

Meaning-Making of Grades of Engineering Students

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ABSTRACT

How students give meaning to their grades is important to discover some important aspects that affect their attitude and motivation toward learning. This qualitative study sought to understand the meaning making and valuing of Engineering students of their grades by determining their experiences in receiving grades, the meanings they attach to them, the factors that influenced their meanings, and their perceptions in themselves, classmates and friends, parents, and teachers. Data were gathered through FGD and

analyzed through thematic analysis. The study revealed that the participants were disappointed with failing or low grades but never discouraged for they wanted to achieve a degree. Good grades made them feel happy. To the participants, grades meant their gained learning, effort, and performance; their future career and motivations; and their gift to their parents. Failing grades meant lost time. Factors that influenced their meanings were self-concept, gratitude, and hope. The participants considered their classmates a strong source of support. They perceived their parents were demanding but were also a source of encouragement. They appreciated teachers who teach well and challenge them. The researchers recommended that the students finish their study; the family to provide support; the teachers to return corrected papers.

KEYWORDS

Education, meaning, grades, qualitative study, FGD, perception, thematic analysis, self-concept, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Meaning making is a basic human process all people engage in all the time all through their lives in their various experiences of communication. Communication is defined by Lasswell as the transmission of a message from a source to a receiver (Wood, 2016). When students in school got their grades, either for a particular activity or at the end of a term, they are receiving a message from their teachers. How do students, particularly the engineering students in Letran Calamba, make sense of their grades? The meanings the students attach to their grades influence their attitude toward their education in school, their perceptions in academic evaluation, and the next move they will make in the course of their learning. In the same way, how they perceive the sender of the message, in this case, the teacher giving grades, also determines the meaning they attach to their grades. Likewise, this meaning that they attach to their grades will determine how they perceive themselves, their classmates and friends, and their parents.

In educational institutions, success is often measured by academic performance or how well a student meets the standards set out by the institution. This academic performance is symbolized in grades. As career competition grows tougher in the industrial world, the importance of

students doing well in school has become a concern of parents, law-makers, and government education departments alike that much effort is being made to identify, evaluate, track and encourage the progress of students in schools (Bell, 2013). Parents care about their child's grades because they believe good academic results will provide more career choices and job security.

How the engineering students give meaning to their grades is important to be explored to discover some important aspects that affect their attitude and motivation toward learning, their aspirations, their difficulties and, perhaps, their rebellion as well. As students communicate and interact with their friends and classmates in their department, they also share meanings of their common experiences with grades without knowing that they are establishing a shared meaning of grades which defines a particular aspect of their culture, in this case, the meaning making of grades prevailing among students in the School of Engineering.

How do the engineering students perceive themselves after they got their grades; how do they feel toward their teachers, parents, and classmates as significant persons in their school experiences? Understanding the meaning making of grades among engineering students could be hoped to improve the relationship and communication between teachers and students, between the children and parents, among classmates and friends, and even with themselves.

As they acquire a clearer understanding of their students' meaning making of grades, teachers could gain insights on the better ways of evaluating the learning of their students and the means by which they could communicate those grades to them. Parents and friends could better show their support if they understand how the engineering student makes meaning of his/her experiences, particularly those related to grades, as they are one of his/her major concerns. And even the engineering student could better understand him/herself if he/she could become more aware, upon reflection, of how he/she makes meaning of the world around him/her, the school, and of his/her experiences, particularly with grades. Often, students tend to mirror their whole being in that thing they call grade.

FRAMEWORK

Meaning, according to Krauss (2005), is a linguistic category that makes up a participant's view of reality that defines his/her actions. Meanings are

trans-behavioral in the sense that they do more than describe behavior – they define, justify and interpret it as well. To Frankl (1963, as cited by Krauss), meaning has a paramount importance to human life for humans are distinctly human because of their natural inclination to understand and make meaning out of their lives and experiences. According to Chen (as cited by Krauss, 2005), “life experience generates and enriches meanings while meanings provide explanation and guidance for the experience.”

