

Academic Compliance Culture and Its Implications on Genuine Learning Among Filipino Tertiary Students

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ABSTRACT. Academic compliance culture has become increasingly evident in higher education, where students often prioritize fulfilling academic requirements over engaging in meaningful learning. This study explored Filipino college students' experiences and perceptions of academic compliance culture and the factors that shape it. Using a descriptive qualitative research design, data were collected from 22 college students enrolled in higher education institutions in Zamboanga City through semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis generated ten themes: Compliance as a Survival Strategy, Performative Participation and Surface-Level Engagement, Grade-Oriented Rather than Learning-Oriented Mindset, Normalization of Academic Dishonesty, Instructor Authority as a Compliance Driver, Compliance Under Pressure, Low Perceived Relevance of Course Content, Mental Fatigue and Academic Burnout, Peer Influence and the Normalization of Academic Behaviors, and Overwhelmed by Academic Workload Demands. These themes revealed that academic compliance is influenced by institutional expectations, family and peer pressures, workload demands, instructor authority, and concerns about academic performance. Compliance was commonly viewed as a practical response to academic demands rather than an expression of genuine learning. The study underscores the tension between educational goals and students' lived experiences. It highlights the need for learner-centered educational practices that foster intrinsic motivation, meaningful engagement, and authentic learning beyond grades, outputs, and performance indicators.

KEYWORDS: *academic compliance culture, genuine learning, Filipino students, higher education*

ARTICLE DETAILS

JEAS-00145; Received: April 4, 2026; Accepted: April 23, 2026; Published: May 12, 2026

CITATION:

Kiram, M.L. (2026). *Academic Compliance Culture and Its Implications on Genuine Learning Among Filipino Tertiary Students*. *Journal of Education and Academic Settings*, 3(1). DOI: 10.62596/6hshk189

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INTRODUCTION

Education has long been recognized as a transformative process that contributes to individuals' intellectual, social, and moral development (Freire, 1970; Dewey, 1938). Educational institutions are traditionally expected to cultivate critical thinking, creativity, independent learning, and meaningful understanding among learners rather than mere memorization and passive participation. However, contemporary educational environments increasingly emphasize

academic performance, task completion, grades, and institutional expectations over authentic intellectual engagement (Knesek, 2022; Ang, 2025). In many learning contexts, students become conditioned to prioritize compliance with academic requirements rather than genuine learning experiences. Nambisan (2024) described academic compliance as students' adherence to institutional and academic demands, while Lamaro et al., (2025) noted that compliance-oriented educational systems often prioritize procedural accountability and measurable outputs over meaningful educational engagement. Such conditions contribute to educational cultures where learners participate in academic activities primarily to satisfy external demands such as deadlines, grades, attendance requirements, and performance metrics instead of pursuing deep understanding and personal growth.

International literature has increasingly criticized compliance-oriented educational systems for fostering superficial learning behaviors. Nambisan (2024) explained that excessive institutional control and academic compliance reduce students' autonomy and weaken authentic engagement in learning. Similarly, Knesek (2022) argued that grade-focused educational systems encourage students to pursue academic achievements as extrinsic rewards rather than as opportunities for mastery and intellectual development. In higher education settings, Vlachopoulos (2024) found that authentic assessment practices promote deeper understanding, critical thinking, and practical skill acquisition compared to traditional compliance-driven assessments centered on task completion and grading systems. These findings suggest that educational cultures emphasizing performance metrics may unintentionally discourage meaningful learning experiences among students.

Several international studies further emphasize the value of authentic learning environments in developing meaningful educational outcomes. Sheppard (2024) revealed that students exposed to authentic learning experiences demonstrated stronger engagement, improved retention, and greater educational satisfaction than students subjected to compliance-oriented instruction. Villarroel et al. (2024) also observed that authentic assessments connect classroom learning to real-world applications, allowing students to develop professional competencies and reflective understanding. Likewise, Martínez-Argüelles et al. (2022) found that authentic learning environments enhance student participation, comprehension, and motivation in online learning settings. Earlier work by Stein et al. (2004) further argued that authentic learning becomes meaningful when students perceive learning activities as personally relevant and socially situated rather than as isolated academic tasks performed solely for compliance. These studies collectively suggest that students learn more effectively when education prioritizes relevance, engagement, and understanding rather than mere academic compliance.

