

Instructor-Driven Causes and Impacts of Grade Inflation in Philippine Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Grade inflation in Philippine higher education is a growing concern, with instructors increasingly assigning higher grades to students. This paper investigates instructor-driven causes behind grade inflation and its impacts. Autoethnography was used as a method. The study locale was public state universities and colleges in Taguig City and Muntinlupa City, Philippines; data collection involved immersion, a personal diary, and informal discussions with faculty and students. Thematic analysis, guided by research inquiries, unveiled the factors driving this trend. Results suggest compassionate grading, influenced by a desire to support students facing challenges, fosters inflated success perceptions. Laziness, apathy, and sycophancy also contribute to lax grading, hindering genuine academic growth. Meanwhile, the impacts extend beyond academia, affecting graduates' skill acquisition and potentially dissatisfying employers. Recommendations advocate for enhanced accountability among instructors through rigorous evaluation systems and continuous professional development to safeguard academic standards. Combating grade inflation necessitates collaborative efforts to uphold education quality and integrity, benefiting students, institutions, and society.



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1. Introduction

I was utterly stunned when I saw a news report that the price of a simple onion had skyrocketed to over P700 (12.65 USD) per kilo (CNN Philippines, 2022). Various memes circulated on social media, with one suggesting giving onions as a gift instead of flowers to loved ones. Others even jokingly compared the vegetable to gold. However, it is not just onions that have experienced a surge in price—even student grades in higher education. I've worked in higher education for five years and have observed this phenomenon firsthand. It turns out that I'm not the only one who noticed this trend. Other academics commented on it, including Arao (2022), an associate professor at the University of the Philippines Diliman.

“UPD FYI: At the University Council meeting this morning, it appears that this graduating batch has 1,433 students graduating with Latin honors (i.e., 634 cum laude, 652 magna cum laude and 147 summa cum laude). Congratulations but we should seriously discuss grade hyperinflation.”

Arao's tweet about the issue went viral, with varying reactions from netizens. While some agreed that the phenomenon differed from their time and warranted investigation, others dismissed it as a boomer mindset. Still, many argued that the timing wasn't right for such discussions and that everyone should be celebrating instead. While Arao may argue that it is grade hyperinflation, I believe it is not the correct term. It could be a case of grade inflation instead. According to Marinakis and White (2022), hyperinflation refers to an extraordinarily rapid and typically uncontrollable increase in the general price level within an economy. In hyperinflationary scenarios, the prices of goods and services skyrocket, leading to a drastic devaluation of the currency. Applying this term to the academic grades, this is not what I have observed. While grades are increasing, it is not happening at an excessive rate. Therefore, I prefer to use the same terminology as Contreras (2024) and David (2022) and refer to this phenomenon as grade inflation.

Grade hyperinflation is an infrequent occurrence characterized by a rapid and drastic surge in the average grades obtained by students within a brief span; in contrast, grade inflation signifies a consistent and gradual uptick in students' average grades over time, occurring without substantial corresponding advancements in their genuine academic progress or learning (Baglione & Smith, 2022). Grade inflation is a phenomenon in which higher grades are awarded to students than they deserve, increasing the average grades (Chowdhury, 2018). Grade inflation is analogous to economic inflation, although it operates in different spheres. In education, grade inflation refers to the trend of higher grades being awarded over time without a corresponding increase in the quality of student performance. This can occur due to various reasons, such as changes in grading standards, pressure on educators to maintain high pass rates, or a shift in educational philosophies emphasizing positive reinforcement (Yeritsyan et al., 2022). Similarly to economic inflation, where the value of currency decreases, in grade inflation, the value or significance of higher grades can diminish if they become more common and less reflective of actual academic achievement.

This trend has been observed in many countries, including the USA (Griffin & Townsley, 2021), Sweden (Nordin et al., 2019), the UK (Bachan, 2017), India (Singh, 2019), and Canada (Cheng et al., 2018). Philippines, of course, is no exemption (Macailing et al., 2022). The motivation behind this paper stems from the increasingly prevalent issue of grade inflation and its potentially adverse consequences on educational integrity and students' prospects. By adopting an autoethnographic approach—immersion in the academic environment, maintaining a personal diary, and engaging in informal discussions with faculty and students—I uncover the less-explored, human-centric aspects contributing to grade inflation. The novelty lies in this intimate and firsthand exploration of the instructor-driven causes of grade inflation. This method allows a nuanced understanding of the motivations,

emotions, and behaviors influencing grading decisions. By bridging the gap between personal experiences and academic research, this study offers a fresh perspective on the complex motivations behind grade inflation, moving beyond traditional quantitative analyses.