A person, in particular, the Engineering student, draws meanings from, or gives meanings to, events and experiences. An experience makes sense to this student as he/she translates it into how he/she thinks and feels. Hence, an experience is the individuals’ subjectivity, or the phenomenological world, that forms the very core of meaning origination and evolvement. As such, meaning, according to Krauss (2005), is the underlying motivation in one’s thoughts, actions, and even the interpretation and application of knowledge.

Related to meaning making theory is constructivism, a learning theory describing the process of knowledge construction. There are two valued tenets of constructivist practice: the process of collaborative learning and deep personal introspection into one’s learning process. Through dialog, people form a network of understanding, a community of others with whom they can learn and share through discourse. However, a dialog is not the only active means of knowledge construction. Mental manipulation, visualization, and the process of developing, testing, and discarding hypotheses are also indicative actions of an individual actively engaged in the knowledge construction process (Osberg, 1997).

The Engineering students’ grade experiences are learning opportunities through which they construct meaning.

Qualitative research facilitates the meaning-making process. The meaning in the lives of people is associated with how meaning is attributed to different objects, people, and life events. In general, qualitative research, according to Lythcott & Duschlin, as cited by Krauss (2005) is based on a relativistic, constructivist ontology that posits that “there is no objective reality. Rather, there are multiple realities constructed by human beings who experience a phenomenon of interest. People impose order on the world perceived in an effort to construct meaning; meaning lies in cognition, not in elements external to humans; information impinging on man’s cognitive systems is screened, translated, altered, perhaps rejected by the knowledge that already exists in that system; the resulting knowledge is idiosyncratic

and is purposefully constructed” according to Lythcott and Duschlin as cited by Krauss (2013).

As the engineering students pursue their education, they accumulate various experiences, particularly those related to the assessment and evaluation made on their learning or academic performance by their teachers. Those experiences shape their perception and meaning making of grades. This study that uses qualitative research method seeks to discover the meaning of grades to Letran engineering students, how do they arrive at such meaning, and how do the meanings of their grades affect their perception of themselves, their friends, their parents, and their teachers. The researchers hope to construct a framework of the meaning of grade from the viewpoint of the students of Engineering.

The illustration shows that part of the students’ experiences in school is their grade. Their experiences with the grades they receive in their subjects from their teachers determine the meaning they attach to grades that are symbolic of their academic achievement and performance. Their meaning making of their grades is shaped by their relationship with their parents, teachers, classmates, and with themselves. In the same manner, this meaning making with their grades influences their perception of themselves, their classmates, their parents, and their teachers, and also of their attitude toward learning and education in general.

Geiger and Cooper (1995) study on the impact of Expectancy and Need Theory to the academic performance on engineering students showed that the expectancy theory model was the best overall predictor of actual academic performance; the need for autonomy, although exhibited low-reliability measures, was also found highly explanatory; but the need for achievement was unexpectedly not a significant predictor of actual performance of this student group. Felder et al. (1995) study on the gender difference in academic performance and retention found that women continue to show more anxiety than men about beginning their course work and school in general (www.onlineethics.org/cms/10438.aspx). Men demonstrated more confidence than women in their preparation, educational background, and problem-solving ability (www.onlineethics.org/cms/10438.aspx). The researchers concluded that women began their education with better predictors of success than men but dropped out from the course at a higher rate, and so they recommended the development of introducing courses that encourage and reward the cooperative behavior that is often necessary

in scientific investigation in order to lessen the said difficulties (www.onlineethics.org/cms/10438.aspx).

Silverman's (1990) study of meaning-making in the museum disclosed that the key feature of the meaning-making process is that visitors bring particular frames of reference in the museums. From the pair talks of visitors, the researcher found distinct combinations of five basic interpretive moves, namely, establishment, evaluation, absolute object description relating special knowledge, and relating a personal experience.

