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Factors and Challenges Influencing the Criminologist Licensure Examination Performance through the Non-passers' Lens

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Abstract: This study aimed to explore the perceived factors that influenced the success and challenges experienced when taking licensure examination among Bachelor of Science in Criminology graduates of a state university in the Philippines who failed in the Criminologist Licensure Examinations (CLE). Descriptive-correlational research design was utilized to analyze quantitative data, and Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenology was used for the thematic analysis of qualitative data. The quantitative findings revealed that home and family factor has a high influence on the success in CLE, while student factor, school factor, review center factor, and personal factor have average influence. Further, ten clusters of themes emerged as factors that influence the success in CLE. Among them were interest and focus on the program, and availability of qualified and dedicated faculty. Among the themes that emerged as challenges were lack of preparedness for the exam because of one's work, and personal and social pressures. There is a significant difference on the respondents' perception towards the factors that influence the success in CLE when they are grouped according to sex. Regarding the challenges associated with preparing for and taking the CLE, a significant difference is only observed when respondents are grouped according to their civil status. Generally, married respondents have higher weighted means than the single ones. This implies that the identified challenges affected married respondents more than the single ones. These results can be used to make policies and initiate programs that would enhance graduates' success in the exam by providing appropriate interventions and early remediations.

Keywords: *Criminology, descriptive phenomenology, higher education, licensure examination.*

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Introduction

Republic Act No. 11131, otherwise known as "The Philippine Criminology Profession Act of 2018" mandates that any person who wants to practice his profession in criminology is required to pass the Criminologists Licensure Examinations (CLE) given by the Professional Regulation Commission's (PRC) Professional Regulatory Board of Criminology. From 2015 to 2019, with two examinations each year, the country had produced a total of 95,884 licensed criminologists out of 280,323 takers with an average national passing rate of 32.87% (PRC, 2015a; PRC, 2015b; PRC, 2016a; PRC, 2016b; PRC, 2017a, PRC, 2017b, PRC, 2018a, PRC, 2018b, PRC, 2019a; PRC, 2019b). Specifically, Region VII, which includes the provinces of Bohol, Cebu, Negros Oriental, and Siquijor, had produced a total of 3,076 out of 17,013 takers with an average regional passing rate of 32.21%. More specifically, the province of Negros Oriental had produced a total of 1,615 licensed criminologists out of 5,575 takers from 2015 to 2019 with an average provincial passing rate of 30.83%.

There is a plethora of literature examining the success predictors of performance in licensure examinations in other disciplines abroad. These predictors include demographic data, scores in admission tests, grades in content courses, grade point average, critical thinking, learning styles, and participation in supplemental instruction sessions. These

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predictors were used to predict nursing licensure examinations (Arathuzik & Aber, 1998; De Lima et al., 2011; Grossbach & Kuncel, 2011; Kaddoura et al., 2017; Kwi-Soon & Bok-Sun, 2009; Lockie et al., 2013; Yei-Jin, 2013) and chiropractic licensure exam (Lawson & Till, 2006).

In the Philippines, several studies have examined the success predictors of performance in licensure examinations. These predictors include grade point average (GPA), pre-board examination result or performance in in-house reviews, final internship grades, and students' aspirations, attitude and study habits. These predictors were used to predict the performance in nursing licensure examinations (Garcia, 2011; Ong et al., 2012; Yasa & Gonzales, 2016), physical therapy and occupational therapy licensure examinations (Constantino et al., 2014), medical technologist licensure examination (Pasia et al., 2012), licensure examination for teachers (Balagtas & Gerundio, 2014; Esmeralda & Perez-Espinosa, 2015), and other examinations.

There is a paucity of research that determines the predictors of performance in CLE in the Philippines or simply analyses the performance of higher education institutions in the CLE. Nevertheless, one notable study was that of Barrera et al. (2013) which concluded that major subjects GPA and English Qualifying Examination scores significantly predicted performance in the CLE. Meanwhile, Pariñas and Obrero (2012) explored the relevance of the topics discussed in the review program considering the profile of the respondents like age, year graduated, sex, UNP CAT rating, number of take of examination, and civil status along with the level of relevance of the subjects lectured during reviews asked in the different areas and the difficulty encountered in the different areas of concentrations in the Criminology Licensure Examination, respectively. On the other hand, Bajeta et al. (2015) described their institution's performance in the six professional board subjects in the CLE from 2008 to 2013, compared the results of licensure examination per subject, and proposed a plan of action to improve the board performance of their university. Lastly, Villarmia (2017) used a qualitative method through focused-group discussion in drawing out the perception of students on their expectations, quality of teaching, role and responsibilities, and confidence to take the board exam, and concluded that the pioneering class was satisfied in their four-year course as most of their expectations were realized during their studies.

However, there is no study conducted yet which both quantitatively and qualitatively explores the factors and challenges experienced by those who failed in the CLE. Thus, this current study addresses the issue by providing an in-depth exploration of the experiences of CLE takers who failed in the CLE.

Specifically, the current study utilized descriptive-correlational and phenomenological methods to examine the factors that influence the success in CLE and the challenges associated with preparing for and taking the CLE as experienced by B.S. Criminology graduates of a state university campus in the province of Negros Oriental, Philippines who failed in the CLE.

This study aimed to explore the perceived factors that influenced the success among Bachelor of Science in Criminology graduates of a state university campus in the province of Negros Oriental, Philippines who had yet to pass the Criminologist Licensure Examinations. It also aims to document the perceived challenges that the takers had experienced when they prepared for and took the examination to facilitate the institution in providing help for future test-takers.

Specifically, the study determines the demographic and academic profiles of the respondents in terms of age, sex, year graduated, civil status when they first took the CLE, and whether or not they were currently employed, and academic profile such as length of time they finished B.S. Criminology, whether or not they have failing grades in their major subjects, number of times they took the CLE, whether or not they enrolled in a review center, and whether or not they were employed on the first time they took the CLE. This also identifies the perceived factors that influence the success in the CLE, and the perceived challenges experienced by the respondents associated with preparing for and taking the CLE. In the end, this measures the significant difference and significant relationship between the weighted means of the perceived factors and challenges for each respondent when grouped according to their profile.

