CAUSES OF STUDENTS' GRADE INFLATION IN PANDEMIC: EXPLORATORY SEQUENTIAL DESIGN

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ABSTRACT

This research study aimed to determine the causes of students' grade inflation in a pandemic using Exploratory Sequential Design. Grade Inflation could lower study desire and hinder schools' ability to detect well-prepared students. At the same time, higher marks may increase other students' confidence and motivate them to pursue challenging professions where they may succeed. The 17 respondents were selected using purposive sampling, and ten (10) students were assigned to in-depth interviews and seven (7) to focus group discussions. A total of 200 respondents were randomly selected and assigned to Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) in equal proportions (EFA). Thus, it was revealed during the interview, as indicated in the theme, that students experienced grading leniency, adjusted to shifting of learning modality, course execution and evaluation, teachers' factor, incorporated efficiency of learning, and organized strategic learning plan. It indicates that although grades may demotivate some students and hinder schools' capacity to identify qualified candidates, better grades may drive other students to pursue complex disciplines in which they thrive. However, the underlying dimensions have a significant impact. It's almost impossible for students to have a positive impact on society if they aren't academically equipped. Thus, the study's results revealed in the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) that the instruments in the study were reduced to 19 out of 30 items as the final tool. It is also indicated that the instrument's reliability was very high, as indicated by the Cronbach Alpha (a=.798). Therefore, it is recommended that teachers use specified rubrics to prevent bias in grading by adequately assessing students' performance.

Keywords: *Grade Inflation, Grade Leniency, Strategic Plan, Exploratory Factor Analysis, Exploratory Sequential Design, North Cotabato Division.*

INTRODUCTION

Most countries all over the world are struggling because of the corona virus's evasive impact. It has an influence on the economy, business, and, most notably, education. As a result, most schools, particularly in the Philippines, are affected and adjusting to the new educational system structure. This new system, which is more online and less face-to-face, has an impact on all students' grades for almost 98%. As a result, grade inflation occurs (Aquino & Carreon, 2021).

Students are graded to determine their academic progress. When grades are inflated, the inclination to doubt the reasoning behind the grading increases. In this sense, "grade inflation" is a frequent explanation for rising notes in terms of assigning better marks to comparable work. Although the empirical research on grade inflation in higher education outside of the United States is limited, this topic has received considerable attention in the United States. Note inflation allegations in higher education have risen in US institutions over the last few decades, coupled with significant data proving the prevalence and significance of the issue. It is well known that

pupils spend less time in class. Moreover, students who received inflated grades in entry-level or preparatory subjects frequently indicated that they felt incompetent in higher courses and cited grade inflation as the cause (Karadag, 2021).

Furthermore, A surge in grade inflation in schools' institutions was seen, i.e., student grades began to rise beginning in the 1960s. A study performed by Kuh & Hu (1999), one of the pioneering studies in literature, stated that grades were higher in the 1990s than they were in the 1980s, and average grades climbed in all higher education institutions. Some research claimed that this is because more women attended higher education in the 1990s than in the 1980s, and it may not be a direct result of grade inflation. Recent surveys, however, show that the number of students waiting for an A grade has risen significantly over the years (Eiszler, 2002).

However, many reasons impacted the rise in higher education grades. For example, attributes this growth to three factors: (a) required student evaluation of classes; (b) pupils becoming more career-oriented; and (c) learning outstripping family finances. According to Rosovsky and Hartley, the causes for rising grades include increased incentives because of the conscription for the Vietnam War; responses to student diversity, new curriculum, or grading procedures; responses to student evaluations and a developing consumer culture (Rojstaczer, 2020).

According to Schutz et al., (2020). Grading inflation produces accumulation at the top of the grading distribution, making it harder for the brightest pupils to distinguish themselves. Grades can be used in the workplace to assist employers identify bright pupils. This approach undermines the dependability of all schools, which are critical institutions for inflation, meritocracy, and upward social mobility. Although it is tempting to believe that grade inflation is simply an educational study field and not a common sociological problem area of interest, theories of class inflation typically suggest a structural shift in the broader society and social institution of education.