This review of related literature and studies helped the researchers a lot in conducting the present study.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study determined the meaning making and valuing the engineering students have of their grades in school. Specifically, the study:

1. Determined the experiences of the research participants in receiving their grades; Discovered the meanings and messages Letran Engineering students attached to their grades in school;
2. Determined the factors that influenced the meaning of grades of the selected Engineering students;
3. Based on their meanings of grades, determined their perceptions of themselves, their classmates and friends, parents, and teachers.

Research design

The researchers used the descriptive research design, specifically, the qualitative method of research. Descriptive research is concerned with describing the participants or subjects of the study, their beliefs, practices, and perceptions. The qualitative method of research, specifically, is interested in describing situations and behaviors. This method is related to the hermeneutic theory that is the study of understanding, especially through systematic interpretation of actions or text. It is interested in looking for deep meaning in people's interpretation of different symbol systems. In this tradition, knowledge is advanced through subjective interaction between the researcher and his/her community, for reality is construed by considering of the "mental and social processes that are continually constructing that reality" (Miller as cited by Baran, 2009). Qualitative research presumably facilitates the meaning making of grades. The complexity of meaning in the lives of people has much to do with how meaning is attributed to different objects, people, life, and events.

Research participants

The eleven participants (six males and five females) came from the second year to fourth-year levels of the programs offered in the School of Engineering specifically, ME, ECE, IE, Cpe, and EE. They were selected according to their academic standing: one is a Dean's Lister, four were above average performing students, and the remaining six were average performing students. The researchers secured the approval in the conduct of the focus group discussion from the Dean of the School of Engineering and to excuse the participants from their classes.

Research strategy and data gathering procedure

The researchers used the focus group discussion (FGD) method in obtaining the needed data/information on the meaning making/valuing of school grades of selected Engineering students in different programs.

It is the method where the researchers acted as moderators who led the in-depth interview with a small group of people in this study. The researchers limited the FGD participants to eleven: three from IE, four from ME, two from ECE, one from EE, and one from Cpe. Series of questions comparable to an unstructured or semi-structured interview were asked. The FGD used open-ended, follow up and probing questions to scratch below the surface of a small group of participants' attitudes, opinions and behavior to understand motivations, feelings, and reactions (Baran, 2009). Much of the value of a focus group comes from the elaboration among the group members as they answer every question or interact and challenge each other's statements. The goal of the FGD is to have that interaction, "creating a richer set of data that can sometimes result from a single interviewer's interaction with a single respondent (Priest as cited by Baran 2009).

Questioning the participants for a focus group discussion took place in two hours in an air-conditioned room in the School of Nursing building. The actual interview was conducted by asking the participants to answer each of the four questions starting with the general question and specific questions at the end to help participants build their confidence and willingness to participate.

The size of the focus group was limited to 11 selected participants. It was only a small group to enable the participants to answer fully each question and to react to the other's statements and to be manageable so that all concerned can voice out their views and opinions.

The focus group session was recorded on video and audio tape for transcriptions to make sure that every participant's ideas don't get lost.

The researchers' role in the interview pivoted in making sure that no one person excessively dominated the discussion or opinion in the group and to keep the group focused on the subject of the research.

Data Analysis

The data gathered were analyzed using thematic analysis. In this approach, the researchers determined the themes and categories based on the responses obtained from the participants after the interview. Its process followed the steps below, according to Aronson (1992):

Data were prepared for analysis. The interview was transcribed into text, and the document was formatted by assigning line numbers for identifying individual bits of data and for cross-referencing.

The text was read and the items of interest were noted. During the initial reading of the text, an inductive approach to thematic analysis was used to allow the themes to emerge from the data. Major issues were noted as they came to mind to acquire a sense of the various topics embedded in the data.

Re-reading the text and annotating any thoughts in the margins was then done to examine the text closely, line by line, and to facilitate a microanalysis of the data. Open coding helped to identify any new information by de-contextualizing bits of data embedded within the primary material.

