ISSN 2278-2540 | DOI: 10.51583/IJLTEMAS | Volume XV, Issue V, May 2026

Zero-Based Grading System and Academic Performance among Quezon City University Students

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.51583/IJLTEMAS.2026.150500101

Received: 06 May 2026; Accepted: 11 May 2026; Published: 4 June 2026

ABSTRACT

The researchers analysed the student attitudes towards the Zero-Based Grading System (ZBGS) at Quezon City University and its effect on student academic performance. A descriptive quantitative approach was selected for the study. A total of 407 student participants completed a survey containing items regarding demographic profile, awareness of grading policies, understanding of criteria for academic outputs, perception of fairness in assessment, and impact on academic discipline. Data gathered revealed that the majority of participants were third-year students, from the College of Computer Studies and College of Engineering, with GWA values being in the range of either very good to good range, and a majority of the respondents had experienced ZBGS for one or two semesters. The study found that the majority of the respondents were aware of the grading policies which yielded the highest weighted mean. Moreover, the results of the analyses indicated that statistically significant differences in ZBGS assessments occurred based on year level and GWA of the respondents but not according to College/Department or length of time exposure in ZBGS. Furthermore, the correlation analysis revealed a significant relationship between ZBGS assessment and academic performance, indicating that more favorable perceptions of ZBGS were associated with better GWA. Overall, the results of this study provided evidence that students generally accepted ZBGS as a reasonable grading practice and that more favorable perceptions of the system were associated with better academic performance, supporting the clear and consistent implementation of grading policies.

Keywords: academic performance, general weighted average, higher education institution, zero-based grading system, student perception

INTRODUCTION

The evaluation of students is an important component of higher education, acting both as a method of measuring a student's academic progress and motivating a student to succeed within a given institution (Chamberlin et al., 2023). As universities modernize their digital assessments and grading systems, creating a grading policy becomes increasingly important in providing the level of transparency needed for high academic standards (McCabe, 2024). In response to the need for increased student mastery, many college-level institutions have embraced a Zero-Based Grading (ZBG) approach (Sharlene et al., 2026). Zero-Based Grading (ZBG) is an innovative academic evaluation method that focuses solely on students' raw scores without grade transmutation (Smith, 2023).

Implementation of ZBG is intended to create accountability and time management within the student population, students must perform consistently during the semester to receive favorable final grades (Sharlene et al., 2026). The impact of ZBG on student performance is complicated, several studies report that higher performance expectations motivate students to achieve more than they thought they could, however, others have identified that some students are more focused on the results-oriented aspect of the ZBG and are therefore less likely to engage in authentic fundamental learning (Muenks & Veronica Yan, 2023). Furthermore, systematic reviews suggest that grading policies significantly shape motivational processes, especially when learning in challenging or high-pressure contexts (Muenks & Veronica Yan, 2023). For this reason, there continues to be considerable debate surrounding whether or not ZBG creates additional student stress and/or discouragement for students to

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engage in challenging programs of study, thereby creating significant barriers to long term learning motivation (Chamberlin et al., 2023; Muenks & Veronica Yan, 2023).

Despite these findings there remain significant gaps in the relevant studies with respect to the relationship between student perceptions, well-being, and academic performance in the context ZBG (Sharlene et al., 2026). Although prior studies have looked into how grading policies affect student's academic outcomes, there is little empirical evidence that has looked specifically at the unique setting of Quezon City University where student coping strategies and psychological reactions to demanding grading practices have not been examined. Additionally, much of the existing literature has alternated between treating grading as a mechanical and objective metric and as a psychological stressor, which does not sufficiently describe how, for the average student at a university, these perspectives relate to each other ((Chamberlin et al., 2023; Panadero & Sánchez-Iglesias, 2025).

The primary focus of this research is to clarify how ZBG influences student academic performance and perceived well-being at Quezon City University. This research will attempt to determine whether or not the perceived accuracy of the ZBG will enhance learning, or produce an atmosphere that reduces students' motivation and performance.

In order for an effective system to be put in place at the university, this study will provide a complete and complete analysis of the ZBG system of evaluating students and students' perceptions of their levels of engagement in assessing their own academic performance. The analysis will focus on the relationships between how the students perceive their environment, measure their psychological engagement, and their actual academic performance. The analysis will be tied directly to the student population's physical engagement in assessing their academic performance and the university's goal of providing quality education.