In this paper, I aim to examine the issue of grade inflation in Philippine higher education. Specifically, I will explore the following research questions:

1. How many Filipino instructors contribute to grade inflation?
2. What are the possible impacts of grade inflation?

2. Methods

The method utilized in this paper is autoethnography; it blends personal experiences and analysis, which may offer educators a powerful way to explore the educational landscape. This approach can provide me with authentic insights and critical examination. Moreover, this paper is based on the insider or emic perspective, for I am a member of the culture where the phenomenon is situated. In crafting this, I strived to balance personal anecdotes with academic rigor. Memories shape narratives, though they may be imperfect. In sum, autoethnography enriches our understanding of the nuances in the educational field, marrying memory, experience, and analysis.

2.1. Research Approach

Autoethnography, a method blending personal storytelling with ethnographic research, resonates deeply with grade inflation augmentation (Cooper & Lilyea, 2022). It is a post-modern research technique, a journey into one's experiences within a cultural context. This approach delves into the intricate web of personal narratives, cultural nuances, and academic landscapes. As someone immersed in education, I find this method particularly apt for unraveling the complex layers surrounding grade inflation. I aim to illuminate how this cultural phenomenon manifests within the academic sphere.

My engagement in this autoethnographic study also involved literature review and theoretical grounding to situate my results within existing scholarship and debates on grade inflation. This scholarly foundation not only informed my research design but also provided a way for interpreting and contextualizing the observed trends and patterns. Through particular attention to detail and an analytical approach, I sought to contribute meaningfully to the ongoing discourse surrounding academic assessment practices and educational policies in Philippine higher education institutions.

2.2. Location

The study locale is based on public state universities and colleges in Taguig City and Muntinlupa City, Philippines. This offers a powerful lens to explore the intricacies of grade inflation within these educational institutions, weaving together personal experiences and cultural insights unique to these localized settings.

2.3. Data Generation

In collecting data for this autoethnographic study centered on grade inflation, a multifaceted approach was employed to capture the nuances of this phenomenon. Embracing an emic perspective, I immersed myself in the higher education environment, actively participating in daily activities and interactions. A pivotal aspect of data collection involved meticulous maintenance of a personal diary, wherein daily observations, reflections, and specific instances related to grade distribution were recorded. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, pseudonyms or generalized descriptors were used for individuals or specific events discussed in the diary entries. Concurrently, informal conversations with peers—faculty members and students—offered diverse perspectives on grade inflation. While these

discussions provided varied viewpoints, ethical considerations remained paramount. I also ensured an understanding of grade inflation while prioritizing ethical data collection practices and confidentiality.

2.4. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis scrutinized data aligning with the research inquiries: (1) 'How do Filipino instructors influence grade inflation?' and (2) 'What are the possible repercussions of grade inflation?' Following Braun and Clarke (2012), this analytical process commenced with data immersion, initial coding, and thematic identification. The identified themes, embodying instructor influence and grade inflation repercussions, were reviewed and defined for coherence and representation of the primary data. Concurrently, secondary data from existing literature on grade inflation supplemented the analysis, enriching thematic interpretations.

2.5. Reflexivity and Subjectivity

With five years working in higher education, from part-time to a full-time role, my engagement provided a valuable foundation for this autoethnographic endeavor. Throughout the exploration of grade inflation in public state universities and colleges in Taguig City and Muntinlupa City, Philippines. I remained committed to reflexivity, recognizing the intricate intertwining of my roles as both researcher and participant. This reflexive stance enabled a continual examination of biases, subjectivity, and inherent positionality (Arora et al., 2023). I constantly scrutinized how my personal experiences, evolving perspectives, and cultural background influenced the lens through which I observed and interpreted grade inflation dynamics.

