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Early Grades Parents' Perceptions of the Use of a Descriptive Grading System

Angela Ray M. Abarquez*

Jonalou S. Danao*

Sarah B. Gonzales*

Vicka Marie M. Siddayao*

Jennica G. Varias*

*University of the Philippines Integrated School

ABSTRACT

In light of the difficult circumstances brought by the pandemic, this study explored the possibility of shifting from numerical to descriptive grading as a potential solution to address the challenges and limitations in the development and learning assessment of Kindergarten to Grade 2 students in a laboratory school. This convergent mixed-method study investigated how a batch of parents of Grade 2 students perceived the Descriptive Grading System (DGS) in the context of remote learning. Fifty-four parents participated in this study. Data were collected through a thirteen-item 4-point Likert scale perception survey with two open-ended questions determining how the DGS affected the learners. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in Jamovi. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to categorize the responses to open-ended questions and group them into themes. Findings showed that parents perceived the DGS favorably, with strong agreement on 12 out of 13 statements in the survey with a mean ranging from 3.48 to 3.70. Six themes were also identified as influenced by the DGS. However, the study focused only on the top three themes as these emerged as the most prominent and influential in shaping parents' perceptions of the DGS. The parents' general positive perception of the use of DGS reinforces the benefits of this approach for young students and highlights its potential to enhance students' overall development and learning experience.

Keywords: *descriptive grading system, early childhood education, alternative grading, assessment, remote teaching and learning*

Introduction

Early grades education is dependent on assessment and grading practices to evaluate students' developmental progress and guide pedagogy. Traditionally, these systems use numerical grades to quantify performance; however, a shift toward descriptive grading has emerged, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, to offer detailed feedback aligned with developmental stages. This aligns with developmentally appropriate practice, or DAP, as outlined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2020). DAP is an approach to teaching in the early grades based on how young children learn and develop. Its three core components focus on being: 1) child development-appropriate, 2) individually appropriate, and 3) socially, linguistically, and culturally appropriate. This means that instruction and assessment practices should align with the child's developmental stages and abilities; learning experiences are tailored to meet the individual child's needs, strengths, and interests; and learning environments respect the child's social, cultural, and linguistic context, making the experience more relevant. With these in mind, early childhood educators design both instruction and assessment to meet the needs of their students and support their overall development.

The pandemic introduced unprecedented challenges, forcing schools to rapidly adapt their curriculum, strategies, and pedagogy and prompting a need to reevaluate current grading practices in response to the new educational format. During this time, parents played a crucial role in supporting their children's education, especially at home. They needed to understand the evolving grading systems to reinforce learning effectively. Their perceptions were key to their effective implementation since a positive view may increase their engagement, while confusion could reduce it (Pérez-Arredondo & Bernal-Carrasco, 2021). Although studies like Hattie and Timperley (2007) explored the impact of grading, few explored parents' perceptions, especially in the early grades and the Philippines. To date, no study has addressed this issue. To address this critical gap, this study examines how parents in a Philippine laboratory school perceive the descriptive grading system introduced in Academic Year (AY) 2020-2021.

Assessment and Grading Practices

Assessment plays an essential role in educational settings. Brewer (2004) defines it as "collecting and evaluating information about an individual's performance, the program's quality, or the effectiveness of an activity" (p. 200). McAfee et al. (2004, as cited in Wortham, 2014) similarly define assessment as the "process of gathering information about children from several forms of evidence, then organizing and interpreting the information" (p. 8). Good assessment helps students recognize strengths, guides instruction, and supports students' potential (Brewer, 2004). Wortham (2014) also considers that the key to effective assessment is matching it with the child's developmental stage to gauge their progress. Given the multifaceted purposes of assessment, it is important to understand the various types of assessment used in classrooms and their role in shaping teaching and learning.

Different assessment methods used by educational institutions result in varied forms of feedback for parents and students. Liu (2008) developed a tool to measure teachers' perceptions of grading practices (TPGP). This survey consisted of three parts: a) 40 statements that teachers rated according to their degree of agreement, b) questions that pertain to teachers' grading practices, and c) participants' demographic information. Findings show that almost all the participants perceive the crucial role grading plays in the process of teaching and learning. Students usually receive grades or symbols in the form of letters, numbers, or figures to represent their performance (Guskey, 2019). It is through grading that assessment results are communicated to students and their families. However, as Guskey and Brookhart (2019) noted, most grading practices have been based on what has been done "traditionally," and evidence has shown that exploring alternative reforms benefits the students more. Hattie and Timperley (2007) assert that descriptive feedback enhances learning more than numerical grades. Additionally, they observed that students who receive descriptive grades performed better and retained more knowledge compared with those who received numerical grades. Some advocate for standards-based grading (SBG), which breaks down grades into learning standards (Guskey, 2009, as cited in Guskey & Brookhart, 2019). Burkhardt (2020) found that parents viewed SBG as informative, suggesting that alternative methods of reporting student progress can enhance parental support. Abandoning grades completely to avoid having students focus on getting high grades instead of focusing on improving their skills is also proposed by others (Kohn, 1999). These differing approaches to grading demonstrate how grading impacts not only academic outcomes but also students' behavior and attitude toward learning.

