

Exploring the Ethical Dimensions of Testing and Assessment: An Investigation Into Grade Inflation Among EFL Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Concerns over grade inflation have been raised since teachers tend to give students higher grades than they should. If the level of achievement does not correspond to an appropriate improvement in quality, it can raise concerns about the value of grades as a meaningful measure of academic achievement as well as the integrity and effectiveness of the education system. This research aims to find out how EFL teachers perceive grade inflation and what procedures and ethical considerations they follow in the grade inflation process. A descriptive qualitative study was employed using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with two high school EFL teachers in Bandung. The result showed that although academic performance remains a central consideration, unconscious biases may influence grading when student behavior is factored into assessments. Moreover, teachers acknowledge the dilemma of doing grade inflation where they actually get pressure implicitly from the assessment system, which often takes the form of minimum competency standard (KKM/KKTP). However, they approach it positively, viewing it as an opportunity to enhance student abilities. Despite employing different procedures and assessment criteria in their grade inflation practices, both teachers incorporate ethics. This highlights the need for all teachers to understand and implement ethical grading practices.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Assessment is an integral part of the learning process, not only as facilitation of learning and provision of information but also as feedback for educators, learners, and parents or guardians. This feedback guides them in determining the next learning strategy, which aligns with Green's (2014) statement that assessment is a continuous process involving a broader and interrelated cycle of activities. These activities are realized in the form of grades given to students. According to Brookhart et al. (2016), grades are symbols that are either issued to specific pieces of work or used as summaries of a body of work. Besides, grades may be defined as measuring quality, competency, intensity, or value (Anderson, 2018). Grades have been widely acknowledged as an essential and pivotal element and a fundamental obligation of educators (Adom et al., 2020). Therefore, teachers must have effective grading practices to report accurate grades that reflect student abilities comprehensively.

Grading practices refer to how the teachers report and use single-task results, such as essays or unit tests, and accumulate them into a cumulative score at the end of the grading period (Guskey & Brookhart, 2019). Teachers' grading practices must indeed be objective to ensure fairness and consistency in evaluating student performance. However, when educators try to grade other categories, they become more subjective when personal presumptions, opinions, and beliefs come into play. Teacher grading has been recognized as a 'hodgepodge' practice that combines cognitive and non-cognitive factors (e.g., effort, participation, and attendance) to determine students' final grades (Arrafii, 2020). Ledlow (2022) raises the question of how assessments that include categories such as behavior, participation, or punctuality can be precise. Those subjectivity elements are prone to shape implicit or unconscious bias in the system that can be induced by factors such as frustration with their students, burnout from over-grading, or pressure from external sources. These biases become evident when teachers are exposed to irrelevant student information, exerting a significant impact on their decisions and assessments, especially in cases where test scores indicate contrasting outcomes (Fiarman, 2016; Malouff & Thorsteinsson, 2016; Meissel et al., 2017; Tobisch & Dresel, 2017; Ledlow, 2022). As a result, students' grades are perceived as an inaccurate representation of their academic knowledge.

Teacher grading has been introduced previously in education as part of the assessment process. At the end of each semester, teachers often feel a dilemma. If students are given actual grades according to their abilities, several things might happen; for example, parents and students will be disappointed, principals and maybe school supervisors will reprimand, fellow teachers will label us idealistic for being too strict in giving grades, and others. Sometimes, teachers go awry in giving grades, which in the end will not be made up according to the student's ability for various reasons, causing it common for grades to be inconsistent, subjective, random, and arbitrary (Sackstein, 2015; Blum, 2020). Teachers teach students to be honest, but they lie to parents with fake grades. Some people even view this issue as a scandal, an injustice, and a violation of student trust (Chowdhury, 2018). This phenomenon is called grade inflation.

Concerns over grade inflation have been raised in several countries worldwide in the last two decades (Cote & Allahar, 2011; Nordin, 2019). In determining students' final grades, teachers should use ethics in raising students' grades. Ethics is defined as what is good and bad, with moral duty and obligation. It is a set of accepted beliefs and practices meant to restrain behavior and promote the common good (Taylor, 2013). In addition, ethics plays

a crucial role in establishing guidelines for us to conduct with our respondents, partners, and the broader society. It aids in addressing the issue of whether our actions are morally correct. Within the classroom setting, ethics aims to ensure that the assessment practices used are both efficient and equitable and to ensure professional integrity (Azizi & Ismail, 2023). Teachers, as the assessors, should consider and implement various categories, including communication about grading, confidentiality, grading practice, assessment techniques, test administration, and standardized test preparation, to uphold the ethical standards of classroom assessment (Green et al., 2007; Fan et al., 2022).

The use of ethical assessment practices has been shown by empirical research to effectively boost test-takers learning and performance in various academic areas (Green et al., 2007). Student assessments should adhere to ethical, fair, practicable, and accurate criteria according to the fair and unbiased assessment, which is one of the basic five quality standards (JCSEE, 2015). However, Williams (2015) mentions that a significant obstacle in implementing ethical principles in grading practice is the absence of a shared understanding of what 'ethics' are and their significance within the assessment context, as there are disparities in how ethical guidelines are implemented. Ethics needs consciousness and contemplation of the socio-cultural, religious, and political circumstances at the local and national levels (Duggan & Bush, 2014). While providing a universally applicable list of ethical considerations for all assessments is impossible, teachers must establish a consensus on ethical grading procedures due to the contextual diversity and the many ethical dilemmas that may occur in each setting.

To support this research, some related references and research undertaken are included. Several studies have examined the practice of grade inflation. Rouai (2020) revealed that most teachers in Algerian Universities believe that grade inflation occurs to some extent in their departments and that its primary purpose is to consider students' failure. In terms of consequences, they agreed that the main result of grade inflation is that students' work ethic decreases, and grades no longer serve well to provide positive feedback on student performance. Furthermore, Nowruzi (2021) found that Iranian English language teachers tend to inflate the students' grades, influenced by internal and external factors, resulting in unfavorable effects on the validity of the grades. Those factors include non-achievement factors such as effort, improvement, ability, and participation, as well as other factors such as learning support, improved motivation, a lack of clear grading standards, stakeholder pressure, and grading flexibility. Al-Jarf (2022) also added that teachers at Saudi schools and universities do grade inflation as they worry about students' and parents' complaints about students' failure.