Items of interest were sorted into proto-themes. Items relating to similar topics were organized into categories to allow themes to emerge. The computer was used to paste the line references together. This process was done with fluidity so that categories can be modified and developed, and the new ones allowed to emerge freely. The themes were kept as simple as possible.

The proto-themes were examined and initial definitions were made. The researchers trawled back through the data to examine how information was assigned to each proto-theme to evaluate its current meaning. A provisional name and flexible definition were created for each emerging theme.

The text was re-examined carefully for relevant incidents of data for each proto-theme. A second trawling back through the data called axial

coding was done. In this re-contextualization, any data was now considered in terms of the categories developed during the analysis.

The final form of each theme was constructed. The name, definition, and supporting data were then re-examined for the final construction of each theme, using all the material relating to it. In this stage of re-contextualization, the researchers focused more closely on the underlying meaning of each theme.

Each theme was reported. The researchers finalized the name of each theme, wrote its description, and illustrated it with a few quotations from the original text to help communicate its meaning to the reader (subvista.wordpress.com/).

Research instrument

The researchers were the instruments of this study. They were Dr. Ricardo M. Bobadilla, Prof. Ellen C. Almoro, and Prof. Bernardita Castillo Bautista. Dr. Bobadilla is a Licensed Civil Engineer by profession, a former Dean of the School of Engineering in Letran Calamba for eleven years and a faculty in the same school for 33 years and in other school for another three years. Prof. Almoro, on the other hand, is a Certified Public Accountant by profession who became an Assistant Dean for one and a half years and a Dean of the School of Business, Management, and Accountancy in Letran Calamba for seven years, and also a faculty in the same school for 31 years. Prof. Bautista, a former Grade School Principal of Letran Calamba for one year, is a faculty of School of Education, Arts, and Sciences for 23 years and in other schools for five years. As educators, besides teaching their subject specializations, they were also engaged in the evaluation as well as in the values formation of their students. As instruments of this study, they prepared and tossed the interview questions during the focus group discussion, transcribed, and interpreted the gathered information from the participants by using their knowledge and experiences in teaching.

This study also used media technology like SLR video camera and voice recorder to capture and document every detail of the focus group discussion with the research participants and to facilitate transcription of the said FGD for data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the transcription, the most common experience was the feeling of frustration or disappointment due to low or failed or declined grades. Students felt that they were exerting effort but were unrewarded. Some felt strongly affected because they knew that low grades could affect their scholarships. As Rediehs (2013) pointed out, bad grades disappoint students.

The low or even failed grade, however, did not discourage the Engineering student participants, but rather, they tried to renew their determination to improve grades to finish the course on time, to get more discount from tuition fee, and to enroll more units in the following semester. Some students, on the other hand, more easily accepted their low grades. One participant admitted his lack of interest and being weak in a certain minor subject like Logic. Another student reasoned out his work outside that caused him to miss some class meetings. Still another one shared that being LEES president, she had to attend extra-curricular activities in school, and this affected her grades. These findings confirmed the results of a study (Geiger & Cooper, 1995) saying that the individual motivated behavior is substantially driven by the strength of the various intrinsic needs for achievement, affiliation, autonomy, and dominance to succeed academically.

Another notable experience of the Engineering students was doubt on the given grades. Four out of eleven participants shared about their experiences of the abrupt decline in their grades – from 94 to 74, 85 to 73, 91 to 83, and 94 to 84. On the other hand, there were those who wondered about the abrupt increase in their grades from prelim to midterm. What confused them was the teachers' seeming lack of interest to show the details of their grades or to return or show their test papers.

When receiving grades after major examinations, the students usually experienced mixed feelings for their grades varied – some grades were high, some were low or failed, some declined while some improved. Students felt happy with high grades, of course. Some felt thankful already even for a grade of 75, for it was at least passing, not failing. Students were happy to note improved grades from prelim to midterm. They interpreted this as their coping ability to adjust to their teachers' style of teaching and testing. Good grades, according to Rediehs (2013), confirm a successful communication between professor and student -- that the student has learned the important lessons or mastered certain essential skills that the professor hoped the

students would learn and master. But getting good grades doesn't mean *everything*. A good grade may or may not indicate a certain mastery of the subject of the course. Even in the best-designed courses, according to Rediehs, this is a basic truth that reflects the deep problem with the entire grading system.

