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Exploring the Impact of Grading for Equity on Student's Academic Performance: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract. Grading for Equity is a pedagogical approach founded on principles of educational equity whereby educators strive to mitigate systemic barriers to learning by implementing alternative grading practices that enhance student performance. This study examined the critical role of equitable grading practices in fostering student success and promoting educational equity. A qualitative method using phenomenological inquiry in order to investigate how Jefferson High School students change their academic performance through grading for equity was used in the study. The data was collected and analysed using thematic analysis and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), by conducting a semi-structured interview with 12 diverse participants. The researchers ensured that the study followed protocols concerning securing permission from the school administration and student parents or guardians. A positive result was revealed when the data interpretation showed how beneficial this practice was to students' engagement and performance. This grading for Equity impacted not only the performance of each student but also the mindset to achieve academic success. This study suggests implementing clear policy guidelines, providing ongoing professional development for teachers, ensuring equitable grading practices across the curriculum, and conducting further research on effective grading strategies. This course of action will have a huge impact on our future generation.

Keywords: Grading for Equity, Educational Equity, Phenomenological Inquiry, Inclusive Learning Environments, Equity-focused Grading Practices.

Introduction

Grading stands as a significant standard in terms of evaluating learners' academic performance and this holds immense significant factors for both teachers and students. As a pivotal factor, grading for equity is an approach where traditional grading was transformed into a more equitable, bias-resistance, and accurate grading practices that focuses on student's progress and achievement over time. The traditional grading paradigm, which is based on a holistic evaluation that includes participation, examination results, assignment completion, and integrity, has long served as the foundation of educational assessment (Shedrack, 2023).

In education, the grading for equity can be seen as a serious rethinking of current assessment practices, aiming to redesign the system to achieve a fairer and more inclusive learning environment by eliminating all the barriers that prevent the students achieve success (Schneider & Hutt, 2023). Although there are so many positive impacts on the educational journey this practice has made, critics are still unbeatable in discovering the pushback of this grading practice. Critics pointed out a critical juncture in educational discourse, emphasising the need for re-evaluation of grading practices, and reconstructing of specifics to ensure equitable outcomes for all students (Sharma, 2021). It is no surprise that this condition of grading is called the "third trail" of schools, whereas it provides power to schools, but no one dares to touch it.

In an inclusive approach to teaching, grading requires focusing on justice, individualised comments, and assistance with targeted support (Messer et al., 2024). As an educator whose goal is to promote a learning process that contradicts traditional grading practices, we often tell our students that mistake is a process of learning or even desired for successful learning yet, we include some traditional ways of assessing performances or outputs. Creating a sane and equitable educational system and placing more effort into this practice will boost non-traditional students to reach their full potential, and be a productive part of society (Ko, 2021). This is the key point of some critics that embracing this equitable grading must be fluent. If all educators and policymakers can provide a transcript of the fluency of this action, then we are moving forward to more supportive, inclusive, and equitable grading practices.

While previous studies have explored grading practices and educational equity, there is a significant lack of research that specifically examines the effects of equity-driven grading on student achievement. Though studies by Feldman (2018) highlighted the shortcomings of traditional grading methods and the potential benefits of equity-focused approaches, there remains a need for empirical evidence to elucidate the nuanced dynamics of grading for equity. By addressing this research gap, this study aimed to support educators and policymakers by contributing essential information to address this issue and help them promote an equitable learning process.

This research focused within the field of educational assessment and grading equity which offers a comprehensive exploration of the impact of equity-driven grading on student success. By focusing specifically on the experiences of students and educators within the context of equity-focused grading practices, this study aimed to provide recommendations and strategies for fostering more inclusive and equitable learning environments through qualitative approach to inquiry. Moreover, building upon existing literature, including works by Feldman (2018), this research drew on theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence to inform its inquiry into grading for equity. By synthesising insights from

related studies, this research aimed to contextualise its findings within the broader landscape of educational assessment and equity-focused initiatives. Additionally, this study contributed to ongoing discussions on the role of grading practices in promoting educational equity and advancing social justice in education.

Furthermore, the findings of this research shed light on the transformative potential of equity-driven grading in promoting student success. Through rigorous examination and analysis, this study aims to uncover the nuanced ways in which equity-focused grading practices impact student outcomes, including academic achievement, engagement, and well-being. By exploring the experiences of students in secondary level, this research provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of equity-driven grading in fostering inclusive learning environments and mitigating disparities.

Research Problem

The research problem explored the need to understand the impact of grading equity on student experiences and academic performance. By exploring students' perspectives on grading equity and identifying significant themes in their experiences, this study sought to address this gap and provide valuable insights that can inform policy recommendations aimed at fostering more equitable grading practices in educational settings.