According to the backgrounds mentioned above, since studies related to grade inflation in Indonesia, which has become a common practice in education, are under-explored, this research aims to determine ethical testing and assessment practices in the classroom and to provide a better understanding of the dynamics of grade inflation in the EFL education environment, focusing on the following formulated problems:

- 1) How do EFL teachers perceive grade inflation?
- 2) What procedures and ethical considerations do the teachers follow in the grade inflation process?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Teacher's Grading Practices

Grading is a complex and complicated act of giving a grade that involves various interrelated factors yet has many important roles, such as measuring student learning achievement and providing feedback to parents regarding student learning progress and areas that need improvement (Zulaiha, 2017). The student's learning progress and achievement can be evaluated and reviewed from the quality of their individual pieces of work or performance to be generated as overall grades over a particular course (McEntarffer, 2022). However, in practice, teachers not only calculate the academic grades of students' knowledge but also consider other elements. This leads to variations in grading practices between contexts and emphasis on diverse dimensions of student development (Brookhart et al., 2016).

Teachers' grading practices are mostly influenced by the teachers' personal beliefs, which means that they issue grades based on their valuation of grades (Chen & Bonner, 2017; Sun & Cheng, 2014). Some teachers see grades as a motivational tool, where grades encourage students to learn more energetically. Meanwhile, other teachers only consider grades to measure students' learning progress. The way teachers assign grades also reflects their philosophy of school goals (Olsen & Buchanan, 2019). Bonner (2016) found that some teachers view grades as a way to help students learn better. It is not surprising that teachers develop their grading practices from various sources, such as personal beliefs about the grades and purposes of education, philosophy of educational objectives about the role of the school and what they want to through education, professional development involving training and workshops followed by teachers about grading practices, their own school experiences concerning the way teachers were assessed when they were still students, and the influence of previous educators involving the way other teachers they knew did assessments (Guskey & Brookhart, 2019; Olsen & Buchanan, 2019). These resources can complement each other and influence teacher assessment practices in complex ways.

Extensive education research has been conducted to investigate the grading practices employed by teachers. Research revealed that the teacher's grading procedures do not align with the suggested practices outlined in the existing literature. Experts and educators in the field of assessment argue that grades should solely be determined by academic performance (Gronlund, 1998; McMillan, 2008). Additional research provides evidence that teachers take into account both achievement factors and non-achievement elements when determining the final grade for students (Cheng & Sun, 2015). The factors frequently cited encompass various aspects of conventional grading methodologies, including effort, behavior (such as completing homework and submitting assignments punctually), classroom engagement, study habits, progress, and certain regulations such as prohibiting retakes, providing extra credit options, calculating grade averages, assigning weights to grades, and utilizing a 0-100-point scale for assignment evaluation (Guskey, 2020; McMillan, 2018; Zulaiha, 2017). Hence, in contemporary grading methodologies, numerous educators incorporate achievement and non-achievement criteria while evaluating and assigning student grades.

Teachers' grading practices exhibit significant variation. The weight teachers assign to each component varies according to the grade/year level environment (Cheng & Sun, 2015; Guskey & Link, 2019; Randall & Engelhard, 2009) subjects covered in the curriculum

(Duncan & Noonan, 2007; Prøitz, 2013), characteristics and demographics of teachers and students, such as behavior, gender, and interest (Lekholm, 2011; Lekholm & Cliffordson, 2009). According to Guskey and Link (2019), teachers in lower grades typically place more weight on formative and ongoing assessments as well as observation. In contrast, teachers in higher grade levels are more likely to consider cognitive factors and emphasize the results of major examinations and composition tests when determining final grades. Further, they also add that when deciding which academic and non-academic criteria to include in grading, teachers' selections are heavily influenced by their awareness of the differences in student preparation between students in the lower and higher levels. Because middle and high school students were thought to possess advanced language capabilities, secondary teachers could employ deeper evaluation styles that required proficient reading and writing skills.

In the Indonesian context, teachers' assessments should utilize norm-referenced criteria with minimal competency standards, known locally as KKM. It determines whether a student has learned the goal competencies in the three learning domains: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. Each of the three domains' worth of student achievement is rated and reported individually (Kemdikbud, 2016). An effective aspect of learning is defined as assessing students' spirituality, social skills, and behavior through teacher and student observations, as well as student self-reflection. Along with an explanation of each grade category, the results are displayed as categorical grades. Furthermore, Ditjen Dikdasmen (2017) explains the assessment mechanism that is regulated based on the implementation of teacher grading practices, which consists of planning assessment strategies in preparing lesson plans and assessing attitudes, knowledge, and skills with relevant techniques. Students who have yet to reach the KKM must take remedial programs. Assessment results are reported in the form of numbers and descriptions. Assessment by education units begins with the determination of KKM, assessment of all aspects of learning, and the implementation of assessments in the form of school or madrasah final exams. Then, the determination of the assessment report and grade promotion or graduation of students. Assessment by education units requires the cooperation of all parties, including teachers in schools and between schools.

2.2 Grade Inflation Overview

Grade inflation, often referred to as grading leniency, is the practice of consistently assigning higher grades for the same level of work over a period of time, resulting in a decrease in the worth of grades, which also does not completely align with the improvement in student achievement (Kostal et al., 2016; Baglione & Smith, 2022). Nordin (2019) states that grade inflation arises as a result of incentives that are not properly aligned. Grades are artificially inflated to favor students, teachers, and schools, but this practice comes at the cost of the overall welfare. Besides, grade inflation results in a higher concentration of grades at the upper end of the distribution, as grades are constrained from above.

The phenomenon of grade inflation has attracted the attention of academics around the world, and it is a complex and evolving topic in educational discourse. It has become the norm in many schools, colleges, and universities worldwide, indicating a consistent upward trend in the number of high grades assigned to students (Chowdhury, 2018). Before teachers raise grades, they will first process pure grades by calculating all assessment elements as an evaluation process. Guskey and Link (2019) argue that combining

achievement scores with process assessment findings in final grades can create a "score pollution" effect, diluting their ability to represent a student's grasp of the material accurately. The phenomenon of grade inflation prompts inquiries regarding the underlying justification for the augmentation of ratings (Karadag, 2021). Grade inflation, as defined by Oleinik (2009), is the decrease in the external validity of grades given to students. This idea should be distinguished from the grade disparity that arises from differences in faculty grading systems and grade compression, which refers to the grouping of grades up to a specific threshold. Finefter-Rosenbluh and Levinson (2020) propose that these concepts may serve as a plausible factor contributing to the phenomenon of grade inflation.

Grade inflation arises due to several factors. According to Brookhart (1998), grade inflation in schools is driven by external and internal factors. Internally, teachers may hesitate to give low grades to maintain students' positive self-image and prevent them from feeling incapable, potentially discouraging them from learning further. Teachers also encounter pressure from the principals, parents, and students when assigning grades. The pressure to alter academic grades is encompassed within this context (Tierney, 2015). It is vital to comprehend such a setting. In addition, Yeritsyan et al. (2022) conclude that factors influencing grade inflation can be classified into three distinct categories: institutional, instructor-specific, and student characteristics.

