**EXAMS TO EXCELLENCE: INSPIRING SUCCESS STORIES OF CIVIL SERVICE PASSERS: A CASE STUDY OF CENTRAL BICOL STATE UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE - CALABANGA CAMPUS, PHILIPPINES**

***Abstract***

This phenomenological study explores the success stories of the students of the College of Arts and Sciences, Central Bicol State University of Agriculture – Calabanga Campus who took and passed the civil service examination. This research uncovered the participants' strategies, secret ingredients, and the perceived benefits of passing the Civil Service Examination, and developed recommendations to improved review processes. This study used semi-structured interviews with 29 participants focusing on participants who had undertaken review programs, and thematic analytical methods were used to analyze gathered data for common strategies and themes. Findings revealed that participants utilized some resources, such as, educational videos, practice tests, online educational platforms, which helped them to their review experiences. It was also revealed that study scheduling and time management, including personalized study plans and consistent review blocks were important. Mental readiness, as well as emotional considerations, such as self-confidence, positive thoughts and stress tolerance techniques were also important. Among the benefits noted, improved job opportunities and career progress were said to be some of the benefits. The study recommended to integrate digital resources into review plans, develop personalized study schedules, prioritize mental and emotional well-being, leverage structured review programs, and implement effective time management strategies. These recommendations aim to enhance exam preparation, improve performance, and support participants in achieving their career goals.

***Keywords.*** Success stories, civil service examination, testimonies

**1. Introduction**

 The Civil Service Examination is widely regarded as one of the most challenging tests in many countries, including the Philippines. It serves as the gateway for individuals aspiring to enter the public sector and contribute to nation-building through various governmental roles. This journey aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, which emphasizes promoting sustained, inclusive economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all. According to Dela Cruz (2020), the Civil Service Examination not only evaluates knowledge and aptitude but also fosters discipline and dedication among aspirants, making it a cornerstone of public service recruitment.

 Studies such as those by Ramos and Bautista (2019) highlight that examinees who utilize structured review programs and mentorship exhibit higher success rates. The journey from preparing for the exam to finally seeing one’s name on the list of passers is often arduous, filled with sleepless nights, sacrifices, and moments of self-doubt. However, for those who persevere, the reward is not just a career in public service but also the fulfillment of a long-cherished dream. *From Test to Testimonies: Success Stories of Civil Service Examinees Passers* captures these remarkable journeys, shedding light on the inspiring experiences of individuals who have triumphed over numerous challenges to achieve success.

 Success stories of Civil Service examinees highlight the diverse backgrounds and unique struggles of candidates who embark on this demanding journey. A study by Mendoza (2021) underscores the significance of socio-economic background in the success of examinees, noting that individuals from lower-income families often face greater challenges but exhibit remarkable resilience. Some come from humble beginnings, juggling work and study to support their families while striving to achieve their goals. Others face the pressure of multiple attempts, each failure testing their resolve and pushing them to work harder. These stories underscore the resilience and determination that characterize successful examinees, proving that no obstacle is insurmountable when one is driven by passion and commitment.

 One of the most compelling aspects of these success stories is the unwavering dedication of the examinees. Many recount how they meticulously planned their study schedules, often sacrificing leisure and social activities to focus on their preparation. Research by Lim and Santos (2018) found that time management and consistent review habits were key factors in the success of Civil Service passers. The discipline required to cover an extensive syllabus, ranging from general knowledge to specialized subjects, is immense. Yet, these individuals demonstrate that with proper time management, consistent effort, and a positive mindset, success is attainable. Their testimonies serve as a source of encouragement for future examinees, offering valuable insights into effective study techniques and strategies.

 Moreover, the support systems behind these success stories play a crucial role in the journey of Civil Service examinees. Family members, friends, mentors, and review centers provide not just academic assistance but also emotional support. A study by Garcia (2020) emphasizes that examinees with strong support systems are more likely to succeed, highlighting the importance of encouragement and guidance. Many successful passers highlight how their loved ones’ encouragement kept them motivated during challenging times. The role of mentorship, in particular, is often emphasized, with many crediting their mentors for providing guidance, clarity, and the confidence needed to excel.

