

EXAMINING THE HALO EFFECT IN TEACHERS' GRADING OF STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT IN SECONDARY AND HIGH SCHOOLS IN MFOUNDI DIVISION

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Abstract

This research investigated the halo effect in the grading of students' achievements by teachers in secondary and high schools within the Mfoundi Division. Specifically, it analyzed the effects of student behavior, student reputation, and teacher expectations on the perceived fairness of grading and halo effects. The study employed an explanatory mixed-methods research design. Data were collected from 347 students selected through stratified sampling and 07 teachers from both public and private secondary schools. Structured questionnaire was administered to students, while teachers participated in structured interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlations, and multiple linear regression, while qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings revealed significant positive correlations between perceived grading fairness and halo effects with student behavior ($r = .513, p < .001$), student reputation ($r = .438, p < .001$), and teacher expectations ($r = .469, p < .001$). The regression model was significant, $F(3,343) = 51.418, p < .001$, accounting for 31.0% of the variance. Student behavior emerged as the strongest unique predictor ($\beta = .321, p < .001$), followed by teacher expectations ($\beta = .208, p = .001$), while student reputation was not a significant unique predictor ($\beta = .110, p = .078$). Qualitative findings confirmed that behavior, reputation, prior performance, and expectations can influence grading decisions. The study recommends the adoption of criterion-referenced assessment, clear marking rubrics, moderation, anonymous marking where possible, and professional development on assessment bias to enhance fairness and objectivity in grading.

Keywords:

Halo effect; teachers' grading; student behaviour; student reputation; teacher expectations; grading fairness.

Résumé

Cette recherche a examiné l'effet de halo dans la notation des performances scolaires des élèves par les enseignants des établissements d'enseignement secondaire général du département du Mfoundi. Plus précisément, elle a analysé les effets du comportement des



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élèves, de leur réputation et des attentes des enseignants sur la perception de l'équité de la notation et sur l'effet de halo. L'étude a adopté un **devis de recherche mixte explicatif**. Les données ont été recueillies auprès de **347 élèves**, sélectionnés par échantillonnage stratifié, et de **sept (07) enseignants** issus d'établissements secondaires publics et privés. Un questionnaire structuré a été administré aux élèves, tandis que les enseignants ont participé à des entretiens structurés. Les données quantitatives ont été analysées à l'aide de statistiques descriptives, du coefficient de corrélation de Pearson et de la régression linéaire multiple, tandis que les données qualitatives ont fait l'objet d'une analyse thématique. Les résultats ont révélé des corrélations positives et statistiquement significatives entre la perception de l'équité de la notation et l'effet de halo associé au **comportement des élèves** ($r = 0,513$; $p < 0,001$), à leur **réputation** ($r = 0,438$; $p < 0,001$) et aux **attentes des enseignants** ($r = 0,469$; $p < 0,001$). Le modèle de régression s'est révélé statistiquement significatif, $F(3,343) = 51,418$; $p < 0,001$, expliquant **31,0 % de la variance**. Le comportement des élèves s'est révélé être le prédicteur unique le plus important ($\beta = 0,321$; $p < 0,001$), suivi des attentes des enseignants ($\beta = 0,208$; $p = 0,001$), tandis que la réputation des élèves ne constituait pas un prédicteur unique statistiquement significatif ($\beta = 0,110$; $p = 0,078$). Les résultats qualitatifs ont confirmé que le comportement, la réputation, les performances antérieures et les attentes peuvent influencer les décisions des enseignants en matière de notation. L'étude recommande l'adoption d'une **évaluation critériée**, l'utilisation de **grilles de notation explicites**, la **modération des évaluations**, le recours à la **correction anonyme lorsque cela est possible**, ainsi que le **renforcement des capacités professionnelles des enseignants sur les biais d'évaluation**, afin d'améliorer l'équité et l'objectivité de la notation.

Mots-clés: effet de halo; notation des enseignants ; comportement des élèves ; réputation des élèves ; attentes des enseignants ; équité de la notation.

INTRODUCTION

The professional evaluation conducted by teachers significantly influence both the academic and personal growth of their students. These assessments are not only pertinent to the grading system but also impact classroom teaching, communication, and tasks development (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; Schmidt, Kaiser & Retelsdorf, 2023). It is important for teachers to gather reliable information concerning their students and utilize this data to assign suitable tasks (McElvany et al., 2009) and provide constructive feedback on their students' work (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Given that teachers frequently spend extensive periods with their students, they possess comprehensive insights into each student's performance in class, leading to the expectation that their assessments would yield differentiated diagnostic information regarding students' achievements (Spinach, 2005). Teachers' evaluations often serve as the main source of information concerning their students' progress and accomplishments. The necessity for valid assessments of students' academic performance is of paramount importance (Schmidt, Kaiser & Retelsdorf, 2023).

Assessment plays an important role in education, as it evaluates whether educational objectives are being achieved and influences decisions concerning advancement, placement, grading, instructional requirements, curriculum, and, in certain

instances, funding. Classroom assessment refers to the methods used by teachers to gather information about student learning during the instructional process, which helps in guiding teaching and providing feedback to students. It is a vital component of education, offering insights into students' progress, shaping instructional methods, and impacting educational policy. In secondary education systems, assessment and grading are essential functions that determine students' academic advancement, certification, and future achievements. Teachers serve as the main assessors of student performance through continuous assessments and final examinations. While grading is anticipated to be objective and based on standardized criteria, research indicates that teacher evaluations are frequently influenced by psychological and contextual factors rather than solely by academic achievement.