Acknowledging the intrinsic subjectivity of the autoethnography, embraced the multifaceted nature of my engagement within these academic institutions. My experiences, emotions, and interactions were integral to shaping the narratives surrounding grade inflation. I navigated this subjective terrain with an acute awareness of the potential impact of my perspectives on the analysis. This self-awareness allowed for a nuanced exploration (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023), where personal reflections and cultural contexts seamlessly intertwined with the broader examination of grade inflation. The reflexivity ingrained in this study served as a guiding principle, illuminating the complexities inherent in merging personal experiences with academic inquiry.

3. Results and Discussion

In this section, I unveil the fruits of my autoethnography, shedding light on the intricate dynamics of grade inflation within the educational landscape. My investigation has delved into two pivotal aspects: (1) instructor-driven causes of grade inflation and (2) possible impacts of this phenomenon. Through analysis and examination, I present the themes from this study. These results contribute to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms behind grade inflation and prompt crucial discussions about its implications for the educational system.

3.1. Instructor-Driven Causes

In this paper, I will first highlight some possible reasons for grade inflation, focusing on the factors related to instructors. While I acknowledge that other factors can also contribute to grade inflation, like the no-fail policy during the pandemic situation (Sarao, 2022) and the global rising IQ of people, otherwise known as the Flynn effect (Rindermann & Becker, 2023), this paper will concentrate solely on the instructors' side. I suggest that instructors influence grade inflation through the following: (1) compassion, (2) laziness, (3) apathy, and (4) sycophancy.

Instructor-Driven Cause	Definition	Example Vignette
Compassion	A tendency among instructors to award higher grades than deserved, often motivated by a desire to boost students' morale despite students not meeting the minimum requirements.	A tenured instructor consistently awards most students 1.0 grades, the highest in the grading system, to elevate their confidence.
Laziness	An instructor's unwillingness to exert effort in teaching responsibilities is often due to external distractions or inherent characteristics, resulting in unprepared or lackluster teaching methods.	A part-time instructor juggling multiple roles makes students do all the teaching by reporting the lessons, compromising the quality of education.
Apathy	A disconnection or indifference toward teaching responsibilities is marked by instructors' lack of interest in students' learning outcomes or development.	An online instructor allocates a 2-hour break in a 3-hour class, neglects teaching with minimal engagement, and displays more concern over salary discussions.
Sycophancy	Behaving obsequiously toward students, motivated by seeking positive evaluations, often leads to inflating grades or favoring students to gain an advantage.	An instructor offers lenient grading in return for favorable student evaluations.

Figure 1 Instructor-Driven Causes of Grade Inflation

3.1.1. *Compassion*

One of the reasons why grades inflate is not necessarily due to a villainous reason but rather a compassionate one. Many instructors are generous in giving good grades, even though sometimes students cannot fulfill the minimum requirements for a subject and hence do not deserve it. I know of a tenured instructor who has been in higher education for many years. Like a loving mother, she is generous in passing grades and getting most of her students 1.0. In the case of our institution, 1.0 is the highest in the grading system. She intends to boost students' morale. Although it may seem harmless, I do not think it will have genuine positive results on their abilities. Even though students barely reach learning outcomes, they get high grades, which is unfair to those who have mastered the skills. I see her as a mother who spoils her kids, who always says "very good" to them even though they did not do well at all, making them hallucinate that whatever they're doing is always excellent. She's not the only one who does that. This is widespread. Many instructors do the same. This tendency to give high grades is known as "generosity bias." This bias can cause instructors to assign higher grades than students deserve.

Consequently, this results in grades that do not accurately reflect student performance. Also, this behavior can lead to a fixed mindset in students, as Dweck (2006) described. A fixed mindset is when individuals believe that their abilities are fixed and cannot be changed through effort or learning. The common contention of these instructors is that they want to build student confidence. However, I believe this is a fake, ephemeral pleasure they are building. While these instructors may have good intentions, it is crucial to consider the potential consequences of their actions. Giving inflated grades may provide a false sense of achievement that can hinder students' long-term growth and development.

Students need well-structured learning experiences and meaningful feedback that honestly discusses their strengths and areas for improvement. I think that is the meaning of genuine compassion in education. This will help students become equipped and more

confident in their skills, helping them grow and develop. Still, instructors need to find a balance between compassion and academic rigor.