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized both descriptive-correlational-survey design using inferential techniques and qualitative approach using semi-structured, face-to-face, in-depth interview applying Colaizzi's strategy of descriptive phenomenology. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used in this study to obtain a more robust and holistic data to address the research questions. In so doing, quantitative and qualitative findings can be corroborated with each other.

The Sample

The respondents of this study who answered the questionnaire included 115 B.S. Criminology graduates of a state university campus in the province of Negros Oriental, Philippine from 2015 to 2019 who took the CLE from April 2015 to November 2019 testing periods but failed at least once and have not yet passed the said exam during the conduct of

this study. The participants who voluntarily consented to participate in the in-depth interview included 29 B.S. Criminology graduates who were likewise part of the same sample who participated in the survey.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents and Participants

Batch	Population of Respondents	No. of Survey Respondents	% of Responses	No. of IDI Participants
2015	49	29	59.18	8
2016	56	24	42.86	7
2017	70	31	44.29	8
2018	83	37	44.58	3
2019	71	34	47.76	3
Total	329	155	47.76	29

Regarding the respondents' demographic and academic profiles (n=155), 80.65% of them are male, while 19.35% are female. Majority of the respondents' age ranged from 24-26-year-old (45.16%). Further, 31.61% of the respondents were 21-23-year-old, 16.77% were 27-29-year-old, 5.16% were 30-32-year-old, 0.65% were 33-35-year-old, and 0.65% were 36-year-old and above. At the time they first took the Criminologist Licensure Examination (CLE), 89.68% of the participants were single, while the rest were married. 54.19% of the respondents were not currently employed at the time this study was conducted. When it comes to the length of time the participants finished their college degree (Bachelor of Science in Criminology), the majority of them (or 85.16%) finished their degree on time (4 school years). The majority of the participants (or 80.65%) did not have any failing grades in their professional courses in college. Further, 50.32% of the participants took the CLE once, 21.94% took the exam twice, 16.77% took the exam thrice, 5.16% took the exam four times, 3.23% took the exam five times, 1.94% took the exam six times, and 0.65% took the exam eight times. Moreover, 51.61% of the participants enrolled in a review center on the first time they took the CLE, while the remaining did not enroll. Lastly, 50.32% of the participants were already employed the first time they took the CLE, while the remaining were not employed.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers targeted the entire population which was 329. However, 140 was considered sufficient considering the pandemic the country has been facing. Only 155 responded to the survey within the study period, partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The data gathering was scheduled in the months of June to August 2020. During these months, the entire country was placed under enhanced community quarantine (ECQ). Only the responses received within this period were included in the analysis.

Since the researchers used a questionnaire based on tested tools, a survey was conducted first to all respondents. After the survey, the semi-structured in-depth interview was conducted next with those respondents who met the identified criteria. The criteria for the in-depth interview were the following: (a) those who failed three or more times (from batches 2015, 2016, 2017) and two times (from batches 2018, 2019) in the CLE, or (b) those who had a failing grade in at least one of their major subjects, or (c) those who have extended years of schooling (spent more than 4 school years to finish the B.S. Criminology program). The survey questionnaires were sent to the respondents electronically using Google Forms through email or Messenger. Respondents who did not have internet connectivity received the questionnaire through a courier.

A semi-structured, face-to-face, in-depth interview was conducted using a pre-prepared interview guide. Participants were encouraged to talk freely and tell stories using their own words. Each interview lasted from 40 minutes to one hour. The lead researcher conducted all interviews. The interview was audio-taped, transcribed, translated, coded, and analyzed. Regarding the process of translation, all transcripts were double-checked by a bilingual translator who is competent in both Cebuano and English. At the end of each interview, the researchers reminded the participants about the former's need for a second contact with the latter via mobile phone calls or Messenger to discuss the study findings and make sure that the study findings reflect their own experiences (Morrow et al., 2015). The lead researcher determined the level of data saturation.

Instrument

For the quantitative aspect of this study, the respondents answered a three-page questionnaire adapted from the study of Herrero (2015), and the study titled "An examination of factors affecting the passing rates of the CPA examination." The questionnaire consisted of items about profile, factors, and challenges that influence the CLE results. The expert advice of published researchers was also sought to review and finalize the questionnaire. On the other hand, the in-depth interview was conducted using semi-structured interview questions.

Analysis

The quantitative data of this study were treated using univariate and bivariate statistical tools. Specifically, to determine the significant relationship between the categorical profile of the respondents and their perceived factors that influenced the success in CLE and the challenges associated with preparing for and taking the CLE, the researchers used the chi-square test. Further, to check if there is a significant relationship between the quantifiable profile of the respondents and their perceived factors and challenges associated with taking the CLE, the researchers used Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient because the data passed the normality test.

On the other hand, the qualitative data were analyzed using the seven steps which represent Colaizzi's process of phenomenological data analysis (Morrow et al., 2015). The process includes the following steps: (1) familiarization, (2) identifying significant statements, (3) formulating meanings, (4) clustering themes, (5) developing an exhaustive description, (6) producing the fundamental structure, and (7) seeking verification of the fundamental structure. Similar to the study of Kwi-Soon and Bok-Sun (2009), credibility was verified by making the participants review the interview descriptions to ensure accuracy.

To establish trustworthiness in the thematic analysis, the following criteria were strictly observed, namely: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and audit trails (based on Lincoln and Guba 1985, as cited in Nowell et al., 2017). To achieve credibility, participants were contacted to seek verifications of the formulated meanings and clustered themes based on their narratives. The participants manifested that what was written down by the researchers was what they intended to convey. Regarding transferability, future researchers who intend to conduct a study related to this may use the entire description of methodology contained herein as their guide to transfer the findings. Moreover, before submitting the manuscript for peer review to a journal, the researchers requested at least two social scientists to audit the research process observed in this current study. To attain confirmability, the peer debriefing, diagramming themes, and team meetings were held to have a consensus on themes. Lastly, all raw data, field notes, and transcripts are kept by the lead researcher for purposes of cross-referencing data with regard to audit trails.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers ensured that the respondents read and signed the informed consent form that vouched for the voluntary nature of their participation. The researchers, likewise, made sure that no person or organization was harmed throughout the conduct of the study. Also, the researchers protected the respondents' identity by presenting the result in general and not mentioning individual responses that may lead to their identification. Finally, the researchers, in the entire duration of the study, especially during data gathering, respected the decision of the respondents who decided to withdraw their participation even if they had already signed the informed consent form. No individuals other than the members of the research team had access to the information provided by respondents. All answers were maintained in a protected database hosted at the Research Office in Negros Oriental State University, Bayawan – Sta. Catalina Campus. Any details that contributed to identification were highly anonymized. Most importantly, this study was granted clearance and approved by Negros Oriental State University's Research Ethics Committee.