Kohn (2013) enumerates three effects of grading on students: a) the tendency to diminish their interest in what they are learning, b) a preference for the easiest possible task, and c) the tendency to reduce the quality of students' thinking. Conversely, students show deeper thinking and a desire to get more engaged in learning in the absence of grades (Kohn, 2013). Multiple studies (Harter, 1978; Butler & Nisan, 1986; Butler, 1988; Crooks, 1988; Pulfrey et al., 2011) also show the negative impact of grades (i.e., giving failing marks to students) in the early grades. According to these studies, grades affect students' motivation and heighten their fear of failure and competitiveness, social adjustment, behavior, self-competence, and attitudes toward schooling. Moreover, studies show that academic failure negatively affects students' self-concept. When students fail in their subjects, they view themselves as failures as well (Byrd, 2005; Chohan, 2018). Additionally, Hargis (2003) mentions that although most believe that grades ought to be motivating, this may not always be the case. Students are only motivated by the grade and not by learning, which is supposed to be the more important takeaway. Furthermore, anxiety may also be developed as a result of fear of getting grades perceived as low.

To address these challenges, alternative approaches to grading are gaining traction, emphasizing monitoring learning progress over giving numerical ratings. Recent research has investigated various feedback practices in educational settings. For instance, Chua

et al. (2017) found that descriptive feedback tends to be more beneficial for learning outcomes compared to evaluative feedback, advocating further for “ungrading” to boost intrinsic motivation (Koenig, 2020). Schinske and Tanner (2014) illustrate that “grades can dampen existing intrinsic motivation, give rise to extrinsic motivation, enhance fear of failure, reduce interest, decrease enjoyment in classwork, increase anxiety, hamper performance on follow-up tasks, stimulate avoidance of challenging tasks, and heighten competitiveness” (p.61). Pérez-Arredondo and Bernal-Carrasco (2021), meanwhile, found that parents appreciated the emotional benefits of a gradeless system for their young children; however, they needed clearer guidance to transition from using numerical grades.

Reddan (2013) contributes to this discussion by examining how grading impacts work-integrated learning courses. He notes that grading can influence motivation and engagement and suggests that educators should consider alternative methods, such as providing formative feedback and putting less emphasis on summative grades. Similarly, Gabriele (2008) suggests that educators should design curricula that enable students to have ownership of learning, resulting in a sense of meaning or engagement. Motivation will be enhanced as the sense of well-being is produced from students’ engagement and the finding of meaning. A meta-analysis by Koenka et al. (2019) demonstrates that written feedback tends to be more effective in promoting academic motivation and improving performance compared to grades alone. Bandura (1977) also asserts that receiving feedback on one’s efforts can enhance an individual’s motivation to remain engaged in a task.

Recent literature has also documented the emergence of standards-based grading (SBG), also called competency-based grading and proficiency-based grading. In SBG, students’ achievement and progress in school are evaluated based on their proficiency in meeting articulated learning standards (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006, as cited in Link & Guskey, 2022). Instead of simply tallying accumulated points taken from achievement indicators and behavioral factors, SBG aims to accurately communicate students’ learning and potential. Those advocating for SBG believe that it offers a more meaningful and accurate way of presenting students’ learning compared to other traditional grading systems (O’Connor, 2017; Townsley & Buckmiller, 2016, as cited in Link & Guskey, 2022). These grading reforms are particularly relevant in early childhood education, where assessment practices must align with the developmental needs of learners. Locally, Bartolome et al. (2017) explored parental involvement in the Philippine Kindergartens. This study highlighted home-school collaboration practices but did not address how parents perceive grading shifts. This gap is particularly significant given the lack of national policies and frameworks supporting early childhood education, which may limit the broader implementation and understanding of alternative grading methods.

While the above studies reveal the impact of grading practices on student motivation and some highlight parental attitudes toward alternative systems, research remains

limited on how parents of young children understand and respond to descriptive grading practices.

Assessment in Early Childhood Education and Remote Learning

Assessment in early grades serves key purposes: guiding teaching and learning decisions, identifying intervention needs, and improving educational and developmental programs (NAEYC & National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education [NAECS/SDE], 2003). It should be purposeful, reliable, valid, fair, age-appropriate, and language-sensitive. Additionally, parents should be involved in and informed about the assessment process (National Education Goals Panel, 1998). It is fundamental, especially in the first eight years, that learning be free of stress and anxiety. As these are the years when children explore their interests and build their learning foundations, the focus should be on developing skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity rather than content mastery (NAEYC, 2020). With this in mind, children's learning is better gauged by observing behavior, the process by which they create and explore, the way they communicate thoughts and ideas, and how they make sense of their environment. This aligns with the concept of DAP, which stresses that assessment should focus on exploration and expression processes in a stress-free learning environment (NAEYC, 2020). Yet this ideal approach to assessment faced significant setbacks, especially during the pandemic, as remote teaching and learning (RTL) introduced unprecedented challenges that complicated teachers' assessment practices: observing and measuring students' learning progress.

Remote learning has affected young children significantly. Its challenges and limitations have forced schools, students, and families to adjust rapidly. The pandemic disrupted the everyday lives of students, teachers, and families. Malloy (2015) mentions that one important consideration in assessing young learners is the differences in how students respond to stress. The pandemic's new demands cause stress and anxiety, which may negatively impact students' school performance. Several factors that may have had a negative impact on learning during the pandemic are an unstable internet connection, the quality of the device used, the quality of the space dedicated to remote learning at home, the availability of parents, and even the ability of parents or guardians to assist children with their learning. Assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic became a debated topic among educators, administrators, parents, and students. Some teachers expressed reluctance to utilize their grade books, arguing that high-stress assessments were inappropriate given the situation (Koenig, 2020). The Alliance of Concerned Teachers advocated for a more considerate approach to assessment when families' capacity to support their children's education was affected (Hernando-Malipot, 2020). According to Vogel et al. (2020), stress and anxiety impede cognition, particularly with higher-demand tasks involved in learning. During RTL, teachers and students had less time to interact with each other, and issues surrounding assessments that predated the pandemic may arise and become more challenging for both students and teachers. In light of this reality, schools should focus on assessing student learning

progress rather than grading and ranking, which could increase stress (University of the Philippines College of Education, 2020).