3.1.2. Laziness

Another factor that contributes to grade inflation is laziness among instructors. Some may be inherently lazy (i.e., personality factor) or have other responsibilities, like doing a graduate degree or researching, that distract them, while others may be doing their teaching role as instructors. To elucidate, laziness refers to a reluctance or unwillingness to exert effort or to do work (Madsen, 2018). Laziness among instructors is the quality of being unwilling to undertake their duties and responsibilities. In my personal experience as a college student, I knew an instructor who was on the verge of finishing his PhD dissertation but was busy teaching classes in the evenings. Of course, he still needed money to support himself and his studies. However, I remember that during class, he would simply read from Google searches or assign students impromptu reporting without proper preparation. This is an unprofessional and lazy approach to teaching, even if it can be called teaching at all. The frustrating part is that this instructor failed to contribute significantly to discussions. Instead, he would simply hand out high grades to cover up for his neglect and laziness. As a result, my classmates seemed to have grown accustomed to this behavior and were content with simply shrugging off the situation.

Here's another example. This part-time instructor was also a principal at an elementary school during the day and taught college classes at night. Like the previous instructor, she's known as a high-grade-giving faculty member and often asked students to do the reporting and assessments for the entire semester. Her old age acted as a barrier, and she struggled to keep up with the demands of her job as an instructor. Her energy was limited, and she frequently dozed off during class. She was overwhelmed with her duties in her full-time position, making her lazy in preparing and teaching the students. While it is understandable that being a principal is tiring, it is essential to note that it should not come at the expense of part-time quality teaching. Sometimes, instructors become lazy, not because they are busy thinking about other tasks and responsibilities. Other times, it is just inherent in their personality. They find the responsibilities of being an instructor do not provide immediate or much gratification, so they resort to shortcuts to finish things with minimal effort. Their mentality is that they put less effort into their work since they will still be paid the same as those who are not lazy.

It seems that this approach, where instructors do not prepare for teaching and instead pass the responsibility to their students, is becoming normalized. Many of these lazy instructors I know are particularly in public institutions and are older. They delegate the teaching responsibility to their students, divide the syllabus into several parts, and ask them to report it to the class. Some even ask the students to craft tests and quizzes. Others go beyond that. They make students grade their classmates and handle the attendance and grading sheet, allowing the instructors to do nothing. However, by giving high grades, these instructors hope to mask their shortcomings in teaching and make their students overlook the lack of proper instruction. This approach is particularly worrisome as it not only hinders the students' learning but also lowers the standards of the teaching profession. Laziness may manifest as a lack of interest in an activity and its effectiveness (Seltzer, 2008). Therefore, the increasing trend of grade inflation may be attributed to instructors' laziness rooted in their low expectations of their students. As a result, instructors may become unmotivated to implement rigorous and practical instruction and assessments, thinking that their efforts won't make much of a difference. This type of behavior ultimately leads to subpar education and limits the potential of students to excel.

3.1.3. *Apathy*

For untrained eyes, laziness and apathy are similar but two distinct concepts. While laziness means avoiding work or effort, apathy means lacking interest or emotional connection. Relating it to the teaching profession implies a sense of indifference or disconnection from their duties and responsibilities. For example, an apathetic instructor gives students all the teaching (through student reporting) and clerical tasks (like encoding grades and crafting assessments). At the same time, they do not care about students' learning outcome or may not feel strongly about their education and development. Nilson (2016) highlights that some students are dissatisfied with their instructors, who they perceive as failing to fulfill their responsibilities. While some instructors may indeed be lazy or lack the necessary skills to effectively teach, which is detrimental, unempathetic instructors can have an even more detrimental impact on their students. These instructors may not enthusiastically or adequately carry out their teaching responsibilities, dismiss their students' concerns or frustrations, fail to provide the necessary support when needed, or even actively discourage their students from seeking help.