Results

Factors That Influence Success in the Examination

Of the five factors considered in the quantitative aspect of this study, data in Table 2 shows that only one cluster of factors has a *high influence* on the CLE performance, that is, home and family factor. This confirms the study of Herrero (2015) which also noted that home and family factors have a high influence on CPA exam performance, alongside student factors. The rest of the factors in this present study (namely: review center factor, school factor, personal factor, and student factor) have *average influence* on CLE performance. It can therefore be inferred from this that all the factors influence the CLE results. These findings, except for the home and family factor which is not included in the study of Serrano (2000), are consistent with the findings of Serrano (2000) which revealed that review school attended, school, peers and review mates (not included in this present study), individual/personal skills, and in-house review program (not also included in this study) are factors that affect the performance in a licensure examination as perceived by those who failed.

More specifically, out of the 21 pre-listed factors, six of them were perceived by the participants to have a *high influence* on CLE performance. Two of these six factors are from home and family factors, another two from school factors, one from student factors, and another from personal factors. These six specific factors were as follows: (1) family gives motivation and encouragement, (2) family supports all expenses in reviewing and taking the CLE, (3) qualified and dedicated faculty and staff are available, (4) teaching strategies that promote effective learning are used by instructors, (5) there is interest in the course (B.S. Criminology), and (6) there is a high motivation to pass the licensure exam.

Table 2. Factors That Influenced the Success in the Criminologist Licensure Examination (n=155)

Factors	High influence 4	Average influence 3	Low influence 2	No influence 1	Weighted Mean	SD	Verbal Description
Student factor							
1. interest in the course (B.S. Criminology)	115	34	4	2	3.69	0.59	High influence
2. time spent on studying lessons	40	79	35	1	3.02	0.72	Average influence
3. doing research in the library or through internet	23	63	63	6	2.66	0.78	Average influence
4. number of hours spent reading books and materials	24	61	62	8	2.65	0.8	Average influence
	202	237	164	17	3.01	0.84	Average influence
Home and family factor							
5. family gives motivation and Encouragement	100	38	12	5	3.5	0.78	High influence
6. family supports all expenses in reviewing and taking the CLE	74	54	20	7	3.26	0.85	High influence
7. parents help a lot in preparations for the CLE	69	56	23	7	3.21	0.86	Average influence
8. family can be depended upon when a problem arises	44	79	22	10	3.01	0.83	Average influence
	287	227	77	29	3.25	0.85	High influence
School factor							
9. availability of qualified and dedicated faculty and staff	77	65	10	3	3.39	0.7	High influence
10. teaching strategies used by instructors that promote effective learning	70	72	11	2	3.35	0.67	High influence
11. adequacy of classrooms with proper ventilation	33	89	32	1	2.99	0.67	Average influence
12. easy access to transportation going to school	39	65	39	12	2.85	0.89	Average influence
13. adequacy of audio-visual Resources	24	79	49	3	2.8	0.72	Average influence
14. adequacy of laboratory equipment and physical facilities	25	68	56	6	2.72	0.78	Average influence
	268	438	197	27	3.02	0.79	Average influence
Review center factor							
15. regular attendance to review sessions/classes conducted by the review center	36	34	15	2	3.2	0.8	Average influence
16. active participation in the review sessions/classes conducted by the review center	26	38	22	1	3.02	0.78	Average influence
	62	72	37	3	3.11	0.79	Average influence
Personal factor							
17. high motivation to pass the licensure exam	83	57	13	2	3.43	0.7	High influence
18. ability to think critically and analyze every item in the exam	39	88	28	0	3.07	0.66	Average influence
19. emotionally stable when taking the exam	36	83	33	3	2.98	0.72	Average influence
20. ability to manage test anxiety and other negative emotions	-27	81	41	6	2.83	0.75	Average influence
21. ability to retain what has been Memorized	20	84	50	1	2.79	0.66	Average influence
	205	393	165	12	3.02	0.73	Average influence

Legend: High influence (3.25 – 4.00); Average influence (2.50 – 3.24); Low influence (1.75 – 2.49); No influence (1.00 – 1.74)

During the in-depth interview, ten common themes emerged from the thematic analysis regarding the factors that influence the Criminologist Licensure Examination (CLE) results which articulated the experiences of CLE non-passers. These themes are elaborated below; select samples of participants' supporting statements are likewise described below.

Interest and Focus in Bachelor of Science in Criminology

This theme points out to the participants' interest and focus in Bachelor of Science in Criminology program. Had the program been their personal choice and had they been serious in their studies back in college, there could have been a high chance of passing the CLE. One participant reported that: "I would have wanted to take Information Technology. But during that time, I was made to choose by the one who will finance my studies between education and criminology. I chose criminology as it fits me, but it was not really the course that I love. Interest in the program is really a factor that influences the CLE performance because no matter how hard the instructors will teach the students if the latter is not interested in the program or is not motivated to finish it, it will still be useless." A comment from one participant was: "Even if the instructor will give his/her best to teach the students, but if the latter does not have an interest or are not motivated [or being physically present in class, but mentally absent], it would be futile. The students wouldn't learn."

One's peers or circle of friends in college is another contributory factor that affects one's focus while studying. It was recounted by some participants that: "Circle of friends is a factor. Going to places or hanging out with friends should have been avoided. There were times I would be absent just to hang out with friends."

Uninterrupted Schooling

Another contributing factor to the non-passing of takers in the CLE is the interrupted schooling. There was a perception among participants that uninterrupted schooling is more advantageous than when you stop schooling and go back to school several years later. It was conveyed that: "There is a big difference if you take the program straight, without stopping. Continuity of schooling is a factor; like in my case, I stopped studying in 2005 and went back in 2015, so it took me a long time to go back to school."