In Indonesia, since the 2013 Curriculum was still being implemented, the fact that teachers were forced to make their students' grades meet the Minimum Completeness Criteria (KKM) standard was no secret and was a factor in the grade inflation. The higher the KKM, the better quality that the school will have. Grade inflation practices have even become a culture at the end of each student's exam. Coupled with the condition of a society that is less concerned with education, KKM is like caught between a rock and a hard place. If the KKM is too low, they fear being considered incompetent. On the other hand, if the KKM is too high, it makes the culture of grade inflation a natural, normal, and required thing (Wahyuni, 2019).

Although Indonesia's curriculum has begun to switch to the Emancipated Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka), the practice of grade inflation is still valid. There is no longer a KKM. However, KKTP (*Kriteria Ketercapaian Tujuan Pembelajaran* – Another term of KKM in Emancipated Curriculum) still considers grades during the learning process until the exam. Teachers still have the potential to inflate grades so that students meet the established KKTP. Some factors contribute to this practice. First, students still have to meet the KKTP that has been set. If a student's final grade is only 50, grade inflation is still needed to meet the KKTP on certain criteria. Secondly, there is a policy prohibiting "grade retention" or "academic retention" (Puslitjakdikbud, 2020). In this case, failing grades should not appear on a student's report card. Therefore, teachers try to complete students' minimum grades to promote them to the next level, even though their qualifications are still in doubt. Third, the factor of continuing students' education to the next level, such as junior high school to high school or vocational school to university, still depends on the report card ranking (Disdikbud Jabar, 2022). Fourth, the interest in maintaining the school's reputation and prestige in an era of intense school competition. A school's reputation is closely linked to its accreditation, which reflects the quality of its graduates, learning processes, teacher quality, and overall school management. Excellent accreditation results, especially for schools that are often dubbed as "quality schools", "superior schools", "favorite schools", "special schools", "model schools", "plus schools", "outstanding schools", "effective schools", and

so on, are a sign of quality education, and in Indonesia, this has become a stigma (Ayu et al., 2024).

Based on the explanation above, the in-depth study of grade inflation in scholarly discourse underscores its significance as a complex and growing problem in education. Academic institutions experiencing concurrent instances of grade inflation can anticipate a decline in their credibility, image, and respect within the academic broader (Caruth & Caruth, 2013; King, 2015). As some researchers regard the phenomenon as uncontrollable, it is clear that grade inflation is more than a symptom; it indicates a broken assessment system that requires comprehensive and systemic solutions. Understanding the complexities and implications of grade inflation is crucial for educators, administrators, and policymakers as they strive to ensure the integrity and fairness of academic assessment in an evolving educational situation.

2.3 Ethical Dimensions in Grading Practices

In order to guarantee that every student has an equal opportunity to succeed, effective and fair ethical behavior during the assessment process is crucial (Azizi & Ismail, 2023). In assessment practice, the importance of "ethical behavior" in evaluating test takers has been widely recognized. Researchers have emphasized this value (Azizi, 2022; Fan et al., 2017, 2020; Tierney, 2014). Furthermore, Brown and Harris (2016) add that the assessment process, which is an integral component of education, needs to be based on ethical behavior to foster positive perceptions and improve student learning outcomes. This can lead to high grading standards that have been speculated by stakeholders (Gershenson et al., 2020). This is a fascinating concept, given teachers' expectations and grading procedures are likely flexible (De Boer et al., 2018; Pollio & Hochbein, 2015; Quinn, 2020), and teachers can use grades to communicate (un)satisfactory progress to students and parents (Brookhart et al., 2016).

While ethics in assessment is understood by testing stakeholder groups such as pre-service teachers, university lecturers, in-service teachers, and education stakeholders, its application in practice often becomes a complicated issue (Fan et al., 2017, 2019; Liu et al., 2016). Objective, fair, reliable, and valid assessment plays a role in the principles-based standards guiding ethical assessment (JCSEE, 2015). Fair, objective, and unbiased assessment is indeed an ideal goal in the educational process. However, in practice, the meaning and interpretation of these concepts can be subjective. This is because fairness and objectivity are not black-and-white concepts, which makes interpreting these concepts diverse.

Assessment equity practices towards fair, accurate, bias-proof, and motivating assessments for all students are being explored by some teachers and researchers. It is important to understand that no single assessment equity practice is perfect for all situations, so teachers should choose the practices that best suit their needs and learning objectives. Here are some examples of such practices, according to Feldman (2019). Firstly, not giving a zero on a 0-100 point scale can be considered unfair and does not accurately reflect students' abilities. Instead, some teachers use a minimum scale, such as 50-100 points, to avoid stigma and provide space for students to show progress. Secondly, the use of a 0-4 point scale with letters (4-A, 3-B, 0-F) can help simplify the grading system and provide a focus on achieving learning standards. Furthermore, grading can be based on a student's last performance on a standard instead of an average of all grades. This

allows students to show progress and learn from their mistakes. A further practice is that when assessing group work, it is important to assess the individual performance of each student, not just the results of the group as a whole. Furthermore, conducting assessments based solely on standards and without additional grades can help ensure fairness and objectivity. He adds that giving additional grades or subtracting students' grades because of their behavior is a form of implicit bias.

Another set of assessment equivalencies proposed by Feldman (2019) is grading students' work based on the time taken to complete it so as to provide information about their learning speed and efficiency; providing non-graded consequences for cheating, such as reworking assignments so as to help prevent cheating behavior and encourage integrity; basing final grades on summative assessments (tests, exams) with formative assessments (assignments, quizzes) as supports that are able to provide a more complete picture of students' learning progress; conducting standards-based assessments to ensure that all students are assessed against the same standards; allowing students to retake tests or assignments to replace previous grades to provide a second chance to demonstrate mastery of the material; and finally providing constructive and informative feedback comments as grades can help students understand what they need to do to improve. With the ethical considerations in assessment practices described above, we can understand that teachers should consider ethical dimensions in their grading practices, including when conducting grade inflation.

3. METHOD

3.1 Research Design

This research was a descriptive qualitative study that employed a qualitative approach to explore the ethical dimensions of testing and assessment practices in grade inflation among EFL teachers. It adopts a case study methodology, focusing on a deeper examination of the experiences and perspectives of individual teachers. The collection of data was done through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

3.2 Participants

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select the EFL teachers with diverse backgrounds and experiences. There were 2 participants selected to take part in this study. The decision to involve a limited number of participants allowed for an in-depth exploration of their perspectives and experiences, ensuring a thorough investigation into the ethical aspects of testing and evaluation, specifically regarding grade inflation among EFL teachers. The participants were currently employed as EFL teachers in one of the public senior high schools in Bandung, possessing a minimum of five years of teaching experience. The inclusion criteria ensure that participants have substantial experience to reflect upon grade inflation in the context of testing and assessment practices.

