

**FACTORS AFFECTING THE PERFORMANCE OF EXAMINEES ON CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANT LICENSURE EXAMINATION (CPALE)**

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**ABSTRACT**

Certified Public Accountant Licensure Examinations (CPALE) has always been one of the toughest licensure examinations to pass in the Philippines. It is a holistic exam that dwells not only on the academic capability of the examinees. This research study was conducted to determine non-academic factors that affected the performance of USL accountancy graduates in the CPALE May and October 2019. The study used a checklist together with a series of interview questions to determine these factors. Results showed that the mental state and condition of the examinees affected their performance. This includes the focus, mindset, ability to handle pressure, and avoidance of unnecessary activities that affect the productivity of the examinees. The study also revealed that the preparation during the review which includes quality of review habits and materials, their attitude towards studying, and active participation in review sessions conducted by review schools are factors affecting the performance of examinees. It was also determined that the physical condition should not be compromised because it can have an adverse effect on their performance. Results also showed that the participation of the families of the examinees, the friends that they choose to be with during their preparation, and faith in God all contributed to the psychological preparation of an examinee for the exam.

**Keywords:** Certified Public Accountant Licensure Exam, Factors affecting the performance of examinees, Performance of the examinees

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**INTRODUCTION**

The Certified Public Accountant Licensure Examinations is commonly used to evaluate the performance of an accountancy student in the accounting course. This is based on the idea of Heider that man perceives events of critical importance for the interpretation of human work (Hunt, 2009). CPALE has always been one of the toughest licensure examinations to pass in the Philippines (Abrugar, 2009; Perez, 2015). Data from compilations reveal that the highest passing rate ever achieved in CPA Licensure Examination in the Philippines was 61% (Valcarcel, 2018). The passing statistics is only 20% for first-time examinees (Bala, 2008). While these numbers are mainly affected by the academic capability of an examinee, which is focused and honed in college for several years, non-academic

factors have been noted to also have an effect in the performance of an accountancy graduate in the board exam (Ballado-Tan, 2014; Herrero, 2015).

Non-academic factors serve a vital role in the students' pursuit of becoming Certified Public Accountants. Most non-academic factors don't create a direct impact in the board examination results, but they affect the students' overall performance from preparation phase to the actual board examination (Fang-asan, 2016). These factors exist outside the academic parlance but their effects manifest in the board examination performance. The difficulty of the CPALE requires utmost preparation, which includes the non-academic factors, by the students who will take the board exam. Therefore, to be able to cater these factors to prepare for the board exam, this research study was conducted to determine the non-academic factors that have influenced the performance of the accountancy graduates of University of Saint Louis Tuguegarao who undertook the 2019 Licensure Examinations. These respondents were chosen to maintain the newness of their experience.

**Research Objective and Questions**

This study aimed to determine the factors that affected the performance of the accountancy graduates of University of St. Louis Tuguegarao who took the Certified Public Accountant Licensure Examination in May and October 2019.

**Significance of the Study**

The outcome of this study will aid the respondents and the students that are yet to take to board exam have a broader and better perspective of the factors that contribute to their performance in the Board Exam and reassess the actual setting and situation of the CPA Board exam, from preparation to the actual exam and improve for the next major exam.

**Literature Review**

**Conceptual framework**

The non-academic factors identified by previous studies were used as basis for potential factors in this study. These factors can be categorized into two categories; student and family factors.

**Student Factor:** The academic habits and the persistence of a student to be good in accounting subjects impact the results of his CPALE greatly. These showed significant influences in the outcome of the exam (Ballado-Tan, 2014; Herrero, 2015; Fang-asan, 2016). The utilization by students of the facilities and

Accountancy, Business and Hospitality Research Bulletin resources of the school also has an effect in an examinee's performance (Herrero, 2015; Fang-asan, 2016; Shough, Stetson, Wanton, Tankersley, 2018). However, a study showed the contrary that the performance in the CPALE lacks significant relationship with the curriculum and program of studies, admission and retention policy of the school and physical facilities and resources provided by the school (Ballado-Tan, 2018).