For instance, I encountered a seasoned instructor who seemed to have become apathetic after spending three decades in the academe. He teaches online. And so, he gets an opportunity to abuse the set-up and the fact that nobody gets to observe him. Specifically, he would give his students two hours of free time, which he calls water break, out of a three-hour session. Based on his students, they don't get much learning in that one hour, too. He rarely talks about students' welfare or development and does the teaching mechanically, but he often raises concerns about his salary in the faculty chatbox. Students also say that their project is to buy his book, which they do not use often. This shows that he's indifferent to students' progress but not to his monetary gains. What's worse, he is noted in the registrar's office as someone who gives irrationally high grades to students. Perhaps it's because he doesn't care anymore, plus it could be a way for him to survive in the academe.

Another example is when students shared with me that a part-time instructor affiliated with another job hurries through lessons and blurts out information from Google searches after only some minutes of reading, indicating a lack of preparation. Most of the time, they catch her not knowing the topic because they ask her questions, yet she dismisses them. Her grading system appears arbitrary, earning her the nickname "the roulette instructor." Students notice that those who barely comply with requirements receive higher grades than those who excel.

There's another instructor with international academic credentials and multiple licenses, yet many students complain about him. At first, he was deemed excellent due to his credentials, but he appears to have become apathetic in his teaching evaluation methods. This instructor does not provide specific grading criteria related to the learning outcomes, encodes grades late, and grades students relatively the same, even when various skills are manifested. When students ask for ways to improve their grades, he provides vague and generic responses such as "just do your best," which is not helpful. Also, students have reported that he doesn't teach regularly. He often mentions that they are already in college and should take responsibility for their studies. He doesn't take the initiative to prepare and only teaches when recording the class for his YouTube channel.

The students feel that there is a lack of care from his side. Since these instructors are indifferent, disengaged, and unmotivated already in their overall role as instructors, they may just give high grades. Some may simply be disengaged and not care about the quality of education they provide, including the grades they assign. Others who become apathetic instructors may have lost the meaning and sacredness in their work and hence would just give high grades to avoid conflicts with students or maintain a positive image within the institution.

Another possible reason for apathy among instructors could be that their negative thinking has become deeply ingrained, leading them to have a pessimistic outlook toward their teaching profession and making them feel hopeless that things will ever change. These

apathetic instructors do not prioritize academic excellence and achievement and are doing a great disservice to their students, as Tilbury (2011) pointed out. Hoversten (1990) believes that instructors often fall into this mindset without attempting to find a solution or voicing their concerns to the appropriate authorities; instead, they may resort to the "Let-Someone-Else-Do-It" syndrome, which may seem like an easy way out in the short term but does not pay off in the long run. Overall, these instructors have become apathetic toward their professional development and complacent in their teaching roles. They may have developed a belief that since they are instructors and hold power and authority over students, they can do almost anything they want and assert academic freedom. However, I argue that academic freedom should not be used as an excuse for neglecting their responsibilities toward their students and their professional development.

Moreover, the Philippine culture has a high power index, which means that individuals in positions of authority are expected to be respected and not questioned by those in lower positions (Hofstede, 1984). This cultural aspect may be a factor in why students do not question their instructors, even if they are not effectively fulfilling their responsibilities. Whatever the reason, it is not fitting for an instructor with the noble role of educating young minds to be neglectful in their duties. I believe students deserve better from their instructors, especially since they are the future leaders and hopes of the next generation. I trust that when instructors become empathetic, students will feel empowered, and their learning experience will become transformative. However, this entails a conscious effort among instructors because, in the words of Jamison (2014), empathy is not just a passive experience but a deliberate decision to be attentive and to reach out to others.

3.1.4. Sycophancy

Sycophancy refers to "behaving in an obsequious way in order to gain advantage" (Stevenson, 2010). While it is common for students to become sycophantic toward their instructors like, for example, by being a teacher's pet, with the hope that it'd positively influence their grades, there are instances where the table turns opposite. Instructors become sycophantic toward their students—this behavior manifests when instructors give students high grades that they do not deserve and tell them nice things that are not true to inflate their ego. All these sycophantic behaviors, instructors hope, may lead to an advantage: getting high scores in Student Evaluations of Teaching (SET). Many instructors worry about it, for the results of SET may be used against them, particularly those who are casual or part-time, as they determine, in many universities, whether an instructor will be made permanent or even promoted.