Despite these educational ideals, compliance-oriented practices remain deeply embedded within many educational institutions. Lamaro et al., (2025) argued that institutional systems driven by documentation, rankings, and quality assurance mechanisms often pressure stakeholders to prioritize procedural compliance over authentic educational experiences. Wright et al. (2026) similarly noted that universities frequently struggle to implement authentic learning practices because institutional cultures prioritize measurable outputs and procedural accountability. Moreover, Chan (2023) highlighted how contemporary academic environments shaped by technological advancements and performance expectations may reinforce output-oriented learning behaviors, where students prioritize completing academic requirements efficiently rather than engaging ethically and meaningfully with knowledge. These studies reveal that compliance culture extends beyond classroom activities and may be rooted in broader institutional and systemic educational structures.

Within the Philippine context, similar educational concerns have emerged regarding the dominance of grade-oriented and performance-centered learning systems. Ang (2025) criticized the Philippine educational culture for rewarding compliance, numerical achievement, and output production while neglecting emotional intelligence, critical thinking, and authentic understanding. Jose and Escote (2024) found that mastery-oriented and intrinsically motivated learning environments significantly improve student engagement and meaningful participation among Filipino learners. Similarly, Magulod Jr. (2019) reported that learning habits and instructional approaches significantly influence students' academic engagement and meaningful learning experiences, highlighting the importance of educational environments that support deeper learning and Gubaton (2024) reported that students demonstrate stronger academic engagement when educational experiences emphasize mastery and understanding instead of mere compliance with academic requirements. These findings indicate that meaningful learning among Filipino students may be hindered when educational success becomes heavily associated with grades and institutional expectations.

Other Philippine studies also reveal the growing challenges surrounding authentic learning in contemporary educational settings. Barayuga (2022) discovered that Filipino students value collaborative, experiential, and meaningful learning opportunities, yet many experience restricted educational engagement due to compliance-heavy academic structures. Similarly, Habagat and Hermosa (2024) found that authentic assessment practices improve student understanding and participation more effectively than traditional requirement-based assessments. However, Gorromeo (2025) observed that institutional demands, documentation requirements, and standardized grading systems often hinder the implementation of learner-centered and authentic educational practices among teachers. Furthermore, recent studies by Fernando et al. (2026) and Miranda et al. (2025) raised concerns regarding increasing output-oriented learning behaviors and academic dependency associated with the use of artificial intelligence technologies among Filipino students. These findings collectively imply that educational environments centered on efficiency, productivity, and compliance may weaken students' critical thinking, autonomy, and genuine engagement in learning.

Although numerous international and Philippine studies have explored authentic learning, student motivation, academic engagement, and assessment practices, limited research specifically investigates the culture of academic compliance and how Filipino students personally experience its influence on genuine learning. Existing studies largely focus on instructional strategies, assessment effectiveness, technological integration, or student performance outcomes, while the lived experiences and narratives of students navigating compliance-oriented educational systems remain underexplored. Moreover, few qualitative studies have examined how students interpret the tension between completing academic requirements and achieving meaningful understanding within the Philippine educational context. This gap highlights the need for a deeper exploration of students' experiences, perceptions, and reflections regarding academic compliance culture and its implications for authentic learning.

Therefore, this study aimed to explore the experiences and narratives of Filipino students regarding academic compliance culture and its implications on genuine learning. Specifically, it endeavored to explore Filipino college students' experiences and perceptions of academic compliance culture and the factors that shape it.

