



Transition to Academic Probation: A Phenomenological Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

Academic probation implementation in higher education institutions aims to ensure that students are meeting academic standards and making satisfactory progress toward their degree or program requirements. It serves as a warning to students not meeting these standards that their academic performance needs improvement. Hence, the purpose of this study was to unveil the lived experiences of board program students who have undergone probation period. The study is qualitative research utilizing the phenomenological approach. This research used purposive sampling. The participating ten board program students were identified and divided equally for in-depth interviews and focus group discussion. The data gathered were analyzed through the use of coding and thematic analysis. Results revealed from responses regarding their experiences: (1) the feeling of self-doubt, (2) gained focus due to limited units, (3) fear of judgment, (4) being challenged to strive more, and (5) kept on blaming the self. In response to the challenges they have encountered, they emphasized the following coping mechanisms as essential: (6) gaining motivation from significant others, (7) managing time properly, (8) becoming optimistic, and (9) having an attitude of acceptance. Also, upon reflecting on their overall experiences, they highlighted the following insights: (10) never giving up, taking full responsibility amidst results, (11) challenging policy with a purpose, (12) making self-realizations, and (13) avoiding taking advantage. The results implied that there are certain interventions to be made within the institution to extend assistance to the students' situations, such as tutorial sessions, and enhance the guidelines of the academic probation policy to strengthen collaboration with its stakeholders. This study is therefore deemed significant as this highly contributes to the body of knowledge related to academic probation policy implementation by higher education institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Academic probation is virtually every institution's challenge, but it is the most under-researched policy practiced at most local colleges and universities. It is one of the academic policies designed to alert students that they are not meeting the minimum academic standards of the institution. It serves as

a warning that the student's performance falls below the institution's requirement for "good academic standing" ([Brawner, Frillman & Ohland, 2010](#); [Agnes, 2019](#)). In the global context, higher education is one of Bangladesh's fastest-expanding commercial industries. Private universities, which are still a relatively new phenomenon in Bangladesh, offer a tested alternative and a new route for higher education. All private universities in Bangladesh are pressured to enroll even more students because they only have limited spots available for the employment-oriented courses they provide. Academic probation is imposed on students who do not make sufficient progress. The purpose of academic probation is to discourage unsatisfactory student performance, to make students aware of the seriousness of their academic situation, and to identify students who may be on the verge of leaving the institution so that proactive measures can be taken to help them improve their performance ([Hoover, 2014](#)).

Moreover, in the Philippine setting, specifically in the Laguna State Polytechnic University, Los Baños, a study was conducted wherein it was found out that the institution is implementing a stricter retention policy regarding the students who enrolled in accounting courses, a boarding program. As such, incoming second-year students must have a general grade of at least 85%, with no grades below 83% in accounting subjects. Because of this, students tend to progress in their academic performance; however, others were overcome by pressure to maintain the stated grades in the policy. Thus, the anxiety towards each subject develops and affects their motivation to strive harder, especially if they will be part of the students under probation ([Sarmiento & Macatangcop, 2021](#)). Though there are studies conducted regarding the probation policy implemented by international institutions, such as the study of [Castellon \(2017\)](#) entitled "Persisting on Academic Probation: Implications of Policy and Practice for Educational Leaders," the researcher has not come across a study that specifically discusses the experiences of the students who were under the probation period as well as the challenges and insights they have in the local context.

Furthermore, this study provides concepts that could create understanding and learning in the academic community regarding the students under probation. This study is anchored through Tinto's Theory of Student Departure (1993) which states that a student's characteristics influence their initial level of commitment to an institution and the goal of degree completion. In turn, these initial commitments influence the student's integration into the social and academic systems of the institution. It means that the more a student integrates socially and academically, the greater their subsequent or ongoing commitments to the institution and the goal of degree completion. Moreover, this study will unveil the experiences, challenges, and insights of KCAST students from the board programs who have undergone probation. Specifically, it will seek to answer the following questions: (1) What are the lived experiences of students who have undergone probation; (2) How do these students cope-up with the challenges faced during the probation period; and (3) What are the insights that the students can share to others?

METHODS

Research Design

This qualitative study utilized the phenomenological approach. Qualitative research design concerns the researcher's attempt to comprehend the situation, particularly the connection to its context and the relationships enshrined herein. Additionally, this research approach is characterized as a study of objects in their natural environments. Moreover, it is mentioned that this is an attempt by the researcher to interpret or make sense of a phenomenon from the unfiltered viewpoints of the participants in the given event. Specifically, this study will utilize a phenomenological approach to shed light on the specific and pinpoint the phenomena through the participants' perspectives inscribed within the given situation.

