim of improving the academic achievement of students. Supporting this, Australian Catholic University (2017) stated, supplementary examination will be advantageous for those who failed to get through regular examinations. Besides, it saves a possibility of loss of academic year as well. In addition to this, British Educational Research Association (2012) and (Badwal, 2009) summarized the benefits of supplementary education as follows;

- Supplementary assessment gives students the second chance at achieving a passing grade for a course (University of Queensland, 2017).
- It gives pupils tremendous support to their learning ethos
- It help parents to be involved while supporting their children’s for success
- Raise academic achievement of pupils and young people often through study support in national curriculum subjects or teaching of community languages
- Enhance confidence, self esteem and social skill such as ability to question and debate in lessons through improving motivation and learning

- Keep students safe and positively occupied
- Engage parents in school and learning
- Contributing to integration and cohesion

### Challenges in Supplementary Education Programs

According to British Educational Research Association (2012), one of the common challenges in the provision of supplementary education is lack of funding as many schools operate on shoestring budget. Likewise, lack of incentive for instructors was found to be the main challenge in practicing supplementary assessment in the study area.

Profile is another common problem. Meaning, many schools are hidden within the community and their success are not always celebrated or acknowledged by local authorities and mainstreaming schools (Badwal, 2009). Supporting this, British Educational Research Association (2012) stated, some staffs in supplementary education programs had qualification in engineering, accountancy, and other professions.

## 3. Methods and Materials

### 3.1. Description of the Study Area

Haramaya University is located in the eastern part of Ethiopia. It is about 510 kms far from the capital city of the country, Addis Ababa. It was founded in 1954 as Alemaya College of Agriculture. In May 27, 1985 it was upgraded to university status due to the opening of faculty of forestry in 1987 and named as Alemaya University of Agriculture. At present, the university has 9 colleges, 1 institute and 1 academy. Namely: College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES), College of Business and Economics (CBE), College of Computing and Informatics (CCI), College of Education and Behavioral Sciences (CEBS), College of Health and Medical Science (CHMS), College of Law (CoL), College of Natural and Computational Science (CNCS), College of Social Science and Humanities (CSSH), College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM), Haramaya Institute of Technology (HiT), and Sport Science Academy. Now, the university has a total of 283 programs of which 108 are undergraduate, 159 are second degree and 22 are at PhD levels. Hence, this study included students from all regular undergraduate programs of 2016/17 (second semester).

### 3.2. Research Design

This study is concerned with exploring the actual situation of re-exam in selected colleges of HU. As a result it used a case study method that is designed in qualitative research paradigm as it allow the researcher to typically observe the clique, to probe deeply and to analyze intensively the multifarious phenomenon related with re-exam with a view to establish generalizations about the wider population to which that situation belongs (Cohen et al. 2007). Moreover, according to Jupp (2006) a case study method helps the researcher to undertake in-depth investigation of an event, group, organization or institution.

### 3.3. Sources of Data

Both primary and secondary sources of data were used to collect the required information. The primary data were collected from students, registrar office data managers, registrar heads, college deans, department (school) heads and course instructors. Secondary data sources such as HU senate legislation (HU, 2013), HU students assessment guide line (HU, 2015), and Modularization guide line (MoE, 2012) were consulted. Additionally, research articles and reports produced by academic programs directorate were utilized.

### 3.4. Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Four colleges having relatively high rate of students who scored FX grade were purposely selected as a sample. Namely: HiT, CAES, CBE and CCI. The statistics of students who scored FX across all colleges is described in table 2 bellow.

Table: 2- Statistics of students who scored FX in second semester of 2016/17 (2009 E.C)

Student	Colleges										
	CAES	CBE	CCI	CEBS	CoL	HiT	CNCS	CHMS	CSSH	CVM	SPA
<b>Male</b>	96	200	101	4	18	397	40	41	56	6	12
<b>Female</b>	175	122	93	19	18	191	76	54	105	6	19
<b>Total</b>	271	322	194	23	36	588	114	95	161	12	31

Source: Cluster registrar of each college

From the total number of 1,090 students available in the four selected colleges, the researcher took 40 students (10 from each college) as a sample. This sample size is considered to be sufficient for qualitative study due to homogeneity of the population and saturation of knowledge (Bertaux, 1981: Kvale, 1996: Guest et al. 2006: Seidman, 2006 & Mason, 2010). Additionally, Crouch and McKenzie (2006) stated that, in qualitative interview based research, small number of cases even less than 20 will enhance the validity of in-depth inquiry in naturalistic setting. Additionally, 10 instructors, 2 school heads and 7 department heads were included as a sample through

purposive sampling. Moreover, available sampling technique was utilized to incorporate 18 cluster registrar data managers and 10 registrar heads.