This research is significant for two reasons: (a) it provides the university administration with valuable information to utilise and improve the university's assessment policies, and (b) it is significant to the overall field of educational research in its contribution of localized data to grading systems. This study ultimately provides evidence to support a university's grading system can help promote student success and the development of students academically (Sharlene et al., 2026)

Statement of the Problem

The objective of this study is to assess students' perceptions of the Zero-Based Grading System (ZBGS) in relation to their experiences as students in Quezon City University. Under ZBGS, all attempts (quizzes, tests, projects) at fulfilling an assessment are combined to make up a grade and count from a base of 0 points. After gathering data on how students react to this new form of assessment and their grades as a result of using it, the investigator has identified 3 variables of interest regarding how students view their grading experience: how accurately they perceive their grades based on actual performance, how well they demonstrate academic success, and how the ZBGS affects them psychologically.

Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of:

1.1.year level;

1.2.department; and

1.3.GWA for the last two semesters under ZBGS?

2. How do the respondents assess the Zero-Based Grading System (ZBGS) in Quezon City University in terms of:

2.1. awareness of grading policies;

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2.2. understanding of criteria for academic outputs;

2.3. perception of fairness in assessment; and

2.4. view on the system's impact on academic discipline?

3. Is there a significant difference in the respondents' overall assessment of the Zero-Based Grading System (ZBGS) in Quezon City University when grouped according to their profile variables?

4. What is the academic performance of the respondents based on their General Weighted Average (GWA) under the Zero-Based Grading System?

5. Is there a significant relationship between the assessment of the respondents on the Zero-Based Grading System (ZBGS) and their academic performance?

Related Studies

The characteristics of grading systems are linked with the motivation of students to perform well academically, student perceptions of fairness in assessments, and the privacy of students when being assessed. Clarity in grading standards enhances student involvement and reduces misunderstanding compared to ambiguity (Cain et al., 2022; Dela Cruz et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2024; Victor, 2022).

Research conducted in the Philippines regarding Zero-Based Grading (ZBG) indicates that ZBG has a dual impact for students. While ZBG offers students greater transparency and discipline, it also produces an increase in workload and stress, as third-year engineering students at Bulacan State University provided higher ratings of negative attributes than positive attributes while simultaneously placing a high value on fairness (Sharlene et al., 2026; Victor, 2022). Global research on non-conventional grading systems (such as specifications-based grading and standards-based grading) reveals a comparable trend, although initial anxiety is experienced regarding non-traditional grading systems, students develop a higher sense of motivation, ownership, and experience lower levels of competitive stress once students have an understanding of what are clear and manageable expectations for success (Buckmiller et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2024; Streifer et al., 2024).

Theoretical foundations suggest that mastery-based grading, such as the ZBG, should emphasize learning outcomes rather than the mere accumulation of points, as this approach helps self-regulation. At the same time, institutional support is essential in reducing inconsistencies and minimizing student distress. (Brookhart, 2017; Chamberlin et al., 2023; Guskey. Thomas & Link, 2019) .

While these findings provide insight into the potential for ZBG, there are no local studies conducted at Quezon City University (QCU) that examine student perspectives of ZBG, only studies within the engineering or high school domains or research conducted in countries other than the Philippines that do not share the same ZBG structural elements (Sharlene et al., 2026; Victor, 2022).Therefore, this research study will provide quantitative data regarding QCU's students' perspectives regarding ZBG, and their academic performance will provide data-driven recommendations for improvements in the educational.

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Quantitative descriptive-correlational was the selected research method of this study on the implementation of the Zero-Based Grading System (ZBG) and how it relates to academic achievement at Quezon City University (QCU). The descriptive-correlational research method of study supported the collection of data in order to describe, explain, and identify relationships with respect to the perception of how the ZBG is being implemented and how it impacts upon student performance.

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Following the guidelines for reliable research methods through descriptive-correlational research, this method utilized observational methods of data collection together with careful planning to develop a viable data analysis and interpretation plan using statistical analysis as part of the research conclusion.