In summary, grade inflation refers to the practice of lowering academic criteria and awarding pupils better grades than they deserve. Furthermore, grade inflation is a method used by education institutions to lower the real worth of an A grade relative to the average grade value. Grade inflation lowers standards and makes it harder to relate marks to knowledge and credentials. Grade inflation in higher education institutions as a "fatal synergy" from this standpoint (Crumbley et al., 2021).

However, little agreement on the causes and effects of grade inflation. Whatever the cause, there are three concerns connected to the phenomena of grade inflation in modern education. The first is connected to the fact that when the distribution of letter grades rises over time (inflation), A and B are given more than C, D, or F. The second section discusses the various elements influencing the course grade. The final point to consider is if the COVID-19 epidemic would result in grade inflation in Philippine schools and institutions. In other words, did the procedure of obligatory distant education cause grade inflation (Gonzalez T., 2020)

Considering the concerns, the purpose of this study is to investigate the aspects of students' grade inflation in pandemic.

FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored to the following theories.

Signaling Theory of Grade Inflation of 2007. According to this Chan et al., (2007) idea, students' academic standards have increased through time, and grades must move in the same direction to preserve their informative meaning in any absolute sense. College admission exam results, on the other hand, tend to indicate a falling rather than growing tendency (Wilson 1999). The idea, which is particularly popular among elite institutions, is that a school's grading systems should match the caliber of its pupils because elite schools have more stringent entrance requirements, higher marks at elite schools are fair and accurate to the extent that they represent their students' stronger aptitudes in comparison to those in a typical university. However, this argument implicitly presupposes that grade consumers, such as future employers, suffer from "grade illusion," and are unable to account for differences in student standards when interpreting marks from various institutions. Such illusion, on its own, does not provide a persuasive explanation for the observed behavior regarding inflated grades, as it is unlikely to have a long-term impact on the whole job market. It also contradicts the reality that, within a university, the most technically challenging courses, and programs, into which the brightest students self-select, are typically those with the most stringent grading procedures.

Theory of Academic Performance was created by Elger (2007). The concept of academic performance (ToP) has six core ideas are emphasized in the theory to establish a framework that may be utilized to analyses the key and efficiency enhancements. Producing valuable results is what it means to perform. A performance can be an individual or a group of individuals working together on a project. Performance development is a process, and degree of performance defines where you are on that journey. Context, degree of understanding, skill set, and level in identification, personal characteristics, and fixed elements are all aspects that influence current performance.

METHODS

Research Design

In this investigation, the exploratory mixed method testing research was employed. This method collects both qualitative and quantitative data sequentially, and the analyses are combined to produce a more robust and full interpretation than utilizing any one data source alone (Creswell, 2009). This approach was also used to cross-validate or corroborate results. As a result, it's frequently utilized to compensate for a defect in one system by leveraging the capabilities of another (Creswell, 2009).

For the researcher to fully understand the study topic, it is frequently necessary to collect and evaluate quantitative and qualitative data at the same time, although in different ways (Creswell et al., 2011). The researcher tries to merge the two data sets, either by integrating the disparate outcomes in the interpretation or by transforming data to make combining the two forms simpler throughout the investigation.

Research Respondents

The respondents in this study were the Magpet West and East Elementary and High School teachers in Magpet, North Cotabato.Simple random sampling would be used as the sampling process.

Qualitative Strand

The study investigated the causes of students' grade inflation the transcribed recorded discussions from the in-depth interview and focus group discussion with participants will serve as the project's research corpus. This IDI and FGD will be regarded the first step of data collecting in accordance with the qualitative research design. Ten (10) teachers will participate in the videotaped in-depth interview (IDI). It featured a fresh group of seven (7) teachers in a focus group discussion. **Purposive sampling** was used to choose participants for the IDI and FGD. **Purposive sampling** is a kind of non-probability sampling in which the sample is chosen depending on the characteristics of the population and the study's purpose. Purposive sampling is often referred to as selective, judging, or subjectivity sampling (Crossman, 2018). The collected material will be transcribed and analyzed thematically.

