

# EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES ON GRADE INFLATION, MOTIVATIONAL GRADING, AND EMOTIONAL RESPONSES

**Anita Muho**

Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Education  
University "Aleksandër Moisiu" Durrës  
Kampusi Universitar, Spitallë, 2000, Durrës, Albania  
**E-mail address: anitamuh@yahoo.it**  
**ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8965-9714>**

**Rregjina Gokaj**

Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Education  
University "Aleksandër Moisiu" Durrës  
Kampusi Universitar, Spitallë, 2000, Durrës, Albania  
**E-mail address: rregjinagokaj@gmail.com**  
**ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-7365-1942>**

**Helena Grillo Mukli**

Department of Albanian Language, Faculty of Education  
University "Aleksandër Moisiu" Durrës  
Kampusi Universitar, Spitallë, 2000, Durrës, Albania  
**E-mail address: helenagrillo@yahoo.com**  
**ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1402-6706>**

**Lindita Lutaj**

Department of Pedagogy, Faculty of Education  
University "Aleksandër Moisiu" Durrës  
Kampusi Universitar, Spitallë, 2000, Durrës, Albania  
**E-mail address: l.lutaj@yahoo.com**  
**ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9469-8862>**

## ABSTRACT

**Aim.** This study investigates the multifaceted nature of grading within the Albanian educational system, aiming to comprehend its complexities and impact on educators.

It focuses on grade inflation, motivating grading practices, and educators' emotional responses, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Methods.** The research addresses educators' perceptions of grade inflation, strategies for motivating grades, and emotional experiences in assigning end-of-semester grades. Quantitative analyses are utilized to gather comprehensive insights. Data collection includes surveys and interviews with educators across various educational contexts.

**Results.** The findings reveal significant difficulties for educators in assigning partially undeserved grades and providing motivating grades. Despite these difficulties, educators express pride in their grading practices. The study highlights the emotional landscape of grading, particularly the heightened stress during the pandemic. It also assesses educators' perceptions of grade inflation and its impact on the assessment system.

**Conclusions.** Albanian educators face grading challenges, especially with undeserved grades and grade inflation, impacting their emotions. Support, localized strategies, and policy reforms are needed to enhance the educational experience and integrity.

**Practical application.** The insights gained from this study can inform educators, policymakers, and stakeholders, fostering a conducive environment for learning, growth, and equity. The research emphasizes the importance of localized strategies to enhance the grading experience within the Albanian educational system.

**Cognitive value.** This comprehensive approach contributes valuable knowledge to the discourse on educational grading practices in Albania. By exploring nuanced aspects of grading, the study sets the stage for meaningful discussions and interventions, addressing the unique challenges faced by Albanian educators.

**Keywords:** educators' perspectives, grade inflation, motivational grading, emotional responses

## INTRODUCTION

The grading process stands as a critical pillar, shaping the academic trajectory of students and influencing the dynamics of the educational system. Grading is not merely an administrative task; it is a nuanced practice that reflects educational values, fairness, and the efficacy of teaching methodologies.

This study aims to provide a holistic understanding of the multifaceted nature of grading in Albania and to unravel the complexities inherent in the grading dynamics within the Albanian educational landscape. Our exploration encompasses educators' perspectives on grade inflation, probing into the perceived impact on the integrity of the assessment system. Additionally, we aim to unravel the strategies educators employ to provide motivating grades throughout the semester, examining variations based on the educational context and student population. Lastly, we seek to understand the emotional terrain of educators as they assign end-of-semester grades, particularly considering the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The assessment practices in any educational system are key to fostering an environment that promotes learning, growth, and equity. Through quantitative and qualitative analyses, this study seeks to contribute valuable insights that can inform educators, policymakers, and stakeholders in their endeavors to refine and optimize the grading experience for both educators and students. By delving into the nuances of grading dynamics, we aspire to pave the way for meaningful discussions and interventions that will enhance the overall educational journey in Albania. This study will answer the following research questions.