Parent's Financial and Moral Support

Another issue of major concern to many of the participants was the parent's financial and moral support while studying in college and while reviewing for the CLE and eventually taking the exam. While in college, it is evident from the data collected in this study that some students experienced financial difficulties because of the meager allowance that their parents provided them which somehow affected their schooling: "I seldom attended classes because of financial challenges. At times I did not have money for my fare because my mother gave me a small amount of money and a portion of it was for my food, so it really affected my studies."

While preparing for the exam, parent's support is also a crucial factor. Specifically, it is best when parents do not expect their children to seek employment in order to financially give back immediately after graduating. One participant narrated that: "Parents should understand that preparation for the exam is needed. There are parents who expect their children to work or give back right after graduating. Lucky are those who have parents who understand."

Adequacy of Classrooms, Laboratory Equipment, and Physical Facilities

This theme highlights the importance of adequate classrooms with proper ventilation, laboratory equipment for B.S. Criminology program, and physical facilities like a library. Regarding the classrooms, it was recognized by the participants that the physical condition of classrooms directly affects their learning. Aside from classrooms, adequate laboratory equipment is also identified as important for effective learning. It was noted by some participants that: "The college really lacked laboratory equipment. Add to that is the fact that we did not have actual firing and actual water survival exercises. That is why we learned only a little."

Availability of Qualified and Dedicated Faculty Members

A large majority of participants identified the availability of qualified and dedicated faculty members as a major factor that influences the CLE results. This factor refers to the availability of faculty members who are both competent and committed to conducting classes regularly, specifically on professional courses. The participants reported that they: "...had difficulty understanding the lesson because our instructor was new [untrained] in teaching Criminalistics, for example, requires a competent instructor, an expert on fingerprints."

The participants also reported that: "We seldom met in our Law class before, so we learned only a little. We had nothing to answer during the exam; our instructors in the Criminal Law Book 1 and 2 were lawyers/attorneys. During my time, we seldom met and then we were only left with seat works. In fact, some participants stated that: In one of our major subjects [law], we met in class once a week and exams were given after; there were instructors who missed classes, and when they were present they immediately gave exams without explaining substantially the lessons."

Additionally, in times when instructors' salary would be delayed, one participant stated that: "They got pissed off because the salary was delayed for months, the reason for the non-holding of classes. Only class attendance was secured."

Use of Teaching Strategies That Promote Effective Learning

The participants in this study had an overwhelming belief that instructors' teaching strategies should ensure the promotion of effective learning among students. This is another factor that influences CLE results according to the non-passers: "We had a dull class in one of our subjects. It was the subject we had difficulty learning. The instructor is really a factor in learning. Lessons should be taught point-by-point. Instructors should assist students in the learning process; instructor is the number one factor. Teaching was not convincing [effective]. Students did not listen attentively. At times, lessons were not acquired or learned."

Some participants commented that: "Discussions proceeded to the next even if the previous lesson was not yet processed and understood by the students. We couldn't catch up. We go to school to learn, but we learned only a little because of the fast pace of the discussion; the instructor's approach was more on theories, always discussing without letting the students understand."

Retention Policy Based on a Cut-off Grade

Some participants in this study identified the difference in the effects when retention policy based on cut-off grade was enforced compared to the effects when it was not. More often than not, there was a perception that strictly enforcing a retention policy based on cut-off grade has a better effect on students' academic performance, and eventually creates a positive effect on their CLE results. One participant stated that: "If a cut-off grade is set, you are pressured to study; you will work hard."

Regular Attendance in Review Centers

Enrolling in a review center and regularly attending review sessions were identified as a recurrent theme in this study. Collectively, the participants acknowledged the benefits and advantages of regularly attending the review sessions conducted by review centers. Chances of passing the CLE are higher when one has attended regularly the review sessions since they provide strategies on how to pass the exam: "Enrolling in a review center is a factor because there are things taught in there which are not taught in school. Review centers also provide techniques on how to pass the board exam."

Some participants attested that self-review or self-study is never enough to pass the exam. There is, for them, a necessity to really enroll in a review center and be serious in attending their review sessions to refresh them with the knowledge learned in school: "Self-review is not enough. You need to enroll in a review center for you to be refreshed with the lessons."

Ample Time, Focus, and Discipline During the Review

A good number of participants in this study were working when they were preparing for the exam. Consequently, their work became a factor that limited the time that they were supposed to spend studying. Hence, ample time, focus, and discipline during the review are identified as factors that influence the CLE results. Some participants narrated that: "I had a little time for the review because I usually got home from work at 7:00 or 8:00 in the evening. Because I had to perform my assigned responsibilities in the workplace, I usually got home tired. After dinner, I just went to bed instead of reviewing."

Time management and discipline during the review are key elements that influence the CLE results. For some reasons, being married and having family obligations affected the time that they were supposed to spend reviewing: "Like me, I am married. I have family obligations, at the same time work responsibilities, so I could not really give my focus on the review. My review was haphazardly done." Even when some participants have enrolled in review centers, time management and discipline were a huge challenge as some of them were tempted to go out at night with friends for fun: "While we were reviewing in a review center then, we went out at night for fun with friends. It was hard to resist temptation."

Ability to Manage Test Anxiety and Retain What has Been Studied

This theme details the non-passers' ability to manage test anxiety and retain what has been studied. Even when you came in prepared for the exam, everything turns useless when takers are consumed by their test anxiety and nervousness: "I had thoughts on whether I can manage to take the exam. When I was taking the exam in Cebu, I was really nervous." Committing to memory the things that have been studied is equally important to pass the exam. This is the experience of some participants: "I really easily forget. I can understand what I study, but it doesn't stay long in my memory. It just passes through."

Challenges in Taking the Examination

Of the eight pre-identified challenges associated with taking the CLE, Table 3 manifests that only six are actually perceived by the participants as challenges. These challenges were as follows: (1) the exam is very difficult to answer, (2) some items in the exam were not discussed in school, (3) I was pressured by the personal and social consequences of failing the exam, (4) it is very expensive to take the exam, (5) the language used in the exam is difficult to understand, and (6) I have no enough time to study or review. The participants did not at all agree that too many family responsibilities and time allotted to finish the exam are challenges associated with taking the CLE. Regarding the respondents' perception that the CLE is very difficult to answer, this finding lends support to Pariñas and Obrero's (2012) study which likewise revealed that the difficulty encountered by their respondents in the different subjects in the CLE is high.