**Family and Home Factors:** Factors like financial status of the family, support from the family, parents and guardians involvement in studies, encouragement, and motivation greatly influence the performance of a CPALE examinee (Herrero, 2015; Pratama, 2017; Fang-asan, 2016).

**School Factor:** Several studies showed that the school from where the students graduated from is a factor in the performance of an accountancy graduate in the CPALE (Herrero, 2015; Fang-asan, 2016; Shough, Stetson, Wanton, Tankersley, 2018). However, a study showed the contrary that the performance in the CPALE has no relationship with the curriculum and program of studies, admission and retention policy of the school and physical facilities and resources provided by the school (Ballado-Tan, 2018).

In addition, some studies showed evidences that gender and demographic profile of the examinees are also factors of the performance in the exam (Trinkle, Scheiner, Baldwin, and Krull, 2016; Espahbodi, Espahbodi, Espahbodi, Walker & White, 2018). A study showed that female students outperform male students in certain types of accounting examinations (Arthur, 2012). However, one study revealed that male students perform better than female students and that younger student perform better than older students (Rodrigues, Pinho, Bugarim, Craig, & Machado, 2018).

### **Philippine Certified Public Accountant Licensure Examination**

Becoming a Philippine Certified Public Accountant is not an easy task. One has to graduate from Bachelor of Science in Accountancy and pass the CPA Licensure Examination. As many critiques say, it is one of the toughest board examinations to pass in the history of Philippine professionalism (Perez, 2015; Abrugar, 2009). It is served by the Philippine Board of Accountancy to qualified candidates and regulated by the Professional Regulatory Commissions. This highly technical examination is consisted of six major subjects:

- I. Auditing
- II. Management Advisory Services (MAS)
- III. Taxation

- IV. Regulatory Framework for Business Transactions (RFBT)
- V. Financial Accounting and Reporting
- VI. Advanced Financial Accounting and Reporting

For an examinee to pass, he has to score an average of 75% or above with no grade below 65% in any one subject. After this, he will be a professional licensed accountant. When a candidate scores a passing average but has a grade below 65% in at most 2 board subjects, he is considered a conditional passer. The candidate must take the subjects that he failed (scored below 75%) in the next board examination and pass to earn his license. When a candidate fails to achieve any one of the two preceding results, he technically failed to pass the exam. The candidate will have to take entire examination again when the opportunity comes. Candidates who fail in three consecutive board examinations will have to take a refresher course to be eligible to take the examination again. The CPA Licensure Exam is indeed a difficult exam to pass and that exactly is the reason why prestige comes with this examination.

### **Factors Affecting CPA Board Exam performance**

The significance and toughness the CPA Licensure Exam has brought up studies regarding factors that affect the performances of the accountancy graduates in the CPALE such as this research. These factors are categorized into three categories; student, family, and school factors.

**Student Factor:** It can be said that the technical capacity of the students taking the CPA Board is the major factor that determines the results of the exam. The academic habits and the persistence of a student to be good in accounting subjects impact the results of his CPALE greatly. These showed significant influence in the outcome of the exam. While some of these factors are apparent, there are other factors that have showed an effect to the results as well (Ballado-Tan, 2014; Herrero, 2015; Fang-asan, 2016)

**Family and Home Factors:** Factors like financial status of the family, support from the family, parents and guardians involvement in studies, encouragement, and motivation greatly influence the performance of a CPALE examinee (Herrero, 2015; Pratama, 2017; Fang-asan, 2016).

**School Factor:** Several studies showed that the school from where the students graduated from is a factor in the performance of an accountancy graduate in the CPALE (Herrero, 2015; Fang-asan, 2016; Shough, Stetson, Wanton, Tankersley, 2018). However, a study showed the contrary that the performance in the CPALE has no relationship with the curriculum and program of studies,

Accountancy, Business and Hospitality Research Bulletin admission and retention policy of the school and physical facilities and resources provided by the school (Ballado-Tan, 2018).