- How do educators in Albania perceive the impact of grade inflation on the integrity of the assessment system, and what specific concerns or challenges do they associate with this phenomenon?
- In what ways do educators navigate the challenges of providing motivating grades during the semester, and how do their strategies differ based on the educational context and student population?
- To what extent do educators feel a sense of pride or concern regarding the grades they assign to students at the end of the semester, and what factors contribute to these emotions, particularly considering the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Perceptions of Grade Inflation in the Albanian Educational System**

Grade inflation, characterized by a consistent rise in academic grades over time, has garnered significant attention globally. In the Albanian educational context, educators' perceptions of grade inflation play a crucial role in understanding its impact on the integrity of the assessment system.

Grade inflation is widespread, with scholars like Stuart Rojstaczer and Christopher Healy (2012) emphasizing its global prevalence and implications for academic standards. They argue that the increase in grades may pose challenges to accurately assessing student performance and maintaining the integrity of the grading system. Investigating grading practices within the Balkan region, which includes Albania, is essential. Liridona Jemini-Gashi and Naime Hoxha (2024) conducted a study on grading practices in Kosovo, offering insights into regional factors that may influence educators' perceptions of grade inflation.

Daniel A. DeCino et al. (2023) conducted a study exploring how educators respond to grade inflation by adapting pedagogical strategies. This study investigates the changes in assessment practices and evaluates the effectiveness of interventions aimed at mitigating the impact of grade inflation. Understanding these responses is crucial for developing informed strategies within the Albanian educational system.

The integrity of the assessment system is fundamental to maintaining the credibility and effectiveness of education. When grades are perceived as inflated, concerns arise regarding the accuracy of student evaluations and the reliability of academic standards. The repercussions of grade inflation can extend beyond individual classrooms, impacting institutional reputation and the broader educational environment. While global discussions on grade inflation abound, there is a research gap concerning its specific implications and challenges within Albania. Understanding how Albanian educators perceive and navigate grade inflation provides an opportunity to address localized concerns and tailor interventions that align with the unique characteristics of the Albanian educational system.

## **Motivational Grading: Strategies and Challenges Across Educational Contexts**

Motivating students through grading practices is a critical aspect of the educational process. The following literature review examines how educators navigate the challenges of providing motivating grades during the semester and explores the variations in strategies based on the educational context and student population.

The motivation derived from academic achievements plays a pivotal role in student engagement and performance (Deci et al., 1991). Furthermore, Ambera Duka et al., (2024) state that the climatic aspects play an important role in motivating children with special needs to enhance their academic performance and social behaviors.

Grading, as a form of feedback, has the potential to positively influence students' intrinsic motivation and learning outcomes (Butler & Nisan, 1986). However, navigating the complexities of providing motivating grades involves addressing diverse challenges. Challenges in motivating students through grades may arise from varying student learning styles, diverse educational backgrounds, and differing levels of intrinsic motivation (Black & Wiliam, 1998). The pressure associated with grades can sometimes counteract their motivational potential, leading to anxiety and reduced enthusiasm (Pulfrey et al., 2011).

Educational contexts vary widely, from primary schools to higher education institutions. In elementary and middle schools, research emphasizes the importance of formative assessment and feedback in motivating students (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). In higher education, where students are more autonomous, aligning grades with individual goals and career aspirations becomes crucial (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005).

Student populations can differ significantly in terms of cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic status, and prior educational experiences. Strategies to motivate students need to be sensitive to these differences. For example, culturally responsive teaching practices may enhance motivation in culturally diverse classrooms (Gay, 2018).

Additionally, understanding the needs of first-generation college students is crucial for effective motivation strategies in higher education.

The integration of technology offers new avenues for providing motivating grades. Gamification, for instance, has shown promise in enhancing student motivation and engagement (Deterding et al., 2011). Personalized learning platforms also provide opportunities to tailor grading approaches to individual student needs (Pane et al., 2017).

Navigating the challenges of providing motivating grades is a multifaceted endeavor that requires educators to consider the unique aspects of both the educational context and the student population. The literature reviewed highlights the importance of understanding the diverse factors influencing student motivation and suggests that effective strategies must be tailored to the specific educational setting and student demographic.

## **Grading Under Pressure: Exploring Educators' Emotional Responses and Factors Amidst Pandemic Challenges**

The concluding act of assigning grades at the end of the semester represents a critical moment for educators, evoking emotions ranging from pride to concern. This literature review explores the extent to which educators experience these emotions and the contributing factors, particularly in the context of the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Educators' emotional responses to grading are complex and multifaceted. The act of evaluating students' performance can be deeply intertwined with educators' perceptions of their effectiveness and impact on student learning.