 The significance of these success stories extends beyond personal achievement. They serve as a testament to the importance of hard work, perseverance, and integrity in achieving one’s goals, aligning with SDG 4: Quality Education, which promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all. Research by Villanueva (2017) highlights that successful Civil Service passers often become advocates for education and mentorship, contributing to a cycle of continuous learning and development. Each story reflects the aspirants' commitment to serving the public and contributing to the betterment of society, fostering sustainable development through competent governance.

From Test to Testimonies: Success Stories of Civil Service Examinees Passers not only celebrates the achievements of successful candidates but also aims to inspire and motivate others to pursue their dreams with unwavering determination. It is a tribute to the human spirit's ability to overcome challenges and emerge victorious, proving that with hard work and perseverance, success is within reach, while also contributing to global goals for sustainable development.

This phenomenological study aims to explore the success stories and meaningful experiences of the civil service examinees passers of the College of Arts and Sciences of Central Bicol State University of Agriculture – Calabanga Campus. Specifically, it will have the following objectives:

1. Discover the participants’ schemes and strategies in passing the civil service examination
2. Find out the participants’ secret ingredients to passing the civil service examination;
3. Identify the benefits and opportunities in passing the Civil Service Examination;
4. Recommend review innovation strategies and processes based from the findings of the study

**2. Methodology**

This study employed a case study design to explore participants' approaches to passing the Civil Service Examination. An interview guide was utilized to elicit detailed information about the participants' strategies, schemes, and "secret ingredients" for success in the examination. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews with 29 participants who were selected through purposive sampling. This sampling technique was particularly appropriate for the study’s qualitative and exploratory nature, as it allowed the researcher to intentionally select individuals who possessed specific characteristics relevant to the research questions.

In this case, purposive sampling targeted participants who had previously taken the Civil Service Examination and had engaged in formal or informal review programs. These individuals were considered "information-rich cases" (Patton, 2002)—meaning they were uniquely positioned to provide in-depth insights based on firsthand experience. Their perspectives were essential for uncovering meaningful patterns in exam preparation strategies, especially given the study’s goal of identifying effective practices and personal methods that contributed to examination success. The inclusion criteria used in this study ensured that all participants could provide reflective and experiential accounts, which in turn enhanced the validity and relevance of the themes identified through content and thematic analysis.

To uphold ethical standards, the study maintained the confidentiality and anonymity of participants by assigning codes instead of using names during data collection and analysis. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and were assured that their participation was voluntary. The study also received ethics clearance from the appropriate institutional review board, reinforcing its commitment to ethical research practices.

**3. Results and Discussion**

 **Participants’ Schemes and Strategies in Passing the Civil Service Examination** Based on the interview sessions, several strategies and schemes used by participants to pass the Civil Service Examination have emerged. The analysis reveals distinct themes in how examinees prepared for the test.

####  *Utilization of Digital Resources.* Many participants emphasized the importance of using digital resources as part of their preparation. Respondent 4 shared, "Watching lessons and techniques on YouTube are the strategies I used while reviewing for the CSC examination." Respondent 12 noted, “I answer CSE questionnaires from the CSE Reviewer app and watch reels on Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube about possible questions we may encounter during the CSE examination.” Respondent 8 also mentioned, "An effective study method for me is watching videos online and live discussions by Coach Lyqa. I have allotted 1-2 hours every night for review." Research supports the benefits of multimedia learning, where educational videos enhance retention through visual and auditory stimuli (Mayer, 2009). The use of platforms like YouTube and social media provides a wide array of interactive content that can help reinforce knowledge and familiarize students with various question formats (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Moreover, consistent review methods, such as those involving structured online content like live discussions, align with principles of spaced learning, which have been shown to improve long-term learning outcomes (Chen et al., 2010). The utilization of digital resources, including educational videos, social media platforms, and review applications, emerged as a key strategy among participants. These resources cater to diverse learning styles and provide flexible, accessible ways for examinees to engage with content, making them invaluable tools in exam preparation.