Locally, Almario and Austria (2020) prioritized formative feedback. Tuscano (2020) echoed this, suggesting that students should be given proper feedback and the “chance to reflect and monitor their learning” in designing online formative assessments (p.14). Wiggins (1990, as cited in Tuscano, 2020) recommends that feedback be tangible, transparent, actionable, user-friendly, timely, ongoing, and consistent. Furthermore, rubrics have been shown to provide clear, specific, and actionable feedback, further improving student outcomes and engagement (McTighe & Frontier, 2022). This shift to descriptive grading aimed to support learning amid school disruptions, unlike numerical grades that might add pressure.

Parents also became more vital in RTL. In this setup, the shared responsibility of teachers and families to assist children in achieving learning competencies became even more crucial. According to NAEYC and NAECS/SDE (2003), curriculum goals should be “defined, shared, and understood by all stakeholders” (p.2). Since students continued learning at home, a lot of support and assistance came from their families. For this partnership to work, parents needed to see the descriptive grading system as clear and helpful because their perceptions can shape how they engage with their children’s learning. When parents view the grading system as clear and meaningful, they are more likely to be empowered to support their children’s education. For instance, a parent who has more insights into their child’s strengths and areas for growth might feel more confident in reinforcing skills at home. A study by Burkhardt (2020) mentioned that parents who were initially exposed to numerical grades and then SBG were given more insight about their child’s performance and more clearly understood their child’s strengths and weaknesses. This allowed them to provide the assistance their child needs and address areas for improvement. Ultimately, this shared responsibility also bridges the gap between home and school, turning parents into true partners in the learning process. Pérez-Arredondo and Bernales-Carrasco (2021) noted that parents who embraced gradeless assessment were more supportive of their children’s well-being, while those who focused on numerical grades tended to be more competitive. It also highlighted the importance of shifting the parents’ focus to the process of learning rather than a measurable outcome, underscoring how parental perceptions influence their approach to their children’s education.

While the pandemic disrupted the education sector, schools also utilized the time to create innovative solutions to continuously support students’ development and learning as recommended by the United Nations (2020). As the first responders in education, teachers made improvements and created new policies to adapt to the new normal. In the Philippines, only the most essential learning competencies were retained and expected to be achieved in AY 2020-2021. Thus, schools needed to adjust the assessment system to reflect what was most essential and appropriate for the students. This shift required educators to explore alternative assessment methods to meet the new challenges in education.

Shift in Assessment Practices

An early grades department (Kindergarten to Grade 2) in a laboratory school in the National Capital Region has worked on developing programs that adhere to pedagogical innovations to provide excellent instruction and implement developmentally appropriate practices for its students. Even before the Department of Education mandated Kindergarten as part of the K to 12 Program, the school had already been proactive in enriching its early grades curriculum to address young learners' needs. The focus of the pre-pandemic program was to develop basic skills that students need for learning in the higher grades. It also aimed to instill values while the students were engaged in socialization with their peers.

Before the pandemic, Kindergarten students and their parents/guardians were given feedback through a checklist of skills that the students were expected to acquire or develop during the school year. It was given in the form of a report card at the end of each quarter. This feedback, along with discussions of the students' strengths and areas for improvement, was shared with parents during quarterly Parent-Teacher Conferences (PTCs). This engaging and accommodating environment was observed to help enrich the students' learning. Students in Grades 1 and 2, on the other hand, were given numerical grades. In their experience with a Numerical Grading System (NGS), their parents/guardians received a grade stub at the end of every quarter (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Sample of Quarterly Grade Stub

PANGALAN	2019-2020			
BAITANG-PANGKAT	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Subject				
English 1	87	90	88	87
Filipino/Araling Panlipunan 1	87	89	91	88
Agham/Kalusugan 1	91	92	90	92
Matematika 1	90	90	89	90

Attendance												
	Ag	Set	Okt	Nob	Dis	En	Peb	Mar	Abr	May	Hun	Total
Araw na may pasok												
Araw na pumasok												
Ilang beses huli												
Ilang klase ang di napasukan												

Adviser:
XXXX
Records Officer
THIS STUB REPRESENTS THE REPORT CARD ON THE SPECIFIED QUARTERS ONLY.

Average ng mga nakuhang puntos	Katumbas na Marka	Descripsyon ng Marka
96-100	1.0	Pinakamahusay
91-95	1.25	
86-90	1.5	
80-85	1.75	Mas Mahusay
74-79	2.0	
68-73	2.25	
62-67	2.5	Katamtamang Husay
56-61	2.75	
50-55	3.0	
40-49	4.0	Pasado
0-39	5.0	Di-pasado (kondisyonal)
		Di-pasado
		Di-kumpleto

They were also invited to a PTC with the stub serving as a document supplementing the discussion on how to further assist their children each quarter. The PTC, however, was not limited to the performance of the students in terms of grades in Sining Komunikasyon sa Filipino, Communication Arts in English, Agham at Kalusugan, and Matematika. Grade 1 and Grade 2 parents were also given feedback on their children's social, emotional, and physical progress.