This study was anchored in Critical Pedagogy Theory, Experiential Learning Theory, and Self-Determination Theory to provide a comprehensive understanding of academic compliance culture and its influence on genuine learning among Filipino students. Critical Pedagogy Theory,

advanced by Freire (1970), posits that education should cultivate critical consciousness and empower learners to actively engage with knowledge rather than passively comply with institutional demands. This perspective helped explain how compliance-oriented educational environments may encourage students to prioritize requirement completion and academic performance over critical reflection and meaningful understanding. Complementing this view, Dewey's (1938) Experiential Learning Theory emphasizes that genuine learning emerges through active engagement, reflection, and meaningful experiences, suggesting that learning becomes most effective when students connect knowledge to authentic situations rather than merely fulfilling academic obligations. Self-Determination Theory, developed by Deci and Ryan (1985), further explains that individuals are more likely to engage deeply in learning when motivated by intrinsic interests and personal growth rather than external rewards or pressures. Together, these theoretical perspectives provided a lens for understanding how compliance-driven educational practices shape students' learning experiences, motivation, engagement, and perceptions of authentic learning. They also guided the exploration of how Filipino students navigated the tension between meeting academic expectations and pursuing meaningful educational experiences.

METHODS

1. Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore and describe the experiences, perceptions, and narratives of Filipino college students regarding academic compliance culture and its influence on genuine learning. A descriptive qualitative approach is appropriate when researchers seek to obtain rich, detailed accounts of participants' experiences and interpretations of a phenomenon within its natural context. The design enabled the researchers to capture how students understand, experience, and navigate compliance-oriented educational environments while providing insights into the meanings they attach to genuine learning. Through qualitative inquiry, the study generated an in-depth understanding of the realities surrounding academic compliance culture among college students in higher education institutions in Zamboanga City (Kim et al., 2017; Doyle et al., 2020).

2. Participants and Sampling Procedure

The participants of this study consisted of twenty-two (22) college students enrolled in various higher education institutions in Zamboanga City. The study utilized purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique that involves selecting participants based on their capacity to provide relevant and information-rich insights regarding the phenomenon under investigation. Participants were chosen because of their direct experiences with academic requirements, institutional expectations, and learning processes within higher education settings. This sampling strategy ensured that the collected data reflected diverse perspectives and meaningful experiences related to academic compliance culture and genuine learning (Campbell et al., 2020).

3. Research Instrument

The primary research instrument used in this study was a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide designed to elicit participants' experiences, perceptions, and reflections regarding academic compliance culture and genuine learning. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions aligned with the objectives of the study and allowed

participants to elaborate on their experiences freely. To establish content validity, the instrument was reviewed and evaluated by experts in educational research and qualitative inquiry who provided recommendations for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives. Necessary revisions were incorporated before data collection. Reliability was strengthened through the use of a consistent interview protocol, careful documentation of participant responses, and member checking to ensure the accuracy and credibility of participants' narratives (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

4. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a qualitative analytic method that identifies, examines, and interprets recurring patterns and themes within textual data. Interview transcripts were transcribed verbatim and subjected to a systematic coding process involving familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, identification of themes, review of themes, and interpretation of findings. This approach enabled the researchers to uncover common experiences and perspectives shared by participants regarding academic compliance culture and its influence on genuine learning. Thematic analysis provided a flexible yet rigorous framework for generating meaningful insights from participants' narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

5. Data Gathering Procedures

Prior to data collection, the researchers secured the necessary permissions from concerned authorities and obtained informed consent from all participants. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on the inclusion criteria established for the study. Individual semi-structured interviews were then conducted at mutually convenient schedules and locations. The researchers explained the purpose of the study, assured participants of confidentiality, and requested permission to record the interviews. Responses were documented through audio recordings and field notes. Following the interviews, the recordings were transcribed verbatim and organized for analysis. The researchers reviewed the transcripts carefully to ensure completeness and accuracy before proceeding with thematic analysis.