Other students explained that they banked on the quite high earlier grade (“*may puhunan na*”) in the preliminary period to sustain a passing mark at the end of the semester, even if they go happy-go-lucky. Whether the grades these students receive were high, low, failed, declined or improved, one thing is sure: the Engineering students care about their grades. Grades are important to them.

Meaning of Grades to the Engineering Students

From the experiences of receiving grades, the focus group discussion turned to the next question in the statement of the problem, which inquired about the meaning of their grades to them. Meaning, according to Krauss (2005), is a linguistic category that makes up a participant's view of reality and which actions are defined

In general, all the participants viewed grades as important. They all claimed that grades are a measure of what they have learned. For them, grades were equated for the efforts they exerted in their study, hence, the fruits of their hard work, specifically, in doing those school projects they worked on every night. Grades, according to them, indicate their overall performance throughout the whole semester.

To the majority of them, grades were what would make them and their parents happy and proud. One student said that his grades were his gifts to his parents and family for he knew that his high grades were what would make them proud of him, what would make them happy, and at the same time what would make him happy as well.

Students 9, 8 and 4 noted that grades, for them, not only tell of their performance but more deeply mirror their whole being, the kind of person they are, their character, and their sense of responsibility. According to one of them, grades will create the first impression people make on him. While another one implied that his grades indicated whether he had been happy go lucky and thereby needed to double his effort to pass his subject. One student scholar, on the other hand, said that he had to study well to maintain his scholarship; the other one shyly pointed out that his scholarship tells of his intelligence.

Grades are not a measure of one's self-worth, Rediehs (2013) pointed out, and this is an important fact that students should realize. A student should learn to affirm his/her self-esteem and identity apart from his/her grades but as a human being.

According to Students 3 and 9, their grades meant their future. Grades are what will appear in the transcript, and people will evaluate them and give them the work they deserve based on their grades. So, for them, good grades will pave the way to their dreamed future.

Some students also revealed that their grades were their motivation. One student said that she goes to school to get high grades, "grades that I deserve, grades that will make my parents happy." According to Rediehs (2013), many college students feel that their future opportunities largely depend on their grades, especially, if they aspire to a competitive job. In addition to these external pressures, many students are internally motivated to do their best and may set high standards for themselves, believing that the grades they receive are a measure of their success or failure in meeting these standards.

Another student noted that low grades should be improved; another said he wanted to learn. Still another one pointed out that he worked well enough to get high grades in prelim and midterm in order to be assured of getting passing final grade, even if he goes easy go lucky toward the end of the semester. Another student added that what matters is to get a passing mark, not failed; he believed that grades need not be very high to be successful. A student even compared a failing grade to a lost time that is wasted.

Factors influencing their meanings of their grades

The sharing of the Engineering students revealed that they defined their grades based on their experiences with their families, school environment, other people around them, and with themselves. According to Silverman (2013), the key feature of the meaning-making process is that [visitors] participants bring to bear particular frames of reference in [museums] the group discussion.

Grade, for the selected Engineering student-participants, meant performance, learning, sacrifices and efforts, a mirror of their being and intelligence, for through their grades they were able to prove themselves and what they could do. Scholarships were achieved because of high grades, and two student-participants claimed that they had worked hard to maintain

them, either to be able to continue to study or to prove one's worth. As cited by Geiger and Cooper (2013), needs theory posits that individual motivated behavior is substantially driven by the strength of the various intrinsic needs for the achievement, affiliation, autonomy and dominance to succeed academically. Another study had drawn that the more motivation a student had the more he/she would have a higher General Point Average (GPA) than a student that did not have any or little motivation

When getting failing grades, on the other hand, according to the participants, they were not discouraged, rather, they promised themselves to rise and make up for the lost opportunity. This finding is quite contrary to what some researchers cited in the review of related studies had noted in their studies that poor academic performance has a negative impact to the students' persistence level. They cited that many engineering students experience few academic challenges in high school and are therefore often unprepared for the level of work expected in college engineering courses. As a result, some students experience frustration and dissatisfaction with their academic performance.