Research Participant

The key participants of this study will be students from the board programs who have undergone probation. Ten participants will be carefully selected in this research endeavor. Five (5) of them will undergo in-depth interviews (IDI), while the other five (5) will be participating in the focus group discussion (FGD). Therefore, a qualitative study with 3-15 participants is ideal. Upon participant

selection, purposive sampling will ensure that only those who can give the necessary data can participate in my study. Therefore, purposive sampling will be applied, relying on inclusion criteria. This sampling method is a non-probability type that guarantees the acquisition of authentic experiences. It is guaranteed as the sampling method employs participants who are closely immersed or involved in the phenomenon being investigated. In the recruitment process, I will religiously follow the succeeding criteria. Firstly, each participant must be a student of a boarding program either from the Institute of Teacher Education and Human Services or a Bachelor of Science in Criminology. Secondly, the participant must undergo probation during the previous semesters. Lastly, the student will either be male or female.

Data Collection

Due to the ongoing pandemic, safety precautions will also be considered when conducting this investigation. To ensure the complete safety and protection of my participants and other involved individuals during the study or data collection, I will adhere to the existing IATF Protocols and any other government protocols when I check certain focal persons for permissions. I will strictly adhere to some of these rules, including the recommendations to keep a social distance, wear face masks, and bring alcohol. Furthermore, a researcher needs to comprehend the nature of the research and the motivation behind conducting the study to introduce it to the participants, ask for their consent to perform it and involve them in the search.

Therefore, the following procedures will be used to collect the necessary data for the study. First, the technical research panel will thoroughly review my work after I submit it for evaluation. Then, I will write a permission letter to the institution where I will be conducting my study after gaining the unanimous support of the panel. I will then use the document above to ask the relevant authorities, specifically the College President and Vice President for Academic Affairs, for permission to conduct the study. After that, I will use the purposive sampling technique to determine who would participate in my study based on the set pre-inclusion criteria. Secondly, I will use the purposive sampling technique, which aids in finding the informants. Finally, before signing the consent and agreement forms, they must read them carefully. These forms stipulated that participation was voluntary and that the informant was willing to share any knowledge crucial to the study's outcome.

Additionally, I will take into account that the informants that the participants receive the benefits of cooperating with me. It requires treating all participants under the category of focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. Further, I will encourage them to sign the informed consent form once they voluntarily consented to participate to indicate their participation and demonstrate that they were fully aware of my study. When it comes to the data to be gathered, discrete coding will be used to completely protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the information the important participants offered. No reports, presentations, or publications emanating from the research study would use the specific identities of the key participants. All research data or information will be stored in password-protected or locked files at all times (for material copies) (for electronic copies). The only person with access to the files would be the lead investigator.

Data Analysis Technique

The coding and thematic technique will be used in this study. Data analysis in qualitative investigations is the methodical search and organization of interview transcripts, observation notes, or other non-textual materials. This procedure will be carried out to allow the researcher to gather information and to improve public comprehension of the phenomenon or research issue. In my case, the IDI and FGD transcripts of the chosen student writers were used as the primary source for this study's data analysis. Numerous treatments and techniques were applied to extract the study's conclusions from the data. I will employ the coding technique in my study to describe and label the main ideas in each response of my participants in the process of IDI and FGD. The ideas which the response portrays will be coded. Another technique to be employed in this study is thematic analysis which is the process of detecting, interpreting, and presenting patterns within a vast amount of data. For example, thick, rich, and detailed descriptions were excavated from the outcomes of my investigation ([Maguire & Delahunt, 2017](#)).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion are presented below in order of the study's research questions grouped into three categories: experiences, challenges, and insights of the students who underwent academic probation under the board programs.

Lived Experiences of Students Who Undergone Probation?

The first research question inquired about the experiences of the students who underwent probation period. Five major themes emerged and were identified: the feeling of self-doubt, gaining focus due to limited units, fear of judgment, being challenged to strive more, and kept on blaming the self for answering this one. Figure 1 provides the major themes and core ideas coded from students' responses. Their responses focused on their struggles upon knowing they would be under probation.