### 3.5. Tools of Data Collection

Questionnaire, interview guide and document review sheet were the main data collecting tools used in this paper. Questionnaire containing items that emphasis on the extent to which instructors provide tutorials was dispatched to students having FX grade. Semi-structured interview guide consisting items that focus on the practices of tutorial and major challenges that affect the practices of re-exam was prepared and conducted to selected students, instructors, department heads and registrar heads. Additionally, document reviewing data sheet was prepared for cluster registrar heads and registrar data managers in a way that shows the number of students who scored FX in each department across all colleges. In data collecting sheet, variables like department, level of year, sex, id number, semester, and CGPA were included.

### 3.6. Methods of Data Analysis

After conducting an interview, the data was transcribed in a way that contained all the detailed information's given by participants. Then after, data reduction was taken place by using codes that signify the themes drawn from the interviews and document analysis. Data collected through interview to supplement the findings of document analysis and interview was analyzed by using percent while correlation analysis was conducted to find out whether there exist relationship between study year level of students and the number of students who scored FX grade.

### Result and Discussion

The main findings of the study are presented in two sections as follows

#### 1. To what extent do instructors provide tutorials for students who scored "FX"?

The principle behind the provision of tutorial for students who scored "FX" in their final assessment result is to help them improve their academic achievement. In line with this assumption, documents like (HU, 2013 & HU, 2015) demand instructors to provide tutorial for students who scored "FX". But, the practice of tutorial provision seems minimal. Thirty one out of forty students and eight out of ten interviewed instructors well-versed that, instructors were not sufficiently providing tutorials for their students before allowing them to sit for re-exam. For instance, as one of the informant from CAES reported:

*Instructors do not respect the rules and regulations of the university. HU may expect its students to sit for re-exam after taking tutorial. But, the reality is unlike. I scored "FX" in two different courses. But, instructors of both courses were not voluntary to provide tutorial (S<sub>6</sub>).*

Additionally, one of the interviewed instructors expressed

*Students who sit for re-exam are really advantageous for two main reasons when compared with their peers. First, since re-exam gives them the second opportunity to sit for exam, they already know what kinds of items will appear on exam. That means, they will be more familiar with the exam style of an instructor. Secondly, they get more time for further preparation and additional reading. As a result, I don't think providing tutorial is mandatory for such students (I<sub>3</sub>).*

The third interviewee also repeated;

*With the assumption that instructors will provide tutorials for students who scored FX, the time of re-exam is decided to be the first two weeks of a new semester. From my past experience, none of the instructors were voluntary to provide tutorial (S<sub>13</sub>).*

Amazingly, another interviewed instructor illustrated;

*"FX" is miserable for instructors. I don't want to take additional responsibility. As a trend there are techniques of escaping "FX". You know most of the time students' who score "FX" obtain marks near to 40. So, if the score of the student is near to 40 just I add few marks and offer them D rather than suffering by providing tutorial and preparing additional exam (I<sub>8</sub>).*

The above ideas though reflected by four interviewees taken as excerpts, it was shared by almost all interviewed students and instructors. In support of this, data collected through questionnaire indicated that the provision of tutorial by instructors was no sufficient. For instance, 57.4% of the students tallied instructors never provided tutorial, 25.7% of them selected instructors provided tutorial for about 2-4 hours and the remaining 16.8% reported instructors provided tutorial for about 4-8 hours. However, HU (2009 E.C) document clearly indicates that, students must take 16 hours tutorial before sitting for re-exam. Fouche (2007) also found in his study that, attending extra academic literacy tutorials has little effect on students' test of academic literacy level marks but it does seem to have an influence on students writing ability. So, one can understand that, the provision of tutorial in the study area is very low even if it is important to improve the academic achievement of low scoring students.