3.3 Data Collection

The data were collected using a structured questionnaire adopted from a dissertation by Rouai (2020), who explored teachers' beliefs and views regarding grade inflation. It was administered to the two selected participants. The questionnaire included 20 questions to gather qualitative data, allowing respondents to elaborate on their experiences about the

research topic (Allen, 2017), that is, teachers' perceptions about the existence of grade inflation at their school as well as their causes and consequences. It has three parts. The first part consists of two questions to obtain information on the gender of the participants and on their teaching experience. Multiple-choice questions are the format chosen for part two, including four items that will be a form of assessment that most accurately reflects student learning and why today's grades compare to past ones, how teachers perceive themselves in terms of grading, and what they consider when assigning their marks. The last part of the questionnaire consists of eight main questions (close-ended), which are the state of grade inflation at the school, grade inflation as a solution for failure, the state of students when grades are inflated, the value of transcripts and degrees, the state of grade inflation for scholarships, the students' pressure over teachers to change grades, the teachers' pressure over other teachers to change grades, and grade inflation as a way to avoid catch-up exams. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews with each participant delved deeper into the teachers' responses to the questionnaire, allowing for a more nuanced exploration of their experiences, beliefs, procedures, and ethical considerations related to grade inflation in testing and assessment.

3.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was applied to the qualitative data from the questionnaire and interviews. The process involved identifying patterns, themes, and connections in the participants' narratives. It offered a deeper understanding of their experiences and perspectives related to ethical dimensions of grade inflation in testing and assessment. In exploring and analyzing the ethical dimensions, we use indicators as stated in UU No. 14/2005, and Permendikbud 66/2013, which emphasize assessment must be objective, fair, integrated, transparent, systematic, comprehensive, and accountable in accordance with standards. Besides, several theories from experts and scholars like Educational Testing Service (2014), Gamage et al. (2020), Holden et al. (2021), and Rouai (2020) were also collected to elaborate the indicators of ethical dimensions in grade inflation which is shown in the following table.

Table 1
Indicators of Ethical Dimensions in Grade Inflation

Indicators	Description	Ethical Consideration
Fairness	Absence of personal bias to certain students, equitable treatment of all test-takers in the testing procedure, and equity of chance to understand the information in an exam.	All students are graded according to their ability and receive additional scores in proportion to the increase in scores according to their effort and what they deserve when the teacher processes the final score.
Transparency	Revealing the actual information about grading in assessment practices.	Teachers explain the rubrics, process, and elements of scoring students' final grades so that they can know why they get those grades.
Objectivity	Based on the actual reality (data and facts) without favoritism.	Teachers assess measurable and observable things related to students' academic achievement and do not involve irrelevant factors such as student-teacher relationships, students' physical appearance, race, ethnicity, etc.
Accuracy	Demonstrating a student's true level of knowledge and competence	Grades given to students must be accurate for the results to be valid and trustworthy.

Indicators	Description	Ethical Consideration
Integrity	A commitment to six fundamental values: honesty, trust, respect, responsibility and courage for educators and learners to act in an academically integrated manner.	Teachers demonstrate fairness, transparency, objectivity, and honesty in assessing students.
Confidentiality	Keeping the privacy of students' records and only informing the results to the people concerned.	Teachers should not publicly disseminate other students' grades.
Accountability	Assessment can be accounted for by internal and external parties for aspects of techniques, procedures, and results.	Teachers provide clarity of assessment criteria and document the assessment process with evidence to support the grades awarded.

4. RESULTS

The following are the results of interviews and questionnaires that have been collected to answer the research questions. 1) How is EFL teacher's perception towards grade inflation? Moreover, 2) What procedures and ethical considerations do the EFL teachers follow in the grade inflation process? Some deeper topics are presented that concern how teachers' attitudes and views on grade inflation applied to students in one of the public senior high schools in Bandung with a condition of medium to high achievers, as well as a few students who have issues with both their English skills and their behavior.

4.1 Teachers' View on Grade Inflation

Grade inflation in educational settings is often assumed to be a process of 'magic' since teachers dazzled the students' scores drastically. Besides, it raises a dilemma for teachers. Many of them feel that when they change, alter, or add to a student's grade, they are indirectly cheating their own students because, for some students, the grades given do not fully reflect their true abilities. Based on the results of the research conducted, both participants have similar views regarding the definition of grade inflation, illustrated in excerpts 1 and 2 below, presenting how teacher 1 (T1) and teacher 2 (T2) characterize grade inflation.

Excerpt 1

T1's view on the definition of grade inflation

"In simple terms, in my opinion, the definition of grade inflation can be said to be an adjustment process to the minimum criteria (KKM), or now, in the emancipated curriculum, we call it KKTP that was previously determined by the school. It varies depending on the teachers themselves to make students to at least have basic knowledge and skills from the material completeness indicators."

*KKM : *Kriteria Ketuntasan Minimal* (Minimum Completion Criteria)

*KKTP : *Kriteria Ketercapaian Tujuan Pembelajaran* (Criteria for Achievement of Learning Objectives)

Excerpt 2

T2's view on the definition of grade inflation

"Well, for me, grade inflation is an unwritten rule for teachers to adjust students' report grades to meet the KKM, but it is not the teacher who has to inflate the grade but the students who try to inflate the grade through processes."

The insights presented in excerpts 1 and 2 explain how the teachers view grade inflation. According to their descriptions, grade inflation is characterized by a systematic increase in student grades, even though these grades are below a predetermined minimum standard. However, this concept goes beyond conventional understanding. Teacher 2 as seen in the excerpt 3 provided a more comprehensive definition of grade inflation, emphasizing that inflation involves an increase in grades that is not just limited to students who perform below minimum standards.

Excerpt 3

T2's additional view on the definition of grade inflation

"Nah, that's the part of grade inflation, too. The rule is also applied to give additional scores for those who have completed the KKM for a fair treatment for all students."

T1 also had the same opinion. He implicitly conveyed that grade inflation relates to students who have completed the KKM but of course, later with a different process. From the definitions expressed, both teachers believe that grade inflation is an unwritten demand, one of which is expressed pointedly by T2 as follows (excerpt 4).

Excerpt 4

T2's consciousness of grade inflation

"That's right. Right now, the teachers are encouraged to do grade inflation every semester."

"So far, there is no pressure because it's not written. The school stakeholders suggest that it is better for teachers to inflate the students' grades, but if they don't, that's OK, too."

Besides, T2 clearly stated her point of view towards inflating her students' grades. It can be seen in excerpt 5.