Quantitative Strand

The quantitative strand used **random sampling** to choose a total of 300 respondents. Random sampling is a sampling approach that ensures that each sample has an equal chance of being picked. A random sample was intended to provide an impartial reflection of the whole population (Bennett et al., 2018). One fifty **(150)** teachers were asked to complete a checklist for Exploratory Factor Analysis **(EFA),** another one fifty **(150)** teachers were asked to complete a constructed researcher-made survey questionnaire for Confirmatory Factor Analysis **(CFA),** and there were also thirty to fifty (50) respondents to test the questionnaire's reliability prior to finalizing the measurement tool's development.

Research Instrument

The researcher created an Interview Guide Questions (qualitative) that asks questions about students' perspectives on the application of teacher's views in handling disagreements to quantify the variables considered in this analysis.

There are 300 sets of survey questionnaires tool in the quantitative component that will be used to gather data from participants. Experts check the material validity of the instruments, and then they go into pilot training to ensure their effectiveness.

Experts were also invited to review the material validity of the interview questions and the suitability of the objects that catch the views during the pandemic constraints. This is to ensure the questionnaire's readability and comprehension.

Statistical Tools

To determine the latent variables or factors underlie a set of items **Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)** was employed. **KMO and Bartlett's Test** was used in preliminary phase of analyzing data to ensure its adequacy. Then the fourth face in measuring validity is **CFA or Confirmatory Factor Analysis** which allows the researcher to determine whether the obtained factor in EFA will be the best fit for item analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Essential Themes that Emerged Pertaining to Causes of Students' Grade Inflation in Pandemic

Grading Leniency

Most of the participants believed that grading leniency provide them maintains accuracy in assessing learning and assigning scores and competence levels among students, teachers, assessments, learning experiences, topic areas, and time.

> *During pandemic, we can't deny the fact that aside from greatly considering the delivery of lessons in this new normal set up, grade inflation is also a problem since students are both intentionally/unintentionally taking advantage of the dilemma to receive grades that are favorable in their end. They can't be blame as well because given the trend, they are already affected by it. On the teacher's part, they don't also have the choice since most mandates are centered on the student's, encouraging them to never give failing grades to their students. Thus, adjustments on their part are tedious (IDI_P1).*
>
> *With or without pandemic grade inflation in Philippine Education are seen. It is because of some policies and guidelines of the department in giving of grades and assessment through our learners (IDI_P4).*
>
> *Grades of students today are not reliable, the reason for that is we can't monitor the progress of our pupils (IDI_P7).*

The ideas of the participants implied that Grading flexibility provides them with the ability to retain accuracy in evaluating knowledge and awarding scores and competence levels across students, instructors, assessments, learning experiences, subject areas, and time.

Shifting of learning Modality

Most of the participants believed that one of the causes of student's grade inflation was abrupt changing of learning modality. Most of the participants believed that the epidemic of Coronavirus disease in 2019 (COVID-19) prompted an abrupt shift in higher education institutions from on-campus, face-to-face sessions to online, distance learning.

> *The need to abide with the school's system and policy, Exclusively set for the new normal (IDI_P1).*
>
> *The need of conformity with the mandates from the Higher-ups, whether favorable or unfavorable (IDI_P2).*
>
> *For me the common causes of grade inflation this COVID 19 Pandemic are: Since its modular learning, learners answer*

> *their modules by the help of their parents. Through this we can really identify learner's penmanship but it's all useless since we rated pupils based on their modules. This really caused grade inflation because they got higher scores though they are not the one who are answering modules (IDI_P2).*
>
> *The lack of knowledge of learners and parents support and participation (FGD 1).*

The remarks of the participants imply that the COVID-19 outbreak forced a change from on-campus, face-to-face meetings to online, distant learning. Online distance learning quickly supplanted face-to-face classes. Most participants had never presented online, requiring a quick learning curve. Participants had to change the structure and content of their offerings and pick the best techniques to engage virtual learners.