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic introduced unprecedented challenges to the education landscape. The sudden shift to remote learning, and disruptions in student engagement, as Klodiana Leka and Emilda Roseni (2022) state that the absence of physical connection between teachers and students resulted in reduced student engagement, and the diverse impact of the pandemic on individual students has added layers of complexity to educators' grading experiences. In the wake of the pandemic, the increased reliance on technology for remote teaching and grading has become a focal point.

Educators' interactions with students, especially during challenging times, play a crucial role in shaping emotional responses to grading. Effective communication, personalized feedback, and a supportive teaching environment have been identified as key elements in mitigating concerns and fostering a sense of pride (Brackett et al. (2011).

The emotional landscape of grading at the end of the semester is deeply influenced by a myriad of factors, from individual perceptions of efficacy to the challenges posed by external circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This literature review provides a foundation for understanding the intricate interplay of emotions in the

grading process and emphasizes the need for continued research to inform strategies that support educators in navigating these emotional challenges.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study made use of a quantitative method research design, to investigate educators' perceptions of grade inflation, strategies for motivating grades, and emotional responses to end-of-semester grading, considering the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Participants

This study was conducted with 1,628 educators using a stratified sampling technique. Participants were stratified based on educational levels (primary, secondary) to ensure representation from each level. Within each stratum, efforts were made to include educators from various subjects to capture diverse perspectives. The length of service of the educators was a key focus, as it can significantly affect perceptions and experiences related to grade inflation, motivation strategies, and emotional experiences in assigning end-of-semester grades. Educators with varying years of service bring different levels of experience, insights, and potential biases to the study. Detailed information about the study was provided, and informed consent was obtained electronically before educators participated in the online questionnaire.

### Data Collection

An online questionnaire, designed with Likert scale questions, was the primary tool for data collection. The use of Likert scales allows for a quantitative assessment of educators' perceptions and experiences related to the study's objectives. The questionnaire includes sections related to educators' perceptions of grade inflation, strategies for motivating grades, and emotional responses to end-of-semester grading. Questions will cover a range of factors, such as the impact of grade inflation on the integrity of the assessment system, specific concerns or challenges associated with grade inflation, strategies employed for motivating grades, and the emotional experiences related to end-of-semester grading.

Before starting the questionnaire, participants were given clear definitions and contextual examples of key concepts to ensure a common understanding and facilitate

accurate responses. They were informed that they could request further clarification if needed and were provided with the researchers' contact information. The questionnaire link was distributed to educators through email and official communication channels, offering a convenient and accessible way for them to participate and share their insights.

Invitations clearly outlined the study's purpose, the importance of educators' perspectives, and instructions for completing the questionnaire. This comprehensive data collection approach aims to gather a holistic understanding of educators' perspectives in Albania regarding grade inflation, motivating grades, and emotional responses to end-of-semester grading.

## FINDINGS

Understanding the intricate dynamics of grading within the Albanian educational landscape is imperative for fostering effective teaching practices and maintaining the integrity of the assessment system. The findings from educators' responses to a series of pertinent questions shed light on the nuanced aspects of their experiences in grading, exploring the challenges faced and the emotions evoked during the process.

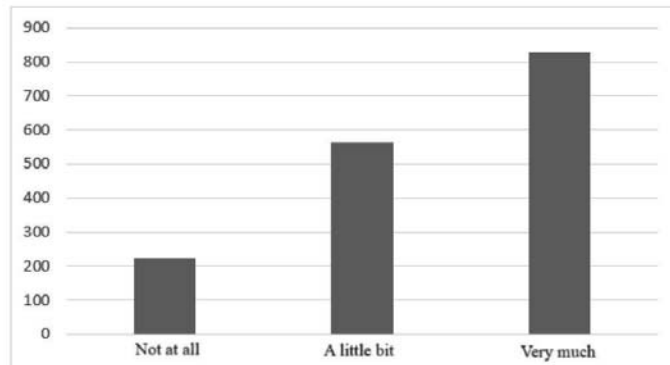
### **Difficulty in Assigning Partially Undeserved Grades**