A description of the characteristic profile of perception toward the ZBG is determined by utilizing five distinct assessment dimensions (awareness of grading policies, understanding of criteria, perception of fairness, impact on academic discipline, and transparency). The strength and direction of the relationship between these five perception dimensions and GPA is examined through correlational analysis without manipulation of either the perception dimensions or GPA measures. The non-experimental nature of this approach to research, which allows for the measurement of naturally occurring outcomes within the context of the university environment, makes it the best choice for this study

Data Gathering

Data Gathering Tools

The study will utilize a researcher-made questionnaire titled "Zero-Based Grading System and Academic Performance Questionnaire." It is composed of two parts: Part I gathers the demographic profile of the respondents (year level, college, GWA range, and number of semesters under the Zero-Based Grading System), while Part II consists of a 4-point Likert scale measuring their perceptions of the Zero-Based Grading System in terms of awareness of grading policies, understanding of criteria for academic outputs, perception of fairness in assessment, and impact on academic discipline. The questionnaire will be administered through Google Forms using the university's institutional account.

Population and Sample Size

The target population of the study consists of approximately 12,000 students currently enrolled at Quezon City University who have experienced the Zero-Based Grading System across all year levels and colleges. The sample size will be computed using Slovin's formula for a finite population at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, yielding a required sample of 387 respondents. A stratified proportional random sampling technique will be employed to ensure that the sample is representative of each college (College of Computer Studies, College of Engineering, College of Education, and College of Business and Accountancy) according to their proportion in the overall student population.

Data Gathering Procedure

First, the researchers will seek approval from their research adviser to administer the questionnaire to Quezon City University students. After the adviser's permission is granted, the finalized questionnaire will be encoded into a Google Form using the university's institutional account. The survey link and QR code will then be shared with qualified students during class breaks and through online class groups to reach different year levels and colleges. Students who voluntarily participate will complete the questionnaire online, the form settings will prevent multiple submissions and will not record names to maintain anonymity. Once the data collection period ends, the responses will be downloaded, checked for completeness, and organized in a spreadsheet for statistical analysis.

Statistical Treatment of Data

The data gathered from the Google Forms survey will be treated statistically. To further analyze the gathered data, the following statistical treatments are used by the researchers:

Weighted Mean

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum(f \cdot X)}{\sum f}$$

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whereas:
$\bar{x}$ = weighted mean, f = frequency, X = Likert scale value (1-4), n = number of data

This study uses weighted mean to determine the level of students' understanding of ZBGS across four dimensions (awareness of grading policies, understanding of criteria for academic outputs, perception of fairness in assessment, and view on the system's impact on academic discipline).

Table 1. 4-Point Likert Scale Used

Response	**Score (X)**	**Verbal Equivalent**
Strongly Agree	4	SA
Agree	3	A
Disagree	2	D
Strongly Disagree	1	SD

Table 2. Verbal Interpretation

Range	**Verbal Interpretation**
3.26 – 4.00	Strongly Agree (SA)
2.51 – 3.25	Agree (A)
1.76 – 2.50	Disagree (D)
1.00 - 1.75	Strongly Disagree (SD)

One-Way ANOVA

$$F = \frac{MSB}{MSW}$$

F = Computed ANOVA F-ratio

MSB = Mean Square Between Groups (variation between group means)

MSW = Mean Square Within Groups (variation within each group means)

This study uses One-Way ANOVA to determine whether there is a significant difference in the respondents' overall assessment of the Zero-Based Grading System (ZBGS) when grouped according to their profile variables such as year level, department, and GWA. The ANOVA test compares the mean scores of different groups to identify if observed differences are statistically significant or due to chance. The resulting F-value is then compared to the p-value or F-critical value at a 0.05 level of significance to determine whether to accept or reject the null hypothesis. A p-value less than or equal to 0.05 indicates a significant difference among group means, while a p-value greater than 0.05 indicates no significant difference.