Based on the experiences of the selected Engineering students, they also got grades that they felt they didn't deserve, for grades also depend on the teachers, some students shared. But in general, the selected Engineering students demonstrated a positive attitude toward the challenges of education.

Kara Maria Kockelman's study in 2001 revealed that the average male instructor assigns lower grades than female instructors, while lecturers and teaching assistants assign higher grades than full, associate, assistant, and adjunct faculty. Instructors teaching chemical, mechanical, and petroleum-and-gas engineering courses assign higher grades, on average than those teaching aerospace, architectural, civil, and electrical engineering, and engineering mechanics.

Students' sharing also showed their awareness of the sacrifices of their families to send them to college and their desire to pay them back and to help them in the future. This gesture shows a typical Filipino value. The Engineering students love their families; by achieving high grades, they hoped to make their families, especially their parents, happy. They considered their good grades as a gift to their parents. They were looking up to successful family members, either parents or siblings and drawing inspiration from them to be successful someday. In general, they wanted their families to be proud of them.

These findings are related to the claim of a study cited in the review of related studies that academic performance is related to the students' personal motivations, socio-economic status, and classroom settings. Based on the FGD conducted, the biggest motivation behind the students' drive to do well academically is still economic in nature. They wanted to pay back their parents and siblings who work hard to be able to send them to a good but high paying school like Letran Calamba.

Good grades make the engineering students happy for to them education is the greatest treasure their parents have bestowed on them. In this education, which is their route to a dreamed future, they get grades that make an impact in their life and inspire them to move on in their endeavors. One participant shared that she even received a monetary reward every time her grade was higher than her dad. At times, they also gambled with their grades. Having made an investment of good grades in prelim and midterm, according to them, they sometimes afforded themselves to go easy-go-lucky in the finals without the jeopardy of failing grades. Some believed that success does not totally depend on high grades. Passing mark is sufficient.

Another essential element in the Engineering students' meaning making of grades is its association with the future. A student wanted to achieve what her Dad has achieved by finishing college. Another student expressed his hope to be employed and to work successfully in the future to be able to help his parents. All other students agreed to this. Another student shared a more vivid scenario of his future by saying that people will judge him if he deserves a work in the future. "As I look for a job, people make the first impression on me based on the transcript that I carry and present to them," he added.

These findings support Vroom's expectancy theory saying that the motivation to act is a combination of the perceived attractiveness of the future outcomes and the likelihood that one's actions will lead to these outcomes. Students are motivated to exert academic effort because of their perception of the benefits of the academic performance on their desired future life. Studies have proven that student motivation has long been considered an important factor in determining academic performance (Geiger, 1995).

Meanings of Grades Affecting the Participants' Perceptions on Selves, Classmates and Friends, Parents, and Teachers

A person's perception is often rooted from his/her experiences which are mostly products of his/her encounter and interaction with the significant persons in his/her life like the parents, teachers, friends and classmates, and also with him/herself.

Since grades were considered by the selected Engineering students in this study as product of their learning, performance in class, and of the efforts they exerted, in general, they perceived themselves developing self-confidence, appreciating their achievements, and challenged to strive harder in order to prove their worth. Amenkhienan and Kogan (2004) pointed that receiving passing grades help to increase student initiatives that enhance academic performance. They also added that individual student's effort and involvement have been shown to play critical roles in student performance and retention and that their participation in their learning processes has been linked to higher learning outcomes, increased student motivation, and positive personal development.