Educators grapple with the dilemma of assigning partially undeserved grades at the end of the semester. The following insights investigate the factors that contribute to the perceived difficulty, unraveling the complexities educators face in evaluating students' performance and striking a balance between fairness and academic rigor. The data reflects educators' perspectives on the difficulty of assigning partially undeserved grades at the end of the semester: A relatively small number of educators, specifically 223 respondents, indicated that it is not difficult at all for them to give partially undeserved grades at the end of the semester. This suggests that there is a minority of educators who find this aspect of grading to be relatively straightforward or less challenging. A significant portion of educators, 536 respondents, reported that it is a little difficult for them to assign partially undeserved grades at the end of the semester. This group suggests that a substantial number of educators recognize a moderate level of difficulty in navigating the complexities associated with giving partially undeserved grades. The majority of educators, comprising 827 respondents, find it very difficult to give partially undeserved grades at the end of the semester. This indicates a prevalent challenge among educators in managing the intricacies and ethical considerations involved in assigning grades that may not fully align

with students' performances. The high number in this category suggests that many educators face significant difficulty in this aspect of the grading process.

### Figure 1

*How difficult is it for you to give partially undeserved grades at the end of the semester?*



Source. Own research.

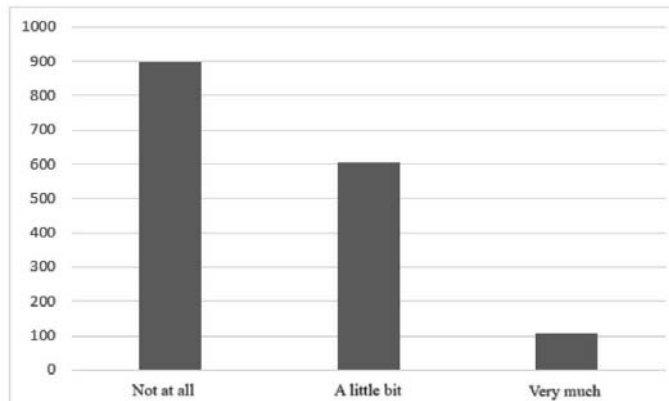
## Challenges in Providing Motivating Grades

Educators confront challenges in providing motivating grades throughout the semester. This question uncovers the diverse strategies employed, the contextual variations in motivating grading practices, and the obstacles faced by educators in fostering a supportive and encouraging learning environment. The data indicates varying perceptions among educators regarding the challenge of providing motivating grades during the semester: Most educators, specifically 899 respondents, expressed that they do not find it challenging to provide motivating grades during the semester. This suggests that a significant portion of educators feel confident and comfortable in incorporating motivating grading practices into their teaching. A considerable number of educators, 606 respondents, acknowledged a moderate level of challenge in providing motivating grades during the semester. While not a majority, this group indicates that there is a sizable portion of educators who recognize some difficulty in consistently implementing motivating grading approaches. A smaller group, consisting of 108 respondents, reported finding it very challenging to provide motivating grades during the semester. While this number is relatively low compared to the total respondents, it signifies that a subset of educators faces significant hurdles in incorporating motivating grading practices into their teaching methodologies, possibly due to various contextual or pedagogical challenges.



**Figure 2**

*How challenging is it for you to provide motivating grades during the semester?*



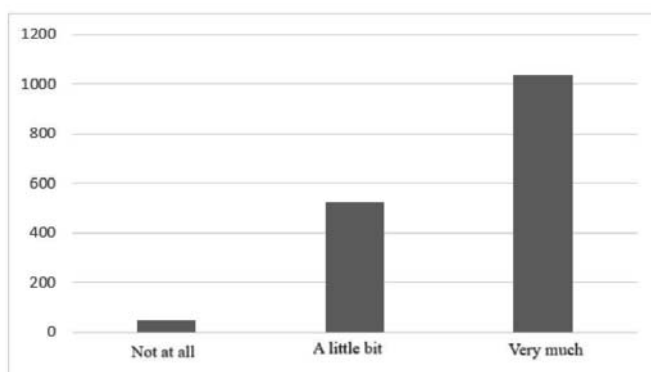
Source. Own research.

