

# RECEIVING PROVISIONAL GRADES DURING THE PANDEMIC: UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' JOURNEY

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**ABSTRACT:** As the COVID-19 pandemic tested the resiliency of universities and colleges in providing quality education, some of these institutions opted to give students provisional (P) grades instead of directly failing the students who did not comply with academic requirements. This study presents the students' experiences at a state university in the southern Philippines with receiving provisional (P) grades. The participants were 15 students from the three colleges of the university. This qualitative study used open-ended questions to gather data through interviews. Content analysis was utilized for the analysis. Themes generated by the participants include 1.) difficulties in interaction due to an unstable internet connection; 2.) self-blame and disappointment; 3.) difficulties in managing time; 4.) challenges in understanding the lesson; 5.) struggles in tracing back activities; and 6.) instructors' unavailability. With this, the researchers recommend that the university provide training and seminars to the instructors and students on topics such as mental health awareness, advocacy, and digital literacy. Moreover, whenever the university comes up with a new policy, it is beneficial to ask for feedback from stakeholders to gain insights into how the policy might affect them and ensure that their rights will be respected and upheld. This is to ensure that the policy is fair, transparent, and equitable.

**Keywords:** Students' experiences, students' perceptions, provisional grades

## 1. INTRODUCTION

During the pandemic, online classes presented various challenges for students and instructors, potentially affecting their performance and leading to provisional grades. Provisional grades are temporary evaluations that provide students with immediate feedback and allow for adjustments as the situation evolves. These grades can sometimes cause tension and misunderstandings between students and instructors during online classes. It explores how different factors such as instructors' and students' behaviors can contribute to the failure of grades, resulting in a lack of communication, unstable internet connectivity, loss of interest, and difficulties adapting to advanced technologies.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted education systems worldwide, necessitating the implementation of remote learning and assessment strategies. Approximately 27 million learners, 1 million teachers, non-teaching staff, and learners' families in the Philippines were affected during the crisis [1]. Given the severe impact caused by this lethal infectious agent and its associated disease, which has resulted in economic instability and a significant loss of lives, the most feasible choice thus far is to shift towards an alternative method of education delivery, specifically distance learning [2, 3]. The disruptions caused by school closures, transitions to remote learning, and the associated challenges have resulted in a variety of difficulties for students. The abrupt shift to online learning and the lack of in-person interaction with teachers and peers have posed challenges in terms of engagement, focus, and access to necessary resources.

Many educational institutions have adopted provisional grading systems to ensure the continuity of education and minimize the negative impact on student's academic progress. The lockdown measures and the swift transition in

educational practices have significantly affected students and their learning journey [4]. The pandemic has brought about heightened stress, anxiety, and distractions that can further hinder academic performance. Consequently, many students have experienced a decline in grades and a general decrease in their academic achievements during this period. Overcoming these challenges in the context of the ongoing pandemic necessitates innovative solutions from educational institutions [5]. In response to the urgent need for a swift transition to online learning, Google offers several products that prove highly beneficial in such challenging circumstances. These tools include (a) Gmail, (b) Google Forms, (c) Calendars, (d) G-Drive, and (e) Google Classroom. Leveraging these tools can effectively serve as an alternative to face-to-face classes [6]. The lack of structure and routine in remote learning, along with increased distractions at home, hindered students' ability to stay focused and motivated.

The memorandum from the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, no 018, s. 2020 a state university in Claveria, in the southern Philippines, mandated that faculty are not permitted to give 'F' (5.0) or 'INC'; instead, 'P' will be given to students who cannot complete requirements within the semester but are offered one (1) year to comply with them. The grade 'P' will be changed to a numerical grade when the student has completed the academic requirements for the course. OVPAA memo No. 1 s. 2021 - Grade Submission for 1st semester AY 2020-2021, further stated that the 'P' will be converted to 5.0 after a year if requirements have not been complied with.

Given the above, there is a good reason that doing this research would attempt to determine the general purpose of finding out the experiences of the students during an online

classroom environment that may lead to having “P” grades – provisional grades. By conducting this study, University administrators will be given a wider perspective on the experiences of the students; thereby, aiming to provide better policies for them.

## 2. METHODS

This study focused on conceptual content analysis, a type of qualitative research that determines whether a set of qualitative data contains particular words, themes, or concepts. The study involved fifteen (15) students from the three colleges of a state university in Claveria, in the southern Philippines, as shown in Table 1. These randomly selected student participants experienced having P grades.