Research Focus

The focus of this study was to investigate how equitable grading practices can contribute to student success and promote educational equity. The authors aimed to explore the lived experiences of secondary-level students regarding grading equity and its impact on academic achievement. Through rigorous analysis, the aim was to uncover nuanced experiences that could inform the development of clear policy guidelines, teacher professional development, and integration of equity-focused grading practices into educational frameworks. Ultimately, the research aimed to advocate for prioritising equity in grading practices across policy, teacher training, education, and research levels, with the overarching goal of promoting meaningful and sustainable improvements in student outcomes and fostering educational equity for all learners.

Research Aim and Questions

This study aimed to explore the impact of grading equity among students at Jefferson High School for the school year 2023-2024 towards policy recommendations. Specifically, it answers the following questions.

1. To what extent grading for equity has impacted you as a student and how grading equity improves your academic performance in the classroom?
2. What significant themes can be drawn from the experiences of students regarding grading equity?
3. What recommendations may be developed based on the formulated significant themes?

Literature Review

In this study, the researchers employed a sequential approach related to previous studies to examine the diverse aspects of fair grading practices. Sequential methodologies entailed a systematic progression through various research phases, facilitating a comprehensive examination of the subject matter. The sequential method in the related studies for grading equity was utilised after data gathering in order to provide a structured and informed approach to the research process.

Grading systems that prioritize equity have a positive impact on the academic success of students attending schools with fewer resources. The power in this frame of reference refers to insufficient access to resources that make the learning more unambiguous (Berns et al., 2021). Student power may be inferred by parental financial status, parents' education level, and infrastructure such as internet access, roads, and electricity, among others. Some students get significantly more academic support from their families compared to others (Milner & Milner, 2023). When entering school, students of colour, those with disabilities, and those from poor families have less power than those who are white, non-disabled and those who are affluent and are more likely to be negatively impacted by the traditional grading system because of the factors highlighted in the above section. Grading for equity ensures that the struggles these students experience because of their conditions do not impact their academic achievement (Ledlow, 2022). Equitable grading practices are implemented to address the achievement gap among students facing challenging home situations, poverty, or health issues. However, the subject of equity in grading feedback is less frequently addressed. Bias issues consistently emerge in the evaluation of grading feedback, as instructors often introduce both unconscious and conscious biases into the grading process (Schneider, 2021). Grading for equity would enable many students who would not have attained a college education because of poor grades to have the opportunity to enrol in. Even if low assignment grades do not affect a student's final grade, they can still harm retention by decreasing student's sense of academic self-efficacy (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020).

Grading for equity would also influence students' success by establishing that the assessment of their performance is based on the mastery of the subject rather than other unassociated factors. In other words, it guarantees accuracy in grading by centring on the points the student gets in a particular subject. As Berns et al. (2021) notes, it would be unfair to give a student an unsatisfactory grade for not attending classes or late submission of assignments, yet they performed well in exams. For example, if the grading rubric displays that a student got beyond expectations or excellently, it means that the student probably got all the answers right. However, if a student did not comply with the assignments and missed most of the classes, that student would certainly fail when the traditional grading system is applied (O'Connor, 2017).

Offering clear and detailed instructions along with grading rubrics makes the content more inclusive by removing the advantages gained from prior preparation in other classes (Singer-Freeman et al., 2021). Hence, equitable grading depicts a clear picture of the academic performance of students less the extrinsic elements that may lower their respective grades.

Students encounter unequal barriers; flexible deadlines help to reduce the impact of these inequities (Kruger, 2023). Policies should be clear and equally accessible to all students, avoiding the need for students to make requests or disclose personal and private information (Hills & Peacock, 2022). Equitable grading favourably affects the success of each student by encouraging them to perform better. Students are inspired to work harder to get higher grades because they know that their performance would affect their final grades. Disadvantaged students would find motivation to overcome setbacks and challenges, persist, and strive for academic achievement (Zoul, 2021). Grading for equity would make doing homework and showing up to classes meaningful to learners because they can aid one perform better in exams. When students are motivated by marks, they will value the need to attend classes and turn in their homework to get better grades. In this sense, equitable grading is a compelling factor for students, leading to better academic achievement.

According to Feldman (2018), the student's environment or educator's implicit bias may affect the grade earned by the students. Grading variability persists among teachers, who often establish their grading practices without evidence-based training. Many of these inequitable grading behaviours may jeopardize students' academic success (Williams, 2023). Park et al. (2024) stated that faculty with fixed

mindset beliefs also supported more traditional views on assessment, grading, and diversity. Moreover, these beliefs were linked to larger equity grade gaps. Faculty behaviours that contribute to creating equity-focused learning environments include being open, transparent, and clear about expectations while remaining flexible and adaptable to student circumstances, all with an emphasis on equity (Center for Research on Teaching and Learning, 2021).