## Pride in Delivering Motivating Grades

Educators take pride in delivering motivating grades to students. The findings illuminate the sources of this pride, whether rooted in the recognition of students' accomplishments, the alignment of grades with individual goals, or the utilization of innovative approaches to inspire and engage learners. The data suggests that most respondents feel very proud about the motivating grades they give to students. Specifically: 48 respondents (minimal representation) indicated that they do not feel proud at all about the motivating grades they assign, while 526 respondents expressed a modest level of pride in the motivating grades they provide, indicating a moderate but not overwhelmingly positive sentiment. The largest portion of respondents, with 1039 individuals, conveyed a significant sense of pride about the motivating grades they assign. This group constitutes a substantial majority, suggesting that a significant number of educators take great pride in motivating their students through the grading process.

**Figure 3**

*How proud do you feel about the motivating grades you give to students?*



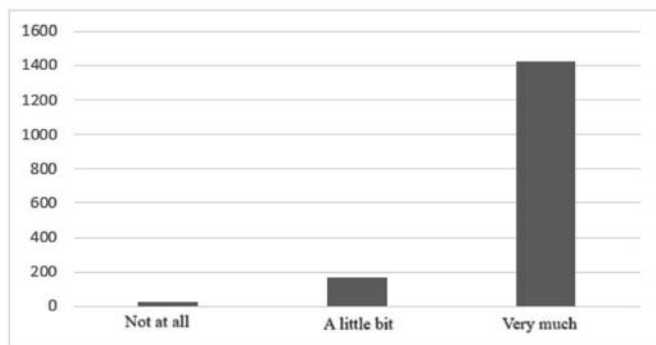
Source. Own research.

## Pride in Assigned Actual Grades at Semester's End

The emotional landscape shifts as educators reflect on the actual grades assigned to students at the end of the semester. This section explores the pride educators feel in maintaining academic standards, the challenges encountered, and the impact of external factors on the grading process. The data indicates varying levels of perceived difficulty among respondents when it comes to providing motivating grades during the semester: A small number of respondents (26) stated that they do not find it challenging at all to provide motivating grades. This group represents a relatively low proportion of the total respondents. The middle category, with 165 respondents, suggests that there is a moderate level of challenge for some educators when it comes to delivering motivating grades. This group acknowledges some level of difficulty but not to an extensive degree. Most respondents (1422) find it very challenging to provide motivating grades during the semester. This significant number indicates that a large portion of educators perceive considerable difficulty in this aspect of their teaching responsibilities. The high number in this category suggests a widespread recognition of the challenges associated with consistently providing grades that motivate students throughout the academic term.

**Figure 4**

*How proud do you feel about the grades you assign to students at the end of the semester?*



*Source.* Own research.

## Emotions Regarding Partially Undeserved Grades During the Pandemic

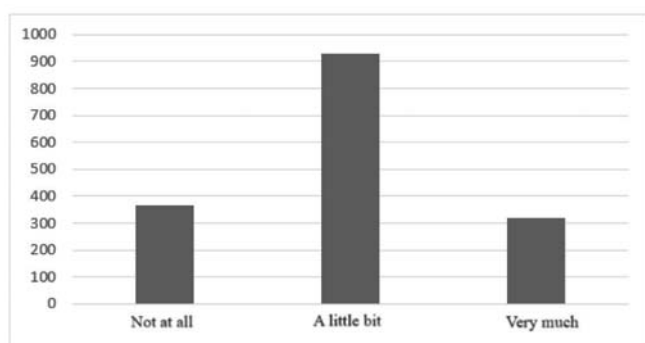
The COVID-19 pandemic introduces an unprecedented layer of complexity to educators' experiences. Examining educators' emotions regarding partially undeserved grades during this challenging period provides insights into the heightened stress, adaptability, and ethical considerations that come to the fore. The data reveals the emotional impact on educators regarding partially undeserved grades given during the pandemic.

A substantial number of respondents (364) reported that they do not feel bad at all about the partially undeserved grades given during the pandemic. This group represents a significant portion of educators who seem to be less affected emotionally by this aspect of the grading process during the challenging circumstances of the pandemic.