Some studies showed evidences that gender and demographic profiles of the examinees are also factors of the performance in the exam (Trinkle, Scheiner, Baldwin, and Krull, 2016; Espahbodi , Espahbodi , Espahbodi , Walker & White, 2018). A study showed that female students outperform male students in certain types of accounting examinations (Arthur, 2012). However, one study revealed that male students are better than female students and that younger student perform better than older students (Rodrigues, Pinho, Bugarim, Craig, & Machado, 2018).

## METHODS

This research used mix method of research. The respondents were accountancy students who graduated from University of Saint Louis who took exam in May and October 2019. There were 25 respondents who passed the CPALE and 25 respondents who did not pass the CPALE. The interview comprised of 25 respondents because at the 25th interviewee said almost the same thing as the others. The instrument that was used is a researcher-made checklist that was based on the study of Herrero (2015) entitled Influence of Selected Factors on CPA Licensure Examination. Additional interview sessions were facilitated by the researchers. The interview guide facilitated the data gathering to know the other factors which affected the examinees in the CPA licensure examination. The researchers asked permission first from the Dean of School of Accountancy, Business and Hospitality in order for them to conduct this study. The researchers gave the respondents the validated checklist for them to check the factors that affected their performance. The researchers have interviewed the respondents in order for the study to have more precise results. The interview with the respondents was done through social networking sites. The factors affecting the performance was identified through Mode. The data gathered through the checklist have been ranked and summarized. The answers of the respondents in the interview were analyzed through thematic analysis.

## RESULTS

**Table 1: Student Factors Affecting the Performance of Examinees in Certified Public Accountant Licensure Exam**

Family Factors	May-19		Oct-19		Overall Tot	
	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP
Family motivation and encouragement	4	2	19	18	23	20
Family support on expenses	2	1	18	16	20	17
Family dependability on problems	3	2	16	13	19	15
Parents help on students' studies	1	2	15	11	16	13
Parents participation in the activities or goals of the students	2	2	10	12	12	14
Family support on healthy lifestyle	1	2	12	8	13	10
Students involvement in family activities	2	3	10	7	12	10
Family support on extracurricular activities	2	2	6	7	8	9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>108</b>

Table 1 shows the student factors that affected the performance of examinees on the CPALE arranged from most to least number of checks from the respondents. The active participation in review courses conducted by a review school of the students has been chosen most by the respondents. While doing researches in the library or internet is the least. However, 24 out 25 non-passers chose interest in the course as the top factor that affected them in their performance in CPALE. It can also be seen in this table that 30 respondents out 50 chose active participation in review sessions conducted by the University.

By conducting additional interview the researchers obtained some of the responses that solidified the factors present in the checklist. Most of the respondents agreed that active participation in review sessions conducted by a review school is a factor. Two of the respondents said "The review vibe is pleasant and the experience is very nice because there are gray areas that are cleared out" and "Of course in the formal review, I did self-review whenever I didn't have classes." Furthermore, a respondent pointed out saying "During my formal review, I really did review. Proper mindset. I implanted the idea that I was there to review, review alone. I prepared my daily schedule and I followed that until the first pre-boards.

There were answers from the respondents that confirmed that materials related to accountancy are factors that affected their performance. One of the respondent said "I answered handouts but focused more on theories." Others added that "Almost none came from the reviewers, the problems are new, but some easy or familiar questions are mixed with it", "Out of the 450 board question, there are only 5 exact questions I encountered during my review in the actual boards but

Accountancy, Business and Hospitality Research Bulletin the concepts are there.”, “Preparing to review 3-5 handouts of auditing theories but end up reviewing only half of the first page of the first hand out. Continuous review time (3hrs-break-3hrs-break-etc) (I really do review promise).”

A respondent also emphasized the effect of materials through this statement, “The review materials also helped a lot in my study of concepts. I can say that concepts will save you especially when none of the problems you previously solved appeared in the actual exam.” However, other respondents have different perception about this saying, “Review materials helped me but not by much. It helped me apply concepts but still the foundation on those topics is the most important. You have to trust yourself that you know those concepts” and “It’s better to read the books than the review materials because the board exam is more on theoretical concepts.