Excerpt 5

T2's perception of grade inflation

"In my point of view, I think it's not a challenge for the student, but a **challenge** for the teacher to improve the quality of our students. For instance, we have to inflate at least two points from 78 to 80. So, the ones who have to work hard are not only the students, but also the teachers as they reflect the students' achievements. All in all, in my opinion, I see grade inflation as a **challenge** for me."

From the explanation above, the two teachers define grade inflation as a process of adjusting grades to achieve standards determined by teachers and schools in the form of increasing grades for those who have not passed the KKM/KKTP and also those who have not completed or stagnating grades with the previous semester but still not less than KKM/KKTP. Grade inflation is a suggestion for teachers, and it is a challenge for teachers to improve student quality because the way teachers teach reflects student achievements.

Parents, as external parties, were also found to intervene often with teachers. Especially at the high school level, they expect their children to be eligible for SNBP or government-affiliated college as an administrative requirement. Not a few do. However, neither teacher experienced this. In fact, teacher 2 said that parents actually help, not suppress, as attached in excerpt 6.

Excerpt 6

T2's experience with parents

"... some of them do not ask me to inflate the grades. Instead, they ask me to motivate the children. Many parents actually help me, so I can collect the assignment through the parents, and the parents will cooperate with me to remind their children. All in all, instead of pressuring me, they actually help me a lot."

It was found that teachers at this school believe that they are not under pressure from any internal or external party. However, there needs to be more clarity between what the two teachers said and the reality. Although they explicitly said that grade inflation was done without any pressure from anyone, it is assumed that they get pressure implicitly from the grading system that applies in the field of education, namely the determination of the KKM itself, which is related to the academic achievement of students.

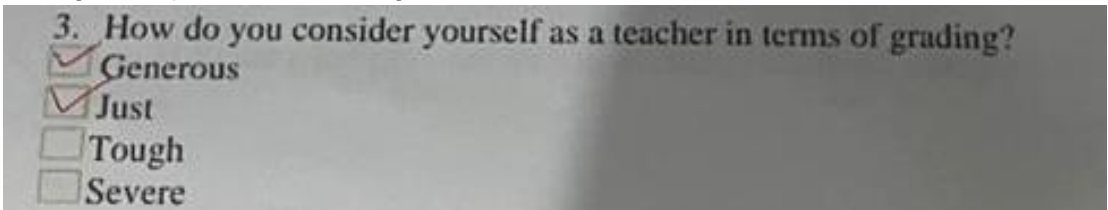
Furthermore, the study discovered that before doing grade inflation, the two teachers accumulate the overall original final score first. The final grade written on the students' reports is an accumulation of several assessments such as midterm tests, final examinations, daily assignments, and projects. The whole is averaged to produce a pure student grade, as in excerpt 7 below.

Excerpt 7

The processing of student report card grades

"In the report card, there are RT (*Rataan Tugas*) assignment averages including project assignments, then summative scores (daily tests), as well as midterm and final term scores, so everything will be added and then averaged and the original score will come out. Only then do we teachers start processing the grades to be displayed on the report card. All teachers from all subjects do this process, both for the report card at the end of the odd semester and for class promotion."

The teachers involve other components in the processing of those reports. They focus on components such as assessment criteria that can be observed and monitored in students, which are non-academic things such as attitude and student activeness in the school. The first criterion is attitude. It refers to behavior that students show in daily life in class or even outside the classroom, seen from the way they speak, act, and behave to fellow friends, teachers, or people in the school environment. It also concerns with the way students respect the people around them, which is reflected in the attention they pay when, for example, other people are speaking or sharing their opinions. In addition, what is meant by attitude here also deals with the students' politeness, honesty, responsibility, and so on. Attitude is very important for teacher 1 in the process of assessing students' final grades. This actually makes it easier for students to pass the English subject in his class. From this view, we can assume that T1 involves his generosity, and this is also validated by him through the questionnaire in figure 1 below.



3. How do you consider yourself as a teacher in terms of grading?

- Generous
- Just
- Tough
- Severe

Fig. 1. T1's questionnaire on how he sees himself in his grading system

Teacher 1 strongly believes that morals, manners, and etiquette must take precedence over knowledge. Grades are secondary to him. Written grades are only academic achievements, but attitudes will shape students into strong individuals in the future so that they will be ready for the challenges of life to come. Prioritizing attitude in academic assessment does seem subjective. Teacher 1 thinks so because he is aware of the current phenomenon where many students have poor attitudes; for example, students ignore the manners of their teachers by talking with informal language or not paying attention when the teacher explains the material. Teacher 1 believes that even later in the workplace, character can be the main consideration in whether a person is accepted for the jobs they apply for. That means attitude plays a vital role in success. This was conveyed by teacher 1 in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 8

T1's perception of students' attitude

"For me, in class, attitude is the most influential thing. What about grades? No. Grade can be number two, and attitude can be number one. Why is that? We can see nowadays that many students have attitudinal problems, rarely paying attention to the teacher's explanation, underestimating the lesson, talking disrespectfully to teachers and elders, and so on. I'm worried that if these small habits continue even into the professional world, it won't be good. Now, most companies value attitude, too. We can't shape the future of the students, but we can send a student to the future that he wants, that he will shape himself. That's why I have a principle; students don't need to talk about grades first. So, yes... My main consideration in grading my students is more to the attitude."

Teacher 1 really prioritizes attitude. No matter how intelligent a student is, if he doesn't have a good attitude, then his grades will be mediocre. This also applies vice versa, if a student is lacking academically but his attitude is good, then his score will be inflated. Teacher 2, on the other hand, has a different view on students' attitude. She does not really involve students' attitudes in the processing of report card grades so that the grades written on the reports are more the result of the accumulation of intelligence scores. In addition, T2 admitted that she is strict in assessing her students as seen in figure 2.

3. How do you consider yourself as a teacher in terms of grading?
- Generous
 - Just
 - Tough
 - Severe

Fig. 2. T2's questionnaire on how she sees herself in her grading system

The next criterion is discipline. It is a feeling of obedience and compliance with the rules that exist in class and school. High discipline is one of the factors that can help students achieve achievement in learning and good character building. Conversely, students who have low self-discipline will achieve less than optimal learning outcomes and poor character. The discipline that teacher 2 considers in grade inflation is the discipline to submit assignments on time. This discipline is even a major factor. She is willing to raise students' grades if they are early in submitting assignments. This is in accordance with what she said in excerpt 9 below.

Excerpt 9

T2's perception of students' discipline

"Discipline is one of my main considerations. I want my students to be disciplined in submitting their assignments. They have also known about it. Thus, if they finish and collect the assignments before the deadline, I will give an additional score. However, if they do not meet the deadline, I will reduce the score. They know the consequences very well as I have told it at the beginning of the semester on the learning contract."