The largest portion of respondents (930) falls into the category of feeling a little bit bad about the partially undeserved grades given during the pandemic. This suggests that a considerable number of educators experience some level of remorse or unease, even if not to an extreme extent. A smaller but notable group of respondents (319) reported feeling very much bad about the partially undeserved grades given during the pandemic. While this group is smaller, their strong emotional response indicates that, for some educators, the challenges of grading during the pandemic have had a notable impact on their emotional well-being.

### Figure 5

*Do you feel bad about the partially undeserved grades you have given during the pandemic?*



Source. Own research.

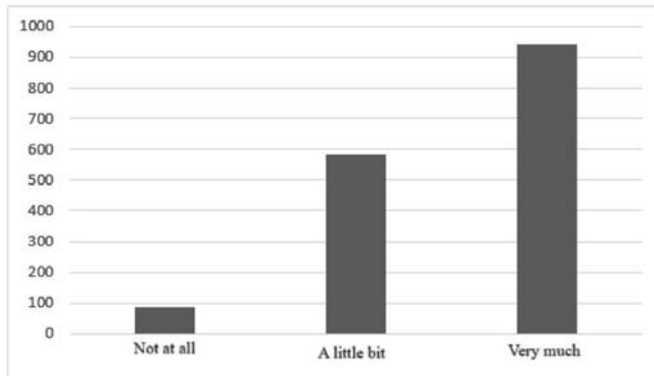
## Perceptions of Grade Inflation and Its Impact

Finally, educators share their perspectives on grade inflation and its potential degradation of the assessment system in Albania. The findings critically assess the perceived consequences, implications for educational integrity, and the need for systemic improvements to maintain a robust and equitable evaluation framework. The data reflects educators' perspectives on whether grade inflation is seen as degrading the assessment system in Albania. A smaller number of respondents (87) expressed the view that grade inflation is not degrading the assessment system in Albania. This group suggests a minority opinion among the respondents who do not perceive grade inflation as a significant threat to the integrity of the assessment system. A moderate portion of respondents (583) indicated that they see grade inflation as having a minor impact on the degradation of the assessment system. This group recognizes some influence but not to a significant extent. Most respondents (943) feel that grade inflation is degrading

the assessment system in Albania to a considerable degree. This larger count suggests a prevalent concern among educators that grade inflation is negatively affecting the overall quality and reliability of the assessment system in the country.

### Figure 6

*Do you think that grade inflation is degrading the assessment system in Albania?*



*Source.* Own research.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study identified several key factors that significantly affect educators' emotions of pride or concern regarding the grades they assign, particularly given the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Impact of Grade Inflation on the Integrity of the Assessment System

Albanian educators believe that grade inflation is a serious problem that puts at risk the validity of the assessment process. Concerns over the long-term effects of grade inflation on academic standards and equity are shared by many educators. These issues show that systemic changes are required to keep a strong and fair evaluation mechanism in place.

### Challenges in Providing Motivating Grades

Educators use a variety of strategies to give marks that motivate students, but they encounter many difficulties—especially considering the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the study, a considerable percentage of educators face moderate to severe challenges, even if many of them are confident in their capacity to motivate students.

The different needs of student populations and the educational system have an impact on these difficulties. To help educators strike a balance between accurate assessment and encouragement, support and localized solutions are crucial.

## **Emotional Responses to Grading**

Grading is a complicated emotional process that makes educators feel both proud and worried. These feelings have been heightened by the pandemic, which has also added levels of stress and ethical dilemmas. The study shows that although teachers are proud of the way they evaluate assignments, there are substantial emotional costs associated with the challenge of giving partially unfair grades and the occurrence of grade inflation. To assist educators in overcoming these obstacles and preserving their well-being, it is evident that significant support networks and policy changes are required.

## **Practical Applications**

The insights gained from this study can inform educators, policymakers, and stakeholders, fostering a conducive environment for learning, growth, and equity. Emphasizing the importance of localized strategies, the study suggests interventions tailored to the unique characteristics of the Albanian educational system, aiming to enhance the grading experience and educational outcomes.

## **Cognitive Value**

This comprehensive approach contributes valuable knowledge to the discourse on educational grading practices in Albania. By exploring nuanced aspects of grading, the study sets the stage for meaningful discussions and interventions, addressing the unique challenges faced by Albanian educators. Future research should continue to explore these dynamics, providing deeper insights and more targeted solutions.

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