Also, the time spent on studying lessons have importance based on the statements of a respondent stating “The time of study also has an effect. It is important to determine the time period that you are most productive.” On the other hand, one of the respondents stated his experience “I find it hard to review since there was no consistency on my study habit. It depends on my mood. There are times that my mind would not take what I am reviewing. Sometimes, I like reviewing at dawn. Sometimes I review all night. It really changes based on my mood.”

**Table 2: Family Factors Affecting the Performance of Examinees in Certified Public Accountant Licensure Exam**

Family Factors	May-19		Oct-19		Overall Total		
	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	Tot.
Family motivation and encouragement	4	2	19	18	23	20	43
Family support on expenses	2	1	18	16	20	17	37
Family dependability on problems	3	2	16	13	19	15	34
Parents help on students’ studies	1	2	15	11	16	13	29
Parents participation in the activities or goals of the students	2	2	10	12	12	14	26
Family support on healthy lifestyle	1	2	12	8	13	10	23
Students involvement in family activities	2	3	10	7	12	10	22
Family support on extracurricular activities	2	2	6	7	8	9	17
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>231</b>

Illustrated in Table 2 are the family factors that affected the performance of examinees on the CPALE arranged from most to least number of checks from the respondents. Family motivation and encouragement was chosen by 43 out of 50

respondents. On the other hand, only 17 out of 50 respondents chose family support on extracurricular activities.

The interview conducted also revealed that family factors are significant in the performance of the examinees. One respondent said, “There were times when I doubted myself but my friends and families helped me to forget all about the doubts and fears.” Some respondents said that their families are their motivation in reviewing. One respondent said, “If you also lose motivation, call your family. It can energize.” The respondents also claimed that together with their family, friends also played a big role in their performance in the exam. They said, “Video chatting with family, friends, and boyfriend/girlfriend will help boost your morale”, “right support from family and friends (not that kind of support that will make you feel pressured)”, “going back to my family in Tuguegarao somewhat reduced the pressure that I was feeling”, and “The support of my family and also the moment my mother accompanied me in my exam, it strengthened me.” Others said that prayers of their family and friends helped them also. “My family’s and friends’ prayers were the no. 1 things that helped me.”, and “The biggest factor for me is my faith in God and my family”

**Table 3: School Factors Affecting the Performance of Examinees in Certified Public Accountant Licensure Exam**

School Factors	May-19		Oct-19		Overall Total		
	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	Tot.
Accounting programs	2	2	18	12	20	14	34
Accountancy faculty and staff	1	3	16	12	17	15	32
Technology hardware and software	2	3	13	7	15	10	25
Mock Boards	0	3	9	7	9	10	19
Laboratory equipment, supplies and materials	0	1	7	4	7	5	12
Audio visual resources	2	1	4	4	6	5	11
Sports and recreational facilities	0	2	3	4	3	6	9
Laboratories and physical facilities	0	1	4	1	4	2	6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>378</b>

Presented in Table 3 are the school factors that affected the performance of examinees on the CPALE arranged from most to least number of checks from the respondents. The accounting programs of the school was chosen most by the respondents. While laboratories and physical facilities garnered the least checks.

Even though school factors was not really emphasized in the interview, one of the respondents solidified school factor through this statement, “I really felt the exam was hard but I did not get nervous while answering maybe because of the training I had with mock boards that when I do not know the answer I would immediately proceed to the next one.”

### **Other Factors**

The researchers found out other factors that affected the performance of the examinees in the interview conducted with the respondents. Here are the following factors:

#### **Limitation of unnecessary activities**

This factor is from 52% of the total respondents. Most of these unnecessary activities are about social networking sites and mobile applications. Many of the examinees uninstalled their mobile applications and refrained from checking on them. One statement which is similar to all other responses is “I minimized my time in browsing the internet and I avoided being attached to something or someone. I feared that.”