Course Execution and Evaluation

Most of the participants believed that common causes of students' grade inflation were Course Execution and Evaluation. Most of the participants confine their ideas that Course evaluations that are thoughtful in nature assist academics in identifying what is working in a specific course and, perhaps even more crucially, what needs to be improved.

> *The method by which evaluations of classroom instruction are conducted to prevents students from deliberating adequately on the issue (IDI_P4).*
>
> *In this time of pandemic, some educators may feel pressured to give higher grades for fear of students complaining and receiving bad course evaluations, thereby diminishing their reputation, and causing them to face lower enrolment in their classes. While pressures to reduce standard do exist, at some school part of grade inflation is the result of increases in student performance (FGD 1).*
>
> *Some cause of grade inflation is the support of the parents or guardians of the learners (FGD 7).*

The ideas of the participants imply that Course Performance and Evaluation were two of the most frequently cited reasons of grade inflation among students. Most of the respondents believed that careful course assessments help academics discover what is working and what requires improvement in a certain course.

Teachers' Factor

Most of the participants believed that one of the common causes of grade inflation is teacher factor. Participants also believed that influence of teacher in the learning performance of every learner varies a lot. This can be Teacher quality is the most significant school-related factor impacting student accomplishment. Moreover, teacher quality is the most important factor of student accomplishment.

> *The teacher's inability to scrutinize every student's answered modules due to their heavy workloads (IDI_P1).*
>
> *The teachers didn't meet the students personally and the grades given are purely based in their submitted modules (IDI_P6).*
>
> *Teachers hesitate to give low grades in modular printed learning modality it is because the grading system was based on the submitted modules (IDI_P9).*
>
> *Teachers are forced to give high grades to avoid some consequences and interventions that they might going to do and since it was distance learning it so hard for a part of a teachers (FGD 7).*

The significant statements of the participants imply that the instructor factor is a frequent source of grade inflation. Teachers have a significant effect on students' learning outcomes, according to the participants in this study. When it comes to student achievement, teacher competence is the main school-related element. As a result, teachers are the most critical component in student success.

Incorporate Efficiency of Learning

Most of the participants believed that efficiency of learning Needs Corporation of ideas and integration of the new ways of teaching learning process. Most of the participants also believed that learning must be delivered as effectively as feasible to compete with the conflicting demands for government money that exist today. When outcomes from education (such as test scores or value added) are generated with the least number of resources, this is referred to as efficiency be that financial or, for example, the innate ability of students.

> *As a teacher, this is our role to help our learners. To prevent grade inflation, we will not focus on the grades of the learners based on their modules but we will give time just to assessed learners individually and rate them based on what we observed during the conduct of intervention (IDI_P2).*
>
> *Provides pupils marks depending on their performance and achievements (IDI_P3).*
>
> *Teachers should conduct one on one tutorial or assessment especially to those pupils who doesn't deserve a high grade (FGD 6).*

The ideas of the participant imply that the effectiveness with which students learn combining and integrating new ideas and methods for teaching and learning. To compete with the competing demands for government money that exist today, the majority of participants also agreed that learning must be given as effectively as possible.

Organized Strategic Plan for learning

Most of the participants believed that organizing strategic plan for students' learning are very essentials. It plays a vital role for learning academic success of every student. Moreover, most of the participants believed that it should be applied to any school with a purpose to achieve in the best educational interests of its pupils, and they should have a strategy to get there.

Make more interventions to lessen this problem (IDI_P2).

Provides pupils marks depending on their performance and achievements (IDI_P3).

Give learners activity that is suitable by their level and give them proper assessment (IDI_P5).

By engaging best practices such as using rubrics (IDI_P6)

Home visitation is one way to improve grade inflation (IDI_P7).

Provides personalized feedback (IDI_P8).

The ideas of the participant imply that developing a strategic strategy for student learning is necessary. It is critical to every student's academic achievement. And the majority of those polled agreed that it must be applicable to any school that wants to accomplish in the best interests of its children, and that they must have a plan to get there.