In Cameroon, secondary school classrooms are marked by large class sizes, insufficient teaching resources, and an over-reliance on teacher-based assessments. Students are experiencing limited academic success, as indicated by their test scores. Various factors that may affect these scores include motivation and engagement, prior knowledge, learning styles and preferences, the quality of teachers, teacher-student ratios, availability of resources, school climate, parental income and education, as well as a nurturing family environment that can enhance academic success. The implications of deficient academic outcomes, as shown by test scores are complex: they include diminished future opportunities, heightened stress and anxiety, increased dropout rates, a lower quality of life, and broader socio-economic and societal consequences. These conditions increase the risk of subjective judgments affecting grading decisions.

Although fairness in educational assessment is important, there is insufficient empirical research focused on how psychological and cognitive biases, particularly the halo effect, manifest within the secondary school educational system. This gap is significant, as grading outcomes have a direct impact on student promotion, eligibility for examinations, and access to higher education. Consequently, this study is theoretically justified as it builds upon existing research with respect to the halo effect by exploring its presence in the educational context of Cameroon. Practically, it offers insights that can guide teacher training, assessment policies, and classroom evaluation practices aimed at enhancing fairness and objectivity in grading. It is therefore important to understand how student behaviour, reputation, and teacher expectations shape grading decisions to bolster the integrity of assessments in secondary schools.

Research Problem and Objectives of the Study

Assessment and grading play an important role in the educational process, significantly impacting students' self-image, academic paths, and motivation. Ideally, the grades assigned by teachers during educational measurement and evaluation should accurately represent students' true academic performance, grounded in objective criteria and quantifiable results. However, both practical experiences and research indicate that non-academic factors, such as student behavior, reputation, and teachers' personal expectations, can often unconsciously sway grading decisions. This phenomenon is recognized in psychological testing as the halo effect (Thorndike, 1920; Schmidt, Kaiser & Retelsdorf, 2023).

Secondary school teachers might inadvertently assign higher grades to students who exhibit good behavior or are known for their high academic performance, while penalizing those who are viewed as problematic or underachieving, regardless of their actual performance. Such biases undermine the fairness of grading, diminish transparency in evaluations, and can adversely affect students' motivation and academic self-esteem (Malouff, Emmerton & Schutte, 2013; Huang, Peng & Zheng, 2023). These biases can impair the accuracy and validity of assessments, discourage students who are struggling, decrease motivation, and erode trust in the teacher's fairness and objectivity, ultimately hindering students' learning and success.

Despite these concerns, there exists a scarcity of empirical research investigating how the halo effect influences teachers' grading of student achievement in the Mfoundi Division, particularly from the viewpoints of both students and teachers on the impact of student behavior, reputation, and teacher expectations on the perceived fairness of grading in secondary schools. Without a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms and extent of such biases, efforts to promote fair and transparent grading may prove ineffective. Consequently, this study aims to examine the influence of the halo effect on teachers' grading of student achievement in secondary and high schools. Specifically, the study examines:

- The influence of student behaviour on teachers' grading of students' achievement
- The influence of student reputation on teachers' grading of students' achievement.
- The influence of teacher expectations on teachers' grading of students' achievement.

Literature Review

Halo Effect in Teachers' Grading

According to Schmidt, Kaiser, and Retelsdorf (2023), the term 'halo effect' was introduced by Thorndike (1920) in his research on employee performance evaluations and the ratings of military officers. It is described as a widespread cognitive bias affecting the evaluation of achievement or performance (Cooper, 1981). Dennis (2007) viewed the halo effect (or halo error) as a bias that tends to increase the correlation of various assessments made by the same evaluator compared to what would occur in the absence of such bias. The domain of achievement where this effect is triggered may either resemble or be entirely distinct from the domain where the initial evaluation takes place. Consequently, halo errors hold potential importance in any context where ratings are utilized to offer feedback on performance (Dennis, 2007). This phenomenon refers to the inclination of an evaluator's overall impression of an individual to sway their judgments concerning that individual's specific attributes. In simpler terms, if a person is perceived as competent or incompetent in one area, that general perception tends to influence evaluations of other, unrelated traits.

Cooper (1981) identified five interconnected sources of illusory halo effects that typically occur simultaneously: under sampling, engulfing, insufficient concreteness, inadequate rater motivation and knowledge, and cognitive distortions. Under sampling occurs when the rater overestimates the relationship between two categories due to a

lack of information, compelling them to depend on a general impression. Haloed ratings resulting from engulfing arise from the assumption that either a general impression or specific prominent features are connected with the categories being evaluated. Insufficient concreteness arises when the characteristics of the rated categories are overly abstract for the rater. Consequently, the rater must consolidate their observations based on the common elements of the presented categories. Insufficient motivation and knowledge on the part of the rater can lead to halo effects if they do not invest adequate effort in the rating process or fail to recognize that their ratings may be swayed by a halo effect. Cognitive distortions can also contribute to halo effects when the rater either omits or adds information during the rating process. Information may be lost due to memory effects, while raters' beliefs concerning correlations across categories can be introduced, leading to an inflated perception of the actual relationships between categories (Schmidt, Kaiser & Retelsdorf, 2023).