The selected Engineering student-participants testified to the strong camaraderie existing in the Department. They all agreed that their friends and classmates were influential in their academic performance. They received and also gave strong academic support from and to their friends and classmates in the form of group study and peer tutoring. In this way, they developed study habit. Many times, comparing grades challenged them to strive and do better. However, this strong spirit of group work is sometimes misconstrued and extended to the level of the group and cooperative cheating during an exam. Despite this, students realized its disadvantage especially when they see the differences in their grades. Often they would ask, "Why my friend's grade is higher than mine when he only copied from me or why is my grade lower when we had exactly the same answer?" The students all laughed on this. But there was one who voiced out admitting his participation by allowing classmates to copy his assignment but never during an exam.

In similar way, Amenkhienan and Kogan (2004) identified peer interaction, together with individual effort and faculty contact, as the academic activities and support services perceived by engineering students having a positive impact on their academic performance.

According to the research participants, their parents have high expectations from them. To describe their parents, two students used the

terms demanding and pressuring them to get higher grades. Parents were disappointed with low grades, and, according to S1, unappreciative of the efforts he was giving to his study at the beginning of his college when his grades became lower as compared to his high school grades. But eventually, later on, his parents began to realize the difficulty of his course. This experience is also true to the sharing of another participant whose grades were compared to the grades of her siblings in the nursing course. On reviews of interpretation of college grades (Rediehs, 2000). Rediehs pointed that parents put pressure on their children to push them to get good grades.

S2, on the other hand, revealed his feeling of being proud of himself as he made his parents smile for not bringing home failing marks. But one time, when he got a 72, he had difficulty admitting it to his parents. He promised to do better next time. S5, on the other hand, shared that when he showed low grades to his parents, instead of being blamed, he was encouraged by them to strive harder, not for them but himself.

The parents of the Engineering student-participants are happy and proud when their children get good grades. The father of S8, who is an engineer, on the other hand, was using a strategy of competition, daring S8 to outdo his performance in similar engineering subjects. Her parents were telling her to pass all her subjects, and never to get any failing grade.

The Engineering students greatly admire teachers who solve mathematical problems correctly on the spot right in front of them. They emulate them like idols. They expressed appreciation of those who teach well and make an effort to make students learn and think, even if they are strict and giving low grades. On the other hand, they voiced out irritation on those who are strict but don't make students learn because "they don't know how to teach" as said by the participants. They disliked those teachers who give high grades but whose requirements are vague. Finally, one student said that they understand that their teachers only compute their grades based on their performance. They, the students, are the ones making their grades.

Grades are purely a measure of one's work, not of who the person is, nor of one's sense of self-worth, Rediehs (2000) emphasized. But, if carefully interpreted, they can reveal certain qualities about the person. Grades do also have the power to open certain opportunities in the future; that's why students should be taken seriously. Their goal must be to strive really for quality education.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, the researchers drew the following conclusions:

In receiving grades, the Engineering participants experienced disappointment on low and failed grades and happiness on high or even just passing mark. Grades meant a lot to the selected Engineering student participants; grades are important to them. Grades, to the participants, meant themselves, their future, and their motivations.

The factors of self-concept, gratitude to family's sacrifices, hope for a good future job, influence the attitude of the participants toward grades. Research participants appreciate themselves when getting good grades and they are challenged, not discouraged, when getting bad grades.

Classmates are their allies and source of support in their studies. Parents are their source of encouragement and inspiration. Teachers are appreciated when they challenge the students to think analytically and inspire them to learn well.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above findings and conclusions, the researchers forwarded the following recommendations:

For the students, to persevere in finishing their Engineering program, their gateway to a successful career.

For the parents and siblings, to provide constant support and encouragement to their family members who are studying.

For the faculty, to motivate and inspire their students to hurdle their courses no matter how difficult they are. Since grades are based on students' performance, teachers should immediately return corrected quizzes and major exams, assignments, seat works, projects, research, and other course requirements to keep the students informed of their performance.

For future researchers, to conduct similar research in another discipline.

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