Table 1. Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Lived Experiences of Students during Probation Period

Major Themes	Core Ideas
The Feeling of Self-Doubt	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. feeling down and confused about what will be the future after the probation 2. keeping the question of the probation period will be survived 3. being pressured by internal and external forces with the what if's statements 4. doubting the self because of the failures experienced
Gained focus due to Limited Units	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. managing duties and responsibilities properly because of a limited number of subjects enrolled 2. being able to gain 15 units of subjects only 3. focusing only on five subjects during the probation period 4. experiencing less stress status because of a lesser number of subjects
Fear of Judgement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. thinking about the things my friends would say about gaining a grade below the required remarks 2. crying in silence due to fear that parents will not have the acceptance 3. keeping the question of how parents and relatives will know and accept it 4. experiencing breakdowns due to fear of what others might say 5. being afraid of what will be the comments by other people
Being Challenged to Strive More	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. being dared to do the best thing to pass the subjects enrolled 2. striving harder due to the adjustments to be done 3. learning to stand alone and strive to overcome the probation period 4. making steps to pass and not only giving up immediately 5. doing things required to gain not just a passing grade 6. avoiding the mindset of just settling for less
Kept on Blaming the Self	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. losing hope to pursue the study Education program 2. asking tons of questions regarding my academic performance and behavior 3. feeling self-disappointed on what are the things I have missed 4. blaming myself on what are the lapses I have made in my academics 5. keeping the questions in mind if I can continue due to personal issues

The above results are related to the study conducted by [Barouch-Gilbert \(2016\)](#), that the students described what it meant to be classified on academic probation. Students expressed concerns over what others thought of them while being classified as such, thus creating negative emotional implications throughout their experiences. It means that there was a plethora of negative experiences for students who have been under academic probation. Also, [McPherson and Marrero \(2021\)](#) cited that some students felt disconnected from their institution and ashamed when placed on probation, while some did not inform their families about their circumstances.

Coping Mechanisms of Students on the Challenges Faced During Probation Period

The second research question inquired about the experiences of the students who underwent probation period. Four major themes emerged and were identified: gaining motivation from significant others, managing time properly, becoming optimistic, and having the attitude of acceptance to answer this one. Figure 2 provides the major themes and core ideas coded from students' responses. More so, students did various processes and steps to solve their experienced challenges during the probation period.

Table 2. Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Coping Mechanisms of Students on the Challenges Faced During Probation Period

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Gained Motivation from Significant Others	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. talking to family and friends and asking for advice about the status2. considering the family as the source of motivation and inspiration3. motivating advice from friends and even loved ones, especially the boyfriend4. helping each other with my close friend and advising each other
Managed Time Properly	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. being on time in submitting learning tasks given by the instructors despite the other responsibilities as a working student2. relaxing the self and dividing the time between studying lessons and hanging out with friends3. doing time management4. managing the time spent in church activities and answering the modules5. setting priorities and taking time management in the things needed to accomplish
Become Optimistic	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. taking the result positively while realizing that it is already halfway to achieving college goals2. finding ways to motivate the self and be positive3. thinking that everything is only part of life's challenges and struggles4. keeping the thought that everything will surpass5. keeping the eyes on the goal of finishing the chosen degree
Having the Attitude of Acceptance	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. conditioning the mind that everything happens for a reason2. accepting the fact that this is part of the process3. thinking that this is policy implementation of the institution4. keeping the attitude of never giving up since this is part of the program policy

As supported by the study of [Arcand and Leblanc \(2011\)](#), the role of significant others, such as family and friends, is needed by students fulfilled their emotional needs when they are under probation period. It suggested that the companion's role was eminently effective. It created a positive ambiance and helped the students tap into confidence shattered in many cases since their stories illustrate the physical and emotional distance between their parents and them. Moreover, in the study conducted by [McPherson and Marrero \(2021\)](#), it was claimed that the experiences of students being mentored by faculty members and advisors caused them to reflect on the changes they needed due to the policy and bolstered their decision to continue in pursuing their dreamt profession. As a result, they managed their academic and personal obligations more effectively, demonstrating a positive outlook and positive impacts of targeted support given by people close to them.

Insights of Students Regarding Probation Policy

The third research question inquired about the experiences of the students who underwent probation period. Four major themes emerged: never giving up, taking full responsibility amidst results, the challenging policy with a purpose, making self-realizations, and avoiding taking advantage to answer this one. Figure 3 provides the major themes and core ideas coded from students' responses.