Manga and De Gioannis (2023) raised concerns concerning the subjectivity inherent in teacher-based assessments. While grading is intended to objectively reflect academic competence, teachers may, whether intentionally or unintentionally, let their personal perceptions and stereotypes affect their evaluations. Such grading methods can lead to educational disparities, favoring certain students over others, and consequently compromising the fairness, validity, and reliability that are important to educational assessment. The repercussions of biased grading extend beyond classroom performance, as grades significantly impact students' motivation, educational ambitions, progression through their schooling, and access to future educational opportunities (Manga & De Gioannis, 2023).

Student Behaviour and Teachers' Grading

According to Ferman & Fontes (2022), student behavior is recognized as a significant factor affecting teachers' assessment methods and students grading. Classroom behavior encompasses students' adherence to school regulations, attentiveness, collaboration with peers, discipline, and engagement with both teachers and fellow peers. Teachers' observations of these behaviors during the educational process may consciously or unconsciously affect their grading decisions regarding learners (Ferman & Fontes, 2022). Schmidt, Kaiser & Retelsdorf (2023) noted that the overall perceptions teachers hold about students impact their academic evaluations of students' work, even when students demonstrate identical levels of performance and achievement. Students displaying positive behavioral traits or favorable impressions tend to receive considerably higher evaluations compared to those viewed less favorably. Classroom behavior plays an important role in shaping positive or negative impressions that subsequently affect teachers' academic assessments, thereby introducing systematic bias into grading practices (Schmidt, Kaiser & Retelsdorf, 2023).

Sankey et al. (2021) observed that teachers frequently depend on contextual information and factors beyond students' observable academic performance when assessing their work. Positive classroom behavior enhances favorable perceptions of students, whereas disruptive behavior leads to negative evaluations. These cognitive processes largely function outside the conscious awareness of teachers, rendering behavioral bias challenging to identify, even when teachers aim to evaluate students

impartially (Sankey et al., 2021). Well-defined marking rubrics significantly diminished the impact of subjective impressions, including views on students' behavior, on grading decisions. In contrast, when grading criteria are vague or poorly defined, teachers tended to rely more on personal impressions and behavioral traits in students' evaluation.

Implementing objective assessment procedures is vital for reducing behavior-related grading bias (Bonefeld et al., 2024). Teachers' grading choices are swayed by non-academic characteristics of students in addition to their academic performance. While much of the existing literature has concentrated on demographic factors such as gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, the review also emphasized that behavioral traits often interact with teachers' perceptions and expectations, thus contributing to subjective grading practices. Such practices compromise the fairness, transparency, and validity of educational assessments (Manga & De Giannis, 2023).

Student Reputation and Teacher Expectations

Research studies underscore the impact of biases on teachers' attitudes and behaviors towards their students. Students from low-income backgrounds frequently encounter diminished expectations from teachers, which can adversely affect their academic engagement and success (Timmermans et al., 2015; Fitzpatrick et al., 2016). Socioeconomic status influences the resources availability like tutoring, educational materials, and technology. Students from more affluent socioeconomic backgrounds generally benefit from increased opportunities and support systems that contribute to their academic achievement (Yuomeyse, 2026). Conversely, research also suggests that elevated expectations from teachers can act as a protective factor for students in poverty, thereby improving their academic performance and aspirations (Gregory & Huang, 2013; Van den Brock et al., 2020). Factors such as teacher mindsets, the quality of student-teacher relationships, and a teacher's competencies and behaviors have all been proposed as mechanisms that may shape biased expectations.

Teachers' expectations significantly influence their relationships with students, affecting aspects such as perceived closeness and conflict (Sebastian Cherng, 2017; Summers et al., 2017). These relationships may differ due to biases connected with student appearance, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. When positive relationships are established through high expectations, they frequently result in improved academic achievement and favorable educational recommendations for students, highlighting the necessity for equal treatment and supportive interactions (Timmermans et al., 2019). Teachers' behaviors towards their students are profoundly shaped by their expectations. When teachers hold varying expectations based on their perceptions of student ability, it can lead to disparities in learning opportunities and academic results (Timmermans & Rubie-Davies, 2018).

The expectations held by teachers are shaped not only by objective academic data but also by their interpretations of various student attributes, including prior achievements, behavior, social backgrounds, and interactions within the classroom (Wang, Rubie-Davies, and Meissel 2018). Lomholt (2026) further noted that teachers' expectations are influenced by insights regarding student engagement, social traits, and learning environments, indicating that teachers consider a wider range of perceptions about

students when assessing their academic potential. Cu et al. (2019) found that reputational information plays an important role in teachers' grading choices, with negative reputations proving particularly difficult to alter.

Students who had a negative perception experienced a less favorable interpretation of their subsequent performance, indicating that reputation can skew the evaluation process and strengthen pre-existing perceptions. Teachers' beliefs regarding students' capabilities can turn into self-fulfilling prophecies, as these expectations affect teachers' instructional methods, feedback, attention, and the opportunities they offer to students. When teachers maintain positive expectations rooted in favorable student reputations, those students are likely to receive more encouragement and support, while those linked to negative reputations may face diminished academic evaluations and opportunities (Jussi and Harber, 2005).