Table 3. Challenges Experienced by the Respondents Associated With Preparing for and Taking the Criminologist Licensure Examination (n=155)

Challenges	Strongly agree 4	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Strongly disagree 1	Weighted Mean	SD	Verbal Description
1. The exam is very difficult to answer.	31	84	35	5	2.91	0.74	Agree
2. Some items in the exam were not discussed in school.	36	67	41	11	2.83	0.87	Agree
3. I was pressured by the personal and social consequences of failing the exam.	29	68	48	10	2.75	0.83	Agree
4. It is very expensive to take the exam.	32	58	52	13	2.70	0.89	Agree
5. The language used in the exam is difficult to understand.	17	77	53	8	2.66	0.74	Agree
6. I have no enough time to study or review.	25	66	49	15	2.65	0.86	Agree
7. I have too many family responsibilities.	18	56	60	21	2.46	0.87	Disagree
8. The time allotted to finish the exam is not enough.	19	53	64	19	2.46	0.86	Disagree
	207	529	402	102	2.68	0.85	Agree

Legend: Strongly agree (3.25 – 4.00); Agree (2.50 – 3.24); Disagree (1.75 – 2.49); Strongly disagree (1.00 – 1.74)

Nine common themes emerged from the thematic analysis of in-depth interviews regarding the challenges associated with the preparation and taking of the Criminologist Licensure Examination (CLE) which articulate the experiences of CLE non-passers. These themes are elaborated below; select samples of participants' supporting statements are likewise presented below.

Lack of Preparedness for the Exam Because of One's Work

The majority of those who participated in the in-depth interview were already employed the first time they took the CLE. As a result, their employment became a challenge when they prepared for the exam as they tried to find a perfect balance between studying and working. This reality is evidenced in the following statements: "If I had time after work, I read a little but without much focus because of the limited time. I still had to work the next day; I never had the chance to study even a little because I was assigned to take the night shift that time. When I arrived home from work, I had to rest, of course, I had other obligations, too."

Time management became a real challenge to some participants: "It is difficult to manage time when you study while you also work. Like in my case, I finished work at 8:30 in the evening, so I could not give focus on my study. I got to read during my day-off only." Worst, other participants had to set aside studying altogether because of their dire need to work to address their financial needs: "I did not study because I was working. I had to work because of financial needs."

Personal and Social Pressures

This theme details how the non-passers were challenged by their perceived personal and social consequences when they could not make it to pass the exam. The personal and social expectations to pass the exam placed so much pressure on them: "I was kind of nervous the first day because I thought whether I could make it or whether I might fail again; I worried whether I would pass or not because I have been taking the exam several times."

Evidently, the data collected demonstrated that the participants felt the pressure from their family to pass the exam because of the additional financial burden they were causing, or because they wanted their parents to be proud of them, or simply because they were being compared to their relatives who have already passed the board exam: "I feel pressured and down because instead of being able to help my parents, I added to their finances; My parent's expectation was also a challenge. I had to pass to make them proud. My study would be useless if I fail; and I was being compared by my relatives to my other cousins who were already professionals." Additional pressure was also felt by some scholars and takers who are now in the government service: "The high expectation of my family pressured me especially that I was a scholar; I am a councilor. I was a bit pressured because some of my batch-mates were already police officers."

Unfamiliar Words Used in the Exam

Another challenge of major concern to many participants was their unfamiliarity with some of the words used in constructing the exam items. Many participants mentioned that: "We did not encounter in school the words used in the exam; there were words in the test that I found difficult to understand. They were really difficult." Because of the participants' unfamiliarity with some of the words used in the test, especially the Law terminologies, it consequently consumed much of their time rereading the items: "I did not encounter some of the Law terminologies, the reason I consumed much time as I had to reread the questions." If they could not still decipher the meaning of the words used in a particular item, they simply resorted to choosing an answer that they were not certain of: "I answered the items without certainty since the words used in test items were not familiar to me."

Difficulty of the Exam

There was an overwhelming belief among the participants that the exam was very difficult: "There were a number of questions that I did not understand. There were questions which were really very difficult to answer." Specifically, what made the exam difficult were the choices which were very confusing because they all seemed to be potential answers: "I found the questions difficult. The choices were all potential answers; the questions were difficult, and the choices were equally competitive as answers; the choices seemed to be similar. You would get confused which one was the right choice."

Insufficiency of Time to Finish the Exam

This theme points out to some participants' experience wherein they felt that the time allotted to finish the exam was insufficient. Many participants recounted that: "The time allotted for the exam was not enough, especially on difficult subjects." Some participants also reported that: "I ran out of time. I was still in item 80 out of 100 when the proctor informed that we had ten minutes left; I was pressured by time also. I had 40 items that were left unanswered." Consequently, many participants simply resorted to selecting and shading answers without careful analysis: "Thirty minutes before the time I still had more than thirty items to be answered because the questions were lengthy, especially in Sociology. What happened was I answered the items without certainty."

Some Items in the Exam Were not Discussed in School

Majority of participants also identified that several items which were not discussed in school came out in the exam: "Many items came out in the test which were not taught in class back in college; there were questions we did not encounter in school; and the questions were tricky." Consequently, the unfamiliarity of some participants to certain items in the exam contributed to the pressure they felt while taking the exam: "I feel more pressured when I do not understand the questions when I haven't encountered them, and when unfamiliar terms are used." One contributing factor to some participants' unfamiliarity with particular items in the exam was the lack of regular faculty members who could teach certain major courses: "There were many items in the test that were not discussed in school. In our Criminalistics class that time, we did not have a regular teacher. We have this teacher for now; the next time, we have a different one."