Meanwhile, there is an argument that schooling can foster the "nice guy syndrome," a term related to sycophancy, where individuals prioritize pleasing others (Coughlin, 2016). While many students strive to please their teachers, leading them to adopt the persona of a "nice guy," I contend that many instructors do the same thing. I imagine both parties wearing smiley face masks, pretending to be someone else to gain validation. Contrary to the widely held belief that being nice is always acceptable, I argue that it is not and even can have negative repercussions. Consider the "yes-man" in a corporate setting who cannot say no to their boss, even when overburdened and mistreated. This behavior can erode one's assertiveness and make it challenging to stand up for what is right. Nice guy syndrome also affects instructors. Some instructors prioritize being nice over being right. They may not correct students, even when essential feedback needs to be relayed, because students may dislike them or conjure up negative feelings. This, they believe, may negatively impact their SET. We cannot deny that instructors care about SET. It somehow provides data on instructors' performance. However, sometimes, students take critical yet important feedback personally and end up hating their instructors. This immaturity may lead to biased, low, or failing scores in the instructors' SET.

In college, I remember an instructor who tried to win us over by reminding us that she gave us plus points in our exams, so we should do the same thing in her SET. An instructor also claimed to identify who gave her low marks in her SET. That claim was impossible since the system anonymized the results. She also reiterated her generous treatment and cajoled us to give her high scores. Now that I'm an instructor, I've noticed that many of my colleagues half-jokingly remind each other to be considerate to students during the SET week. We try not to give them complex tasks because they may retaliate in the SET. This is not just our behavior; many instructors do it because it may determine whether or not we keep our jobs. Though SETs are not always reliable (Gelber et al., 2022; Hornstein, 2017), they may determine the fate of instructors.

To give a concrete example, a fellow instructor was relieved of his job because he received low scores in his SET. Because he was stringent in giving grades and his students did not like it, some angry students swayed their friends, colleagues, and the entire class to give him a failing score. Yes, that's the power of the students! The administrators, claiming to be *student-centered*, had not given him a chance to explain himself and asked him to find another job. We cannot entirely blame instructors for engaging in sycophantic behavior and seeking validation from students, given that their bread and butter is at stake. In many cases, the institutional system creates this environment. And instructors must navigate it to survive. They may be forced to become validation-seekers to maintain their livelihood. I see that instructors become like politicians. Professor Durvasula notes, "They have to be validated to...remain in office, so they are by nature validation-seekers" (Scutti, 2017).

3.2. Impacts of Grade Inflation

There are some possible repercussions of grade inflation in the country. I suggest that it may (1) give students a false sense of success, (2) lead to disappointment among employers, and (3) create pressure on the faculty and universities.

Table 2 Impacts of grade inflation

Impact of Grade Inflation	Definition	Suggestions to Mitigate the Impact
False Sense of Success	Grade inflation creates a perception of achievement without genuine learning or skill development among students. This illusory success is based on inflated grades rather than authentic comprehension and mastery of the subject matter.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage transparent grading criteria that align with learning outcomes. • Provide meaningful feedback to students, emphasizing skill development over mere grades. • Foster a growth mindset by emphasizing learning from mistakes and setbacks.
Disappointment Among Employers	The prevalence of grade inflation may result in graduates with high grades but inadequate skills and preparation for the workforce. Employers might face challenges in identifying highly skilled candidates due to inflated grades that do not reflect students' capabilities. This could lead to decreased trust in academic credentials and a shift toward other candidate assessment indicators.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement competency-based assessments to evaluate actual skills and knowledge. • Encourage collaboration between academia and industry to align education with the demands of the job market. • Emphasize experiential learning and internships to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and practical skills.

Pressure on Instructors and Universities	Grade inflation diminishes the value of grades, as they no longer accurately reflect a student's achievement or competence. This trend puts universities and instructors under immense pressure as it compromises academic rigor and challenges the credibility of higher education institutions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish clear grading standards and policies within institutions. • Offer professional development for instructors on fair and consistent grading practices. • Encourage a culture that values genuine learning over superficial academic achievements.
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3.2.1. *False Sense of Success*

With grade inflation, I can see a picture of a highly decorated student with many medals and awards but still frustrated because they only focus on getting high grades rather than authentically learning. While getting good grades may feel satisfying and provide academic validation, it's important to remember that grades, if not accurately and consistently assessed by instructors, may not necessarily equate to skills. Students may develop a distorted view of their performance. The tendency is that they would think that giving mediocre work will always result in an A+ or commendation. They may believe that they are effectively learning specific topics or skills when they are not. It is an illusion. As a result, students may need to be equipped to face failures and challenges in the real world because they minimally have experienced low scores or failures.

