

Report of the Committee of Statisticians, constituted by Kerala Public Service Commission, to study the standardization procedure for Plus Two Level Common Preliminary Examinations, 2022.

The Kerala Public service Commission constituted the committee to standardize the marks obtained by candidates in preliminary examinations to short list candidates who secured marks above a cut off mark for the selection to the main examination. The preliminary examinations were conducted on three different dates, with different question papers based on the same syllabus. The committee is of the opinion that the standardization is required only if there is significant variation in difficulty levels among the different question papers.

One cannot determine which question is more difficult simply by reading the questions. It is not fair to decide a question is more difficult based on intuition or subjectivity of a person. The decision can be taken only based on empirical evidence.

So, the committee decided to compute the index of difficulty (difficulty level) of each question in each question paper. **The index of difficulty (p) of a question is defined as the proportion of correct answers of that question (that is the number of correct answers of the question divided by the total number of candidates who wrote the examination with the respective question paper)**(Nitko (1996), Crocker & Algina, 1986). The larger the proportion getting a question right, the easier the question. The higher the difficulty index indicates the easier the question and the lower the index of difficulty indicates the question is difficult. The index of difficulty will be always in between 0 and 1. **The index of difficulty ‘0’ means the maximum is the difficulty and ‘1’ means the difficulty is minimum.** The committee carried out an exploratory analysis on the marks of three phases. The marks scored by the candidates in three phases shows that even if there is significant variation in the difficulty of question papers, there are significant number of top scorers in each phase. This may be due to the heterogeneity in the educational qualifications of the candidates appeared for the examination. So, the committee decided to consider the candidates who scored atleast 45% marks from each phase to compute the difficulty indices.

The questions in each question papers are to be divided into five strata as follows:

Stratum No.	Range of difficulty index(p)	Difficulty Level
1	$0 \leq p < 0.2$	Very difficult
2	$0.2 \leq p < 0.4$	Difficult
3	$0.4 \leq p < 0.6$	Average
4	$0.6 \leq p < 0.8$	Easy
5	$0.8 \leq p \leq 1$	Very easy

If the distribution of difficulty levels in different question papers varied significantly, then we can infer that all question papers are not in the same level. Under this circumstance we have to adopt some methods to standardize the marks. **It is to be noted that all these procedures can be done only under the assumption that there is no regional variation in the capabilities of candidates.**

The Committee considered different procedures for standardization and illustrated with sample data. The Committee was of the opinion that the effect of standardization should be same for all candidates who scored the same mark within a particular group (answered a particular question paper) because the weightage of all questions were same while conducting the examination. Also it is not fair to give the same benefits of difficulty for all in a phase because the difficulty level of candidates within a phase may be different due to various reasons. So, the committee decided to give the benefits of difficulty proportional to the performance of the candidates. The committee unanimously suggests the following procedure for standardization.

All questions in a question paper are to be stratified into five levels as given above. Then a score of difficulty (DS) is to be computed for each question paper as given below.

$$\text{Compute } DS_i = \sum [N_{ij} \times (1 - M_j)] / N_i$$

Where DS_i is the score of difficulty for the i^{th} question paper; N_{ij} is the number of questions in the j^{th} stratum of the i^{th} question paper. M_j is the median difficulty level of the j^{th} stratum ($M_1=0.1, M_2=0.3, M_3=0.5, M_4=0.7, M_5=0.9$), N_i is the number of questions in the i^{th} question paper.

Then the proportion of difficulty (PD) of each question paper to the lowest difficult question paper (DS_i is minimum) can be computed as:

$$PD_i = (DS_i / DS_{\min})$$

PD_i is the proportion of difficulty of the i^{th} question paper to the lowest difficult question paper; DS_{\min} is the score of difficulty of the question paper which has the minimum DS.

Then the final mark of the j^{th} candidate who attended the i^{th} question paper (S_{ij}) is to be computed as:

$$S_{ij} = \text{Min}[100, M_{ij} \times PD_i]$$

Where M_{ij} is the mark actually scored **out of 100** (including negative marks) by the j^{th} candidate in the i^{th} group.

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Note:

1. All the marks may be corrected to a convenient number of decimal places to break tie.
2. The standardization procedure depends on the nature of data, hence the above said procedure cannot be applied to another situation without exploring the feasibility of the method.

References

1. Crocker L. and Algina J. (1986). Introduction to classical and modern test theory, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston
2. Nitko A.J (1996): Educational assessment of students. Second edition, New Jersey, USA, Prentice- Hall

APPENDIX

Number of questions in each stratum

		Stratum				
		Very difficult	Difficult	Average	Easy	Very easy
Phase	1	13	20	11	22	32
	2	10	12	16	22	38
	3	7	13	10	31	33

Score of Difficulty (DS)

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
0.4184	0.3653	0.351

Proportion of Difficulty (PD)

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
1.192	1.041	1