5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study. Participants were fully informed about the purpose, procedures, potential benefits, and voluntary nature of their participation through an informed consent process. They were assured that their identities and personal information would remain confidential and anonymous. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. All collected data were securely stored and used solely for research purposes. The study adhered to the provisions of the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173), which safeguards the privacy and protection of personal information by ensuring proper collection, storage, processing, and disposal of research data.

RESULTS

Question 1: To explore Filipino college students' experiences and perceptions of academic compliance culture and the factors that shape it.

Figure 1 presents the thematic framework illustrating Filipino college students' experiences and perceptions of academic compliance culture and the factors that shape it. The central concept is connected to ten interrelated themes that emerged from the analysis. These themes highlight how academic compliance is influenced by students' efforts to cope with academic demands, institutional expectations, social influences, and learning environments. Collectively, these themes demonstrate that academic compliance extends beyond adherence to academic requirements and is shaped by a complex interaction of personal, social, and institutional factors that influence students' educational experiences.

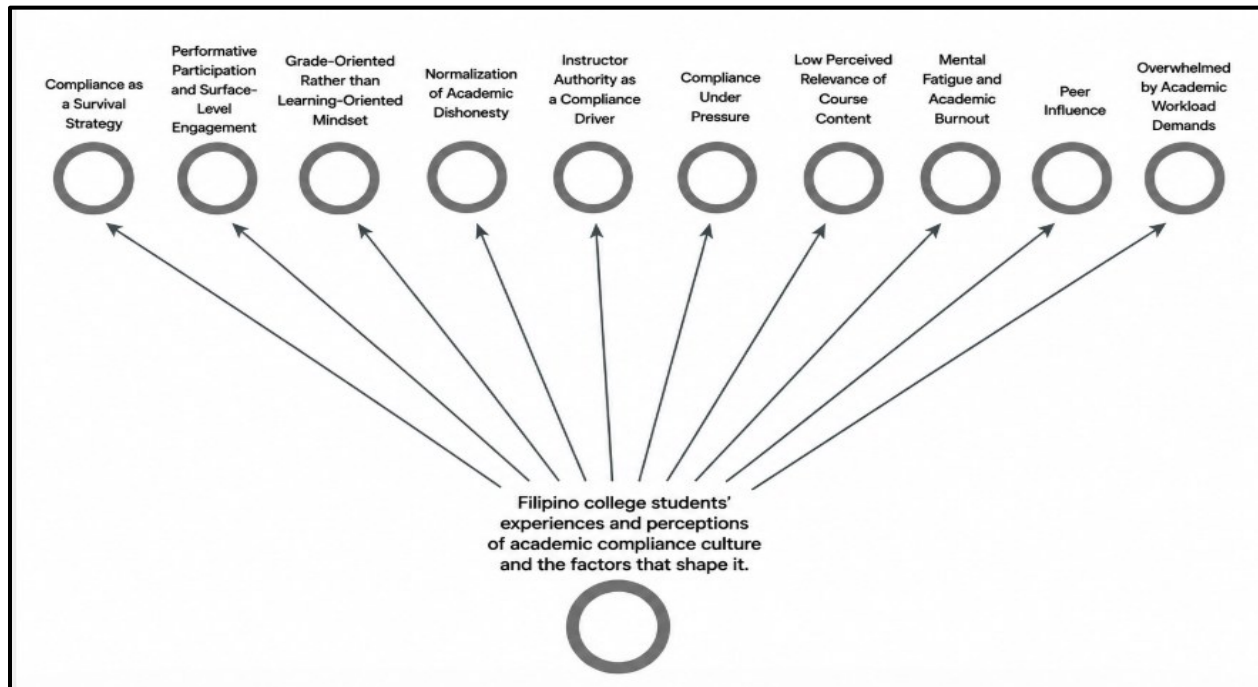


Figure 1: Thematic Framework of Filipino College Students' Experiences and Perceptions of Academic Compliance Culture

Theme 1: Compliance as a Survival Strategy

Seventeen of the twenty-two participants described academic compliance culture as a strategy for surviving the demands of college rather than a process of meaningful learning. Participants frequently associated compliance with completing requirements, meeting deadlines, and avoiding academic penalties. For many, success was measured not by how much they learned but by their ability to keep up with institutional expectations. This suggests that academic compliance has become a practical response to academic pressures, where students prioritize staying afloat over engaging deeply with course content. One participant explained:

"Most of the time, I focus on finishing requirements because there are just too many things to submit. Even when I know I haven't fully understood the lesson, I still submit the work because missing a deadline has bigger consequences. At some point, passing became more important than learning."