High Review and Exam Expenses

There was a common perception among participants in this study that reviewing in a review center potentially increased the chances of passing the CLE. Also, they recognized that knowledge is enriched with the inputs provided by review centers. However, there was also a common perception that reviewing in a review center entails a substantial amount of money, and they did not have sufficient resources to finance for this purpose. Many participants mentioned that: "Review centers are expensive. It was already costly to take the exam, also considering the fare, how much more the fee for the review. I could not afford." Instead of reviewing in a review center, some opted to work to earn an income for themselves: "I did not continue with my review sessions because I did not have the money to sustain my review needs. That is why I decided to work in Dumaguete City for me to earn."

Aside from the fact that reviewing in a review center is expensive, taking the exam itself demands enough budget for transportation, accommodation, food, among others, which exacerbate the financial struggle that others experienced: "Financially I was struggling. The location for the exam was also far. I had to prepare for the expenses, for my personal needs there, too."

Family and Parental Responsibilities

Deep focus when preparing for an exam is a crucial element necessary to pass it. To some participants, their focus was unfortunately snatched because of their family and parental responsibilities: "I did not focus on what I studied. My focus was on helping my family. Financial issues were also the reason; I was working eight hours regularly. When I reached home, I could only study a little because I have two kids to attend to. I could not give my whole attention and focus on my review."

Other participants had to attend to their children who were hospitalized when they were preparing for the exam: "I had a problem the last time I took the exam. I never had focus because my child was hospitalized; I enrolled in a review center but missed many sessions and could not focus because I have a child. During the final coaching in Dumaguete City, I went home since my child could not sleep without me. My child was also hospitalized at that time, so I could not really give attention to my review."

Problems Related to Exam Venue and Accommodation

Venue and accommodation were also identified by some participants as challenges. Such is evidenced by the following supporting statements: "Our exam was in the University of Cebu. The room was not air-conditioned. It was hot. The room had plenty of big electric fans, but they produced disturbing sounds. They were noisy; of course, when you take an exam, the room should be free from noise, but I got distracted and pissed off by the sounds of the birds."

Cebu City is the testing center of the CLE nearest to Negros Oriental. Because of the participants' unfamiliarity with the place, finding a place to stay also became a real challenge to them: "I was new to the place (Cebu). That was my problem. I had to look for a place to stay; I had a hard time looking for a boarding house. I toured around but could not find a vacant one. Finally, on my third try, I got one at about 900 pesos for four nights. I worried about my budget. It might not be enough."

Tables 4 and 5 reveal that when arranged according to the respondents' profile, there is a significant difference on the respondents' perception towards the factors that influence the success in CLE when they are grouped according to sex. On the other hand, with regard to the challenges associated with preparing for and taking the CLE, a significant difference is only observed when the respondents are grouped based on their civil status. Except for one item on the challenges (I was pressured by the personal and social consequences of failing the exam), married respondents have higher weighted means than the single ones. This implies that the identified challenges affected the married respondents more than the single ones.

Table 4. z-test Results for the Significant Difference on the Weighted Means of the Factors That Influenced the Success in CLE and Challenges Associated With Preparing for and Taking the CLE

Category	z Critical value	p-value	z computed value	Decision	Remark
Sex					
Factors	±1.96	0.035	-2.105	Reject H ₀	Significant
Challenges	±1.96	0.21	-1.25	Accept H ₀	Not significant
Current Status of Employment					
Factors	±1.96	0.163	-1.393	Accept H ₀	Not significant
Challenges	±1.96	0.936	0.081	Accept H ₀	Not significant
Civil status on the time they first took CLE					
Factors	±1.96	0.94	0.078	Accept H ₀	Not significant
Challenges	±1.96	0.012	-2.5	Reject H ₀	Significant
Whether or not they have a failing grade in one of their professional courses in college					
Factors	±1.96	0.38	-0.89	Accept H ₀	Not significant
Challenges	±1.96	0.422	0.802	Accept H ₀	Not significant
Whether or not they enrolled in a review center on the first time they took CLE					
Factors	±1.96	0.149	1.442	Accept H ₀	Not significant
Challenges	±1.96	0.413	-0.818	Accept H ₀	Not significant
Whether or not they were employed on the first time they took CLE					
Factors	±1.96	0.164	-1.393	Accept H ₀	Not significant
Challenges	±1.96	0.936	0.081	Accept H ₀	Not significant

Table 5. One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Results for the Significant Difference on the Weighted Means of the Factors That Influenced the Success in CLE and Challenges Associated With Preparing for and Taking the CLE

Category	F critical value	p-value	F computed value	Decision	Remark
Age (21-23 y.o., 24-26 y.o., 27-29 y.o., 30-32 y.o., 33-35 y.o., 36 y.o. and above)					
Factors	2.275	0.604	0.727	Accept H ₀	Not significant
Challenges	2.275	0.213	1.441	Accept H ₀	Not significant
Year Graduated (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019)					
Factors	2.432	0.251	1.36	Accept H ₀	Not significant
Challenges	2.432	0.078	2.144	Accept H ₀	Not significant
Length of time it took them to finish their college degree (4 S.Y., 4 S.Y. and 1 Sem., 5 S.Y., 5 S.Y. and 1 Sem., 6 S.Y., more than 6 S.Y.)					
Factors	2.432	0.749	0.482	Accept H ₀	Not significant
Challenges	2.432	0.553	0.759	Accept H ₀	Not significant
Number of times they have taken CLE (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8)					
Factors	2.16	0.631	0.723	Accept H ₀	Not significant
Challenges	2.16	0.55	0.828	Accept H ₀	Not significant

Note: S.Y. means School Year; Sem. means Semester

Table 6.1 indicates that there is a significant relationship between the perceived factors and respondents' sex, having a failing grade in a professional course, enrollment in a review center, and employment status when taking the CLE for the first time. Similarly, results reveal that there is a significant relationship between the perceived challenges and the respondents' civil status on the first time they took the CLE, current status of employment, having a failing grade in a professional course, enrollment in a review center, and employment status when taking the CLE for the first time. Moreover, Table 6.2 shows that there is indeed a correlation between these quantifiable profile and the respondents' responses; however, this correlation is negligible. Thus, there is no strong evidence to associate the respondents' age, year graduated, length of time it took them to finish their college degree, number of times they have taken CLE, and average grade in college, to their perceived factors and challenges.