Table 1

Essential Themes that Emerged Pertaining to Causes of Students' Grade Inflation in Pandemic

Issues Probed	Core Ideas/Statements	Code/ Categories	Essential Themes
Students Grade Inflation Amid Pandemic	• Teachers may attempt to provide a higher mark to compensate for the unforeseeable bad conditions. • Teachers cannot evaluate their students' performance objectively. • Students receives higher grades they are not deserved. • Students are not giving grades based on their work and knowledge. • Students Grades are monitored. • Students Grades are not reliable. • Grades inflation may result low academic performance of the learners.	**Grading Leniency**	**Grading Leniency**

Common Causes of Students Grade Inflation Amid Pandemic	• Students are compulsory to abide Deped's mandate on shifting education. • Students are not prepared for the new modality of learning. • Lack of knowledge and support in answering modules. • Teachers and students adhere to school regulations to establish the new normal.	**Changing of learning Modality**	**Shifting of learning Modality**
	• The approach used to evaluate classroom teaching precludes students from thoroughly evaluating the subject. • Learners are too dependent with their parents. • Learners are too dependent with the internet.	**Lesson Implementation and Evaluation**	**Course Execution and Evaluation**
	• The teachers didn't meet the students in person; thus, the grades are based only on their modules. • The teachers are attempting to conform to the new mode of instruction (modular printed), which results in a rise in grade inflation. • As teachers, we may start to improve the grade to compensate for unanticipated bad conditions. • Due to the teacher's tremendous workload, he or she is unable to evaluate each student's completed modules. • Teachers are hesitant to provide low grades in the modular printed learning mode since the grading method is dependent on the modules submitted. • Teachers are compelled to provide high marks in order to avoid some of the repercussions and interventions that they may face.	**Teacher Factor**	**Teachers' Factor**
Teachers' Recommendation to Prevent	• Teachers systematically assessed the performance of students.	**Incorporate Efficiency of Learning**	**Incorporate Efficiency of Learning**

Students" Grade Inflation	• Teachers evaluated and observed learners' performance. • Teachers incorporate activity sheets that suits to their level of understanding. • Teachers gave grades based on their intervention and appropriate assessment. • To avoid grade inflation, teachers should assign high standards to learners. Give learners clear and simple feedback.		
	• Teachers track learner's progress. • Teachers provide personalized feedback. • Teachers' imposed intervention plan. • Teachers give diagnostic assessment. • Teachers' conducts formative test. • Teachers use strategies in evaluating learners. • Teachers bestowed quality teaching.	**Organized Strategic Plan for learning**	**Organized Strategic Plan for learning**

Table 2 shows the Checklist Survey Questionnaire to be subjected for EFA which replicated the perspectives of the participants on causes of students' grade inflation in pandemic scale components which are included the checklist. The items reflect the important topics, important ideas/ statements, issues demonstrated and implications. There are 30 items on the survey questionnaires.

Table 2
Checklist Survey Questionnaire subjected for EFA

	Statements	5	4	3	2	1
1	Our supervisors have assured us that no pupils would get a poor grade.					
2	Our principal advises us to consider of not giving our students low marks.					
3	Student evaluations and grades are monitored.					
4	The method by which student evaluations of classroom instruction are conducted prevents students from deliberating adequately on the issues.					
5	Occasionally, instructors are unable to assess their pupils' marks objectively due to the order promulgated by higher-ups.					
6	Our principal said that no student received a failing grade.					