**Table 1. Distribution of Participants according to the College.**

College	Program	Frequency
College of Arts and Sciences	BS in Social Work	5
College of Agriculture	BS in Agriculture	4
	BS in Agroforestry	2
	Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education	1
College of Engineering and Technology	BS in Environmental Engineering	1
	Bachelor of Food Processing and Technology	1
	BS in Agricultural and Biosystems Engineering	1

The researchers utilized a self-made questionnaire for data collection. Researchers used semi-structured open-ended interview questionnaires as a research instrument.

Content analysis was employed in analyzing the responses of the students obtained during the interview.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following the three stages of the data analysis framework proposed by Dahlberg et al. [7], the participant’s responses regarding their experience on receiving provisional grades were analyzed and based on concepts drawn from the interviews.

### Theme 1. Difficulties in interaction due to unstable internet connection

The participants experienced difficulties in interaction because of unstable internet connection toward provisional grades. The internet is an essential part of our lives and is vital for students trying to complete their studies. Unfortunately, unstable internet connections can cause many problems for students, especially when submitting assignments and receiving grades. An unstable internet connection can significantly hinder effective communication between students and teachers. This can lead to a lack of understanding of the learning being taught, as well as a lack

of feedback from the teacher. This can lead to a provisional grade, as the student may have yet to have the opportunity to demonstrate their complete understanding of the lesson.

The impact of an unstable internet connection on student communication and interaction also supports implementing provisional grades in these cases. Studying the obstacles to e-learning as reported by a survey showed that inadequate/unreliable internet connectivity, inadequate computer labs, a lack of computers and laptops, and technical issues were the greatest challenges for adjusting to e-learning [8]. Smallwood [9] stated that poor connections could affect students' ability to interact with their peers, impacting their academic performance. For this reason, many universities and other educational institutions are now providing provisional grades so that students with unreliable internet connections are not disadvantaged by technology issues. Unstable internet connections can seriously impact student learning, making it imperative that universities and other educational institutions implement solutions such as granting provisional grades [10].

### Theme 2. Self-blame and disappointment

The participants encountered a self-blame experience toward the provisional grade. Students may experience self-blame when they receive a provisional grade. This guilt can be caused by various factors, such as feeling like they did not put in enough effort, not studying enough, or not understanding the material. One of the outcomes of students receiving a P grade is self-blame. Students may blame themselves for the assault either because of their character (e.g., "I am weak," "I deserve punishment," or "I didn't study hard enough") or their behavior (e.g., "I'm so lazy," "I didn't study hard enough"). A more realistic assessment of the incident and recovery may be hindered by these perceived "faults." In situations of academic and social failure, there were positive correlations between depression and personality self-blame.

Students experienced increased levels of performance anxiety and self-blame when receiving provisional grades in online courses, which could lead to decreased motivation and a sense of frustration [11]. Students in online classes expressed higher levels of self-blame associated with their academic performance, such as feelings of inadequacy and helplessness [12]. Students experienced higher levels of self-regulation and self-blame when taking online than when taking traditional in-person classes. Additionally, students reported decreased confidence in their ability to manage their learning, which was associated with increased levels of self-blame [13]. Peer views are more indicative of interpersonal outcomes, whereas self-views are more indicative of the intrapersonal effects of victimization (loneliness, anxiety, low self-worth) (peer acceptance and rejection). The initial claim is that behavioral self-blame is an adaptive antiabortion for handling victimization [14].

### Theme 3. Difficulties in managing time

The participants needed help with time management. Time management is the art of organizing your time and deciding how to divide it up between different tasks. Even under time constraints and intense pressure, carry it out correctly, and work more productively and efficiently to finish more tasks in less time. The most successful individuals excel at time management. Managing time is very difficult, especially if

you're a student. There are many instances that it can lead to failing grades or having a P grade. Time management can be a challenge for students aiming for a provisional grade. Planning and setting realistic goals for completing assignments and studying for exams is essential.

Managing students' time has become one of the challenges as there are tendencies where school and work responsibilities stack up at the same time [15]. For web-enhanced, blended, and online courses, student characteristics and technical skills may be comparable, but communication and time management skills are different [16]. Due to their prior experience, students may have given these high ratings because they are well-prepared for online learning tasks. However, poor time management can affect academic performance, particularly when grades are provisional. Students are expected to be self-disciplined learners who effectively manage their time because time management in online courses is very different [17]. Students should develop a regular schedule and stick to it to understand how to manage their time better for online courses. They must prioritize tasks based on importance and urgency, set realistic goals and timelines, and reduce distractions like phone notifications and social media.