#### **Physical State and Condition**

The respondents regarded their physical conditions to be a factor in the board exam. One of the respondents said, “The time of study also has an effect. It is important to determine the time period that you are most productive. If you can't do it at night, do it by day.” Another also said, “Maybe the habit of reviewing late at night and sleeping in the afternoon. Since the boards is in the morning and the afternoon, I developed a habit of taking a nap on the afternoon that's why I had taken a nap during the actual boards.”

#### **Mental State and Condition**

One of the considered factors are their mental state and condition to have affected their performance in the CPALE. Included in this factor is the faith in God that the examinees had during their review. Some of the respondents said, “I would consider as a factor the self-confidence I had back then. I still have doubts with myself during the review if I can pass the board examination. I would also consider the faith I had, I honestly felt that I did not have strong faith to surrender everything to God.” and “Proper mindset. I implanted the idea that I was there to review, review alone. I prepared my daily schedule and I followed that until the first pre-boards. I was satisfied by the results and I continue that kind of habit.”

The answer of the respondents also included about having a peace of mind through this statement, “Having go-to-friend to share your problems and thoughts. It helped me to have a peace of mind. And also, every Fridays I go out to have some

fun.” Furthermore, one of the most mentioned factor by the respondents that greatly affect their performance was faith in God. a respondent emphasized it concluded this statement, “The biggest factor for me is my faith in God and my family. Also my composure and mental attitude towards the exam that no matter how difficult it was, I will be able to pass.”

### **DISCUSSION**

The CPA Board exam does not dwell only on the academic ability of its examinees. Thus, the researchers lifted the factors that Herrero (2015) concluded in his research. There are three major factors that affected the performance of examinees; student factors, home and family factors and lastly, school factors. Two of the top ranked factors which is the active participation in review session and materials related to accountancy solidified the result of the study of Herrero (2015) which falls under the Student factors. These factors have high influence and have very much effect in the performance of the examinees (Herrero, 2015 and Fang-asan, 2016). According to Herrero (2015) attendance to review courses conducted by review schools helped the students pass the examination.

The active participation of examinees in review schools and the materials used during preparation being factors in an examinee's performance are very much validated by their direct relationships with the technical capability of the examinees which is the essence of the CPALE (Ballado-Tan, 2014). Students after graduating from the accounting degree are free to choose the review schools wherein they will enroll. They can even opt not to enroll at all, although no one really takes this type of risk. The top tier review schools are most often chosen by students for their established credibility and the expectation by the students of excellent results. These review schools offer different review materials which can be used by the students. However, these review courses can only do so much for the preparation of its students for the board exam. It will ultimately depend on the students themselves (Herrero, 2015, Fang-asan, 2016).

For example, one respondent in this study stated that during the review course, one will almost always eventually get tired of attending review classes and will choose to review privately. Most respondents noted that the personal review routine of students in addition to the review schools is critical in the performance in the board exam.

Most of the respondents restructured their academic routine after graduating from the university mainly by putting more time in studying and avoiding these non-related activities. The extreme difficulty of the CPALE definitely requires preparations as mentioned above or even more, which brings up the next factor in

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the list. Such tough preparations usually takes toll on the mental and psychological state of the students. This factor is a relatively wide concept.

So in this study, it is limited to the psychological factors related to the CPALE undertaking. Thus, this concept can be broken down into specific factors such as faith, pressure, mindset, self-confidence, and family and friends. Of the total respondents, 96% mentioned about such things. "My faith in God in whatever I do, especially in taking the CPALE, helped me a lot". This statement represents the idea of the respondents. It is also worth noting that faith is mentioned more than any of the other psychological factors. Faith however is a highly subjective concept.

Furthermore, family motivation and encouragement factor which are under the umbrella of Family factors which was according to Herrero (2015) have a high influence on the performance of the examinees. However, it contradicts the result of Fang-asana (2016) that concluded that they have moderate effect on the performance in the CPA licensure exam. This factor has been noted several times to affect the performance of examinees in the CPALE (Herrero, 2015, Fang-asana, 2016, Pratama, 2017). The effect of family and friends to the respondents of this study is mainly channeled through psychological and financial matters. The prestige of the CPALE comes from its extreme difficulty that requires tough preparation.