However, in response to the pandemic's challenges and the need to provide a broader understanding of students' progress beyond numerical grades, the laboratory school's early grades department decided to implement a more developmentally appropriate method of assessment in AY 2020-2021. While numerical ratings also tracked student progress, these provided limited insight into the specific needs of students. This led to the introduction of the Descriptive Grading System (DGS) for Kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 2, which was developed considering the unique context in which the students were learning, as well as the challenges faced by students, their families, and teachers during the academic years RTL was in place. The DGS aimed to shift the focus from assigning numerical ratings to students' performance to monitoring their progress, guiding them in achieving learning competencies, and focusing more on providing detailed and descriptive feedback. Acknowledging the key role parents play in their child's learning, the study aimed to investigate their perceptions of the use of DGS.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a convergent mixed-method design where both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered and analyzed. Later, the results of qualitative and quantitative data were compared to check if the collected data confirm or disconfirm each other. (Gonzaga University, n.d.)

Participants

Data were collected to determine the perception of parents toward the use of DGS. Out of the 100 Grade 2 parents who were invited, all of whom had exposure to both NGS and DGS, 54 parents participated in the study. The NGS was experienced by the respondents in AY 2019-2020 when they received a grade stub at the end of each quarter. It contained a numerical grade for each subject, ranging from 50 to 100 if the student passed and 49 and below if they failed. In AY 2020-2021, the school transitioned to DGS as part of the shift to RTL. This was the first time the participants encountered the DGS. This practice adhered to the principles of Standards-Based Grading (SBG) which evaluated students' achievement and progress based on targeted learning competencies. With the new grading system, the parents received a report called the *Ulat ng Pagkatuto* (UnP) at the end of each semester (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Sample Page of the Ulat ng Pagkatuto (UnP)

XXXX SCHOOL National Capital Region	
ULAT NG PAGKATUTO A.T. 2020-2021 Unang Semestre	
APELYIDO, PANGALAN BAITANG - PANGKAT	
SINING KOMUNIKASYON SA FILIPINO	
KASANAYAN	MARKA
Wikang Binibigkas <i>Nakakapagbahagi ng mga ideya at saloobin tungkol sa paksa</i>	S
Kasanayan sa Pag-unawa <i>Natutukoy ang mga pangunahing elemento ng kwento</i> <i>Napagsusunod-sunod ang tatlong pangyayari ng may tulong ng larawan</i> <i>Natutukoy ang problema at solusyon</i> <i>Nakakagawa ng simpleng prediksiyon</i>	M
Balarila	
Mga Uri ng Pangungusap <i>Natutukoy ang pagkakaiba ng mga uri ng pangungusap at nakapagbibigay ng mga halimbawa</i>	M
Salitang Ngalan <i>Natutukoy at nakapagbibigay ng halimbawa ng salitang ngalan;</i> <i>Natutukoy ang pagkakaiba ng tiyak at di-tiyak na salitang ngalan</i>	M
Palabigkasan at Pagkilala sa Salita <i>Nababasa nang may pag-unawa at katatasan ang mga salita, parirala, pangungusap, at magkakaugnay na pangungusap (maikling kwento o talata) na naglalaman ng mga salitang may diptonggo -ay</i> <i>Natutukoy ang kahulugan ng mga talasalitaan at nakasasagot ng mga tanong tungkol sa binas</i>	S
Dagdag na Komento:	
Mapapansin kay XXXX na sanay siya sa paggamit ng wikang Filipino. Nauunawaan at naipakikita niya nang mabuti ang aplikasyon ng mga aralin sa mga gawain. Nababasa niya nang may katamtamang bilis ang mga bagong salita at nauunawaan ang mga ito. Mainam na mapagtibay pa ang kaniyang kumpiyansa sa pagbabahagi at mahasa pa ang kaniyang pagsagot sa mga tanong na may mataas na antas ng pag-unawa. Sa pagsulat, karamihan sa mga ideya at mensahe niya ay malinaw sa naipapabatid ngunit kailangan pa ng gabay sa pagpapalalim ng mga ito. Karamihan din sa kaniyang mga salita, gramatika, pagbaybay, paggamit ng malaking titik at bantas ay angkop.	
Pahina 1 ng 7	

A list of competencies was provided, and students were given a letter rating for each topic or group of indicators. The legend for these letter ratings was included in the UnP where each letter rating described how the student performed without corresponding “high” or “low” values. A copy of this is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3*Legend Table as shown in the Ulat ng Pagkatuto*

Letter Grade	Kahulugan	Paglalarawan
M	Mahusay	Ang bata ay nagpapakita ng kasanayan at pagkatutong nakatutugon sa pamantayan nang mag-isa at mahusay.
S	Sanay	Ang bata ay nagpapakita ng kasanayan at pagkatutong nakatutugon sa pamantayan nang mag-isa.
PK	Patungo sa Kasanayan	Ang bata ay nagpapakita ng kasanayan at pagkatutong nakatutugon sa pamantayan ngunit nangangailangan pa ng kaunting gabay at pagsasanay.
U	Umuusbong	Ang bata ay nagpapakita ng panimulang kasanayan at pagkatuto ngunit nangangailangan pa ng higit pang gabay at pagsasanay.
N	Nagsisimula	Ang bata ay hindi pa nagpapakita o sumusubok pa lamang magpakita ng panimulang kasanayan at pagkatuto kung kaya't kailangan pa ng higit na gabay at pagsasanay.