T2 applies discipline because she wants to get students used to being responsible and completing their tasks within the given time frame so that they will also learn time management. Besides, she also believes that being disciplined encourages students to do what is good and right and helps them understand and adjust to the demands of their environment. T1, on the other hand, is not so concerned about the timeliness of students submitting assignments. As long as they submit it, even if it is late, he will tolerate that. The third factor is participation. This means students who take part in English language competitions outside of school create English written works or are involved in activities related to efforts to improve their English language skills. Winning is not a prerequisite; as long as they participate in the competition and can provide proof of their involvement, the teacher will consider it. This factor is a consideration highlighted by teacher 1, especially targeting students with upper-intermediate achievement levels. The following excerpt (Excerpt 10) presents T1's explanation regarding students' participation in out-of-class activities as his other considerations in grade inflation.

Excerpt 10

T1's perception on students' participation in out-of-class activities

"I once told my student, if you have a target grade, from first semester to second semester. You want to get 85 in the first semester, then you want to get 90 in the second semester. We cannot do this by only scoring. Our regulation about score inflation is by 3-4 points. So, students' needs to join any competition. It does not matter whether students win, lose, bring the medal or not. But you have to bring the certificate so you can prove that you are a participant of one's competition. Then, I will give you the extra points because you already know what the competition is like outside of the school."

From what T1 said in excerpt 10 above, it can be concluded that he implements the idea that high achiever students must also strive to get the desired additional grades to the maximum. This aims to motivate them to be more active in improving themselves so that it is worthwhile to get the sought-after extra points. Nevertheless, teacher 2 did not discuss this factor because it was not a consideration for her.

Besides, the findings show that T1 and T2 are both aware of the negative effects of this practice of grade inflation. High achievers are already expected to feel unfairly treated. The T1 solution explains the initial grade, the scoring procedure, and the final score, which is always determined solely by the academic performance and attitude of the students. T2's solution, however, limits the score to 85 for students who are unable to meet the curriculum competence criteria (KKM) even after completing some additional tasks.

Regarding the practice of grade inflation, both teachers exhibit excellent integrity. Since the learning contract section was introduced to the class on the first day, the procedure has been made very clear. The most crucial factor is that teachers do not artificially raise grades without any input from the students. Both teachers are aware of how

grade inflation helps students fulfill curriculum competency requirements, which subsequently facilitates their application to universities. Students in this practice of grade inflation still have a long way to go in order to meet the school's curriculum competency requirements.

4.2 Procedures and Ethical Considerations in Grade Inflation

Both teacher 1 and teacher 2, who are experienced educators, have different ways of grading their students. They also have different procedural approaches to dealing with the complex problem of grade inflation. Although teachers have different methods for assigning grades, the differences in these methods shed light on the larger discussion about how to evaluate student performance.

Excerpt 11

The procedure used by T1 to differentiate instruction in relation to grade inflation

“So, what we do is actually, each teacher has a different approach about how to raise the student's grade which still has not yet achieved the target of minimum competence criteria. Actually curriculum 2013 and emancipated curriculum are quite the same. Students can't have scores below minimum competence criteria. Because we also pursue 100 percent of graduation. The difference between curriculum 2013 and emancipated learning is differentiated instruction. Curriculum 2013 does not have any differentiated instruction. The implementation procedure of differentiated instruction for students who do not achieve the minimum competence criteria is based on students' abilities, need and interest. For example, a student failed in a descriptive text topic during a listening test. Then, as the teacher we will ask the student on what skill from the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) he is good at. Let's say he is good at reading. Then his remedial will be about reading because he is good at it. We give them writing, because they're good at it. So, the form of remedial will also be different for each student depending on their abilities and interest. That's why at the beginning of the semester, the teacher should have a cognitive assessment first. We have to differentiate first, which students are good at audiovisual, which students are good at spatial, which students are good at kinaesthetic, and so on. We have to classify them, so that the tasks are also different. Especially, when we talk more about remedial work. Even though the child failed the listening test about descriptive text, he can do remedial in speaking, writing and reading.”

T1 clarified that the emancipated curriculum and the 2013 curriculum are both the true factors contributing to grade inflation. Even though he claimed that each teacher's grade inflation procedure is unique, students still need to put in a lot of effort to meet the minimum competence criteria (KKM) whenever they fall short of it. Furthermore, he points out that the 2013 curriculum and the emancipated curriculum—which offers differentiated instruction—differ in terms of grade inflation. Differentiated instruction, also referred to as differentiation, is a teaching and learning philosophy that recognizes the differences in students' backgrounds, interests, skills, and prior knowledge. If a student doesn't pass an exam, they will have the opportunity to work on remedial material in the areas where they excel.

Excerpt 12

T2's procedures of grade inflation in relation to remedial teaching

“Well, when the students can't achieve KKM, automatically, there will be additional tasks, of course. In fact, I never give students any remedial tests because I believe when we want to do remedial tests, we automatically have to do remedial teaching, as well. It is impossible for us to remediate the students with the same questions. I usually give an evaluation treatment first. I'll ask them “Which materials do you think you don't understand?” and next I'll give additional tasks;

not remedial. Therefore, the tasks can help them to improve their grades. I understand that not all students can follow the lesson well. There are some who are categorized as fast learners and some who are slow learners. We can't ignore that. That's why, it's a challenge for us as teachers to help those who are not interested in English to be able to maintain their grades, or at least they can achieve KKM."

In the classroom, there are always quick learners and slow learners. T2 believes that in order to assist those slow learners in meeting the minimum competence criteria (KKM), she should identify the lessons that these students still need to learn and then provide remedial instruction. Additionally, it is not possible to pose the same question to the students as you did in the previous exam. In contradiction to T1, T2 will then assign additional tasks in order to raise the students' grades.

Excerpt 13

The T1's evaluation indicators

- Q : "What about the lowest achiever who is not good at speaking, listening, reading and writing? Is there any other consideration? For example, politeness and enthusiastic aspects?"
- A : "Well, as for me being a teacher, I'm talking about other teachers. I'm just saying about my perspective as a teacher. I don't know about other teachers. I don't see my students as just from their grade. If we see them from the grade, that's wrong. Because we will train our students to be just like us. We don't even know what they need, what they're good at, and what their future will be like. We can't shape the future of the students, but we can send a student to the future that he wants, that he will shape himself. So, we are like a mediator, just like a driver. That's why when I have a principle, a student doesn't need to talk about grades first. I explained in the learning contract section, you don't have to think about the grade first, look at this grade, for example, you achieve 90, 80, 85, 90 in this semester. It's good but it's just an achievement. It's not a report value, your report value will add 3, 2, 1 or even 4 if you have many achievements. All of that will not only be evaluated by the eyes, by writing only, by my handwriting in the scoring book. I pay attention to you in my class, how will you carry yourself. I give them four colours in their attendance list..."