#### **Theme 4. Challenges in understanding the lessons**

The participants experienced students' difficulties articulating the topic, which may lead to provisional grades. Students may have trouble understanding the instructional clarification of a topic for various reasons. They may not have strong background knowledge of the topic or be unable to connect the material and their prior knowledge. Additionally, they may not be able to comprehend the language used to explain the topic, or they may not be able to focus on the material due to distractions.

The learning process frequently includes unavoidable but crucial difficulties. This seems especially true for learning complex conceptual information. Learning challenges are particularly challenging to identify and address in educational settings where teachers are unable to give students nuanced and personalized feedback and support to help them overcome their challenges due to growing class sizes and the increased use of digital technologies [18]. Most students will run into a subject they don't fully understand at some point in their education. Their dislike may have a significant impact on how well they do in this subject if they dislike it because they find it tedious, think they aren't very good at it, think it's a pointless subject that they won't use in the long run, or actively dislike it [19]. Focuses on the lack of direct contact with professors and other students, as well as the difficulty of advanced concepts without the help of a personal mentor online [20]. The challenge of understanding complex topics when learning online due to the lack of instructional clarity. It provides best practices for overcoming this challenge, such as breaking down topics into smaller parts and leveraging supplemental resources. It also advises students to take advantage of the support of their peers and to reach out to their instructors with any questions they may have [21].

#### **Theme 5. Struggles in tracing back the activities**

The participants also needed help tracing the activities toward the provisional grade. Tracing back the activities toward a provisional grade can be a difficult and time-consuming

process. Sometimes, it may appear that the student has done well overall but still needs to complete one activity to meet your instructor's requirements.

They were attempting to track the activities of their students during online classes. The article highlights that in the absence of physical presence, teachers often need to be made aware of the activities and engagement levels of the students. Some challenges teachers face when attempting to monitor their students in an online classroom include a need for real-time access, maintaining student privacy and security, and difficulties maintaining consistency across different classes [22]. Self-realization can be beneficial to students in tracing academic requirements during online learning as it allows them to gain a better understanding of their skills and activities, assess what may be missing or need to be focused on, and make the necessary adjustments to properly manage the responsibilities associated with their activities [23]. It explores the challenges faced when attempting to trace back academic activities to the instructor. Emphasizing the importance of having clear expectations and guidelines for what activities are expected and how they should be submitted [24].

#### **Theme 6. Instructors' unavailability**

The participants encountered challenges in complying with the P grade. In this situation, participants struggle to comply with requirements, but the instructors aren't on campus. The students face when trying to meet the requirements of their activities without an instructor physically present on campus. If the Teacher is unavailable, it can be difficult for them to check in and provide feedback on student assignments or answer questions. Students may also struggle to keep up with course material without having the teacher present to provide guidance and support. This could lead to lower grades or even the potential of failing the course.

It was discovered that during lockdowns at the school, the teachers modified their lesson plans in accordance with the institutional policies. Due to poor or nonexistent internet connectivity, the majority of students required assistance to complete the required learning activities [25]. There is a need to address the teachers' concerns regarding how to conduct performance evaluations outside of the classroom as well as the majority of submissions they must evaluate, whether they are made online or offline. Important considerations for the assessment itself and how students will be graded are the design and planning [26]. The article addresses the impact of unavailability on student learning, compliance, and grades and how school administrators can ensure that students are still provided with a quality education during teacher absences.

## **4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

This qualitative study explored the experiences of students in receiving provisional grades during the pandemic. Their responses are themed into 1) difficulties in interaction due to unstable internet connection, 2.) self-blame and disappointment, 3.) difficulties in managing time, 4.) challenges in understanding the lesson, 5.) struggles in tracing back the activities, and 6.) instructors' unavailability. the researchers recommend that the University should provide training and seminars to the instructors and students

on topics such as mental health awareness, advocacy, and digital literacy. Moreover, whenever the University comes up with a new policy, it is beneficial to ask for feedback from stakeholders to gain insights into how the policy might affect them and ensure that their rights will be respected and upheld. This is to ensure that the policy is fair, transparent, and equitable.

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