7	I believe that my pupils are unprepared for the new mode of instruction, because of which they obtained higher marks than predicted.
8	I feel that student evaluations result in improvements to the teaching quality at this school.
9	I think that some of my students lack knowledge and support in answering modules.
10	I have trust in pupils' abilities, which is why I gave them good marks.
11	I thought that some of my pupils are too reliant on their parents, which explains their good marks.
12	I evaluated pupils' performance in a methodical manner prior to awarding them high marks.
13	I can evaluate and observe learners' performance.
14	I integrate activity sheets that are appropriate for their level of comprehension to ensure that they do not fail the class.
15	I set high standards in giving grades to my students.
16	I track learner's progress.
17	I provide personalized feedback.
18	I imposed intervention plan.
19	The way student evaluations of faculty instruction are analyzed/reported enables simple differentiation between excellent and bad teaching.
20	I give diagnostic assessment.
21	I conduct formative test.
22	I use strategies in evaluating learners.
23	I bestowed quality teaching.
24	When it comes to teacher assessment, ethics are critical.
25	If a teacher is inexperienced with the students, he or she may award high grades.
26	Certain pupils feel they are entitled to superior grades.
27	Grades in each class accurately reflect student achievement.
28	Certain pupils get higher grades than they deserve.
29	Certain instructors may award higher grades to students.
30	Teachers can adjust grades to affect how students evaluate them.

Dimensions on categorizing the causes of students' grade inflation

***Testing of the 30-item Scale*.** The Kaiser Meyer-Olkin Measure (KMO) of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity were employed to ensure that the construct can be tested for factor analysis, It can be seen in Table 3 that KMO value is .870 which is above the recommend value of .5, which indicates that the sample is meritorious and adequate for Factor analysis. Kaiser (1974) recommends accepting values greater than .5 are acceptable. Furthermore, values .5 to .7 are mediocre, values between .7 and .8 are good, values between .8 and .9 are great and values above .9 are superb (Kaiser, 1974).

Table 3

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.870
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3554.190
	Df	435
	Sig.	.000

Meanwhile the Bartlett's test was performed to check if there is a certain redundancy between the variables that we can summarize with a few numbers of factors. The results revealed that the p-value is significant ($p<.05$) which suggests that the data has patterned relationships, and factorability is assumed. It is emphasized by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) that the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity should be significant for factor analysis to be suitable.

As shown in the preliminary analysis, it can be generalized that the 30-item evaluation and analysis on the causes of students' grade inflation in pandemic is suitable and adequate for extraction of factors, and thus ready for factor analysis.

Derivation of the Number of Factor Structure

To determine the number of factors, the 30-item scale was tested using unrotated factor matrix, with estimates of eigenvalues, percent of variance and cumulative variance. The eigenvalues can be used to decide how many factors to extracts in the overall factor analysis (Brown, 2009). Using the Kaiser rule, item with eigenvalues of ≥ 1 were considered. In the same way, Fabrigar et al., (1999) stated that the most popular method for deciding on the retention of factor is Kaiser Eigenvalue greater than 1 criterion.

Based on eigenvalue, the data emerge to have three factors above 1, the 30 items were then subjected for rotation. The Promax rotation was used since the factors seems to be correlated with a coefficient between .44 to .65 and the data is not assumed as orthogonal. Moreover, the loadings less than .4 are suppressed in the model and the variables are listed in the order size of their factor loadings.

Thus, those items cross-loading or not loading at all would suggest that they are poor unreliable items and were deleted from the analysis. This technique is suggested by Field (2005) that the suppression of loading less than .4 and ordering variables by loading size will make interpretation easier because there's no need to scan the matrix to identify substantive loadings.

The table 4 shows the pattern matrix using principal Axis Factoring with a rotation method of Promax with Kaiser Normalization. It can be observed in the results that loadings of items in the three factors are above .4. However, with the suppression of items <.4, it can be gleaned that *item 4 "The method by which student evaluations of classroom instruction are conducted prevents students from deliberating adequately on the issues", item 5 "Occasionally, instructors*

are unable to assess their pupils' marks objectively due to the order promulgated by higher-ups", item 8 " I feel that student evaluations result in improvements to the teaching quality at this school", item 9 "I think that some of my students lack knowledge and support in answering modules", item 10 "I have trust in pupils' abilities, which is why I gave them good marks", item 11" I thought that some of my pupils are too reliant on their parents, which explains their good marks", item 12, "I evaluated pupils' performance in a methodical manner prior to awarding them high marks", item 14 " I integrate activity sheets that are appropriate for their level of comprehension to ensure that they do not fail the class", item 15 " I set high standards in giving grades to my students", item 19 "The way student evaluations of faculty instruction are analyzed/reported enables simple differentiation between excellent and bad teaching", and item 24 " When it comes to teacher assessment, ethics are critical" does not meet the desired criterion of item loading, and thus been subject for deletion. This is supported by Field (2000) that the suppression of loading less than 4 is recommended and rerunning for analysis is necessary to obtained desired factors.