In keeping with the discussion of remedial work based on differentiated instruction in the preceding paragraph. T1 is also aware that there are other factors to consider when determining a student's grade besides test results. He begins by explaining the learning contract sections to the class on day one. There are other assessment factors besides scores. In addition, he observes how each student enters the classroom, beginning with their attendance, engagement, and learning attitudes.

Excerpt 14

T2's two most important evaluation indicators

"For me, that will be two different things. We have cognitive assessment and social attitude assessment. For me, they are separable. In terms of cognitive assessment, I never give scores based on subjectivity. Let's say, for example, oh this student is enthusiastic and umm... polite during class, well, I'll give him/her 90 then. Not that way. I never involve my subjectivity. Discipline is one of my main considerations. I want my students to be disciplined in submitting their assignments. They have also known about it. Thus, if they finish and collect the assignments before the deadline, I will give an additional score. However, if they do not meet the deadline, I will reduce the score. They know the consequences very well as I have told it at the beginning of the semester on the learning contract."

In contrast to T1, T2 makes a clear distinction between the assessment of social and cognitive attitudes. Even though they are extremely courteous, pupils may struggle with

their cognitive abilities. They will still receive a low score on their cognitive evaluation. Discipline and their cognitive evaluation are the only factors taken into consideration as well. Students will receive bonus points if they turn in their assignments on time or within the time frame given. However, they will lose points for turning in the assignment after the deadline.

Additionally, T1 divided the students into four colour categories: 1) Red. This student performs the lowest in the class in terms of attendance, engagement, learning attitudes, and test scores. 2) Yellow. This student is occasionally quite eager to complete the assignment in class, but not always. 3) Green. This student is reliable, punctual, has a positive attitude toward learning, and does the work well. 4) Orange. This student goes above and beyond what other students do. She excels in English, attends school regularly, has a positive attitude toward learning, and participates enthusiastically in extracurricular activities. The teacher still values the green students' mindset even though they did not win a medal in the competition. Participating in extracurricular competitions will instruct students for their future later.

Excerpt 15

T1's fairness in grade inflation

"Yes, right. Students will feel unfair because they only focus on the result; the final score which is attached to the report. For example, the high achiever feels unfair with the low achievers as they say, 'Isn't it unfair as they (low achievers) cheat during exams and come late to school, but still manage to get 1 point of additional score. What about me? I'm much more diligent than them'. Students will feel unfair because they don't see the process, but rather see the result. Talking about the point increase, yes, it might be unfair, indeed, but did they see the process? Starting point of high achievers is different to those of low ones. Let's say a high achiever got 89. In the next semester he can get 90, and then a low achiever gets 75, and then changed to 76. Why is it different? Because the start is also different. The high achievers can gain improvement only in one process while the low achievers must do it several times, maybe three or four times to get that one additional score. That's why I believe that this procedure is fair. It is fair because we see the process and the struggle."

T1 further pointed out that he is treating grade inflation fairly. He evaluates both the final result and the learning process of the pupils. He does keep an eye on the educational progress of both high and low achievers. The starting score is what separates high achievers from low achievers. A high achiever typically begins with a high score, such as 89, and depending on her engagement, learning attitudes, and test results, she will typically receive an inflation of one or two points in the following semester. A low achiever, however, starts with 75, so if she works hard enough, she should be able to increase her score by roughly 2 or 3 points the following semester. Occasionally, when dealing with truly difficult students, the teacher even dares not to inflate any extra points or even reduce the student's score because of her participation, engagement, completion of assignments, and test results. In general, he can ensure that grade inflation is solely determined by the work that students do in the classroom.

Teacher 2 showed a stronger preference for the use of project-based tasks in the proportion of assessment compared to daily tests. This is revealed in Excerpt 16, where Teacher 2 explains the reason behind his preference.

Excerpt 16

T2's grading proportion

"Daily test... mmm I rarely have it as I prefer project-based tasks. For examples through book projects or debates. I'll focus on what skills can be seen from them. Therefore, the biggest proportion is in the projects. Through project-based tasks, I can assess the students' discipline, cooperation, and performance. I only take 30% of summative tests. First, it's because we never know where our students get the answers from. They may be honest, but they may also cheat. Next, I believe when students take tests they are not always in a good condition, it could be that at that time they are upset or not fit. Besides, I also assess the students' personality by looking at how they submit the assignments and how they respect their teachers."

T2 stated that she can complete 30% of the summative tests on the final exam of each semester. She believes that students can be honest or dishonest in summative exams. She is unable to ensure that. Or perhaps the student is ill, upset, or in poor health on that particular day. She, therefore, develops project-based assignments based on the abilities she needs students to possess, such as debates and book projects. She can evaluate the discipline, cooperation, and performance of the students in this project-based assignment. She will complete 70% of the daily formative assessment so that she can evaluate the progress of the students at each meeting.

Taking account of ethics and principle considerations within the education system, based on the interview and questionnaire which were constructed and answered by the participants, it showed that they claim to have followed several guidelines and principles in terms of fairness and equity, transparency, communication, and consistency; and academic integrity. In maintaining those values, they have a plenary meeting which is held at the end of each semester to discuss the students who do not meet the criteria as mentioned in the following excerpt (Excerpt 17).

Excerpt 17

Plenary meeting at school

"Then, I brought this case to the **plenary meeting**. ... will be discussed and decided in the **meeting**. We usually have a **plenum** ... so that they can be discussed in the **meeting**."

They usually keep the score low without inflating the grade to ensure integrity which then will be brought to the meeting to be decided by the room. Even for the worst situation where a specific student does not follow the rules, they will hold a case conference in the school which is joined by all teachers and a headmaster who teaches the student in trouble.

5. DISCUSSION

The grade inflation phenomenon is a dilemma that cannot be avoided by teachers. The two participants in this study viewed and addressed this phenomenon positively, which actually made it a challenge for them to improve the quality of students. Teachers have to tweak students' final grades so that they at least meet the minimum completeness criteria. This practice is not done simply. Students must follow certain procedures. This phenomenon is normalized, proving Chowdhury's (2018) point, as the participants acknowledge the practice of grade inflation as an unwritten rule that must be done every semester. That perception leads the phenomenon to become a topic of growing concern and discussion among educators in a dynamic environment of education.

One essential component of negotiating the challenges of academic assessment and preserving the integrity of educational standards is teachers' awareness of the effects of grade inflation. Teachers are vital to the shaping of the educational experience because they are the guardians of academic rigor and the judges of student performance. Teachers must be aware of the effects of grade inflation in order to maintain the integrity of fair and transparent evaluations and create a learning environment where students are motivated to pursue real academic goals.