Grading for equity eliminates the personal biases that teachers have toward a student. For example, one may be tempted to give a student a low grade if that student is always turning in late assignments or does not submit at all. In grading for equity, grades are awarded depending on marks obtained by the students. These marks act as evidence of the learners' current level of knowledge. On the other hand, the traditional grading system is biased because it disregards the students' performance in class and instead uses scores taken from different categories such as homework, class participation, projects, and tests to determine the overall grade (Griffin & Townsley, 2021). This type of grades shows that a student who submits all the assignments, attends all classes and turns in all projects may get similar marks to the one who did only the test and scored the same marks. This type of system could potentially conceal crucial details about the student, resulting in skewed judgments. One example that Feldman (2018) cites is that educators may not know the subject mastery of a student who performs excellently in tests but fails in classroom participation, homework, and projects. As a result, even in a classroom where decision-making is shared between the instructor and students, grading remains an area where instructors hold all the authority, and students have minimal influence (Ko, 2021). To eliminate such biases, grading should be based on the mastery of the subject and other behaviours should be graded or classified differently. Grading for equity can successfully remove such biases.

Grading for equity avoids mixing achievement and behaviour, a factor that makes grades lose its significance. Feldman (2018) further reiterated that teachers from the dominant culture whose students came from minority communities may be biased in grading if they make decisions based on the subjective behaviour of the learners. According to O'Connor (2017), rewarding behaviours with points gives students false interpretations about their competence and actions. When faced with potential grading reforms, teachers often respond with a combination of partial support, cautious involvement, and occasional frustration (Guskey, 2023). Educators are increasingly interested in equitable grading to accommodate diverse student backgrounds, perspectives, and current life situations (Vahid et al., 2023). In this context, grading for equity is like how teachers ask their students to write their names at the back of the paper to prevent them from making biased opinions about them when marking. The effect of biased opinions on scoring is avoided by equitable grading, which eliminates all scores associated with student behaviours and focuses on those obtained in exams alone.

Grading for equity aside from overcoming educators' biases also aids in overcoming institutional biases. According to Feldman (2018), institution bias transpires when the procedures applied in institutions gratifies some groups and devalue others. Some of these procedures seem neutral and have an acceptable way of doing things. Traditional grading system tends to penalize students from marginalized communities who encounter many obstacles that may make them unable to meet some of the requirements (Zoul, 2021). Unfortunately, the issue of representation is a broader societal problem that starts long before students enter our institutions. While recognising that creating inclusive and equitable classroom environments alone cannot increase representation, it can positively affect the retention and inclusion of marginalized community members (Pérez-Quñones et al., (2023).

Some categories included in the traditional grading system, such as homework, only accommodate students who have access to a restful studying environment, access to electricity always, and possibly have parents with a college education (Farley & Burbules, 2022). Individuals from impoverished neighbourhoods where the access to well-lit rooms is not possible and whose parents cannot help them

in accomplishing homework when they encounter difficulties are more likely to turn in their work incomplete or late. The same applies to students who are considered English learners or whose first language is not English. These students may have difficulty in understanding their assignments and parents who cannot also understand English are unable to help them which may lead to late submission, incomplete or may not submit at all (O'Connor, 2017). In this sense, the traditional grading system translates the socioeconomic differences of learners into academic achievement disparities. Therefore, grading for equity eliminates any institutional biases that disadvantage certain students while favouring others, by not solely relying on exam scores as the sole determinant of performance.

By addressing institutional biases and promoting equitable grading practices, students are given the opportunity to succeed as their growth and progress are recognized over time. As stated by Sanders (2021), the traditional grading system penalizes students for errors made in the past. This is because the final grade is based on all the grades the students have attained over time, including their class participation and homework. Furthermore, Frazier (2021) reiterated that traditional grading fails to acknowledge that students who may be struggling with content at the beginning of class may later catch up and achieve better. A student who scores an A in the final exam after mastering the subject may end up being given a lower grade. In this sense, the grade they will be signed at the end of the term will not reflect their actual performance. Their accurate level of content mastery will be misrepresented, a factor that may impact them throughout their academic journey.

Poor performance at the start of the semester can dishearten learners if they feel it will affect their final grade. Grading for equity motivates learners to continue working hard even if they perform unsatisfactorily at the beginning of the semester. Feldman (2018) further articulated that students who perform better in exams at the start of the semester and fail later in the course may be given high marks despite having lost mastery of the course along the way. These students may have achieved greater success due to receiving effective instruction from a teacher early on or participating in enrichment programs. On the other hand, the students who performed unsatisfactorily at the beginning of the semester but later improved may have low grades despite having gained mastery of the subject at the conclusion of the course (Zoul, 2021). In this sense, these students will be disadvantaged. Since grading for equity focuses on the final grade only, all students succeed irrespective of their histories and resources.