After rerunning the analysis and deletion of items with less than .4 and those having cross loadings, the table 5 shows the pattern matrix illustrating a 3-factor model. it can also be observed that the numbers of items are reduced from 30 to 19 items after several deletions to obtain clean pattern. Moreover, the item loading of each item to their factor are above .4 which indicates sufficient correlation between factors and variables and can be considered as component of the factor. It is emphasized by Hair et al., (1998) that when a factor has larger loadings, it is more reflective of the variable's role in explaining the relationship between the two.

Table 4
Pattern Matrix

Items	Factor Loadings		
	1	2	3
Student evaluations and grades are monitored.	.665		
I evaluated pupils' performance in a methodical manner prior to awarding them high marks.	.616		
I can evaluate and observe learners' performance.	.535		
I track learner's progress.	.882		
I provide personalized feedback.	.845		
I imposed intervention plan.	.782		
I give diagnostic assessment.	.745		
I conduct formative test.	.919		
I use strategies in evaluating learners.	.769		
I bestowed quality teaching.	.669		
I believe that my pupils are unprepared for the new mode of instruction, because of which they obtained higher marks than predicted.		.526	
If a teacher is inexperienced with the students, he or she may award high grades.		.693	
Certain pupils feel they are entitled to superior grades.		.608	
Certain pupils get higher grades than they deserve.		.763	
Certain instructors may award higher grades to students.		.632	
Teachers can adjust grades to affect how students evaluate them.		.569	
Our supervisors have assured us that no pupils would get a poor grade.			.676
Our principal advises us to consider of not giving our students low marks.			.883
Our principal said that no student received a failing grade.			.691

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.
Rotation Method: Promax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 8 iterations.

Final Output Pertaining the Causes of Grade Inflation of Students in Pandemic

The last kind of the tool, which is the output of this study, is presented provided in Table 5. This scale consists of 19 items. Specifically, a total of ten (10) for teachers' strategies, six (6) items unreliable grades, and three (3) items for Higher Ups Mandatory. The five-point Likert-scale from 5 = strongly agree 4 = agree 3 = moderately agree 2 = disagree 1 = strongly disagree.

Table 5
19- Items Pertaining the Causes of Students' Grade Inflation in Pandemic

Items	Factor Loadings		
	1	2	3
Factor 1: Teachers' Strategies and Intervention			
Student evaluations and grades are monitored.	.665		
I evaluated pupils' performance in a methodical manner prior to awarding them high marks.	.616		
I can evaluate and observe learners' performance.	.535		
I track learner's progress.	.882		
I provide personalized feedback.	.845		
I imposed intervention plan.	.782		
I give diagnostic assessment.	.745		
I conduct formative test.	.919		
I use strategies in evaluating learners.	.769		
I bestowed quality teaching.	.669		
Factor 2: Unreliable Grades			
I believe that my pupils are unprepared for the new mode of instruction, because of which they obtained higher marks than predicted.		.526	
If a teacher is inexperienced with the students, he or she may award high grades.		.693	
Certain pupils feel they are entitled to superior grades.		.608	
Certain pupils get higher grades than they deserve.		.763	
Certain instructors may award higher grades to students.		.632	
Teachers can adjust grades to affect how students evaluate them.		.569	
Factor 3: Higher Ups Mandatory			
Our supervisors have assured us that no pupils would get a poor grade.			.676
Our principal advises us to consider of not giving our students low marks.			.883
Our principal said that no student received a failing grade.			.691

Reliability of the Instrument

Reliability Test Scale. The instrument was employed to determine its reliability and validity test for the uniformity of the items. Table 6 showed the overall reliability test of the Causes of Students' Grade Inflation in Pandemic Scale is very high with overall Cronbach's Alpha value of .798. It was found out that subscale for Teachers' Strategies and Intervention (a = .708), Unreliable Grades (a = .785), and Higher Ups Mandatory (a=.852). This means that the tool is being used in the study has good internal consistency.