Table 6.1. Chi-square Test for Independence Result Between the Profile of Respondents and Their Perceived Factors That Influenced the Success in CLE and Challenges Associated With Preparing for and Taking the CLE

Category	Tabular χ^2 Value	Computed χ^2 Value	Decision	Remark
Sex				
Factors	7.815	21.514	Reject H ₀	Significant
Challenges	7.815	7.377	Accept H ₀	Not Significant
Civil status on the time they first took CLE				
Factors	7.815	6.432	Accept H ₀	Not Significant
Challenges	7.815	9.283	Reject H ₀	Significant
Current status of employment				
Factors	7.815	5.375	Accept H ₀	Not Significant
Challenges	7.815	17.641	Reject H ₀	Significant
Whether or not they have a failing grade in one of their professional courses in college				
Factors	7.815	17.353	Reject H ₀	Significant
Challenges	7.815	9.957	Reject H ₀	Significant
Whether or not they enrolled in a review center on the first time they took CLE				
Factors	7.815	14.079	Reject H ₀	Significant
Challenges	7.815	12.622	Reject H ₀	Significant
Whether or not they were employed on the first time they took CLE				
Factors	7.815	20.606	Reject H ₀	Significant
Challenges	7.815	23.576	Reject H ₀	Significant

(Level of Significance = 0.05)

Table 6.2. Correlation Result Between the Profile of Respondents and Their Perceived Factors That Influenced the Success in CLE and Challenges Associated With Preparing for and Taking the CLE

Category		Correlation Coefficient	Description
Age	Factors	0.009	Negligible correlation
	Challenges	0.044	Negligible correlation
Year graduated	Factors	0.002	Negligible correlation
	Challenges	0.03	Negligible correlation
Length of time it took them to finish their college degree	Factors	0.035	Negligible correlation
	Challenges	0.114	Negligible correlation
Number of times they have taken CLE	Factors	0.004	Negligible correlation
	Challenges	-0.058	Negligible correlation
Grades	Factors	-0.098	Negligible correlation
	Challenges	-0.006	Negligible correlation

Discussion

This study aimed to quantitatively and qualitatively explore the perceived factors that influenced the success among Bachelor of Science in Criminology graduates of a state university campus in the province of Negros Oriental, Philippines who had yet to pass the Criminologist Licensure Examinations. It also aimed to document the perceived challenges that the takers had experienced when they prepared for and took the examination to facilitate the institution in providing help for future test-takers. While there is a plethora of literature examining the success predictors of performance in licensure examinations in other disciplines in the Philippines and abroad, there is a paucity of research that determines the predictors of performance in CLE in the country or simply analyses the performance of higher education institutions in the CLE. Specifically, there is no study conducted yet which both quantitatively and qualitatively explores the factors and challenges experienced by those who failed in the CLE. Thus, this current study addresses the issue by providing an in-depth exploration of the experiences of CLE takers who failed and have not yet passed the CLE.

Most of the themes that emerge in this study as factors that influence the success in taking the CLE confirm previous studies' findings. This present study reveals that interest in and focus on ones' academic program while still studying in college is a potential factor that influences exam performance when graduates would, later on, decide to take the exam. Some participants in this study admitted that they seldom attended classes because of a sheer lack of interest or of peer influence. This finding is similar to the finding in the study of Kwi-Soon and Bok-Sun (2009) whose participants also expressed regret for not having studied harder (while in nursing school). As also shown in Tan (2014), attitude towards one's studies is one predictor that has a significant relationship with licensure examination performance.

Also, parents' support (financial or moral) is a factor that spells a considerable difference in takers' performance in the exam. This supports the study of Kwi-Soon and Bok-Sun (2009) which revealed that the support of participants' families and those around them encouraged those who were reluctant to start preparing for the examination (NCLEX-RN) due to lack of confidence. Moreover, our study noted that laboratory equipment's adequacy is essential to promote effective and experiential learning of students. Unfortunately, the college where the participants in this study graduated from has inadequate laboratory equipment, as perceived by the participants. The respondents noted the same in Villarmia (2017) who observed that they "only used a few criminology types of equipment and experienced incomplete laboratory activities in their subjects". Similarly, Dayaday (2018) also concluded that the lack of laboratory facilities/equipment was partly blamed for the examinees' poor performance.

The respondents in the study of Villarmia (2017) also pointed out that the "first two years of the degree (B.S. Criminology) was frustrating. It was during these years that all of their instructors handling major subjects were part-time instructors. These instructors did not focus on teaching and usually made absences because they were police personnel and private lawyer." This is consistent with our study results which also noted that some part-time instructors who were lawyers made absences in their classes since they had to attend case hearings, thereby affecting the quality of education students acquire. The quality of faculty highly affects the quality of graduates that are being produced, more so passers in licensure examinations. This is supportive of the study of Dayaday (2018), which argued that examinees' performance is positively influenced by faculty and instructional materials.

Furthermore, grades should ideally reflect students' mastery of the competencies in a given course. Therefore, it makes sense to impose a cut-off grade for professional courses as a basis for the retention of students in a particular academic program. This is another theme identified in this study which lends support to the study of Lawson and Till (2006) which concluded that students should continue in their education only after they have shown a degree of mastery.

Likewise, there is an overwhelming belief among the participants in this study that regular attendance in review sessions offered by review centers is a potential factor that increases the chance of passing the CLE. This idea is consistent with the result of Kwi-Soon and Bok-Sun (2009) which reported that "taking the preparation course resulted

in improvement in participants' English reading abilities and consolidation of their knowledge". Likewise, Lascano and Bansiong (2017) confirmed that "attendance to review classes can increase one's chance to hurdle examinations". Additionally, Herrero (2015) also acknowledged the significance of university and review school-administered pre-board or mock board exams. She also observed that review centers have up-to-date review resources.

Our study results demonstrate that time management and discipline during the review are factors that influence the CLE performance, particularly to those who were working while preparing for the exam. This is consistent with Kwi-Soon and Bok-Sun's (2009) findings that participants had very little study time due to shifts and other job-related commitments. Concerning the ability to retain or recall what has been studied, this finding is also noted in the study of Kwi-Soon and Bok-Sun (2009) which conveyed that participants had doubts as to whether they could remember information learned recently.