Many disadvantaged students who perform badly at the start of the semester and improve later can obtain college entrance when the grading for equity concept is employed. Currently, many colleges are using GPAs and passing grades when enrolling students, a practice that was not stressed in previous years (Feldman, 2018). The chances of getting a post-high school education solely rest on academic performance. Since colleges consider transcripts rather than students' compliance with the non-academic components, emphasizing grading for equity will give more students a chance to enter highly competitive higher learning institutions. Many students from deprived communities, such as people of color, have lower academic achievement because of their low numbers in post-high school institutions (Bushnell, 2021). The problem can be partially ascribed to the use of the traditional grading system alongside other systemic issues unrelated to school.

Using grading for equity can also assist in disclosing the learning gaps among the students. Teachers would be placing more effort into academic mastery because they would have precise data regarding the actual performance of the learners. They can prioritize the areas of subject content for students who have poor performance to help them get better grades at the end of the year (O'Connor, 2017). Without a clear picture of the subject mastery of students, teachers would be unable to know areas of focus. When teachers have an obvious picture of what they need to do for the students to

perform well, the overall academic performance of students will be higher. Issues such as absenteeism can be addressed through other means but not by penalizing students through lowering their grades.

Besides assisting teachers identify gaps in students' subject mastery, grading for equity can also motivate teachers to improve their performance. Some educators can be stimulated by pedagogical justifications alone. Most teachers are encouraged to enter the profession by the belief that every student merit academic success (Zoul, 2021). This suggests that anything that can enhance the academic success of students will be highly welcomed. Grading for equity eliminates non-academic components that prevent students from succeeding academically (Fieldman, 2019). Teachers who want equity in their classrooms will be delighted to apply grading for equity in their subject areas.

According to Morris et al., (2023), teachers that belong to schools located in the impoverished neighbourhood feel more confident in using grading for equity. In contrast to the traditional grading system, educators seem a little bit depressed with the poor performance of their students with what they get for their final grades, which, the lower scores were attributed to assignments or homework being turned in late or incomplete or may be due to lack of class participation for being absent. In traditional academic teaching methods, professors are obligated to assign grades to students, thereby establishing power hierarchies where professors have authority over students (DiSalvo & Ross, 2022).

Traditional grading systems undermine the principles of equity, including denying disadvantaged students from entering higher institutions of learning (LeBlanc, 2021). Teachers' use of traditional grading methods has been shown to fail economically disadvantaged students at twice the rate of their more advantaged peers, even when academic abilities are similar (Morris et al., 2022). Teachers will be more willing to push through discomfort and skepticism to ensure equity in their classrooms once they understand better the shortcomings of the traditional grading system. The efforts exerted by teachers will translate into students' academic success.

Equitable grading cultivates the enforcement of justice, inclusion, equity, and diversity in school districts. Implementation of these social components will indirectly benefit students by helping those from marginalized communities attain high in academics. The school district can train teachers to eliminate non-academic factors that may impact the overall performance of the students (Rapchak et al., 2023). Teachers' training can also assist them eliminate biases that may negatively influence the performance of the students. School districts can implement grading policies that prioritise equity and work to eliminate systemic injustices that hinder the academic achievement of marginalised students in society.

Aside from motivating teachers, equitable grading entices students to work extra hard to obtain better grades. These students are aware that the external factors that make them unable to attend school daily or fail to turn in their assignments timely no longer affect their final grades. Therefore, despite the social and economic challenges they go through, they perform extra effort to ensure that they pass a final exam to improve their chances of entering colleges (Assiter, 2023). Equitable grading can aid students who have accomplished poorly because of failing in homework, get motivated to work hard and improve because they know their final grades will not be impacted by past failures. They may also forge strong relationships with their teachers because they would be concentrating on getting better grades at the end of the semester (Feldman, 2018). This is the exact opposite of the traditional grading system, which may make students lose motivation after failing in homework and attending classes because they know it will impact their final grade. In this context, fair grading serves as a key incentive for students to work diligently and succeed in their studies.

In summary, equitable grading performs an important function in securing students' academic success. Students who do not meet the non-academic expectations like turning in late homework or

being absent during graded class work or participation or simply perceived as being rude in class, are still guaranteed to succeed if they have better performance during their final exams. Grading for equity also encourages educators to identify students' subject mastery gaps and address them to guarantee their academic success. It can also help overcome teachers' personal and institutional biases. Teachers' biases in grading that result from their dissolute opinions on students' behaviour are eliminated by grading for equity. Teachers focus solely on the academic performance of learners without stressing their adherence to class and assignments. Institutional biases in grading are eliminated, giving many students from marginalized groups an opportunity to enter colleges after passing their final exams. Overall, implementing grading for equity in high schools would be a magnificent idea in ensuring all students succeed in academics irrespective of the economic and social hardships they go through outside the school.