According to Hinton et al., (2004), for an exploratory or pilot analysis, cut-off points for reliability include outstanding reliability (0.90 and above), high reliability (0.90 and above), and moderate reliability (0.90 and above) (0.70-0.90). Moreover, Straub et al., (2004), high reliability (0.60 and above), moderate reliability (0.50-0.70), and poor reliability (0.50 and below) are all ideal. Even though reliability is essential for research, it is insufficient unless it is combined with validity. To put it another way, for a test to be accurate, it must also be correct (Wilson, 2010). Furthermore, Soto & Rojas (2019) points out the reliability of career decision making, and their implications can make them more efficient in handling final decisions in choosing career. The findings of the study are supported by Hinton et al. (2004). They pointed out that items for an exploratory or pilot study, cut-off points for factor analysis, which contains excellent reliability (0.90 and above), and high reliability (0.70-0.90). Moreover, Straub et al., (2004) recommended that factor analysis for questionnaire items should be equal to or above 0.60 and moderate reliability (0.50-0.70) which can be considered as a good tool for exploratory factor analysis.

Table 6
Reliability Test on the Causes of Students' Grade Inflation in Pandemic Scale

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha
Teachers' Strategies and Intervention	.708
Unreliable Grades	.785
Higher Ups Mandatory	.852
Overall Reliability	**.798**

Educational Implication

The result of this study on the Causes of Students' Grade Inflation in Pandemic has drawn several implications that many factors contributed to the surge of college degrees. Some examples: (a) mandatory student review of courses; (b) students becoming more career-oriented and learning outstripping family funds; and (c) education outstripping family finances. As a result of recruitment for the Vietnam War, students were given more incentives to do well in school, as were changes in curriculum or grading systems, as well as reactions to student assessments and the rise of consumerism.

Thus, it further implies that when grade inflation occurs, the smartest students find it more difficult to stand out from the crowd. Employers may utilize grades to identify their most talented employees. Inflation, meritocracy upward and social mobility all rely on the reliability of schools, which are undermined by this policy. It is easy to think that formative assessment is only an educational issue and not a sociological one, however theories of class inflate often reveal a structural change in the larger society and educational institution.

CONCLUSIONS

. In qualitative strand, results revealed from the thematic analysis that there are six essentials' themes on causes associated with the Students' Grade Inflation in Pandemic such as: Grading Leniency, shifting of learning Modality, Course Execution and Evaluation, Teachers' Factor, Incorporate Efficiency of Learning, Organized Strategic Plan for learning. It means that the Grade inflation may reduce some students' motivation to study and impede schools' ability to

recognize well-prepared candidates; but better marks may boost other students' confidence and inspire them to pursue hard fields in which they may excel. While in quantitative strand, results revealed from the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) that there are three underlying dimensions on the Causes of Students' Grade Inflation in Pandemic such as: Teachers' Strategies and Intervention, Unreliable Grades, and Higher Ups Mandatory. It means that students are unable to learn because of the continuance of grade inflation. There is practically no possibility for pupils to help society if they are not intellectually prepared. Moreover, results revealed from the Cronbach Alpha that the overall reliability test of the Causes of Students' Grade Inflation in Pandemic very high. It means that the internal loadings of the items are appropriates and shows valid internal consistency. Furthermore, results revealed from the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) revealed that the final tool of Causes of Students' Grade Inflation in Pandemic scale was consisted of 19 items. This indicates that the items that remain after factor loadings are valid, reliable, and have strong internal consistency.

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