This finding supports the work of Ang (2025), who argued that grade-focused educational systems often reward output completion over genuine understanding. Similarly, Nambisan (2024) found that students tend to comply with academic demands to satisfy institutional expectations rather than to pursue authentic learning. The theme also reflects Freire's (1970) Critical Pedagogy, which critiques educational environments that encourage passive compliance instead of critical engagement, and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which suggests that externally driven behaviors may weaken intrinsic motivation to learn. The prevalence of this theme implies that when academic demands are perceived primarily as obstacles to overcome, learning may become a matter of survival rather than intellectual growth.

Theme 2: Performative Participation and Surface-Level Engagement

14 of the 22 participants portrayed academic compliance culture as an environment where students are expected to demonstrate participation regardless of their actual level of understanding. Many shared that attending classes, submitting outputs, and responding to classroom activities often became symbolic indicators of academic involvement rather than evidence of meaningful engagement. Participants acknowledged that while they fulfilled visible academic expectations, their connection to the learning process was frequently shallow, driven more by the need to appear responsible and academically active. One participant stated:

"There were classes where I attended every meeting, submitted all the requirements, and even joined discussions, but honestly, I was just doing what was expected. I was present, but I wasn't really invested in learning the material."

This finding resonates with the observations of Chan (2023), who noted that students increasingly prioritize the production of acceptable academic outputs over deeper intellectual engagement. Similarly, Ang (2025) argued that performance-oriented educational cultures often reward visible academic behaviors while overlooking genuine understanding. The theme also reflects Freire's (1970) critique of passive educational practices that encourage compliance rather than active knowledge construction. From Dewey's (1938) perspective, meaningful learning emerges through purposeful engagement and reflective experience, conditions that appear constrained when participation becomes performative rather than authentic. These findings suggest that academic compliance culture may create an illusion of engagement where outward participation masks limited intellectual involvement in the learning process.

Theme 3: Grade-Oriented Rather than Learning-Oriented Mindset

18 out of 22 participants associated academic compliance culture with an overwhelming emphasis on grades, academic standing, and credential attainment rather than the acquisition of meaningful knowledge and skills. Participants frequently described success in college as being defined by numerical outcomes, passing marks, and course completion. While learning remained an acknowledged purpose of education, many admitted that academic pressures often redirected their attention toward securing favorable grades rather than fully understanding lessons. As a result, educational activities were frequently approached as requirements to be completed rather than opportunities for intellectual growth.

"If I'm being honest, my first thought is usually, 'Will this affect my grade?' before I think about what I can actually learn from it. Sometimes I study just enough to pass an

exam, then move on to the next requirement because that's what college trains you to do."

The findings echo Ang's (2025) assertion that grade-centered educational systems encourage students to prioritize measurable achievement over genuine understanding. Likewise, Knesek (2022) emphasized that when grades become the primary indicator of success, learning risks becoming a secondary concern. This pattern also aligns with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which suggests that externally motivated behaviors driven by rewards and evaluation can diminish intrinsic interest in learning. Furthermore, Dewey (1938) argued that education should cultivate meaningful experiences that promote growth and understanding rather than merely producing academic outcomes. The prominence of this theme suggests that academic compliance culture may foster a mindset in which credentials become the destination, while learning itself is treated as a means to reach it.