Letter Grade	Meaning	Description
E	Excellent	The child independently and excellently shows the fundamental knowledge, skills, and core understanding.
P	Proficient	The child independently shows the fundamental knowledge, skills, and core understanding.
AP	Approaching Proficiency	The child shows the fundamental knowledge, skills, and core understanding, but still needs minimal/some guidance and practice.
D	Developing	The child shows the minimum knowledge, skills, and core understanding, but still needs thorough guidance and practice.
B	Beginning	The child has yet to show or attempts to show the minimum knowledge, skills, and core understanding and still needs thorough guidance and practice.

Also included in the report was descriptive feedback or narrative accounts about the students' performance and points for improvement in each subject. Other than this, students also received more descriptive comments on their worksheets. The exposure to both grading systems allowed the parents to compare how each system affected their child's learning.

Instruments

Information about their perception was gathered through a researcher-made tool, the Parents' Perception Survey (PPS), which was administered online using Google Forms. This expert-validated tool was adapted from Liu's (2008) Teachers' Perceptions of Grading Practices (TPGP) and was tailored to the specific context of the study and guided by the comments of the validators. It consisted of the following parts: a) an explanation about the grading system; b) 13 statements about their perception of the

use of descriptive grades; c) two items on aspects affected by the DGS; and d) two open-ended questions for respondents to provide specific situations or experiences on how the grades affected their child. The 13 statements were rated by the respondents using a four-point Likert scale: 1- strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3- agree, 4- strongly agree.

Procedures

The researchers sought permission from the school principal to gather feedback from parents through the PPS. The survey, administered via Google Forms, was sent to the parents/guardians through the students' email accounts by the homeroom advisers. Access to the collected responses was restricted to the research team to ensure confidentiality. The survey was conducted at the end of the academic year after parents had received the final grades of the students under the DGS. It remained open for two weeks to allow sufficient time for the collection of responses. Participation was voluntary and informed consent was part of the survey introduction.

Data analysis

Quantitative data were run on Jamovi and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The mean, median, and standard deviation were calculated to determine the perceptions of the parents toward the use of DGS. Qualitative data from the open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic analysis where codes were used to categorize the responses and were then grouped into themes. Four members of the research team served as the primary coders for the qualitative data. The data were initially divided among the research team members who first met to assign codes together and establish coding guidelines. This initial meeting ensured consistency in the coding process before the researchers worked independently. Following this, each researcher independently coded their assigned set of responses. Once the coding was completed, the team reconvened to review each other's work to provide a second layer of coding and to ensure accuracy and alignment in the assigned themes. During the review sessions, inter-coder reliability was assessed by checking for agreement between coders. Any inconsistencies in the coding were discussed and resolved collaboratively to ensure consistency and alignment across the data. Data were stored in the institution's cloud storage, with access limited to the members of the research team.

Ethical considerations

This study strictly followed ethical standards. Participants were thoroughly informed about the scope and limitations of the study and gave voluntary consent, ensuring their data remained confidential and anonymous. Participation in the perception survey was entirely voluntary, with no repercussions for opting not to respond. Prior to data collection, the researchers sought approval from the school's office of research, development, and publication as evidence of their dedication to ethical conduct and participant welfare.

Results

The study aimed to gather parents' perceptions about the use of DGS. Table 1 presents the summarized responses of the participants toward descriptive grading. The data show that participants strongly agreed to 12 of the 13 statements in the Parents' Perception Survey, with the mean ranging from 3.48 to 3.70. On the other hand, participants disagreed with statement 10, which had a mean rating of 2.24. This statement was negatively stated, signifying that they disagree with the negative effect of the descriptive grades on their child's learning. Based on the quantitative data, the participants had a generally positive perception of the use of DGS.