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Participants

The study sample consisted of 347 students and 7 teachers from both public and private secondary and high schools in the Mfoundi Division of the Center region of Cameroon. The selection of the student population was conducted using a stratified sampling method. The demographic characteristics of the participants are detailed in the table below.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the students' respondents

No	Variable	Modalities	Frequency	Percentage
1	Gender	Male	137	39.5%
		Female	210	60.5%
2	Age Range	14-16years	184	53.0%
		17-18years	136	39.2%
		19-20years	27	7.8%
3	School	Private	125	36.0%
		Public	222	64.0%
4	Class	Form Five	118	34.0%
		Form Four	65	18.7%
		Lower Sixth	81	23.3%
		Upper Sixth	83	23.9%

The sample comprised 347 students and was predominantly female (60.5%, $n = 210$), with males accounting for 39.5% ($n = 137$). Most participants were aged 14–16 years (53.0%, $n = 184$), followed by those aged 17–18 years (39.2%, $n = 136$) and 19–20 years (7.8%, $n = 27$). Public-school students constituted 64.0% ($n = 222$) of the sample, compared with 36.0% ($n = 125$) from private schools. By academic level, Form Five had the largest representation (34.0%, $n = 118$), followed by Upper Sixth (23.9%, $n = 83$), Lower Sixth (23.3%, $n = 81$), and Form Four (18.7%, $n = 65$). Overall, 47.2% of participants were in the Sixth Form cycle, while 57.9% were enrolled in terminal examination classes (Form Five and Upper Sixth).

Concerning the teachers participants, their teaching experience varied from 2 to 16 years, covering subjects such as History, Citizenship Education, Geography, Economics, English Literature and English language. The majority had undergone some form of training through teacher education and professional development initiatives, whereas a minority had not received formal instruction in assessment and grading.

Table 2: Demographic information of teachers' respondents

Respondent	Years of Teaching	Subject(s) Taught	Assessment Training
1	4 years	English language	No
2	2 years	Geography	No
3	8 years	History	Yes
4	13 years	Economics	No
5	11 years	History, Citizenship	Yes
6	16 years	Geography	Yes
7	14 years	English Literature	Yes

Material and Design

The study data were collected using a structured interview guide facilitated by teachers, along with a closed-ended questionnaire administered to students in an explanatory mixed methods research design. Initially, the quantitative questionnaire was administered, which was subsequently complemented by a qualitative interview guide to enhance the understanding of the halo effect on teachers' grading of student achievement.

The researcher developed the questionnaire to align with the context and characteristics of the participants. The questionnaire were divided into two sections: Section A focused on demographic variables. Section B included items that assess students' perceptions of the halo effect in teacher grading practices, categorized into four dimensions: Student Behavior (6 items), Student Reputation (5 items), Teacher Expectations (6 items), and Perceived Grading Fairness and Halo Effect (9 items). The questionnaire utilized a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Reliability was evaluated through test-retest reliability, and Cronbach's alpha was employed to assess the reliability, resulting in a value of 0.86.

The structured interview guide was divided into six sections: Section A focused on demographic information, Section B addressed teachers' grading practices, Section C investigated the extent to which student behavior impacted teachers' grading and how teachers differentiated between academic performance and classroom conduct. Section D explored whether students' prior academic performance, reputation, or external opinions influenced teachers' expectations and grading decisions. Section E assessed the impact of teachers' expectations on student assessment and the strategies implemented to reduce potential grading bias. Section F examined teachers' awareness of the halo effect, the impact of non-academic factors on grading, and their views on fairness in grading practices. The structured interview guide allowed researcher to gather in-depth explanations and experiences from teachers, thereby enhancing the quantitative findings

from the student questionnaire and offering a more thorough understanding of the halo effect's influence on grading practices.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.0. A range of statistical tools: Pearson product-moment correlations, multiple linear regression analysis, mean, standard deviation, and descriptive statistics, were employed to interpret the research data. The results of the analysis were found to be statistically significant at a 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$). For the qualitative data, thematic analysis was applied. The interview responses were transcribed verbatim and reviewed multiple times to enhance familiarity with the data. Initial codes were created and organized into broader categories, leading to the development of themes and sub-themes. These themes were subsequently reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately reflected the participants' responses and addressed the research questions. The findings were presented in a narrative format, incorporating selected verbatim quotations from respondents to illustrate and support each theme.

FINDINGS

Table 3: Correlations among Study Variables

		Perceived Grading Fairness and halo effects (EGFHE)	Student Behaviour (SB)	Student Reputation (SR)	Teacher Expectations (TE)
Perceived Grading Fairness and halo effects (EGFHE)	Pearson Correlation	1	.513**	.438**	.469**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	347	347	347	347
	Bootstrap ^b	Bias	.000	-.002	.001
		Std. Error	.047	.041	.047
		95% Confidence Interval			
		Lower	.413	.352	.382
		Upper	.598	.515	.556
Student Behaviour (SB)	Pearson Correlation	.513**	1	.617**	.600**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	347	347	347	347
	Bootstrap ^b	Bias	.000	-.001	.001
		Std. Error	.047	.036	.030
		95% Confidence Interval			
		Lower	.413	.540	.538
		Upper	.598	.684	.655
Student Reputation (SR)	Pearson Correlation	.438**	.617**	1	.627**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	347	347	347	347
	Bootstrap ^b	Bias	-.002	-.001	.000
		Std. Error	.041	.036	.031
		95% Confidence Interval			
		Lower	.352	.540	.564
		Upper	.515	.684	.685
Teacher Expectations (TE)	Pearson Correlation	.469**	.600**	.627**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	347	347	347	347
	Bootstrap ^b	Bias	.001	.000	.000
		Std. Error	.047	.030	.031
		95% Confidence Interval			
		Lower	.382	.538	.564
		Upper	.556	.655	.685

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

b. Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples

The Pearson product-moment correlations were computed among 347 students to examine the relationships among perceived grading fairness and halo effects (EGFHE), student behaviour (SB), student reputation (SR), and teacher expectations (TE) among the 347 students. According to presentation in Table 3, all variables were positively and significantly correlated with one another and all the correlation coefficients were significant at the 0.01 level, with $p < .001$. Perceived grading fairness and halo effects (EGFHE) demonstrated a moderate positive correlation with student behaviour, $r = .513$, 95% bootstrap CI [.413, .598]. EGFHE was also positively associated with student reputation, $r = .438$, 95% bootstrap CI [.352, .515], and teacher expectations, $r = .469$, 95% bootstrap CI [.382, .556]. These results indicate that higher scores on EGFHE were associated with more positive student behavior, more favorable student reputation, and higher teacher expectations.