#### *Study Scheduling and Time Management.* Participants utilized different strategies for effective time management and scheduling. Respondent 5 explained, "Some people say studying in the early morning is effective. However, since I am not a morning person, I review in the afternoon until evening." Respondent 9 shared, "I have allotted 1-2 hours of my time every night for review." Additionally, Respondent 6 suggested, "Create a calendar or set alarms. For example, use Monday for Numerical Category, Tuesday for Philippine History, Wednesday for English Grammar." Studies indicate that aligning study sessions with individual peak performance times, as mentioned by some participants, can improve learning outcomes (Rothen, 2012). Regular, scheduled study sessions, like the ones many participants employed, are proven to be effective in reinforcing learning through spaced repetition, which improves retention over time (Cepeda et al., 2006). Structured study schedules, such as the use of calendars and alarms, help ensure systematic coverage of all exam topics, reducing the likelihood of cramming (Zimmerman, 2002). Study scheduling and time management emerged as crucial strategies in participants' exam preparation. Tailoring study times to personal preferences, maintaining consistent study blocks, and using structured scheduling techniques helped participants ensure comprehensive and balanced review sessions.

####  *Practical Review Techniques.* Participants consistently emphasized the importance of practical review techniques, such as practice exams and mock tests. Respondent 10 shared, "I repeatedly answer questions until I memorize the easiest process to answer a question correctly." Respondent 7 noted, "In mathematics, I focus on the mistakes I made and review those areas." These techniques are grounded in well-established educational principles, such as retrieval practice and error correction. Research has shown that regular practice testing significantly improves long-term retention and understanding by strengthening memory recall (Roediger & Butler, 2011). The strategy of focusing on mistakes and reviewing problem areas aligns with the principle of error correction, which is known to help learners develop a deeper understanding and improve their performance on similar tasks in the future (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). The use of practice tests and error correction emerged as vital strategies in reinforcing knowledge and improving exam performance. These techniques are widely recognized as effective methods for enhancing retention and test-taking abilities, helping participants better prepare for the Civil Service Examination.

####  *Active Engagement and Participation*. Active engagement in the review process was emphasized by participants as essential for effective learning. Respondent 3 highlighted, "Follow the instructions given by the reviewer, don’t be afraid to ask questions, and sit at the front." Respondent 11 shared, "I think the most effective strategies for me were participating during the review program and scanning review tests." These active learning strategies are crucial for maximizing learning potential. Studies show that active participation and following structured review guidelines significantly enhance cognitive processing and retention (Veldman et al., 2018). Interactive learning methods, such as engaging in discussions and revisiting review content, have been proven to improve comprehension and memory retention (Chi, 2009). Moreover, engaging directly with review materials ensures that the learning process is not passive, which in turn fosters deeper understanding and recall. Active engagement and participation were found to be central to successful exam preparation. Participants who took a hands-on approach to their review process, followed instructions, and participated actively in review sessions demonstrated better retention and a higher level of preparedness for the Civil Service Examination.

 **Participants’ Secret Ingredients to Passing the Civil Service Examination.** Based on the interview data, participants shared various strategies and insights they believe contributed to their success in passing the Civil Service Examination. These can be categorized into several themes:

###  *Effective Study Strategies.* Respondent 1 emphasizes the importance of consistent study hours, stating, “Always prioritize having at least 2-3 hours per day to watch teaching methods.” Respondent 2 advocates for discovering and using personalized study methods, sharing, “I find what works best for me, such as using flashcards or listening to audio reviews.” Respondent 7 also recommends structured planning, saying, “Create a study plan, manage time, and focus on goals.” Research supports the effectiveness of regular, structured study sessions for improving long-term retention and understanding (Ebbinghaus, 1885; Baddeley, 2012). The benefits of personalized learning strategies are well-documented, with metacognitive approaches enhancing study efficiency and effectiveness (Flavell, 1979; Zimmerman, 2002). Additionally, studies indicate that structured planning and goal setting reduce anxiety and improve performance by helping learners stay focused and organized (Locke & Latham, 2002; Schunk, 2001). Participants' strategies for success in the Civil Service Examination revolve around consistent study commitment, personalized learning approaches, and structured planning. These strategies are supported by research demonstrating their ability to improve retention, reduce anxiety, and enhance study efficiency.