Table 1

Perception of the Parent Participants toward the Use of Descriptive Grades

Statements	N	Mean	Median	SD	Qualitative Description
1. Ang mga descriptive grade ay mahalagang bahagi/aspeto ng pag-unlad ng aking anak. <i>My child's descriptive grades are an important part/aspect of their progress.</i>	54	3.70	4.00	0.461	Strongly Agree
2. Ang mga descriptive grade ay may positibong epekto sa pang-akademikong kagalingan ng aking anak sa iba't ibang asignatura. <i>Descriptive grades have a positive effect on my child's academic achievement in all subjects.</i>	54	3.67	4.00	0.476	Strongly Agree
3. Ang mga descriptive grade ay may magandang epekto sa pagkatuto ng aking anak. <i>Descriptive grades have a positive effect on my child's learning.</i>	54	3.57	4.00	0.536	Strongly Agree
4. Mahalaga ang mga descriptive grade bilang motibasyon sa aking anak upang mag-aral. (Hal. nasasabik na pumasok sa paaralan at lumahok sa mga gawain) <i>Descriptive grades are important in motivating my child to study. (Ex. eager to attend school and join class activities)</i>	54	3.56	4.00	0.604	Strongly Agree
5. Nahirikayat ang aking anak na magpasa ng maayos na gawa dahil sa mga descriptive grade na natatanggap. <i>Descriptive grades encourage my child to submit quality work.</i>	54	3.54	3.54	0.539	Strongly Agree
6. Natutulungan ako ng mga descriptive grade na malaman ang mga kailangan pang pagbutihin ng aking anak sa iba't ibang asignatura. <i>Descriptive grades help me recognize my child's points for improvement in different subjects.</i>	54	3.69	4.00	0.543	Strongly Agree
7. Nalalaman ko sa pamamagitan ng mga descriptive grade ang kalagayan ng aking anak sa mga gawaing pangklase. <i>Descriptive grades inform me how my child is doing in class.</i>	54	3.65	4.00	0.555	Strongly Agree
8. Nabibigyan ako ng sapat na feedback ng mga descriptive grade tungkol sa aking anak. <i>Descriptive grades provide sufficient feedback about my child.</i>	54	3.52	4.00	0.606	Strongly Agree
9. Nahirikayat ang aking anak na matuto kapag mataas ang nakukuhang mga descriptive grade. <i>Getting high descriptive grades motivates my child to learn.</i>	54	3.56	4.00	0.634	Strongly Agree
10. Nawawalan ng gana ang aking anak na matuto kapag mababa ang nakukuhang mga descriptive grade. <i>Getting low descriptive grades demotivates my child to learn.</i>	54	2.24	2.00	0.930	Disagree
11. Naipakikita ng mga descriptive grade ang pagsisikap ng aking anak na matapos ang mga gawaing pampaaralan. <i>Descriptive grades reflect my child's effort in accomplishing tasks.</i>	54	3.54	4.00	0.573	Strongly Agree
12. Naiimpluwensiyahan ng mga descriptive grade ang pagsisikap ng aking anak sa paggawa ng mga gawaing pampaaralan. (Hal. Nagsisikap na matapos ang mga gawain at nagpapasa sa takdang oras) <i>Descriptive grades influence how much effort my child gives in completing tasks. (Ex. Strives to accomplish the task and submits on time)</i>	54	3.48	4.00	0.606	Strongly Agree
13. Nasasalamang ng mga descriptive grade ang abilidad ng aking anak sa iba't ibang asignatura. <i>Descriptive grades reflect my child's ability in the different subject areas.</i>	54	3.57	4.00	0.570	Strongly Agree

Note: 1.00-1.75 Strongly Disagree, 1.76-2.50 Disagree, 2.51-3.25 Agree, 3.26-4.00 Strongly Agree

In addition, the participants were asked to provide specific situations on how the descriptive grades affected their children. The effects on the students through the lens of the parents are shown in the sample responses presented in Table 2. Based on the codes used in the thematic analysis of the qualitative data from the PPS, a total of six themes emerged as the ones that were affected by the DGS: awareness, happiness, encouragement and motivation, diligence, interest, and self-concept. Among them, the first three, identified by 30 out of the 54 (55.56%) respondents, were the most common. Due to this high identification rate, these were the focus of the paper. Fourteen of the respondents (25.93%) were not able to expound on the specific benefits of descriptive grading.

Table 2

Actual Responses to the Parents' Perception Survey Open-ended Questions

Themes	Actual Sample Responses
Awareness	<i>Nalalaman ng aking anak kung anong gawain ang dapat pa niyang pagbutihin.</i> (My child knows what they need to improve on.) <i>Mas nauunawaan nya [niya] ito kaysa kung numero ang grado na walang paliwanag baket [bakit] ito ang grado na kanyang nakuha.</i> (My child understands this better than a numeric grade that does not have any explanation.) <i>Base sa napansin ko sa anak ko, mas specific na mas naiintindihan niya kung bakit ganoon [y]ung nakuha niya[ng] score kase may explanation na.</i> (Based on my observation, my child understands why a specific grade was given because an explanation was already provided.)
Happiness	<i>Bakas sa mukha na aking anak ang galak habang binabasa namin ang descriptive g[r]ade na mula sa guro.</i> (Happiness is seen on my child's face as we read the descriptive grades from the teacher.) <i>Natutuwa sya [siya] sa pag improve ng grade nya [niya] in letter.</i> (My child is happy with the improvements in the letter grades.) <i>Dahil sa descriptive grades, naeenjoy ng bata ang kaniyang pag-aaral at nabibigyan niya rin ito ng pagpapahalaga lalo na kapag gustong gusto ng bata ang makakuha ng mataas na marka.</i> (Because of the descriptive grades, my child enjoyed the learning process and appreciated it more especially when my child wanted to get good marks.)
Encouragement and Motivation	<i>Kapag sinasabi ko sa anak ko na mataas ang marka na nakukuha niya, lalo siyang ginaganahan mag-aral, ginagawa niya lahat ng makakaya para lalong mapabuti ito. Nagkakaroon siya ng tiwala sa sarili niya na kaya ang mga pinapagawa sa kanila.</i> (Because of the good feedback, my child was more motivated to study and gave their best to improve even more. My child was more confident to do tasks assigned to them.) <i>Reading the comments of his teacher motivates our son to do his best in all activities and tasks.</i> <i>Kapag hindi nakuha ang pinakamataas na descriptive grade ay nagiging motivation ito upang magaral [mag-aral] pa ng [nang] mabuti.</i> (When the highest descriptive grade is not yet attained, my child used it as a motivation to do better.)

Awareness

Among the themes, awareness emerged as the most prominent. Four items in the survey (Statements 6, 7, 8, and 12) may be attributed to this theme to support the data. These showed that descriptive grades promoted parent awareness and understanding of their child's learning. Parents and guardians noted that descriptive grades were easier to understand compared to numerical grades, which simply provided a score for a subject. Moreover, information from descriptive grades also helped them understand their child's academic abilities holistically. As one parent noted, *"Descriptive grades are able to explain how my child did in class more holistically vs. quantitative grades."* Students themselves were also aware of their strengths and areas for improvement, as one parent commented, *"Nalalaman ng aking anak ang kanyang kakayanan at kung saang bahagi ng pag-aaral n'ya s'ya nangangailangan ng oras."* See Table 2 for other responses.