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson-r)

$$r = \frac{n(\sum XY) - (\sum X)(\sum Y)}{\sqrt{[n\sum X2 - (\sum X)2][n\sum Y2 - (\sum Y)2]}}$$

whereas:
r = correlation coefficient

X = perception scores

Y = self-reported GPA range

n = number of respondents

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This study uses Pearson-r to identify the significant relationship between students' perceptions of ZBGS and their self-reported academic performance (GWA range). Correlation strength is interpreted as: 0.00-0.19 (very low), 0.20-0.39 (low), 0.40-0.59 (moderate), 0.60-0.79 (high), 0.80-1.00 (very high).

Table 3. Correlation Strength

r-value	**Interpretation**
0.00 - 0.19	Very Low
0.20 - 0.39	Low
0.40 - 0.59	Moderate
0.60 - 0.79	High
0.80 - 1.00	Very High

Frequency and Percentage

$$\% = \frac{f}{N} \times 100$$

whereas:
% = percentage

f = frequency

N = total respondents

These profile respondents' demographic characteristics and self-reported GPA ranges. Self-reported GWA validity. Research confirms high reliability (r = 0.82-0.97) of student GPA self-reports for group-level analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 4. Demographic Profile (n = 407)

Variable	**Category**	**f**	**%**
Year Level	First Year	70	17.2
	Second Year	99	24.3
	Third Year	195	47.9
	Fourth Year	43	10.6
College/Department	Computer Studies	138	33.9
	Education	94	23.1
	Engineering	115	28.3
	Business and Accountancy	60	14.7
GWA	1.00 - 1.25	64	15.
	1.26 - 1.75	198	48.6
	1.76 - 2.25	114	28
	2.26 - 2.75	18	4.
	2.76 - 3.00	9	2.2
	I don’t know	4	0.8
Semesters under ZBGS	1 semester	67	16.5
	2 semesters	324	79.6
	3 semesters	8	2
	4 semesters	8	2

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Table 4 presents the demographic profile of the 407 student-respondents. Of the total number of respondents, 47.9% are third year students; 24.3% are second years; 17.2% are first years; and 10.6% of respondents are in fourth year. Thus, the student sample is primarily comprised of upper-middle year students who have had several semesters in which to utilize the Zero-Based Grading System and give them a more informed basis with which to evaluate its use and impact on their academic programs.

Analysing the demographic data by college/department, it can be determined that the largest portion of respondents (33.9%) was from the College of Computer Studies; 28.3% were from the College of Engineering, 23.1% from the College of Education; and 14.7% from the College of Business and Accountancy. Overall, the distribution of the respondents demonstrates that the majority of the findings will provide an accurate representation of students whose degree programmes support the use of structured approaches to assessment and grading systems.

The majority of respondents for both semesters report GWA in 1.26-1.75, at 48.6% of the total. This indicates a "Very Good" performance level (1.00-1.25) - 15.7% were very high achievers, 28% achieved between 1.76-2.25, which is also considered a strong performance level. Only a minority of respondent's report GWA between 2.26-3.00 (a total of 6.6%, combining both ranges), thus, most students under ZBGS maintain satisfactory academic standing. The number of respondents not reporting a GWA (0.8%) was limited, which may be attributed to limited access to official grades or lack of attention to grades. Most respondents (79.6%) have only experienced the Zero-Based Grading System for two semesters; approximately 16.5% only been subjected to one semester of the ZBGS, and a very small number of respondents (4.0% combined) have been exposed to three or four semesters of ZBGS. Therefore, the majority of individuals completing the research are relatively new to ZBGS, with most having only experienced either one or two semesters, and thus such a relatively small sample may result in diminished confidence in their knowledge of academic policies, grading policies, and evaluation criteria.

Assessment of ZBGS (Awareness, Understanding, Fairness, Discipline)

Table 5. Mean Perceptions of ZBGS (Scale: 1=SD to 4=SA; n=407)

Variable	Mean	SD	Interpretation
A. Awareness of Policies	3.45	0.73	Strongly Agree
B. Understanding of Criteria	3.40	0.74	Strongly Agree
C. Fairness	3.34	0.79	Strongly Agree
D. Impact on Discipline	3.38	0.75	Strongly Agree
Overall Mean	3.39	0.75	Strongly Agree

The overall strong agreement ($M = 3.39$) indicates broad acceptance of ZBGS among Quezon City University students, particularly in awareness ($M = 3.45$), likely reflecting effective communication of grading expectations (Brookhart, 2017; Liu et al., 2024).