Theme 4: Normalization of Academic Dishonesty

13 of the 22 participants described academic compliance culture as a condition that can encourage dishonest academic practices when the pressure to meet requirements becomes overwhelming. Participants acknowledged that behaviors such as copying assignments, relying excessively on others' work, sharing answers, and using shortcuts were often viewed less as ethical violations and more as practical responses to heavy workloads and constant deadlines. Rather than being driven by a desire to deceive, these actions were frequently rationalized as necessary measures to keep pace with academic expectations and avoid negative consequences.

"There were times when everyone was rushing to submit something, and honestly, copying parts of a classmate's work didn't even feel wrong anymore. It wasn't because we wanted to cheat. It was more like everyone was just trying to survive the workload and get things done."

This finding supports Chan's (2023) observation that performance-driven academic environments may shift students' attention toward producing acceptable outputs rather than engaging authentically with learning. Similarly, Fernando et al. (2026) and Miranda et al. (2025) highlighted how output-oriented academic cultures can weaken independent learning and critical engagement. The theme also reflects Freire's (1970) Critical Pedagogy, which argues that educational systems emphasizing compliance and performance may inadvertently undermine genuine intellectual development. The emergence of this theme suggests that when academic success becomes strongly tied to requirement completion, some students may gradually normalize dishonest practices as acceptable coping mechanisms rather than recognize them as barriers to meaningful learning.

Theme 5: Instructor Authority as a Compliance Driver

15 of the 22 participants associated academic compliance culture with the authority exercised by instructors in the classroom. Participants described situations where following instructions without question was often viewed as the safest and most acceptable course of action. Many expressed hesitation in voicing disagreements, seeking clarification, or challenging academic expectations due to concerns about being perceived as disrespectful, difficult, or uncooperative. Consequently, compliance was frequently linked not only to institutional requirements but also to maintaining favorable relationships with instructors and avoiding potential academic repercussions. One participant remarked:

“Honestly, I usually just follow whatever the professor says. Even if I don't agree with a requirement or think it's unnecessary, I still do it because I don't want any issues. At the end of the day, they're the one giving the grades.”

This finding aligns with Nambisan's (2024) observation that academic compliance is often shaped by students' responses to institutional and instructional expectations. The theme also strongly reflects Freire's (1970) Critical Pedagogy, which critiques educational environments where authority is concentrated in the teacher and students are positioned as passive recipients of knowledge. Such conditions may discourage dialogue, critical inquiry, and active participation in the learning process. From Dewey's (1938) perspective, meaningful education thrives when learners are encouraged to engage, question, and reflect on their experiences. The prevalence of this theme suggests that perceptions of instructor authority can reinforce compliance-oriented behaviors, potentially limiting students' willingness to exercise intellectual autonomy and critical engagement within the classroom.

Theme 6: Compliance Under Pressure

19 of the 22 participants described academic compliance as being driven less by a genuine desire to learn and more by the pressures surrounding academic success. Participants frequently cited fear of poor grades, disappointing their families, losing scholarships, delaying graduation, or falling behind their peers as reasons for adhering to academic expectations. Many viewed compliance not as a personal choice but as an obligation shaped by cultural expectations and the sacrifices made by their families to support their education. Over time, this persistent pressure often resulted in stress, emotional fatigue, and a diminished sense of purpose in learning. One participant shared:

“Honestly, it's hard to separate school from pressure. I keep up with requirements because failing isn't really an option. My parents work hard to send me to college, so even when I'm exhausted, I feel like I have to keep going and submit everything that's expected of me.”

The findings reflect Ang's (2025) observation that academic cultures centered on performance and achievement can create strong pressures that shape students' motivations and behaviors. Similarly, Gubaton (2024) found that external expectations significantly influence students' academic engagement, while Barayuga (2022) noted that demanding academic structures can limit meaningful learning experiences and contribute to emotional strain. From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), compliance motivated by fear, obligation, and external expectations reflects controlled forms of motivation that may weaken intrinsic interest in learning. The prevalence of this theme suggests that academic compliance among Filipino students is often sustained by a complex combination of personal anxiety, cultural responsibility, and social expectations, conditions that may contribute to burnout and reduce opportunities for authentic engagement with learning.