However, four out of 44 responses indicated uncertainty about whether their child should allocate more study time to a particular subject, which areas needed more improvement, and their child's current learning level. One respondent expressed that their child felt descriptive grades did not reflect their abilities or whether the teacher recognized their strengths. Nevertheless, the majority of the respondents perceived that descriptive grades helped students clearly understand their academic strengths and areas for improvement.

Happiness

Notably, while not explicitly stated in the survey, the open-ended responses revealed that DGS brought joy to students. The comments and feedback provided by the teachers on students' work contributed to this sense of happiness. Based on 28 responses, students experienced joy upon receiving their descriptive grades and were delighted to observe their progress. They particularly appreciated the qualitative comments and feedback, which they considered to be more meaningful than numerical scores alone. Furthermore, parents noted that their children's joy was evident, not only when they received high marks, but also when notable improvements were stated in the feedback. As reported by the parents, the reactions they observed were mostly positive as reflected in terms found in their responses (*galak, masaya, natutuwa, sumasaya*). (See Table 2).

While the responses from parents generally highlighted positive reactions to descriptive grades, there were also some concerns. Nine responses pointed to how the child felt shy, sad, or anxious upon receiving "low" descriptive grades. Others reported that their child not only experienced sadness but also struggled with the feedback. Additionally, one parent observed that their child felt disappointed with "low" descriptive marks or when they were made aware of areas needing improvement.

Encouragement and Motivation

Awareness of students' learning contributes to their happiness, which in turn fosters encouragement and motivation. The parents and guardians saw the descriptive grading their children received served as a strong motivator for them to work harder and do their best in school. According to them, these descriptive grades also encouraged their children to participate and be more engaged in class. They believed that the feedback reported by the teachers in the UnP, which included descriptive grades and comments, played a crucial role in this motivation.

In addition, the students, according to their parents, did not get easily discouraged even if they committed mistakes. Instead, students were inspired to work harder when there were lessons that they had not mastered yet and were encouraged to work on the areas that needed improvements (*"Kapag hindi nakuha ang pinakamataas na descriptive grade ay nagiging motivation ito upang mag-aral pa nang mabuti"*). (See Table 2 for the other responses.)

Discussion

These results show that the parents and guardians perceived the DGS as beneficial to students' learning, as revealed in the descriptive statistics. The quantitative data revealed a positive perception of DGS, with parents agreeing with 12 of 13 survey statements (means ranging from 3.48 to 3.70) and disagreeing with the negatively framed statement (mean 2.24). The qualitative data further supported the positive perceptions of the respondents on the effect of DGS on the students, specifically in terms of awareness, happiness, and motivation and encouragement. With descriptive grades, students gained awareness of their learning progress and could identify specific strategies for improvement. This fostered a sense of joy and achievement and reinforced intrinsic motivation and deeper engagement with learning. This connection among awareness, motivation and encouragement, and happiness likely explains why these three themes are the most significant and may positively influence students' learning and development. These findings reflect several themes in the existing literature, which are elaborated in the succeeding sections. This study also lends a unique perspective on how the DGS affects the learning experience of students through the lens of their parents.

The descriptive grades promoted parent awareness and understanding of their child's performance. They found the DGS to be specific, indicating which subjects or topics required more attention and providing detailed feedback on areas where students needed further development. This observation supports Brewer's (2004) statement that assessment should make students aware of their strengths, aligning with Frontier's (2021, as cited in McTighe & Frontier, 2022) emphasis on the crucial role of feedback in guiding students to take specific actions to enhance their learning and improve their performance. The detailed feedback also aligns well with Wiggins' principles (1990,

as cited in Tuscano, 2020) because it enables students to reflect and monitor their learning effectively. Results also highlighted that the DGS was able to provide a more holistic view of the students. This may have led students to demonstrate more authentic performance, as their performance did not equate to numerical grades. Similar findings were reported by Chua et al. (2017) that, through descriptive comments, the focus of learning naturally shifted toward the process rather than solely achieving high scores.

The responses that pertain to happiness fall under the second of three conceptualized approaches (hedonism, meaning, and engagement) to happiness put forward by Peterson et al. (2005, as cited in Gabriele, 2008). In this approach, *meaning* arises from feelings that surface when a person is involved in activities that they believe bring about their full potential and give meaning to life (Waterman, 1993, as cited in Gabriele, 2008). Since school is a significant part of children's lives, feedback related to their development in school is likely highly valued by parents, as this plays a key role in empowering children to reach their utmost capabilities. Thus, they were particular with the reaction they observed in their children when they read the comments in their UnP, during the PTC, and in the formative assessments. Through the descriptive grades they received, student learning opportunities became joyful, an important ingredient in ensuring that children reach their full potential (NAEYC, 2020).

Parents' descriptions of their children's sadness or disappointment over "low" grades imply possible influence from prior grading systems. Since the letter grades do not correspond to "high" and "low" values, the students' progress was emphasized in the PTCs and within the narratives provided in the UnP. Teachers utilized descriptive grades to point out the insights of these ratings: those perceived as "lower" descriptive ratings were the areas where they needed to improve, and those perceived as "higher" ratings would serve as an affirmation of the competencies they had learned well. Furthermore, since addressing the emotional impact of feedback is important, providing constructive guidance through descriptive grades and PTCs remains fundamental to supporting students in their learning and development.