Research Methodology

Design

In this study, a qualitative study design known as phenomenology to explore the lived experiences of the participants at the secondary level on grading equity practices was used. The phenomenological inquiry was chosen as the methodological approach for this research due to its ability to delve deeply into the subjective experiences and perceptions of participants.

Locale

This study was conducted at Jefferson High School in Daly City, California. This school was in the thriving city of Daly City which provides as a vital educational institution for students from many backgrounds and students with educational needs including English Language Learners, Adult Learners, and those who require special educational support.

Participants

In this study, 12 secondary learners from Jefferson High School were selected as participants using a purposive sampling technique. With purposive sampling technique, it allowed the researchers to explore participant's experiences on grading for equity. The researchers conducted interviews with these students to ensure a wide sample across grade levels and subject topics. Selecting participants from a variety of grade levels was a method that attempted to ensure the diversity and impartiality of the research findings, allowing for a thorough investigation of students' experiences with grading equity.

Table 1

Profile of the Participants

Participant #	Student's Initial Name	Grade Level	Gender	School
1	De Li	9	M	Jefferson High School
2	Ay Hu	10	F	Jefferson High School
3	Ja Co	10	M	Jefferson High School
4	Kh Ga	10	F	Jefferson High School
5	Me Ch	11	F	Jefferson High School
6	Ye Ca	12	M	Jefferson High School
7	Co An	9	F	Jefferson High School
8	Ag Al	10	F	Jefferson High School
9	Fi Te	9	M	Jefferson High School
10	Bu Ge	12	M	Jefferson High School
11	Go Il	11	F	Jefferson High School

Source: Author 's development

Data Gathering Procedure

In this study, the participant information was gathered using a semi-structured interview approach. Before conducting data collection, the permission was obtained from the school principal through a formal letter that informed and secured approval to conduct the study. Subsequently, a letter seeking parental consent was sent to the parents who requested authorisation for their children's participation in the research. Following this, participants were provided with a consent form detailing the purpose and procedures of the study, ensuring their voluntary agreement to take part. Ethical considerations were carefully addressed, with the interview protocol designed to explore students' experiences with grading equity and its impact on their academic performance. These tailored questions served to effectively address the research objectives. Throughout the data collection phase, interviews were meticulously recorded, transcribed, and subsequently subjected to thorough analysis.

Instrument

This study employed a semi-structured interview guides or questionnaires. The research instrument consists of three sections: preliminary, developmental, and post-interview questions. The initial portion of the session included basic questions aimed at building a connection and promoting a relaxed environment for participants. Consequently, the developmental section delved deeper into the main research inquiries focusing on participants' perceptions and experiences related to grading equity. Lastly, the post-interview questions which provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on the interview experienced and offered any additional insights or comments they may have.

Ethics

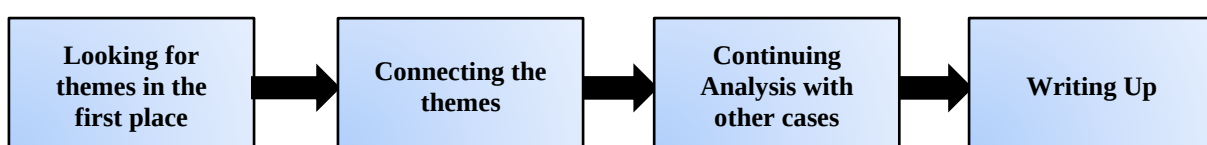
The study adhered to the essential ethical guidelines. With approval from the High School Principal, the researchers obtained legal permission to conduct the study. The methodology and objectives of the study were explained to the principal during an in-person meeting with the researchers. To ensure each participant's voluntary participation, permission forms were provided and signed prior to their involvement in the study. Before conducting the interviews, the research questions were carefully reviewed to prevent any potential physical or psychological harm to the participants.

Data Analysis

In this study, the researcher utilised the data analysis process called Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). In IPA, it involved a systematic approach: 1) identifying and defining themes within individual cases, 2) establishing connections between these themes, 3) iteratively analysing additional cases to enhance understanding and depth, and 4) synthesizing findings into a comprehensive written report (Smith, J. A., 1996, p. 68-91).

Figure 1

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Schema



Source: Author's development.

Results

The following section presents the background information about the results of the interviews that were conducted into three primary findings: grading practices, learning enhancement, and achievement results.

Based in the findings of this study, grading practices emerged as a core category in influencing students' experiences and perceptions of grading equity at Jefferson High School. One of the identified significant aspects was the familiarity of grading practices among students. According to the participants mentioned that they have the familiarity of the grading practices in school which indicates a clarity and consistency in grading policies are essential for promoting a sense of fairness and transparency in the classroom. Also, the participants stressed out that they are allowed to do retakes and do test revisions which allows students to benefit from opportunities to retake assessments or revise their work which led students to improve their understanding of the lessons and ultimately achieve higher grades. This finding is evident in providing students with opportunities for mastery learning and promoting academic growth through iterative assessment processes.