Theme 7: Low Perceived Relevance of Course Content

12 of the 22 participants associated academic compliance culture with learning experiences that felt disconnected from their personal interests, career aspirations, or real-life concerns. Participants shared that when course content appeared irrelevant to their goals, their motivation to deeply engage with lessons

diminished. Under these circumstances, academic tasks were often approached as requirements to be completed rather than opportunities for learning. As a result, compliance became the dominant response, with students focusing on fulfilling expectations rather than investing effort in understanding the material. One participant explained:

"Sometimes I do the requirements just because they're required. If I can't see how a lesson connects to my course, future job, or even my daily life, it's hard to stay interested. I just finish what needs to be done and move on."

This finding aligns with the work of Sheppard (2024) and Martínez-Argüelles et al. (2022), who found that students demonstrate stronger engagement when learning activities are perceived as authentic and meaningful. Similarly, Dewey (1938) argued that education becomes most effective when learners can connect academic content to lived experiences and practical concerns. The theme also reflects Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which suggests that intrinsic motivation flourishes when learners find personal value and relevance in what they are studying. The emergence of this theme indicates that perceived irrelevance may weaken students' commitment to genuine learning, encouraging a shift toward compliance-oriented behaviors focused on task completion rather than understanding.

Theme 8: Mental Fatigue and Academic Burnout

16 of the 22 participants described academic compliance culture as closely linked to experiences of mental exhaustion and burnout. Participants shared that the continuous cycle of deadlines, examinations, projects, and academic responsibilities often left them physically and emotionally drained. As their energy and motivation declined, many found it increasingly difficult to engage deeply with lessons, reflect on concepts, or pursue meaningful learning. Under these conditions, compliance became the more manageable option, with students focusing on completing tasks rather than investing in genuine understanding. One participant shared:

"...by the time I finish one requirement, there are already three more waiting. After a while, you're just trying to keep up. I still submit everything, but honestly, I'm too tired to really process what I'm learning."

This finding is consistent with Barayuga (2022), who observed that demanding academic structures can limit students' opportunities for meaningful engagement and authentic learning. Similarly, Ang (2025) noted that performance-centered educational environments often place students under constant pressure to produce outputs, contributing to emotional strain and disengagement. From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), prolonged exhaustion can diminish intrinsic motivation and reduce learners' capacity to engage actively in the learning process. The findings suggest that when students experience persistent academic fatigue, compliance may become the path of least resistance, allowing them to meet expectations while sacrificing deeper intellectual engagement.

Theme 9: Peer Influence

13 of the 22 participants identified peer influence as an important factor shaping academic compliance culture. Participants observed that many students around them prioritized completing

requirements, meeting deadlines, and securing passing grades rather than engaging deeply with learning. Over time, these behaviors became normalized within their academic environment, influencing how they approached their own studies. When compliance-oriented practices were consistently modeled by classmates, students often came to view such behaviors as a standard and expected way of navigating college life. One participant explained:

“When you see most of your classmates focusing on submissions, grades, and getting requirements out of the way, you start doing the same. It becomes normal because that's what everyone around you seems to be prioritizing.”

This finding reflects the observations of Ang (2025), who argued that performance-centered educational cultures can shape collective student behaviors that prioritize achievement indicators over meaningful learning. Similarly, Nambisan (2024) noted that academic compliance is influenced not only by institutional expectations but also by the social environments in which students operate. The theme may also be understood through Freire's (1970) Critical Pedagogy, which emphasizes how educational practices and norms are reproduced within learning communities. The prevalence of this theme suggests that compliance-oriented behaviors are not merely individual choices but are reinforced through peer interactions, creating a culture where output completion and academic performance become accepted measures of student success.