Lastly, the parents and guardians saw that the DGS fostered encouragement and motivation, a finding that has been affirmed in the literature. For instance, Hattie and Timperley (2007, as cited in Koenka et al. 2019) suggest that written feedback from teachers positively influences student motivation. Additionally, Bandura's (1977) social learning theory supports this idea, positing that positive feedback on one's efforts can increase an individual's determination to stay engaged with the task or subject matter. Reddan (2013) further argues that students may reduce their effort without feedback unless they are highly internally motivated. The relationship between feedback and motivation in assessments is closely connected and may significantly impact student performance.

Contrary to the conventional view that grades drive student motivation, Pulfrey et al. (2011) found that numerical grades have a limited positive impact on students' intrinsic

motivation. Guskey (2019) further contends that grades alone do not significantly contribute to students' improvement. In fact, Schinske and Tanner (2014) assert that grades can decrease intrinsic motivation and increase extrinsic motivation. This research presents a different perspective on the role of grades in fostering motivation and engagement. Based on the findings of this study, which focuses on the effect of descriptive grades, the use of the DGS has shown positive contributions to student engagement and motivation. Descriptive grades not only provide meaningful insights for improvement but also support intrinsic motivation by emphasizing learning progress rather than mere performance outcomes, as highlighted by Gabriele (2008), Pulfrey et al. (2011), and Schinske and Tanner (2014). Students know they can do better and understand the steps needed for improvement, therefore motivating them to learn more. Descriptive grades have the potential to contribute significantly to this process by encouraging students and motivating them to participate actively in their learning.

These findings suggest that the students maintain their motivation and do not become easily discouraged by mistakes, which may be reflective of strong intrinsic motivation. Receiving descriptive grades may have contributed to this positive attitude, which allows them to identify areas for growth and improvement. This supports findings by Tuscano (2020), Chua et al. (2017), and Frontier (2021, as cited in McTighe & Frontier, 2022), who all highlight the importance of feedback in enhancing learning. By providing clear and detailed feedback, descriptive grades likely foster a positive learning environment where students feel supported and encouraged to perform better academically. Furthermore, NAEYC (2020) highlights that students are more motivated to learn in environments that nurture their sense of belonging, purpose, and agency. Descriptive grades play an integral role in this by providing students with feedback that acknowledges their progress and effort.

In summary, the three themes that pertain to the positive perception of parents toward the DGS point to its adherence to the principles of DAP as it prioritized individualized descriptive feedback, which supports children's learning progress. With this, students can build on their strengths and identify areas for improvement. This approach ensures that assessment is meaningful and relevant to the child, which is at the core of DAP. As with any new system introduced, negative perceptions are inevitable. Although negative perceptions (e.g., students' disappointment, poor self-concept, and stress) are noted, both quantitative and qualitative data point to an overall positive perception of the descriptive grading system.

Conclusion

The study, with its limitations in terms of a relatively small sample size of respondents, revealed that parents generally have a positive perception of the use of a descriptive grading system. Based on the results, it promoted increased awareness of areas for improvement, happiness, and encouragement and motivation, which fostered a positive learning environment and showed promising potential in enhancing student's overall

development. Although it also posed some challenges such as feelings of disappointment with perceived “lower” grades and parents worrying about their child’s performance, the overall responses pointed toward a positive perception of a descriptive grading system.

After careful deliberation and consultation, this system is currently adopted in the early grades department of the study locale. Further data indicated that parents, given their exposure to both grading systems, generally leaned more toward the use of a descriptive grading system. This system may be considered as an alternative grading system in the early grades.

Since the study was conducted during an RTL set-up, it is recommended that a descriptive grading system be implemented in a face-to-face context to further explore its effectiveness, given the aforementioned benefits. For school administrators and Teacher Education Institutions, the results of the study may contribute to the evaluation, development, and improvement of existing grading systems in basic education institutions. For teachers, these results may provide useful guidance in supporting the assessment of student development and learning. By implementing a descriptive grading system, teachers may be able to better assess and provide quality feedback to their students. For parents, the use of descriptive grades may offer deeper insights into their children’s learning and may provide information on how to better support their children. For researchers, this study may provide a foundation for future research on the effectiveness of the use of a descriptive grading system in a bigger school setting with broader stakeholders’ participation, including students and teachers. Further explorations on how the descriptive grading system influences student motivation could also be beneficial.

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Authors' Bionotes

Angela Ray M. Abarquez is an Assistant Professor at UPIS. Her research focuses on early childhood and movement education. She aims to contribute to the advancement of Physical Education in the Philippines.

Jonalou S. Danao is an Assistant Professor at UPIS. Her research interests include early childhood, reading education, and use of technology in education.

ORCID ID: [0009-0000-6640-5762](https://orcid.org/0009-0000-6640-5762)

Sarah Balbuena Gonzales is an Assistant Professor at UP Integrated School (Kindergarten to Grade 2 Department). Her research interests include early literacy, language development, and teachers' personal and professional development.

Vicka Marie M. Siddayao is an Assistant Professor at UPIS. Her research interests focus on early childhood education, particularly in beginning reading, language development, and fostering literacy skills.

Jennica Varias is an Assistant Professor at UPIS, specializing in early childhood education. Her research focuses on community-based literacy programs, with interests in beginning reading instruction and environmental education.

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