###  *Mental and Emotional Preparation.* Respondent 3 emphasizes the importance of self-belief, stating, “Always have confidence in yourself before and after the examination.” Respondent 3 also mentions the importance of accepting outcomes, sharing, “Don’t be afraid to fail, because it’s part of the process.” Respondents 12 and 13 highlight maintaining a positive mindset and enjoying the learning process, with Respondent 12 noting, “I make sure to enjoy the learning process.” Self-efficacy theory suggests that belief in one's abilities positively impacts persistence and success (Bandura, 1997). Research on growth mindset indicates that accepting failure and learning from setbacks enhances resilience and long-term success (Dweck, 2006). Positive psychology studies show that maintaining a positive attitude and finding enjoyment in the learning process leads to better motivation and performance (Seligman, 1998; Fredrickson, 2001). Mental and emotional preparation, including fostering self-belief, accepting failure as a learning experience, and maintaining a positive mindset, emerged as crucial strategies for exam success. Participants who demonstrated resilience, confidence, and positivity during their preparation were more likely to perform well in the Civil Service Examination.

###  *Utilizing Resources.* Respondents 4 and 5 recommend enrolling in review programs, with Respondent 4 sharing, “Review programs helped me refine my strategies and clarified difficult topics.” Respondent 8 emphasized maximizing study materials, stating, “I make sure to use every resource I can, including books, online resources, and review apps.” Studies indicate that structured review programs provide expert guidance and can significantly enhance exam preparation and performance (Sommers, 2004; Schunk & Pajares, 2002). Research also shows that maximizing study materials, such as using diverse resources and reviewing from multiple formats, ensures comprehensive coverage and better question-answering skills (Miyake & Shah, 1999; Mayer, 2009). The strategic use of resources, including review programs and diverse study materials, proved effective for participants in their exam preparation. These resources helped refine strategies, clarify difficult topics, and ensure comprehensive coverage of exam content.

###  *Time Management.* Respondents 4 and 5 discussed the importance of practicing quick question answering, with Respondent 5 saying, “I make sure to time myself when answering practice tests to improve speed.” Respondent 10 highlighted time awareness, noting, “I use my digital clock to keep track of time and make sure I don’t spend too long on a single question.” Research supports that practicing under timed conditions helps improve speed and efficiency, which are crucial for maximizing performance during exams (Cowan, 2005; Kuhl, 2000). Time-awareness strategies, such as using a digital clock during practice, help students allocate their time effectively, preventing overthinking and reducing anxiety during the exam (Zhang & Cocosila, 2006). Time management emerged as a critical strategy for exam success. Participants who practiced answering questions quickly and utilized time-awareness tools were better equipped to manage the time constraints of the Civil Service Examination, ensuring efficient and effective performance.

 **Benefits and Opportunities in Passing the Civil Service Examination.** Based on the responses provided, several themes emerge regarding the benefits and opportunities of passing the Civil Service Examination. These themes shed light on the different perspectives and experiences of individuals who have taken the exam.

###  *Credential for Job Applications.* Many participants see passing the Civil Service Examination as a valuable credential that enhances their job applications. Respondent 1 noted, "It is one of my biggest achievements that I can put in my resume to apply for work." Respondent 4 shared, "Having an eligibility, I foster get a job." Another participant stated, "Aside from additional knowledge, passing the Civil Service Exam helps me improve my resume because of the certificate. It helped me because it was an additional factor for my employment after graduation." Research supports the notion that professional certifications and eligibility can enhance job prospects by signaling competence to potential employers. A study by B. R. Smith (2020) titled "The Impact of Professional Certification on Employment Outcomes" found that professional certifications often improve job prospects and lead to better opportunities by showcasing a candidate’s skills and dedication. According to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM, 2019), employers favor candidates with relevant certifications, viewing them as more qualified and prepared. Passing the Civil Service Examination provides a competitive edge in the job market, as it enhances candidates' resumes and qualifications. Civil service eligibility is often a requirement for many government positions, making it an essential credential for job applications.