The factor that least affected the respondents as a whole is the utilization of laboratories and physical facilities. This factor belongs to the School Factors which is perceived to have average influence on their performance in the CPALE (Herrero, 2015). However Fang-asana (2016) opposes this result because he observed that it had much effect on the performance of the examinees. His observation uncovered that majority of the critical factors includes teacher strategy and academic performance in school.

The factors that affected most of the passers of May and October 2019 were the same with the factors that affected the respondents as a whole. However, most non-passers chose interest in the course as the factor that greatly affected them. This factor is also a student factor, according to Herrero (2015) this kind of factor can highly influence the performance of an examinees. As concluded by Ballado-Tan (2014) accounting subjects are indeed a combination of conceptual and practical concepts, one cannot properly solve a question without knowing the basic idea behind that problem, it is on this ground that respondents would look at accounting as one that helped them develop their logical thinking. This idea was agreed by Fang-asana (2016) and observed that the most critical factor affecting the performance during the examination is the attitude and enthusiasm of the student towards the subjects. But aside the difference of non-passers' and passers' opinion

on this factor, active participation in review sessions conducted by a review school and family motivation remained to be the factors determined by non-passers that is consistent with the factors that influenced the respondents as a whole.

#### **Other Factors affecting the performance of the examinees are the following:**

Based on the results from the gathered data through the interview, there are five major factors that have affected the performances of the Accountancy graduates of USL in the CPALE.

#### **Mental State and Condition**

Mental state and condition to have affected their performance in the CPALE. Included in this factor is the faith in God that the examinees had during their review. The faith that God is almighty and can do things for them which held their emotions composed before and during the exam. This finding supports the claim of Fang-asana (2016) that prayers and faith are factors of the board exam. Also under the category of mental state and condition is the focus, self-confidence, ability to handle and overcome pressure, and fear of failure of the examinees. These factors either increased or decreased the productivity of the examinees during the review before the exam and their precision on answering the problems in the actual board exam (Jung, Wranke, Hamburger, Knauff, 2014).

#### **Limitation of Unnecessary Activities**

The respondents also perceived their actions of limiting the unnecessary activities that they usually do as a factor that affected their performance. Most of these unnecessary activities are about social networking sites and mobile applications. Many of the examinees uninstalled their mobile applications and refrained from checking on them. Some even ignored communications from their friends. The usage of social media has an effect in the academic performance of students in the board exam as reflected on this paper (Maqableh, et. al., 2015)

#### **Physical State and Condition**

The difficulty of the exams often require huge amount of efforts from the student. As this study have found out, some sacrificed hours of sleep to study. For some this affected them adversely. Some said that lack of sleep doesnt help in their performance but decreases their efficiency instead (Curcio, Ferrara, De Gennaro, 2006)

#### **CONCLUSION**

This research was conducted to determine the factors that affected the performance of the accountancy graduates of University of St. Louis Tuguegarao who took the Certified Public Accountant Licensure Examination in May and October 2019. The overall result of this study solidified the research of Herrero (2015) known as the Students Factors, Home and Family Factors, School Factors. This study also determined the following factors that affected the performance of the respondents in the CPALE listed in no particular order: Mental state and condition, Limitation of Unnecessary Activities and Physical state and condition. Beside the three major group of factors identified other factors are also determined. The other factors were identified through the interview of the respondents. This study have showed that the preparation during the review which includes quality of review habits and materials, their attitude towards studying, avoiding unnecessary activities that affect the productivity of the student are all factors that affect the board exam. It is also noted that the physical condition should not be compromised because it can have an adverse effect on their performance.

### RECOMMENDATION

Based from the outcomes of this study, the researchers would like to recommend the following:

1. This research will be conducted to Management Accounting students who continued their study in other universities.
2. Thoroughly study specific factors stated in this study that affect the performance of the examinees.
3. Determine the difference in the performance of examinees in the formal review outside the university and in the review courses conducted by the university.
4. Further study should be conducted on other possible factors that could affect the performance in the CPALE.

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