Based on the findings, accepting late work was also highlighted as an important factor in maintaining equity. Most students appreciated the flexibility of the late work policy that allowed them for late submissions without penalizing their grade. By accommodating late submissions can eliminate this barrier and ensure that the grading process is more equitable. It also said that avoiding favouritism in grading. Several students were worried that favouritism played a role in grading practices, and pointed to perceived inconsistencies in how work was marked as evidence of this. With grading equity, it highlights the need for educators to adopt fair and impartial grading practices, ensuring that all students are evaluated based on their individual successes rather than external factors.

Furthermore, participants stated that having more accurate grades was one of the findings of this study. Participants can meet or be ahead of their academic goals only if they receive feedback that shows their performance. Hence, timely and consistent feedback is provided to help the learner address weaknesses, enhance performance, and become more successful. Participants also stressed that giving chances to have good grades is one of the most specific examples of equity in grading they could think of. Additionally, many participants stated that their teachers invite them to show their knowledge and apply their skills to problem-solving in various tasks, and these policies motivate learners to be the best they can be. By providing each student with due credit and promoting the reward for their achievements, educators can help facilitate the development of a positive learning atmosphere and help all students engage in academic success.

Conversely, giving students the chance to relearn concepts emerged as an important factor in enhancing learning. Many participants expressed that the opportunities to revisit and review previously covered material greatly helped them in reinforcing their understanding and address areas of weakness. By allowing students to relearn concepts, teachers can promote mastery of learning and ensure that all students can achieve academic success. Participants highlighted the importance of enhancing their prior skills to further their learning. They emphasised the value of targeted interventions and support systems that aimed to strengthen their foundational skills and competencies. By providing opportunities for skill development and growth, teachers can empower students to overcome academic challenges and achieve their full potential.

The participants also emphasised the importance of engaging and interactive learning experiences that promote deeper understanding and mastery of learning. By creating opportunities for active learning and inquiry-based instruction, educators can foster a culture of academic excellence and promote equitable learning outcomes for all students. Thus, learning from mistakes was identified as a

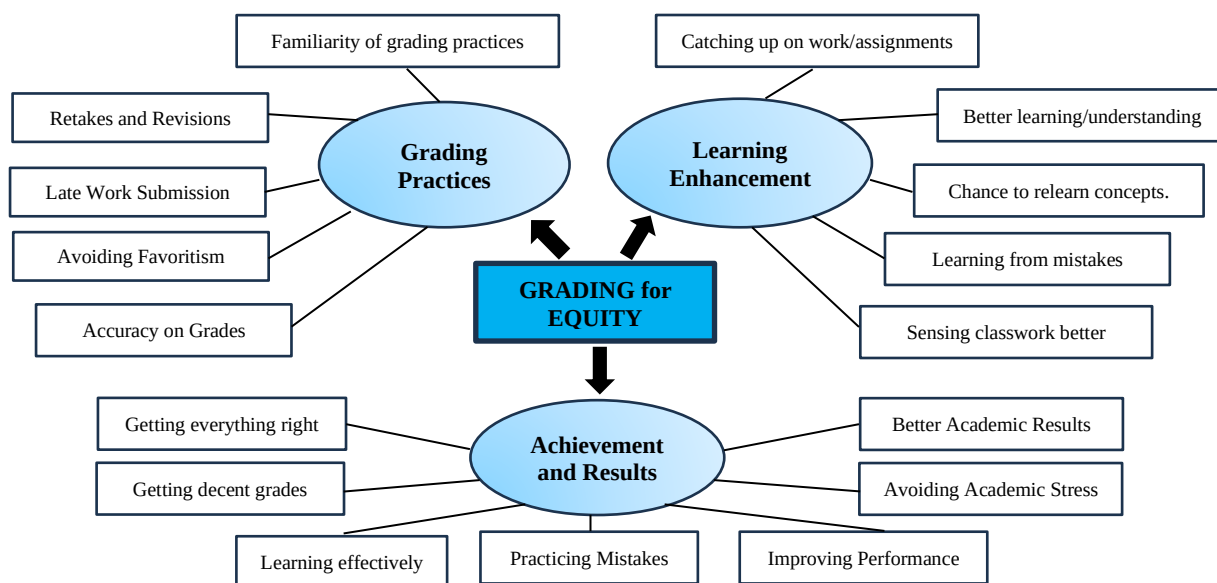
crucial aspect of learning enhancement. Participants described the value of constructive feedback and opportunities for reflection, noting that these practices helped them identify areas for improvement and grow as learners. By creating a supportive learning environment where mistakes are viewed as opportunities for growth, educators can empower students to take ownership of their learning and strive for continuous improvement.