Among the predictor variables, the strongest correlation was observed between student reputation and teacher expectations, $r = .627$, 95% bootstrap CI [.564, .685]. Student behaviour was also strongly correlated with student reputation, $r = .617$, 95% bootstrap CI [.540, .684], and teacher expectations, $r = .600$, 95% bootstrap CI [.538, .655]. Thus, the findings indicate substantial interrelationships among behavioral perceptions, reputational perceptions, and teacher expectations within the student-teacher assessment context. The bootstrap estimates provide additional evidence of the stability of these associations. Bias estimates for the non-diagonal correlations ranged from $-.002$ to $.001$, and all 95% bootstrap confidence intervals remained entirely above zero. Based on 1,000 bootstrap samples, these results provide consistent evidence of positive associations among the study variables.

Table 4: Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.557 ^a	.310	.304	3.77378	.310	51.418	3	343	.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), Teacher Expectations (TE), Student Behaviour (SB), Student Reputation (SR)									

This table presents the multiple regression results examining the combined predictive contribution of Teacher Expectations (TE), Student Behaviour (SB), and Student Reputation (SR) to the dependent variable. The model produced a moderate-to-strong multiple correlation ($R = .557$), indicating a meaningful overall relationship between the three predictors and the outcome variable. The R^2 of .310 shows that TE, SB, and SR jointly explain 31.0% of the variance in the outcome. At the same time, the adjusted R^2 of .304 indicates that approximately 30.4% remains explained after adjusting for the number of predictors. The model is statistically significant, $F(3, 343) = 51.418$, $p < .001$, confirming that the predictors collectively make a significant contribution.

Table 5: ANOVA for the Regression Model

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2196.801	3	732.267	51.418	.000 ^b
	Residual	4884.801	343	14.241		
	Total	7081.602	346			
a. Dependent Variable: Perceived Grading Fairness and halo effects (EGFHE)						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Teacher Expectations (TE), Student Behaviour (SB), Student Reputation (SR)						

This table presents the ANOVA results for the regression model predicting Perceived Grading Fairness and Halo Effects (EGFHE) from Teacher Expectations (TE), Student Behaviour (SB), and Student Reputation (SR). The results show that the regression model is statistically significant, $F(3,343) = 51.418$, $p < .001$, indicating that the three predictors collectively provide a significant explanation of variations in perceived grading fairness and halo effects. The regression sums of squares (2196.801) compared with the residual sum of squares (4884.801) demonstrate that a meaningful proportion of variability in EGFHE is accounted for by the predictors.

Table 6: Regression Coefficients Predicting EGFHE

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	14.825	1.029		14.401	.000
	Student Behaviour (SB)	.311	.059	.321	5.274	.000
	Student Reputation (SR)	.143	.081	.110	1.765	.078
	Teacher Expectations (TE)	.199	.059	.208	3.383	.001
a. Dependent Variable: Perceived Grading Fairness and halo effects (EGFHE)						

This table presents the regression coefficients examining the individual predictive effects of Student Behaviour (SB), Student Reputation (SR), and Teacher Expectations (TE) on Perceived Grading Fairness and Halo Effects (EGFHE). The findings indicate that Student Behaviour is the strongest significant predictor of EGFHE, with an unstandardized coefficient of $B = .311$, standardized coefficient of $\beta = .321$, and $t = 5.274$, $p < .001$. This suggests that, controlling for the other predictors, positive differences in student behaviour are significantly associated with higher levels of perceived grading fairness and halo-effect perceptions. Teacher Expectations also make a significant positive contribution, with $B = .199$, $\beta = .208$, $t = 3.383$, $p = .001$, indicating that teacher expectations are significantly associated with EGFHE when student behaviour and reputation are held constant. In contrast, Student Reputation does not make a statistically significant unique contribution, despite its positive coefficient ($B = .143$, $\beta = .110$, $t = 1.765$, $p = .078$). Its non-significance suggests that its observed bivariate relationship with EGFHE may overlap with student behaviour and teacher expectations. The regression equation can therefore be expressed as

$$\text{EGFHE} = 14.825 + .311\text{SB} + .143\text{SR} + .199\text{TE}.$$

Presentation of Qualitative Findings

Theme One: Academic Performance as the Primary Basis for Grading

Many participants noted that grading ought to primarily represent students' academic performance, as evidenced by their examination responses, mastery of the subject matter, application of knowledge, and attainment of learning outcomes. They highlighted the importance of objective indicators, including students' responses during assessments, the organization of information, language proficiency, and mastery of content. *Respondent 1 (2026) explained "Based on their responses in questions asked during evaluation". Similarly, Respondent 6 (2026) stated: "Language use, knowledge acquisition, application".* A number of respondents indicated that they depend on marking guides and assessment criteria to maintain consistency and fairness in grading. This implies that educators acknowledge the significance of objective assessment methods and strive to align their grading decisions with quantifiable learning outcomes.