#### 2. What are the major challenges that affect the practices of Re-exam?

##### Challenges from Students Perspective

Belittling is major challenge that affects the implementation of re-exam. Regarding this, one of the interviewed students claimed;

*Instructors have completely negative attitude for “FX”. Due to absence of fixed date and time at the university level it is up to the student to communicate the course instructor and take re-exam. So, when you go to the office of instructor, their face becomes depressing, you shrink down. Simply you suffer a lot. But you cope up as there will not be other option (S<sub>3</sub>).*

The other interviewed student also added “it is not only instructors that frighten us but also registrar data managers and head department secretaries do not treat us in a usual way that other students are treated”.

The third student with similar case reported;

*Scoring “FX” is not directly related with being poor in academic achievement. Personally, I scored “FX” because one of my friends who sat beside me was coping answer from my answer sheet. Suddenly, the invigilator came and signed on my final exam. Hence, I scored zero on final exam and my total mark becomes 38. This indicates my grade is “FX”. But, what I observed from instructors is that, they consider you as lazy student whenever you score “FX” (S<sub>18</sub>).*

From the above paragraphs, there is derision on “FX” scoring students from both the instructors and other supportive staff like registrar data managers and secretaries of department heads. Additionally, some of the staff members misunderstood the causes of “FX” by associating it with poor academic performance of the students though some students scored “FX” because of their health problem at the time of exam and other invigilation related problems like academic cheating by fellow students.

#### **Absence of fixed schedule to sit for re-exam**

Regarding this, one of the respondents said;

*Normally, exams like tests, mid exams and final exams have clearly known date and time schedule prepared by department heads and students sit for exam consequently. But in case of FX it is up to the student and the course instructor to fix the exam date and time within the first two weeks of the next semester. Due to this gap, I personally suffered a lot because when I prepare myself and go to the office of my course instructor to sit for re-exam he changed the schedule and appointed me for about four times.*

The other interviewed student also repeated

*Instructors will not allow you to re-sit for exam on the first date of their appointment. They will always appoint you to come again and again as they immediately start their class since they are enforced to apply the principle of DOCO and they become busy*

The third interviewee also explained;

*With the assumption that instructors will provide tutorials for students who scored FX, the time of re-exam is decided to be the first two weeks of a new semester. From my past experience, none of the instructors were voluntary to provide tutorial. Therefore, it is better if students are allowed sit for re-exam at the beginning of the first two days of a new semester rather than spending their study time whenever their instructor change the time of re-exam.*

From these interview results one can realize that, absence of fixed schedule (exact date and time) for re-exam is affecting the implementation of re-exam. However, in universities like Curtin and Queensland, if a student is granted an opportunity for supplementary examination, he/she will be notified the exact date, time and venue of the supplementary examination in writing via a hard copy letter or email to student provided account by the relevant school heads (Queensland University of Technology, 2013 & Curtin University, 2015).

#### **Absence of separate responsible stakeholder that facilitate the concern of re-exam**

One of the major problems in relation to re-exam is absence of separate center that take responsibility and facilitate re-exams. In some universities, there are separate offices or centers that are responsible for such issues. For instance, in Australian Catholic University, it is up to Learning Improvement Center (LIC) to determine if the student is eligible for supplementary assessment by checking all the requirements; Set new assessment task(s) that are appropriate to each student; Notifying a student of the supplementary assessment about details of the assessment task/s such as day, date, time and location of assessment rooms; Offer the supplementary assessment task; convert his/her achievement to grade and submit a new grade to the head of school within 20 working days of the student completing the supplementary assessment task/s (ACT, 2017). Similarly, there is delegated authority in Australian National University that runs the issue of supplementary assessment. Moreover, board of examiners is responsible for the concern of supplementary assessment in case of Curtin University. In Wollongong University Student Services Division (SSD) is responsible for such issues. Regarding this, first year female interviewee complained;

*Since there is no other official that facilitates the concern of re-exam, it is up to the student to communicate the course instructor. Hence, it is too frightening to go back to the course instructor and make appointment about tutorial session and exam time.*

The second interviewee also said;

*No one is responsible for the issue of re-exam except the course instructor and the student him/her self. This is not right because the course instructor already completed everything about the course. So, he/she should not be responsible for the second time unless additional incentives are allocated. I mean, there*

*should be other separate office that runs issues related with re-exam.*

Still another student reported “We felt shame when we go back to the course instructor. Things will be easier if there is separate office that takes responsibility like screening students who scored FX grade, preparing re-exam schedule and the like”.