Slightly lower fairness perceptions ($M = 3.34$) align with documented concerns about equitable grading practices, especially given demographic patterns such as high-GWA students (Table 4), where top performers often favor relative systems (Buckmiller et al., 2017; McCabe, 2024).

Uniformly low SDs across dimensions suggest minimal controversy, unlike more divisive curve-based approaches elsewhere (Chamberlin et al., 2023), supporting ZBGS's potential to foster discipline ($M = 3.38$) and motivation through clearer standards ((Muenks & Veronica Yan, 2023; Streifer et al., 2024)). Targeted interventions addressing fairness for lower-year or Business students could further enhance equity (Victor, 2022).

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Significant Differences by Profile

Table 6. One-Way ANOVA Results on Respondents' Overall Assessment of ZBGS by Profile Variables

Profile Variable	Group	Count	Mean	F	p-value	Interpretation
Year Level	First Year	70	3.2824	3.0626	3.0626	Significant
	Second Year	99	3.3153			
	Third Year	195	3.4217			
	Fourth Year	43	3.6134			
College/Department	Computer Studies	138	3.3257	1.6991	0.1666	Not significant
	Education	94	3.5116			
	Engineering	115	3.3973			
	Business and Accountancy	60	3.3475			
GWA	a. - 1.25	64	3.8521	28.8945	<0.001	Significant
	1.26 - 1.75	198	3.5103			
	1.76 - 2.25	114	3.0304			
	2.26 - 2.75	18	3.1456			
	2.76 - 3.00	9	2.6905			
Semesters under ZBGS	1 semester	67	3.3427	0.3018	0.8241	Not significant
	2 semesters	324	3.4031			
	3 semesters	8	3.2740			
	4 semesters or more	8	3.4771			

Significant Differences in Respondents' Overall Assessment of ZBGS by Profile Variables

Table 6 presents the one-way ANOVA results on the respondents' overall assessment of the Zero-Based Grading System (ZBGS) when grouped according to their profile variables. The findings show that GWA and year level have significant differences in assessment, while semesters under ZBGS and college/department do not. This means that students' academic standing and year level are associated with how they view ZBGS, but the length of exposure to the system and their department are not.

Differences in ZBGS assessment according to semesters under ZBGS

Respondents with 1 semester of ZBGS exposure scored a mean of 3.3427, 2 semesters at 3.4031, 3 semesters at 3.2740, and 4 or more semesters at 3.4771. The non-significant ANOVA result indicates consistent overall assessments regardless of exposure length (Buckmiller et al., 2017). Though longer exposure showed a slightly higher mean, it lacked statistical meaningfulness, aligning with literature on stable perceptions in standards-based systems over time (Streifer et al., 2024).

Differences in ZBGS assessment according to GWA

Higher GWA groups rated ZBGS more favorably: 1.00–1.25 (M=3.8521), 1.26–1.75 (M=3.5103), 1.76–2.25 (M=3.0304), 2.26–2.75 (M=3.1456), and 2.76–3.00 (M=2.6905). The significant ANOVA difference supports that top performers view relative grading as equitable and motivating, while lower performers perceive greater challenges (Chamberlin et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2024). This pattern implies better-aligned habits among high achievers (Cain et al., 2022).

Differences in ZBGS assessment according to college/department

Education students led with M=3.5116, followed by Engineering (3.3973), Business and Accountancy (3.3475), and Computer Studies (3.3257). Non-significant ANOVA results indicate uniform perceptions across disciplines, suggesting ZBGS applicability beyond program-specific demands (Sharlene et al., 2026).

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Differences in ZBGS assessment according to year level

Means increased with progression: First Year (3.2824), Second Year (3.3153), Third Year (3.4217), and Fourth Year (3.6134). Significant ANOVA differences highlight advanced students' more positive views, likely from accumulated experience and adaptation (Brookhart, 2017; Muenks & Veronica Yan, 2023). Lower years may still face adjustment pressures (Dela Cruz et al., 2025).