Theme Two: Influence of Student Behavior on Grading Decisions

This significant theme surfaced, and most respondents recognized that constructive behaviors like classroom engagement, timeliness, discipline, and attentiveness could result in advantageous grading outcomes. *Respondent 1(2026) noted: "A student that is always active in class and answers questions might push me to add marks". Respondent 3(2026) stated: "Students who always participate in my class gain extra marks".* Conversely, certain respondents recognized that negative conduct might lead to more severe judgments. *Respondent 4 (2026) openly stated: "Recalcitrant students no matter how best they perform, I am hard on them".* The acknowledgment by certain participants that behavioral traits affect grading raises issues regarding the validity of assessments.

Theme Three: Influence of Student Reputation and Previous Performance

The study discovered that a student's reputation and prior academic success often influence teachers' expectations. Several participants recognized that awareness of a student's past accomplishments affects their interpretation of present performance. *Respondent 1(2026) indicated: "If the student proves to be a student ready to learn, good grading is expected". Similarly, Participant 5(2026) stated: "A student that you have taught and followed up his/her performance for years and the child ends up failing, that will affect you".* Simultaneously, certain respondents exhibited an understanding of this possible bias and shared methods to mitigate its impact. These methods encompassed anonymous grading and emphasizing the quality of each individual work.

Theme Four: Teacher Expectations and Assessment Practices

Participants commonly acknowledged that teacher expectations influence assessment judgments. Teachers recognized that they sometimes evaluate student work differently depending on prior beliefs about students' abilities. *Respondent 3(2026) explained: "If I believe a student is strong or intelligent, I might read their work more generously, overlooking small errors."* Another noted: *"If a student is known to be brilliant, it may call for concern when grading"* (Respondent 2, 2026). The acknowledgment of expectation bias by respondents suggests that many teachers are aware of this challenge. However, awareness alone may not eliminate bias without deliberate institutional safeguards.

Theme Five: Awareness and Understanding of the Halo Effect

Several participants demonstrated a significant variation in their awareness of the halo effect. Although a number of them displayed a solid comprehension of the concept, others indicated minimal or no acquaintance with the term. Those respondents who were knowledgeable about the concept accurately recognized scenarios in which behavior, punctuality, participation, or past performance might affect grading decisions. *For example participant 3(2026) stated: "A student who is well behaved, punctual or performs high may have their work marked more favorably".* This implies that professional development programs should include training on psychological biases that affect teacher judgment.

Theme Six: Influence of Non-Academic Factors on Grading

Participants commonly acknowledged that non-academic factors can influence grading decisions. The identified factors include behavior, participation, effort, family background, punctuality, discipline, and interpersonal relationships. *Respondent 1(2026) stated: "Relationship ties or family background". Respondent 3(2026) identified: "Behavior and attitude, effort and improvement, participation".* This reinforces concerns that teachers may unintentionally allow personal impressions and contextual information to influence academic judgments.

Theme Seven: Perceptions of Fairness in School Grading Systems

A number of respondents expressed reservations regarding the fairness and consistency of grading practices within their schools. Several participants believed that differences in teacher standards and grading approaches create inconsistencies in student evaluation. *Respondent 2 (2026) stated: "Not all teachers have the same evaluation process." Respondent 3 (2026) explained: "One teacher might be stricter than another."* This highlights the significance of moderation processes, standardized marking systems, and cooperative assessment methods to enhance reliability and equity.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion of Findings

The quantitative analysis revealed a moderate and statistically significant positive correlation between perceived grading fairness and halo effects, as well as student behavior $r = .513, p < .001$, with a 95% bootstrap confidence interval of [.413, .598]. Student behaviour was identified as the most substantial unique predictor of perceived grading fairness and halo effects-in the regression model, $\beta = .321, p < .001$. Consequently, among the three explanatory variables assessed, student behaviour contributed the most significantly to the variations observed in perceived grading fairness and halo effects. The qualitative findings also offer an important explanation for the observed relationship. While participants consistently recognized academic performance as the rightful basis for grading, many admitted that behaviour, participation, attentiveness, discipline, and effort could sway their grading decisions.

These factors provide a tangible rationale for the quantitative relationship. It appears that teachers may allow their overall impressions of students' classroom behaviour to affect their evaluations of academic performance. These results corroborate

the research conducted by Bietenbeck, Marcus, and Weinhardt (2022), which compared teacher-assigned scores with blindly assigned scores on high-stakes examinations, revealing that teachers systematically modified grades based on classroom behavior, granting more favorable scores to well-behaved students and less favorable scores to those exhibiting poor behaviour. Teachers may perceive positive behaviour as indicative of engagement, effort, responsibility, or a learning-oriented mindset.

The reputation of students exhibited a positive and significant correlation with perceived grading fairness, halo effects, and student behavior, $r = .438$, $p < .001$, accompanied by a 95% bootstrap confidence interval of [.352, .515]. However, when student behavior and teacher expectations were incorporated into the regression model, student reputation did not yield a statistically significant unique contribution to perceived grading fairness, halo effects, and student behavior, $\beta = .110$, $p = .078$. This result offers an important explanatory insight. At the bivariate level, the reputational standing of students is linked to perceived grading fairness, halo effects, and student behavior; however, reputation does not seem to function independently of behavior and teacher expectations.