Grade inflation, moreover, shields students from negative feedback (Caplan, 2018), which may lead to a fixed mindset; hence, students may struggle to adapt to challenges and setbacks in their studies or work. If instructors continue to give students high grades without merit, they may lack resilience and emotional toughness and fail to value hard work and perseverance. This may also result in a lack of motivation to learn and improve, as they may need to see the value in putting in the extra effort when they can achieve high grades with little effort. Grade inflation ultimately does not help students progress in life. It only reinforces a shallow and fleeting sense of success.

3.2.2. *Disappointment among Employers*

With the prevalence of grade inflation, there is a potential decrease in the quality of graduates. This may result in graduates with high grades not facing challenges and difficulties, leading to inadequate skills and preparation for the workplace. Consequently, employers may need help in identifying highly skilled candidates. All the high grades and stunning awards could make it more challenging for employers to select the most highly skilled candidates for a particular role. Second, decreased trust in academic credentials may result from grade inflation. Employers may question the value of high grades as an indicator of skills and competencies. They may become less reliant on academic credentials, turning to other indicators such as work experience or skills assessments. This could lead to a decrease in the perceived value of higher education and a shift toward practical skills and experiences in the hiring process. Lastly, if new graduates are not adequately prepared for the workforce in spite of their high grades, it could pressure employers to invest more resources into training programs to get them up to speed. This, of course, could lead to an increase in costs and time spent onboarding new hires and may make employers more hesitant to hire recent graduates.

3.2.3. *Pressure on Instructors and Universities*

In the past, grades were considered sacred, and tampering with them was not taken lightly. However, nowadays, grades are not given the same level of importance. Some instructors have shared that they give high grades to students who ask for them without much thought or consideration. This lack of academic rigor diminishes the value of grades, making them not truly reflective of a student's hard work, achievement, and competencies in the given tasks. Grade inflation jeopardizes the reputation of universities and instructors. Instructors

who give students high marks they have not earned betray their students, their profession, and their societal obligation. Indeed, this devalues higher education and produces a generation of entitled, undereducated graduates who need to be equipped to thrive in the real world.

If the trend of giving high grades without merit continues, it will put immense pressure on universities and instructors. Industries, media, and other stakeholders will begin to question universities' credibility, resulting in a significant backlash. Instructors and universities will be pressured to ensure their students are equipped with the necessary skills. Failure to do so reflects poorly on universities and instructors and can build ill will among high-graded but not skillful graduates.

4. Conclusion

This study has explored how college instructors contribute to grade inflation, citing factors like compassion, laziness, apathy, and sycophancy as potential reasons behind inflated grades. The negative impacts of grade inflation have been discussed, including a distorted perception of success among students, decreased graduate quality, and damage to institutional reputations. The autoethnographic approach employed in this research illuminates the intricate nuances of instructor-driven grade inflation, providing a personal and immersive perspective. Its theoretical implication enriches educational discourse by highlighting the multifaceted influences shaping grading practices. However, limitations exist, primarily centered on subjectivity inherent in autoethnography, and the discussion about grade inflation only focused on the instructor. It must be noted that grade inflation is a complex issue, and other direct and indirect contributory factors remain. To combat grade inflation, suggestions include holding instructors accountable for grading practices, promoting professional development, and implementing robust assessment systems. Stakeholders, including parents, are urged to emphasize skill improvement over mere academic validation. Future research endeavors could focus on triangulating findings with quantitative data or adopting a mixed-methods approach. This could further strengthen the validity of insights and provide a broader scope for intervention strategies to mitigate grade inflation effectively.

Acknowledgment

I am grateful to my family members for their ongoing support as I engage in research endeavors. I hope that these efforts will yield positive outcomes. I dedicate this to young professionals in the educational arena who courageously seek to examine and address prominent but often overlooked issues, as well as to those who approach their writing with genuine passion and so that long-lasting change may be achieved.

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