Theme 10: Overwhelmed by Academic Workload Demands

18 of the 22 participants identified heavy workloads and strict deadlines as major factors contributing to academic compliance culture. Participants described managing multiple requirements simultaneously, often under tight submission schedules that left little opportunity for reflection, mastery, or meaningful engagement with course content. Faced with competing academic demands, many prioritized completing and submitting tasks on time rather than investing effort in fully understanding lessons. Consequently, academic success became closely associated with productivity and output completion rather than learning itself. One participant shared:

“Most weeks feel like a race against deadlines. When several requirements are due at the same time, my goal is to finish everything before the cutoff. I don't always have enough time to sit down and really understand the lesson behind the task.”

This finding supports the observations of Barayuga (2022), who found that demanding academic structures can restrict opportunities for authentic learning and meaningful engagement. Similarly, Ang (2025) argued that performance-centered educational environments often encourage students to focus on output production and requirement completion. The theme also reflects Dewey's (1938) Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasizes that meaningful learning requires time for engagement, reflection, and connection-making. The prevalence of this theme suggests that excessive workloads and inflexible deadlines may create conditions where compliance becomes a practical necessity, reducing students' capacity to pursue deeper and more intentional learning experiences.

CONCLUSION

Academic compliance culture among Filipino college students emerged as a complex educational phenomenon characterized by the prioritization of requirement completion, academic performance, and institutional expectations over meaningful engagement with

learning. Students largely understood compliance as a practical strategy for navigating the demands of higher education, often manifested through survival-oriented behaviors, performative participation, grade-centered thinking, and, in some cases, the normalization of academic dishonesty. Rather than functioning as an avenue for intellectual growth, academic activities were frequently approached as obligations that needed to be fulfilled to avoid negative consequences and maintain academic standing. These experiences suggest that compliance has become deeply embedded in how many students understand and navigate their educational responsibilities.

The factors shaping academic compliance culture extended beyond individual student choices and were rooted in broader academic, social, and institutional conditions. Instructor authority, family expectations, peer influences, perceived irrelevance of course content, mental fatigue, and overwhelming academic workloads collectively contributed to the development and persistence of compliance-oriented behaviors. The interplay of these factors revealed that students often operated within educational environments where external pressures outweighed intrinsic motivations for learning. Consequently, compliance frequently became the most accessible and rational response to the realities of college life, particularly when academic success was measured primarily through outputs, grades, and productivity.

Viewed more broadly, the study highlights a tension between the intended purposes of higher education and the realities experienced by students. While education is expected to cultivate critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, and lifelong learning, the prevalence of compliance-oriented behaviors suggests that many students are being socialized to value performance indicators over genuine understanding. This raises important questions regarding how educational systems define success, structure learning experiences, and evaluate student achievement. The persistence of academic compliance culture implies a need to reexamine educational practices that may inadvertently reward compliance more than learning, particularly if higher education seeks to develop graduates who are reflective, engaged, and capable of independent thought.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Higher education institutions should strengthen learner-centered practices that emphasize meaningful engagement, relevance, and understanding rather than excessive reliance on output production and grade-based measures of success. Educators may consider designing assessments that encourage reflection, application, and critical thinking while ensuring that workloads remain manageable and aligned with intended learning outcomes. Creating classroom environments that support dialogue, student autonomy, and intellectual risk-taking may also help reduce compliance-driven behaviors and foster deeper learning. Furthermore, institutions should implement initiatives that promote student well-being, address academic burnout, and encourage healthy academic cultures where learning is valued not merely as a means to earn grades or credentials but as a process of personal and intellectual development. Future researchers may further examine academic compliance culture across different educational levels, disciplines, and institutional contexts to deepen understanding of its long-term implications for learning and student development.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The researcher expresses his sincere gratitude to all the college students who generously shared their time, experiences, and insights, making this study possible. Appreciation is also

extended to the academic mentors whose guidance, expertise, and constructive feedback contributed significantly to the completion of this work. The researcher likewise thank his families and friends for their encouragement and support throughout the research process. No external funding was received for the conduct of this study. Finally, gratitude is extended to everyone who, in one way or another, contributed to the successful completion of this research.

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