Conversely, achievement and results encompass various aspects related to students' academic performance, learning outcomes, and overall achievement. One significant aspect identified within the achievement and results is the desire to get everything right. Many participants expressed a strong desire for academic excellence by striving to achieve high grades and better performance in their coursework. Another vital aspect of success and outcomes is the value of earning satisfactory grades. Participants highlighted the value of receiving fair and equitable grades that accurately reflect their efforts and performance. By recognizing students' achievements and providing constructive feedback, teachers can support students in reaching their academic goals.

Making mistakes was highlighted as an important part of gaining academic success. Participants emphasised the importance of learning from failures and setbacks, which provide great chances for growth and improvement. Teachers can help students overcome obstacles and reach their full potential by instilling in them resilience and determination. Furthermore, minimizing academic stress emerged as a critical factor in academic achievement. Participants discussed the negative consequences of stress and pressure on their academic performance and well-being, emphasizing the significance of fostering a helpful and welcoming learning environment. By fostering balance and well-being, teachers may assist students in managing stress and achieving academic success in a healthy and sustainable manner.

The results of the study shed light on the multifaceted nature of grading equity and its impact on students' academic experiences. The key findings reveal that equitable grading practices encompass various aspects, including familiarity with grading procedures, opportunities for reassessment and revision, flexibility in submission deadlines, avoidance of favouritism, accuracy in grading, and recognition of achievement.

Overall, the study highlighted the importance of learning enhancement strategies, such as providing support to catch up on work, facilitating better understanding, allowing opportunities for relearning, improving previous skills, mastering concepts, and learning from mistakes. Furthermore, the findings underscored students' aspirations for academic achievement and success, including the desire to get everything right, receive decent grades, learn effectively, practice mistakes, improve performance, avoid academic stress, achieve better results, and make better grades. The results emphasised the critical role of equitable grading practices in fostering inclusive learning environments and supporting students' academic growth and achievement.



Source: Author's development.

Figure 2. Schematic Diagram of Grading Equity Results

Discussion

Grading Practices

Based on the results and findings, it is evident that grading for equity significantly impacts student academic achievement. When considering the prevalence of traditional grading systems, it becomes apparent that standardised approaches may not always cater to the varied learning preferences and backgrounds of our students. According to Feldman (2018), traditional grading which assesses both students' behaviour as well as their knowledge of content, creates subjectivity and implicit bias. Traditional grading often disseminates a "fixed mindset" framework for learning, accelerates skepticism and stress and can result in students engaging in compensatory behaviours.

Hollins et al. (2023) further stated that the culture-based misunderstanding may occur between students and educators especially with regards to race, religion, and socio-economic background resulting in students being necessarily chastised for perceived rudeness even if their actions were not deliberately intentional. By adopting equitable grading practices, such as letting students take retakes and test revisions, it can be acknowledged that learning is a process with opportunities for growth and development. This idea not only promotes a growth mindset but also serves as a guarantee that students are not unfairly penalised for things not related to their performance.

Feldman (2018) noted that letting students turn in late work or assignments may have a long-term repercussion like when these students are already working or have future careers. Implementing equitable grading practices fosters student empowerment by creating a flexible learning environment that promotes a growth mindset and prioritizes their well-being. This approach encourages academic success and provides opportunities for personal achievement and self-fulfilment. Ensuring that every student gets what they want when it comes to assessment and grading is an important and compelling teaching and learning matter. Zoul (2021) suggests that in order to promote equity, the education system needs to reassess practices such as competition, tracking, and enrichment programs. Instead of categorizing students as "winners" and "losers," the focus should be on providing each student with the

necessary support and resources to thrive academically. This shift can help create a more inclusive and positive learning environment for all students.

Grading for equity eliminates favouritism, all students are treated well, and the principles of equity and justice are maintained so that each student has an equal chance to succeed. Furthermore, to address specific learning needs effectively, teachers can adapt their instructions that accurately reflect the mastery of students of the used materials. This provides significant feedback in identifying which students may need additional support. In addition, providing students chances to achieve good grades would motivate them to work harder to attain excellence and their efforts and achievements are thereby recognised. By celebrating and recognising their individual successes, students are inspired to achieve their utmost potential and a culture of academic excellence is being promoted. In essence, equitable grading isn't just about giving scores or numbers but rather it promotes inclusivity and a learning environment where students can academically thrive.

Learning Enhancement

According to Feldman (2018), Morris (2024) and Ewing (2023) equitable grading encompasses a sophisticated approach to assessment that focuses on students' growth and learning. Feldman further stated the significance of allowing students to learn from their mistakes and properly correct them. This process enables students to continue with their journey to achieve knowledge that helps them in their growth and learning. This conforms to the idea that grading for equity not only promotes equity but also enhances academic achievement of students by allowing them to relearn concepts enhance former skills and permitting them to catch up on unfinished work.