Table 3. Themes and Core Ideas on the Insights of Students under Probation Period

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Never Give Up	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. keeping the perseverance of not giving up 2. striving harder despite how bumpy the situation is 3. embracing challenges to continue 4. taking a thought of not giving up 5. embracing seriously the chance given to continue pursuing the dreamt degree
Taking Full Responsibility Amidst Results	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. doing actions to avoid the same results 2. valuing the time and opportunity given 3. taking responsibility for the reasons for being under probation 4. rendering efforts to accomplish the required tasks 5. being aware of the consequences which might happen
A Challenging Policy with a Purpose	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. favoring the implementation since it is anchored on the goals of the institution 2. giving best efforts because it is a big challenge 3. allowing students to strive for excellence 4. extending chances for students to continue in the program 5. helping to change the bad habit of students
Making Self-Realizations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. letting students see the reality of not settling for less 2. being aware of the lapses committed 3. making someone to be challenged of doing better things 4. choosing the right people that will influence the academic journey 5. reflecting on how to become a responsible person
Avoid Taking Advantage	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. taking advantage is a big no 2. being relaxed is also a bad habit 3. making self so comfortable might result in failure 4. valuing every advice given by other people

In connection to the results, [Somo \(2013\)](#) highlighted that being academically integrated allowed the students to overcome the probation period, and the policy motivated them to persevere toward their academic goals. The students' experiences give them hope and courage to improve. In addition, [Barouch-Gilbert \(2019\)](#) stated that implementing probation policies classified students based on their academic standing. Therefore, it will allow the students to be categorized differently from other students with regular academic loads, thus informing them not to take advantage of their courses since short- and long-term consequences stemming from academic probation could only be lifted when the student decides to self-regulate and take the necessary steps to return to normal academic standing.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the participants have generally expressed the struggles and hardships toward the fact that they will not finish the degree in time with their batchmates, received only a limited number of courses, and felt shame towards what others might comment. However, the students saw the policy implementation as beneficial, building a hardworking attitude and perseverance. These imply that being under academic probation established management and strategies for students, thus strengthening their communication with their parents, affecting their academic journey. Therefore, This study is deemed beneficial as it highly contributes to the knowledge related to crafting academic policy and its implementation. Furthermore, as a student taking a boarding program, the researcher reflected that the different experiences revealed by the participants were a testament to the process of attaining the dream profession. In some way, the study paved the way for parents, teachers, school administrators, and other stakeholders to be informed about the participants' untold experiences and their impacts on

their lives. This scholarly endeavor gave the researcher vast experience listening to the participants' responses. As they expressed their experiences under academic probation, the researcher gained a meaningful experience that taught her to be sympathetic, open-minded, and communicative about the status of the students without any judgment or criticism. She learned that it is important for the stakeholders of an institution to be involved in implementing the academic probation policy.

Furthermore, the researcher acknowledges that these effects may not generalize to other institutions by only exploring a single institution's program. However, the observed effect of our program using direct measures of student behavior (attendance at meetings and earned GPAs) combined with a strong research design vastly increases our confidence in our internal validity to make claims about the program's effectiveness. From the reflection and lessons gained, the researcher prayed that this academic work would become an eye-opener for all board program students to strive harder in their academics and never take advantage since there are possible consequences: the outcomes when they are under academic probation. She also hopes that through this inquiry, the concerned board program heads/coordinators and administrators of the institution would take more action to extend student assistance, academically and even psychologically. Lastly, she hopes this paper will uncover the reality of the student's situation, which may bring a deeper understanding to the readers and future researchers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results coded from the participant's responses, the study opened a rich recommendation of the possible solutions to address the challenges students experienced in implementing the academic probation policy. Mainly, for the students who undergone probation period, the study suggested that they may do the following: (a) seek guidance from teachers, classmates, and parents; (b) employ management not just in time but also in every aspect have effect to academics; (c) select priorities; as well as (d) be patient and persevere because everything takes a long process and sacrifice.

Moreover, the teachers, program heads/coordinators, and administrators may plot sessions to extend assistance through intervention programs like tutorial sessions and rendering advice to the students. By offering a perspective that views students through their capabilities and enabling factors, a support system that teachers and school administrators can deliver as support consultants, this can give students the thought that though they are placed under academic probation, they still have what it takes to achieve and succeed academically. Further, support to students may include building and reinforcing their self-efficacy beliefs and developing their psychological processes, such as courage and perseverance. Parents may also take involvement with their students' academics since they are the other significant others who can provide comfort and motivation for students not to give up on pursuing the profession even though their batchmates will leave them behind because they underwent academic probation. It implies that family support may be established by strengthening the parent-teacher partnership. Finally, to get a wider scope of responses to the questions of this study, it is recommended to conduct further research using a large number of participants and not only focus on one institution. Also, it is recommended that the concerned personnel of the board programs may partner with the guidance office to provide psychological assistance to the students. Hence, the student's responses, especially their insights regarding the academic probation policy of the institution, may lead to a review of its existing guidelines as part of its goal of offering quality education to its constituents.

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The authors declare no funding and conflicts of interest for this research.

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