### *Potential and Future Opportunities.* Some participants see civil service eligibility as a stepping stone for future opportunities. Respondent 8 shared, "It opens a lot of work opportunities." Respondent 3 expressed, "Passing the CSE exam benefits me to enter a Government Agency where I currently work." Another participant mentioned, "When I apply to PSA, I was supposedly hired because I have my eligibility." Certifications and credentials can also lead to greater career advancement opportunities. A study by T. Williams (2017) titled "The Role of Professional Certification in Career Advancement" emphasized that certifications often lead to greater career mobility and open up higher-level positions. Similarly, K. Lee (2019) in "Future Employment Opportunities for Certified Professionals" highlighted that holding professional certifications increases job prospects, providing a broader range of career paths. Civil service eligibility not only opens up immediate job opportunities but also serves as a foundation for future career advancement. Participants who passed the exam believe it positions them for greater professional growth and success in securing government-related or public-sector roles.

### *Limited Immediate Benefits.* While many participants recognize the potential advantages, some shared that they have not yet experienced significant benefits from their civil service eligibility. Respondent 7 stated, "So far, I haven't experienced any benefits because I'm still in my fourth year and plan to apply for a job after graduation." Similarly, Respondent 2 mentioned, "As of this moment, I still don’t gain any benefits aside from passing because I could only use my eligibility once I graduate from my four-year course." Studies indicate that while certifications like civil service eligibility provide long-term advantages, the immediate benefits may not always be evident, especially for students or early-career individuals. According to a study by K. Lee (2019), it is common for certifications to be more beneficial once candidates have completed their education and can fully leverage their qualifications in the job market. Although many participants believe in the future benefits of civil service eligibility, some have yet to experience tangible advantages, particularly those still in school or early in their careers. However, the certification remains a valuable asset for future employment opportunities once they complete their education.

**Recommended Review Innovation Strategies and Processes based from the Findings of the study.** The study has revealed various insights into how review programs can be enhanced to better serve candidates preparing for the Civil Service Examination. Based on these findings, several innovative strategies and processes are proposed to improve review programs and help candidates optimize their preparation. These strategies cover digital integration, time management, active engagement, mental preparation, and support systems, with the goal of enhancing both learning outcomes and emotional readiness

 ***Digital Resource Integration.*** To address the growing need for flexible and accessible review tools, the integration of digital resources in review programs should be expanded. A comprehensive digital learning platform can be developed that aggregates educational videos, practice questions, mock exams, and interactive content. This platform should incorporate multimedia elements to cater to diverse learning styles, making it more inclusive and accessible. Additionally, social media channels such as Facebook and TikTok can be leveraged for sharing study tips, materials, and interactive quizzes, capitalizing on the high engagement these platforms offer. Live webinars or virtual study groups should also be incorporated into the review process, allowing candidates to engage with instructors and peers in real time. By implementing this strategy, review programs can provide greater accessibility to a variety of learning resources, increase engagement through interactive content, and enhance overall exam preparation through the use of diverse digital tools.

 ***Study Scheduling and Time Management****.* Effective time management is crucial for successful exam preparation, and this can be achieved by introducing personalized study schedules that cater to individual preferences and productivity levels. Tools or apps can be developed to help candidates create and manage customized study plans based on their peak study times and preferred study durations. Alongside this, workshops or online tutorials on time management techniques can be conducted, providing candidates with practical advice on structuring their study blocks and organizing topics by day. Automated reminders and progress tracking features can also be integrated into the digital platform to ensure candidates adhere to their schedules. This strategy aims to improve adherence to study plans, enhance time management skills, and ensure that all exam topics are systematically covered.

 ***Practical Review Techniques*** Another essential strategy for exam preparation is the use of structured practice and error analysis. A comprehensive database of practice tests and mock exams should be expanded to simulate actual exam conditions, allowing candidates to experience timed exams and receive immediate feedback. Additionally, error analysis tools can be developed to help candidates identify their weaknesses and focus on areas that need improvement. These tools could include digital flashcards and targeted review sessions based on common error patterns. Regular mock exams and timed review sessions should be scheduled to replicate exam conditions, helping candidates become familiar with the pacing and reducing test anxiety. By implementing this strategy, candidates can improve their performance through consistent practice, better identify and address their weak areas, and reduce anxiety during the actual exam.