Morris (2024) emphasised the importance of allowing students to demonstrate their understanding of concepts, rather than focusing on the number of times they may need to retake exams or assessments. This balanced approach to retakes values student learning and mastery of material. This idea highlights the need for teachers to promote an organised and scalable system for retakes, allowing grading practices or assessment methods to stay fair and unbiased for every student.

Likewise, Ewing (2023) emphasises the significance of offering students opportunities to make up for being absent to showcase their understanding in fair ways. Ewing further underscores the idea that learning is ongoing by permitting retakes for unsatisfactory exam results or scores and offering make-up assessment, ensuring that every student has the chance to improve and succeed.

Fundamentally, the outcomes drawn from the discoveries highlight the pivotal function of equitable grading in fostering academic success among students. Embracing pedagogical approaches that prioritise learning enhancement, such as permitting exam retakes, reinforcing comprehension, and facilitating opportunities for advancement, educators can promote a nurturing learning atmosphere where every student has the potential to thrive and excel.

Achievement and Results

Fair grading practices have a significant impact on students' academic achievements. The research emphasises the limitations of averaging a student's performance over time, stressing the importance of enabling students to retake assessments until they achieve mastery. This approach not only encourages authentic skill development but also supports continuous growth, leading to improved academic success (Feldman, 2018).

Ragusa et al. (2023) emphasise the importance of self-regulation strategies for students in academic settings, including managing emotions, nurturing motivation, and conquering difficulties. They point out that students might delay exams or tasks out of fear of failure, highlighting the necessity

for grading practices that offer support, relieve academic stress, and enhance student involvement. Bell et al. (2022) investigates the correlation between enthusiasm for learning and student engagement, suggesting that a supportive learning atmosphere contributes to enhanced academic success. Likewise, Bayoumy and Alsaye (2021) highlight the intricate relationship among achievement, motivation, personality traits, and academic performance, emphasising the diverse elements influencing student achievement. Additionally, Thurber (2021) research on self-assessment emphasises its importance in bolstering academic performance. By enabling students to evaluate their learning, abilities, and progress, self-assessment not only enriches understanding but also promotes accountability and ownership.

Moreover, Bonilla (2024) study on stress and academic achievement underscores the importance of achieving harmony between rigorous standards and manageable stress levels. While moderate stress can drive academic performance, excessive stress can hinder learning and result in adverse consequences such as depression and academic underperformance.

Nevertheless, grading for equity includes various methods that prioritise student learning, engagement, and overall well-being. Through the incorporation of approaches like permitting retakes, encouraging self-assessment, and addressing academic stress, educators can cultivate an inclusive learning atmosphere conducive to the academic success of all students.

Limitations of the Study

This study provides a focused examination of particular viewpoints related to equitable grading practices and their effects on students' academic success. However, the limitations of this study are primarily rooted on its small sample size which impacts its generalizability wherein it limits the impact of the results to a larger population. Furthermore, the use of purposive sampling also limits the diversity of the sample because it only includes participants who meet specific criteria. Although limited by its sample size, the findings of this study provide rich and relevant data that can inform the complex issues on grading for equity towards student's academic performance.

Conclusions and Implications

The empirical investigation into grading practices through an equity lens demonstrated compelling evidence that supports the essential role of fair and just grading methods in enhancing student outcomes and scholastic achievement. Through a systematic exploration of various aspects of grading for equity, researchers identified several key benefits and implications for educational practice.

Firstly, the findings emphasised the importance of allowing students opportunities to retake assessments until they achieve mastery levels. With retakes on assessments, this not only fosters true competence but also promotes reiterative learning which ultimately lead to greater student academic success.

Secondly, the findings also emphasised on the significance of managing academic stress and promoting student engagement. Grading for equity practices that mitigate stress and foster enthusiasm for learning creates a positive learning environment where students are more likely to succeed academically.

Additionally, the studies underscored the value of self-assessment in promoting academic performance that empowers students to evaluate their knowledge and skills foster a sense of ownership and accountability, ultimately enhancing learning outcomes.

Overall, the significant implications of the research on grading for equity underscored the transformative potential of equitable grading practices in promoting student learning, engagement, and well-being. By implementing strategies such as allowing retakes, mitigating academic stress, promoting self-assessment, and structuring retake policies, teachers can create inclusive learning environments where all students can thrive academically.

Suggestions for Future Research

Educational policymakers should create and enforce guidelines for fair grading practices among educators which include clear retake standards, teacher training on equitable grading, and alignment with fairness and transparency. Teachers need ongoing professional development in order to implement fair grading and adopt a growth mindset. Furthermore, the schools must integrate equitable grading into teacher training, curriculum development, and school improvement plans while supporting research on effective grading practices. While continuous research is crucial to understanding the effects of fair rating on student success, it is particularly important in addressing the unique academic needs of students and informing policies and practices to promote educational equity.

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Conflict of Interest

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