The qualitative findings support this interpretation. Participants noted that prior academic performance, established reputations, and long-term familiarity with students can shape teachers' assessments of present performance. Student reputation was found to be strongly correlated with student behavior ($r = .617$, $p < .001$) and teacher expectations ($r = .627$, $p < .001$). Thus, it is reasonable to suggest that reputation may partially influence the expectations teachers develop concerning students and their perceptions of students' behavior. This aligns with the research findings of McNatt (2017), who identified that negative reputational information could skew evaluations, even when subsequent actual performance contradicted such information. Although that study focused on evaluations of teaching rather than the academic grades of school students, its significance lies in illustrating that reputational information can consistently affect judgment, even in the face of contrary evidence. Furthermore, Schmidt, Kaiser, and Retelsdorf (2023) investigated the halo effects in grading and the findings showed that prior performance information can sway subsequent judgments. Their findings provide evidence that evaluations can be influenced by internal biases.

The expectations held by teachers exhibited a moderate and statistically significant positive correlation with perceived grading fairness, halo effects, and student behavior, $r = .469$, $p < .001$, with a 95% bootstrap confidence interval of [.382, .556]. Furthermore, teacher expectations remained a significant independent predictor within the regression model, $\beta = .208$, $p = .001$. Consequently, after controlling for student behavior and reputation, teacher expectations continued to account for a significant portion of the variation in perceived grading fairness, halo effects, and student behavior. Qualitative findings offer a direct explanation for this correlation. Participants recognized that their expectations regarding students' capabilities could affect how they interpret students' work. This provides evidence of a mechanism that aligns with the statistical findings: teachers' expectations may shape the interpretation of ambiguous or borderline academic evidence.

This outcome corroborates the findings of De Boer, Timmermans, and van der Werf (2018), who, in a systematic review and meta-analysis of teacher-expectation interventions, discovered evidence that teacher expectations can be modified and that interventions aimed at addressing these expectations can impact future student achievement. Their results align with this study, as they illustrate that teacher expectations are not merely passive perceptions; rather, they can be linked to teacher behavior and student outcomes. The current findings broaden this perspective by indicating that teacher expectations may play an important role at the moment of assessment judgment itself. Schmidt, Kaiser, and Retelsdorf (2023) demonstrate that prior achievement information can affect future grading judgments, reinforcing the idea that teacher evaluations can extend beyond the immediate evidence presented in the work being assessed.

An important finding from the study indicates that student behavior, student reputation, and teacher expectations are closely linked. The correlation between student behavior and student reputation was substantial, $r = .617$, as was the correlation between student behavior and teacher expectations, $r = .600$. However, the most robust correlation observed in the entire matrix was between student reputation and teacher expectations, $r = .627$; all correlations were significant at $p < .001$. The qualitative findings provide insight into these relationships. Participants noted that past performance, behavior, participation, discipline, and other traits accumulate over time, shaping teachers' perceptions of individual students.

This suggests that teachers may form relatively stable impressions of students through ongoing classroom interactions. A student who consistently excels and exhibits positive behavior may earn a favorable reputation, which could lead to elevated expectations. In contrast, a pattern of poor performance or problematic behavior may result in a less favorable reputation and diminished expectations. This trend offers a potential explanatory framework for the quantitative findings. Rather than functioning as isolated factors, behavior, reputation, and expectations may form an interconnected system of teacher perceptions. Research on teacher judgment underscores the necessity of acknowledging such interconnected perceptions. Investigations into halo effects in teacher judgment have shown that evaluations can be swayed by information beyond the specific performance being assessed. Pélissier et al. (2021) explored halo effects in teachers' judgments and demonstrated that cognitive judgment processes can affect the assessment of students' academic attributes. The present qualitative discovery enhances this research by illustrating that teachers themselves acknowledge the impact of prior knowledge, behavior, and reputation on their evaluations.

The multiple regression model offers a comprehensive explanation of perceived grading fairness, halo effects, and student behavior. A significant model was produced by the combination of student behavior, student reputation, and teacher expectations, with $F(3, 343) = 51.418$, $p < .001$, and $R = .557$, $R^2 = .310$. Consequently, these three variables accounted for 31.0% of the variance in perceived grading fairness, halo effects, and student behavior, with an adjusted R^2 of .304. The qualitative findings lend substantial meaning to this statistical outcome. Participants did not view behavior, reputation, and expectations as separate influences. Rather, their responses suggested that teachers take

into account students' academic performance, behavior, past performance, reputation, participation, effort, and perceived ability simultaneously.

However, the individual coefficients reveal that the variables do not contribute equally. Student behavior emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .321, p < .001$), followed by teacher expectations ($\beta = .208, p = .001$), while student reputation did not provide a significant unique contribution ($\beta = .110, p = .078$). This pattern indicates that the statistical relationship among perceived grading fairness, halo effects, and student behavior and reputation is partially shared with behavior and teacher expectations. The regression analysis identifies the statistically significant variables, while the qualitative findings elucidate how these variables may influence teachers' grading judgments. The quantitative predominance of student behavior is qualitatively reflected in teachers' acknowledgments that participation and conduct can lead to either additional or reduced marks. Similarly, the independent effect of teacher expectations is evident in accounts of teachers interpreting the work of students perceived as intelligent or capable more favorably.