 ***Active Engagement and Participation****.* To improve engagement and participation in review programs, it is essential to incorporate interactive learning methods. Review programs should be designed to include activities such as group discussions, Q&A sessions, and hands-on exercises. This approach encourages candidates to actively engage with the content and with their peers, enhancing their understanding. Structured guidance should also be a core component of review sessions to maximize participant involvement and ensure they follow a clear learning path. Additionally, feedback mechanisms should be put in place, allowing candidates to receive guidance and answers to their questions in real time. This strategy aims to increase participant engagement, ensure better adherence to review guidelines, and foster deeper understanding through interactive learning.

 ***Mental and Emotional Preparation.*** Mental and emotional well-being is crucial to successful exam performance, and review programs should incorporate strategies to address this aspect of preparation. Confidence-building workshops can be offered to help candidates boost their self-confidence and reduce stress. Stress management tools, such as mindfulness exercises and relaxation techniques, should also be made available to help candidates manage anxiety. Creating support networks or peer groups where candidates can share experiences and offer encouragement would further enhance emotional preparedness. This strategy aims to reduce exam-related stress, improve mental resilience, and foster a positive mindset, ultimately enhancing candidates’ overall performance.

 ***Support Systems and Resources****.* Leveraging existing support systems and resources can provide candidates with additional guidance and motivation throughout their preparation. Mentorship programs can be established, where experienced individuals offer support and advice to candidates, helping them navigate the exam process more effectively. Workshops on how to make the most of available study materials and resources should also be conducted to maximize resource utilization. Furthermore, providing spiritual and motivational support through content designed to maintain a positive mindset and resilience can help candidates stay focused and motivated. This strategy seeks to improve candidates' resilience and motivation, ensuring they remain focused and committed to their study plans.

**Civil Service Exam Preparation Interview Summary**

Based on the interview findings, participants preparing for the Civil Service Examination employed a variety of strategies, with several themes emerging across their responses. A dominant and widely used approach was the utilization of digital resources. Most respondents relied heavily on platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, and mobile review apps to access interactive and flexible learning materials. These digital tools supported diverse learning styles through visual and auditory content, making preparation more engaging and accessible. Equally important was the role of personalized study scheduling and time management. Many participants created structured study plans, using calendars and alarms, and adjusted their review times to suit their personal peak productivity hours. This systematic approach ensured comprehensive coverage of exam topics and reduced the tendency to cram.

 Another frequently mentioned strategy was the use of practical review techniques such as mock exams and repetitive practice. These methods, grounded in retrieval practice and error correction, helped participants improve retention and boost their confidence. While not as frequently cited, active engagement—such as asking questions during review sessions and participating in class discussions—was still considered beneficial by some participants for enhancing understanding and motivation. In terms of effective study strategies, respondents emphasized consistency, structured planning, and the use of personalized methods like flashcards and audio reviews. These individualized approaches not only improved focus but also reduced anxiety during preparation.

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| **Theme** | **Frequency (based on respondents)** | **Key Insights** |
| Utilization of Digital Resources | High (6+ respondents) | Use of YouTube, social media, and apps for interactive and flexible learning. |
| Study Scheduling and Time Management | Moderate to High (5+ respondents) | Personalized study times, use of schedules/calendars for systematic review. |
| Practical Review Techniques | High (5+ respondents) | Practice tests, mock exams, and focus on error correction improve retention. |
| Active Engagement and Participation | Moderate (3-4 respondents) | Participation in classes, asking questions, and structured guidance enhance learning. |
| Effective Study Strategies | Moderate (4+ respondents) | Consistent study hours, personalized methods like flashcards/audio, structured planning. |
| Mental and Emotional Preparation | Moderate (3+ respondents) | Self-confidence, accepting failure, enjoying the process enhance resilience and motivation. |
| Utilizing Resources | Moderate (4+ respondents) | Enrollment in review programs and maximizing books, apps, and online tools. |
| Time Management | Moderate (3+ respondents) | Timed answering practices and use of clocks for improving exam pacing. |
| Credential for Job Applications | High | Passing exam improves resume and eligibility for job applications. |
| Potential for Future Opportunities | Moderate to High | Seen as a gateway to future career growth and public sector employment. |
| Limited Immediate Benefits | Low (few respondents) | Benefits not yet realized by students still completing their education. |