In grade inflation, there must be a cause and an effect. Internal and external pressure matter. We cannot deny that institutional and parents pressure factors often intervene with teachers in the grade inflation process. Internally, grades have always been a timeless topic. Grades are related to the prestige of the school in the community. Schools that are considered favorites are assumed to have high grade averages (Ayu et al., 2024). In addition, student grades are one of the important criteria in accreditation. So, schools have an interest in their students' grades. If the grades are not improved, there will be many students who do not pass the KKM/KKTP, thus affecting the school's graduation standard. Regarding those pressures, both teachers stated that there was no pressure from the school or parents to inflate grades, but in fact, the teachers actually get pressure implicitly from the grading system that applies in the field of education, namely the determination of the KKM itself which is related to the academic achievement of students. Nevertheless, they try their best to apply ethical dimensions in this grade inflation so that the grades obtained by students can still describe their true abilities reflecting the teacher's responsibility as an assessor. Teachers' efforts in applying ethical behavior in assessment are what causes them to have a positive perspective on grade inflation. This is in accordance with what Brown and Harris (2016) state.

The assessment procedure carried out by both teachers is the same as in general practice where it starts with accumulating several tests such as midterm exam, final term test, daily assignments and projects. The whole will be averaged to produce a pure student grade. Students who score below the KKM must make efforts to improve their grades. In this case, there are differences in the approaches taken by the two teachers. After that, other components in the processing of the report card grades are involved, such as student attitudes and participation at school, as other assessment elements for inflated grades. This aligns with research by Cheng & Sun (2015), who found evidence that teachers consider factors beyond just achievement when determining grades.

The teachers' confession that they not only give extra marks but can also reduce the marks of undisciplined students shows that implicit bias exists in assessment practices. This is in line with the findings of Fiarman (2016), Malouff & Thorsteinsson (2016), Meissel et al. (2017), Tobisch & Dresel (2017), Feldman (2019), and Ledlow (2022), who argue that adjusting grades based on behavior introduces subjective bias, diverging from purely academic evaluation.

Both teachers strive to demonstrate their professionalism and integrity by implementing a fair and transparent assessment process. They are aware that this grade inflation phenomenon will cause protests from students who feel that the number of grade increases is not equal to their friends, such as high achievers who are only increased by 1 or 2 points while low achievers increase by 6 to 7 points. To address this, both teachers provide explanations to students to ensure students feel fair in processing their final report card grades. Both participants are also openly transparent by informing the students of the assessment process and explaining what is being assessed.

Teachers do their best to present accurate grades, as evidenced by the grade processing process carried out by accumulating all sources of assessment to gain a comprehensive understanding of students' genuine capabilities. However, grade inflation hinders accuracy in grading, especially for low-performing students. The score in numerical form does not always accurately represent their actual proficiency. For example, if a low-performing student earns a score of 45, but the score is then increased to 76 on a scale of 100, it fails to authentically reflect his or her true ability. So, parents should be informed about the interpretation of numeric scores.

All in all, when a question arises, is it ethical for educators to raise or round up the grades of their students to meet the KKM/KKTP? The answer must be seen from various sides. If the teacher tries their best, the students also learn their best, but the students' performances are low as indicated by the grade still being below the KKM, then the teacher just raises the grade without the student's effort and effort. Is that ethical? No, because this situation undermines the academic standards that have been set. By raising the grade without asking the student to do additional work, the teacher may be perceived as not giving a consistent message about the importance of effort, responsibility, and perseverance in learning. If this is the case, in order to be ethical, teachers and students must both make an effort. The effort that can be given is to give additional or remedial assignments that are at the same level as the student's ability, so that the KKM can be achieved. The maximum grade that can be given is on KKM score. This is ethical and fair because the other students get higher scores because of their best abilities, while the remedial students get the minimum score as a reward for their efforts to overcome their difficulties to reach the minimum standard.

From the explanation above, it can be said that the practice of grade inflation by both participants has met the ethical dimensions standard where teachers emphasize fairness, transparency, and integrity. There are still many teachers who do not apply ethical dimensions, so the grading practices of the two participants are an effort that deserves appreciation even though, in practice, there are still many students who do not develop. The practice of grade inflation in schools, especially at the high school level, makes it less difficult for teachers to manage and organize their grades because the ambition to achieve higher achievement also dominates.

6. CONCLUSION

The examination of the teacher's grading practices in determining students' final grades shows that they involve both achievement and non-achievement elements with academic grades remaining central. Although teachers believe that they are fully objective, giving extra marks or reducing students' marks because of their behavior shows that unconscious bias forms an inevitable culture of assessment practices. The practice also reveals a complex interplay of factors that lead to grade inflation as the implicit and unwritten rule that the teachers are encouraged to adjust the students' scores in accordance with the minimum standards (KKM/KKTP) whether by providing additional grades for students who have and have not exceeded the standards or giving stagnant grades as in the previous semester. Both teachers stated firmly that there was no pressure from parents and schools to conduct grade inflation. In fact, the KKM or KKTP is the implicit cause behind the grade inflation phenomenon itself.

As grade inflation becomes an unavoidable dilemma, the teachers respond to this phenomenon with a positive attitude. They believe when teachers raise students' grades, it is a challenge for them to improve students' abilities. They also agree that the process of grade inflation must be done with a process that involves efforts from students so that the scores are not just added. Students have to keep trying before the final grade is set by the teachers, either by taking remedial tests or doing additional tasks. From the existing practices, teachers have strived for fair and transparent assessments, so we can conclude that both teachers use ethics in doing grade inflation, although they have different procedures and assessment criteria in treating the students in grade inflation practice. All teachers need to understand and apply this.

From the results presented, this research has limitations. The analysis and conclusions drawn are based on interviews only. More comprehensive research needs to be done. For researchers who want to conduct research on the practice of grade inflation, they should also look at data on student grades before and after being processed and make observations during the process of determining the final report card grade to prove whether teachers really practice ethical dimensions. The number of participants in this study is also limited to only two from one school. More teachers from various levels are suggested to be involved in order to explore the phenomenon of grade inflation in a broader context of classroom assessments.

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Authors' Contribution

Enggar Pangesti Wibowo worked on the project and the main conceptual ideas and wrote the manuscript. Ayu Lestari and Merry Adrian collaborated to analyze the data and write the manuscript. Kanaya Salsabila Firdausiyah, Jiaul Haque Islamic, Raudhah Diara Putri, and Taufiq Kemal collaborated on the collected data and wrote the manuscript. Eri Kurniawan proofread the manuscript.

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