The qualitative findings uncovered another significant aspect: perceived discrepancies in grading standards among teachers. Participants noted that "not all teachers utilize the same evaluation process" and that "one teacher may be more stringent than another." Although this theme was not explicitly examined as a separate quantitative variable, it offers an important contextual understanding of the larger issue of grading equity. This concern is bolstered Quinn (2020), who discovered evidence of bias when teachers assessed student writing using an ambiguous grading scale, while such bias was absent when a rubric with more clearly defined criteria was employed. The alignment suggests that grading fairness cannot solely rely on teachers' intentions. The framework of the assessment system is also significant. When criteria are ambiguous, teachers possess greater latitude to depend on general impressions, including perceptions of behavior, reputation, or ability. Conversely, when criteria are clear and specific, the opportunity for such impressions to sway grades may be diminished.

The qualitative findings indicated differing levels of awareness regarding the halo effect. Certain teachers exhibited a clear understanding that factors such as behavior, punctuality, participation, and past performance could impact grading, while others showed a limited grasp of the concept. This observation is significant, as being aware of bias does not automatically lead to its removal. The quantitative results reveal notable correlations between perceived grading fairness, halo effects, and perceptions of student behavior, reputation, and teacher expectations, implying that these elements are systematically interrelated within the context of the study. Additionally, the qualitative insights illustrate that some teachers acknowledge these influences but may still describe practices that allow them to impact grading. This observation aligns with the research conducted by De Boer et al. (2018), which found that interventions can shape teacher expectations, indicating that professional development may be instrumental in addressing expectation effects. However, it is important to note that altering expectations and ensuring fair assessment are not necessarily the same process.

Implications of the Findings and Recommendations

The results of this research carry significant implications for assessment practices, teacher professional development, school leadership, and educational policy. The primary implication pertains to assessment practices. It is important to ensure that the academic grades assigned to students accurately reflect the skills and competencies that the assessment aims to evaluate. Students' behavior should be permitted to impact their academic grades, unless behavior is explicitly defined as a criterion for evaluation. If punctuality, participation, effort, and collaboration are considered educational learning outcomes, they should be assessed transparently and distinctly, rather than being formally incorporated into the students' academic scores.

Another important implication relates to teacher professional development. The professional growth of teachers should focus on directly addressing halo effects, reputational bias, teacher expectations, and other forms of subjective judgment bias. Teacher professional development should include exercises where educators assess identical student work under varying knowledge contexts. This should be followed by discussions to determine whether knowledge of a student's reputation, behavior, or past performance influenced their evaluations.

The qualitative findings regarding the disparities in teachers' grading standards highlight the necessity for institutional moderation and equity among students. Educational institutions ought to implement processes that enable teachers to collaboratively review assessment tasks, marking criteria, and examples of student work. This moderation can enhance consistency and provide opportunities for teachers to recognize variations in their personal interpretations of assessment standards. Reputation and behavioral perceptions may favor some students while disadvantaging others. A student with a favorable reputation may benefit from positive expectations, while a student with a negative reputation may need to overcome a preconceived notion, even when showing improved performance. Therefore, assessment systems should prioritize evaluating students based on current evidence of achievement, ensuring that past reputation does not serve as a lasting measure of capability.

In terms of policy, educational authorities and school leaders should formulate assessment policies that incorporate explicit provisions for grading fairness and potential biases. These policies should encompass clearly articulated assessment criteria; standardized or shared marking guides where applicable; internal moderation; processes for reviewing contested grades; professional development focused on assessment bias; appropriate implementation of anonymous marking; monitoring of grading consistency; and a distinct separation between academic and behavioral evaluations. Such measures would transfer the responsibility for equitable assessment from individual teachers to a more comprehensive institutional quality-assurance framework.

Based on the combined quantitative and qualitative findings, this study advocates for the implementation of a transparent criterion-referenced assessment system, wherein students' performance is evaluated against a fixed set of predetermined learning standards and criteria. It is essential for schools to ensure that grades are explicitly connected to well-defined learning outcomes and assessment criteria. During evaluations,

students' behavior should be distinguished from their academic performance. Factors such as behavior, punctuality, participation, and effort should only influence academic grading when they are explicitly included as part of the competencies to be assessed.

The findings of this study recommends enhancing student assessment through moderation. Educational institutions should establish regular collaborative moderation of assessment tools, marking criteria, and samples of student work. This process should be complemented by the promotion of anonymous marking wherever possible. Written assessments should be anonymized when students' identities are not necessary for the evaluation of their work. Additionally, it is recommended that teachers receive professional development focused on subjective judgment bias. Teacher training should cover halo effects, teacher-expectation effects, reputational bias, confirmation bias, and reflective evaluation.

The research further recommends the implementation of structured marking procedures to mitigate the halo effects impacting students' grades. It is important for secondary school teachers to assess student work based on explicit criteria prior to taking into account any contextual information concerning the student. The use of fixed reputational labels should be discouraged, as students ought not to be permanently defined as "brilliant," "weak," "problematic," or "poor performers." Such labels can adversely affect future teacher expectations. Additionally, there should be a framework for transparent grade review procedures, allowing students to have a suitable means of requesting clarification or reevaluation of their grades.

Another key recommendation is the establishment of a system to monitor grading consistency. Secondary school administrators should regularly assess discrepancies in marking standards across teachers, subjects, classes, and types of assessments. This initiative should be coupled with the maintenance of high expectations for all students. Teacher expectations ought to be guided by evidence of students' demonstrated learning and potential, rather than being predominantly influenced by past reputations or behaviors. It is important to differentiate student engagement from their actual achievements. While participation and effort can provide valuable insights into learning processes, they should not be automatically regarded as indicators of mastery unless they are integral to the defined assessment criteria.

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