Academic performance of the respondents based on GWA

Table 7. Academic Performance of the Respondents Based on GWA under ZBGS (n = 407)

GWA Range	f	%	Interpretation
1.00 – 1.25	64	15.7	Excellent
1.26 – 1.75	199	48.9	Very Good
1.76 – 2.25	116	28.5	Good
2.26–2.75	19	4.7	Fair
2.76–3.00	9	2.2	Passing/Low
I don't know	4	0.1	Not reported

Table 7 shows the academic performance distribution of respondents under the Zero-Based Grading System (ZBGS) based on General Weighted Average (GWA). The largest group falls within the 1.26–1.75 range (very good), comprising 199 students or 48.9%, followed by the 1.76–2.25 range (good) with 116 students or 28.5%, indicating that most respondents achieved favorable academic standing ((Buckmiller et al., 2017).

Meanwhile, 64 respondents (15.7%) reached excellent levels of 1.00–1.25, while lower brackets of 2.26–3.00 included few students, suggesting limited weaker performance under ZBGS (Brookhart, 2017; Streifer et al., 2024). The four "I don't know" responses likely reflect incomplete grade access rather than broader issues (Liu et al., 2024).

Significant relationship between ZBGS assessment and academic performance

Table 8. Pearson Correlation between Respondents' Assessment of ZBGS and Academic Performance

ZBGS Assessment Variable	N	Pearson r	p-value	Interpretation
Awareness of grading policies	407	-0.400	$p < 0.001$	Significant, Moderate Negative
Understanding of criteria	407	-0.419	$p < 0.001$	Significant, Moderate Negative
Fairness in assessment	407	-0.441	$p < 0.001$	Significant, Moderate Negative
Impact on academic discipline	407	-0.420	$p < 0.001$	Significant, Moderate Negative

The Pearson correlation results indicate that all four ZBGS assessment variables awareness of grading policies, understanding of criteria, fairness in assessment, and impact on academic discipline are significantly related to academic performance (all $p < 0.001$), with moderate negative correlations observed across each (Brookhart, 2017; Chamberlin et al., 2023).

This means students who rated ZBGS more positively tended to have better academic performance, as lower GWA values (e.g., 1.00–1.75) represent higher achievement in the Philippine grading scale (Buckmiller et al., 2017). Among these, fairness in assessment showed the strongest relationship, suggesting that perceptions of equitable evaluation play a key role in academic outcomes under relative grading systems like ZBGS (Cain et al., 2022; McCabe, 2024).

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CONCLUSION

This study examined the students' perceptions of the Zero-Based Grading System (ZBGS) in Quezon City University and its relationship with their academic performance. Overall, the findings show that the respondents generally have a positive assessment of ZBGS, indicating that the system is understood, accepted, and seen as supportive of academic discipline.

The demographic profile of the respondents showed that most were third-year students, came largely from the College of Computer Studies and Engineering, had GWA values mostly in the very good to good range, and had experienced ZBGS for only one to two semesters. This suggests that the respondents were mostly upper-middle year students with limited exposure to the system, yet already had enough experience to evaluate it meaningfully.

In terms of perception, the respondents strongly agreed with the statements describing ZBGS in relation to awareness of grading policies, understanding of assessment criteria, fairness, and academic discipline. This indicates that the grading system is generally viewed positively by the students and that it may help promote clearer expectations, responsibility, and consistent performance.

The analysis of differences by profile variables showed that students' overall assessment of ZBGS differed significantly according to year level and GWA, but not according to college/department or length of exposure to the system. This means that students' academic standing and year level influence how they view ZBGS, while their department and number of semesters under the system do not appear to create meaningful differences in perception.

The academic performance results further showed that most respondents fall within the very good to good GWA range, which reflects satisfactory academic standing under ZBGS. In addition, the correlation analysis revealed a significant relationship between students' assessment of ZBGS and their academic performance. Students who viewed the system more favorably tended to have better academic performance, showing that positive perceptions of grading policies, criteria, fairness, and discipline are associated with stronger academic outcomes.

Overall, the study confirms that the Zero-Based Grading System is generally acceptable to the respondents and is linked with positive academic performance outcomes. It also highlights that students' perceptions of the system are shaped more by their academic level and performance than by their department or length of exposure. This implies that continuous clarification of grading policies, fair implementation of assessment criteria, and support for student discipline may strengthen the effectiveness of ZBGS in Quezon City University.

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