Most of the themes that emerge in this study as challenges associated with the preparation and taking of the CLE lend support to the results of the studies of previous scholars. This present study shows that lack of preparedness for the exam because of one's work is one of the challenges experienced by the CLE non-passers. This finding supports the study of Kwi-Soon and Bok-Sun (2009) which reported that as the participants were too busy to study, they would consider giving it up. Being physically and mentally exhausted from work also led to reduced motivation to study. This is also consistent with the findings of Arathuzik and Aber (1998) that, among others, work burdens are one of the blocks to success in the NCLEX-RN.

Additionally, findings in this study indicate that personal and social consequences of failing the exam placed so much pressure on the participants to the extent that they felt ashamed to go home or they would have low self-esteem if they did not pass the exam. This is also supportive of what Kwi-Soon and Bok-Sun (2009) pointed out in their study that "some participants who failed on the first try were ashamed of the failure that they wanted to hide themselves".

This study reveals that answering the licensure exam was a real challenge among many participants because some items were not discussed in school. This is partly due to the lack of regular faculty members who could teach certain major courses. This is similar to the study of Villarmia (2017) which reported that the knowledge acquired by the respondents (B.S. Criminology graduating students) is insufficient, especially for the subjects during their first and second years.

Results of this present study also suggest that family responsibilities, alongside parental responsibilities, are among the factors that influence the CLE results of test-takers. That is, some participants in our study have been overwhelmed by obligations in their families and children. However, regarding parental responsibilities which are identified as a challenge in preparing for the exam, this is contrary to the study of Kwi-Soon and Bok-Sun (2009) which conveyed that a studious environment was created at home for participants who have had children.

This current study further reveals that thinking critically and analyzing every item in the exam is one of the factors that influence examination performance. This finding confirms the finding of Kaddoura et al., (2017) who found that there was a statistically significant relationship between critical thinking (C.T.) scores and passing the NCLEX-RN. Significant relationships between the respondents' grades (whether or not they have a failing grade in one of their professional courses) and the factors that influenced success in CLE, and between grades and the challenges associated with preparing for and taking the CLE were discovered in this present study. Amanonce and Maramag (2020) likewise noted in their study that there is a strong and significant correlation between graduates' grade weighted average in college and performance in Licensure Examination for Teachers. The same strong relationship was found between the grades in professional courses and the examinees' rating in professional subtest in licensure examinations (Alhifany et al., 2020; Fontejon-Bonior & de la Rama, 2018).

Conclusions

As perceived by the respondents, this study discovered that home and family factor has a high influence in the success on Criminologist Licensure Examination performance, while student factor, school factor, review center factor, and personal factor have average influence. Furthermore, among the challenges associated with the preparation and taking of the CLE are: the exam is very difficult to answer, some exam items were not discussed in school, and personal and social consequences of failing the exam pressured the respondents. The qualitative findings disclosed ten clusters of themes which emerged as factors that influence the success in CLE. Among them are interest and focus on B.S. Criminology, parent's financial and moral support, adequacy of classrooms, laboratory equipment, and physical facilities, and availability of qualified and dedicated faculty members. In addition, nine clusters of themes emerged as challenges associated with preparing for and taking the CLE. Among them are lack of preparedness for the exam because of one's work, pressured by personal and social consequences of failing the exam, unfamiliar words used in the exam, and very difficult exam. These results can be used to make policies and initiate programs that would enhance graduates' success in the CLE by providing appropriate interventions and early remediation.

Recommendations

Taking into consideration the quantitative and qualitative findings of this study, the following recommendations are made: (a) Higher education institutions that offer Bachelor of Science in Criminology need to ensure that all courses in the curriculum, especially professional courses, are taught by qualified, permanent, competent, and dedicated faculty members. (b) To promote effective learning of B.S. Criminology students, faculty members have to improve their teaching strategies and methodologies. (c) To further support all efforts that aim to deliver quality instruction and promote students' effective learning, it is highly suggested that the program must prioritize the procurement of facilities, equipment, materials, and apparatuses required for B.S. Criminology program as stipulated in Commission on Higher Education (2018). These facilities should be equipped with the needed amenities. (d) Provision of sufficient laboratory equipment, supplies and materials for questioned documents, forensic ballistics, polygraphy, dactyloscopy, police photography, forensic chemistry, and toxicology courses may be given utmost attention and importance.

Moreover, (e) The library holdings must acquire more books, journals, and other learning resources related to the B.S. Criminology program in order to conform to existing Commission on Higher Education (2017) requirements. (f) Since not all B.S. Criminology graduates can financially afford to enroll in a review center to refresh their knowledge before taking the licensure examination, it is highly recommended to conduct a course audit program or any review course which is free of charge. (g) A follow-up study on graduates' CLE performance and its contributing factors is recommended after the recommendations mentioned above have been implemented. Furthermore, an evaluation study may also be conducted to measure the effect and impact on licensure results of the interventions initiated by the College of Criminal Justice Education to increase the CLE results. Lastly, future researchers may also want to compare the passers and non-passers perception on the factors that influence the success in Criminologist Licensure Examination (CLE) and the challenges associated with preparing for and taking the said exam, and analyze the actual ratings of CLE examinees for the last five years as released by the country's Professional Regulation Commission.

Limitations

This study has the following limitations. First, it only provided the perceptions of non-passers. Second, it did not compare the passers' and non-passers' perceptions based on certain variables and run regression test using CLE results as dependent variable, and socio-demographic and academic profiles independent variables to determine the differential effects of each factor. Lastly, it did not compare the perceptions of students from other campuses of the institution. Future studies may consider in their analysis these limitations for a deeper investigation on this matter.

Ethical approval

Ethics clearance for this research project was issued by the Ethics Committee of a state university in Region VII dated May 18, 2020 with Reference No. REA-2020-EXE-002.

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Declaration of competing interest

The authors of the correspondence declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Authorship Contribution Statement

Albina: conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, funding acquisition, methodology, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing. Balasabas: Conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, methodology, writing – original draft. Laquinon: Conceptualization, formal analysis, methodology, validation, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing. Pampilo: Conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, methodology, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing. Caballero: Conceptualization, formal analysis, methodology, validation, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing.

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