In addition to the challenges discussed above, interviewee mentioned that, bad perceptions of instructors and their readiness, suffering due to unacceptability of meal card to utilize cafeteria until registration after sitting for re-exam, and peer pressure are additional factors that affect the practices of re-exam.

### Challenges from Instructors Perspective

It is obvious that instructors have important roles in realizing re-exams. Tutorial session is also an additional opportunity for students to build better understanding about the course. However, as confirmed by an interviewee “absence of incentives” seems to be one of the challenges hindering the provision of tutorial.

Talking about this issue, almost all interviewed instructors complained that HU highly encourages lower achievers and female students to prefer two courses per semester and take additional 16 hour tutorial session in order to score better result on these courses. In such situation instructors obtain some amount of incentives if their workload is above 12 Cr hours. But, in case of “FX” though instructors spent the same kind of energy and time, no one can consider it as an extra load. However, Haramaya University citizens charter (HU, 2009) vividly indicated that, students in each program of the university can choose two different courses based on their interest and takes 16 hours tutorial session for each course per semester. Here, it is obvious that teachers will be paid with some amount of money if they submit an attendance that shows the instructor offered tutorial and the department head confirms the issue. But in case of FX there is no such incentive that motivates instructors to offer tutorial.

### Shortage of time is also another challenge as reported by instructors

As confirmed by an interviewee “shortage of time” seems to be one of the challenges hindering the provision of tutorial. An interviewee has explained the issue as follows:

*As you remember the provision of tutorial and re-exam for “FX” should be completed in the first two weeks of a new semester. In our university, there is also another principle known as “DOCO” meaning ‘day one class one’. This means, we have to start regular class immediately after the registration of students. Thus, there is no time to provide tutorial and other support to students of “FX”.*

In support of this idea, one of the students with such case reported the following

*Yes, time is one of the constraints that both instructors and students with “FX” might face. As to me the appropriate time for re-exam should be at break time. That means, in the middle of the two semesters. Time of re-exam is not appropriate as regular class schedule will overlap with tutorial session for “FX” case. So, the only opportunity incase if you face “FX” is you should miss either regular class or tutorial class.*

### 3. Association between study year level of students’ and FX grade

As shown in table 3 below, the Sig value 0.029 is less than 0.05 which indicates that, there is significant correlation between study year level and the number of students who scored FX grade. Hence, the null hypothesis that states there is no significant association between study year level and the number of students that scored FX grade was rejected. Moreover, Pearson correlation value  $r(1825) = -0.92, p < 0.05$  indicates that, there is strongly correlation between the two variables. The negative sign in this value indicates that, both variables are inversely related. Meaning, as the study year level of the students increased, the number of students who scored FX grade has decreased and vice versa.

**Table 3: Correlation between year level and number of students who scored FX grade**

		Correlations	
		Year level	Number of students
Year level	Pearson Correlation	1	-.916*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.029
	N	5	1827
Number of students	Pearson Correlation	-.916*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.029	
	N	1827	1827

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The finding of this study disclosed that, majority of students are sitting for re-exam without attending tutorial sessions. This situation would lead to the conclusion that instructors are not sufficiently providing tutorials for students who scored FX before allowing them to re-sit for exams. Thus, it is suggested that, instructors need to provide tutorials as per the assessment guide line of the university and nationally harmonized curriculum

framework to enhance the achievement of FX scoring students. Additionally, the researcher recommended that, management body of the university particularly registrar heads and department heads need to follow up the provision of tutorial for FX scoring students and allow the required incentive for instructors that successfully carry out the task as per the guideline.

Secondly, it was found out that, belittling, absence of fixed schedule, absence of separate responsible stakeholder that facilitate the concern of re-exam, and absence of incentive for instructors were influencing the practices of re-exam. Hence, middle and lower management body of the university such as registrar heads, deans and department heads ought to clearly schedule the dates and exact time of re-exam to students and instructors so that students who scored FX grade will not suffer while communicating their course instructor. Additionally, it is better if the university realize separate structure as a position that facilitate the concern of re-exam like identifying students with FX grade, notifying the exam dates and time, providing exams, scoring it and finally submitting the grade to registrar office.

Furthermore, the present research highlighted insight about the practices and challenges of re-exam. As a result other researchers are suggested to carry out further study on areas like major causes that expose students for scoring FX, its implication on improving their academic achievement and its impact on reading habit of students.

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