 Mental and emotional readiness emerged as a vital component of successful preparation. Respondents highlighted the importance of self-confidence, accepting failure as part of the process, and maintaining a positive mindset. Such attitudes fostered resilience and perseverance. Participants also took advantage of available resources, including review centers, printed materials, and online tools, recognizing the value of using multiple formats for thorough preparation. In addition, time management during the exam itself was considered critical; some practiced under timed conditions and used clocks to develop pacing strategies and avoid spending too much time on individual questions.

 In terms of perceived benefits, passing the Civil Service Examination was widely regarded as a valuable credential that enhanced job applications and employability, particularly in the public sector. Many viewed it as a stepping stone to future opportunities and career advancement. However, some respondents—particularly those still in school—had not yet experienced these benefits but remained optimistic about the exam’s long-term value.

These findings suggest that modern exam preparation is increasingly shaped by digital literacy, self-regulated learning, and mental resilience. These results echo the findings of previous studies such as those by Zimmerman (2002) on self-regulated learning, which emphasize the role of strategic planning and metacognition in academic success. Similarly, research by Junco (2012) and Wang et al. (2020) on the educational use of social media supports the notion that digital platforms can enhance engagement and accessibility when used effectively.

Furthermore, the strategies identified in this study reinforce the broader relevance of learner-centered approaches found in the literature, particularly in contexts requiring independent preparation. The integration of emotional preparedness aligns with findings by Cassady & Johnson (2002), who linked test anxiety and emotional regulation to performance outcomes. Overall, the findings illustrate that a combination of digital integration, disciplined time management, active participation, personalized methods, and emotional resilience forms the core of effective exam preparation. Passing the Civil Service Examination is not only seen as a key academic achievement but also as a gateway to professional stability and success.

**4. Conclusions**

Based on the detailed analysis of participants' strategies, secret ingredients, and the perceived benefits of passing the Civil Service Examination, several key conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the diverse approaches to exam preparation underscore the importance of leveraging digital resources, personalized study methods, and structured planning. Participants who utilized a mix of educational videos, interactive platforms, and regular practice demonstrated enhanced learning outcomes. This aligns with existing research that supports the use of multimedia and interactive tools for improving comprehension and retention. The consistent application of these strategies, such as tailored study schedules and frequent practice, reveals a clear path to effective preparation and success.

The psychological and emotional aspects of exam preparation play a crucial role in achieving success. The emphasis on self-belief, maintaining a positive mindset, and managing stress highlights the importance of mental and emotional readiness. Participants who actively engaged with their study materials and maintained a positive attitude reported better outcomes, corroborating theories on self-efficacy and growth mindset. Furthermore, the use of supportive resources, including review programs and guidance from mentors, suggests that a combination of practical strategies and emotional support can significantly influence exam performance

Passing the Civil Service Examination opens up valuable opportunities and enhances job prospects. As noted by participants, having civil service eligibility serves as a credential that boosts job applications and career advancement. This is supported by research indicating that professional certifications and credentials can improve employment outcomes and provide a competitive edge in the job market. The examination is not only a requirement for specific positions but also a gateway to broader career opportunities and professional growth, underscoring its significance in both immediate and long-term career planning.

**5. Recommendations**

Based on the analysis of participants' strategies, secret ingredients, and the benefits associated with passing the Civil Service Examination, several recommendations can be made to enhance exam preparation and performance:

 **Integrate Digital Resources into Study Plans**: To maximize preparation efficiency, examinees should incorporate a variety of digital resources into their study routines. Educational videos, online practice tests, and interactive learning platforms offer valuable tools for understanding complex concepts and familiarizing oneself with exam formats. Utilizing platforms such as YouTube for instructional content, practice apps for real-time feedback, and social media for engaging study materials can enhance both learning and retention. Institutions or review programs could consider integrating these digital tools into their curricula to provide a comprehensive learning experience that caters to different learning styles.

 **Develop and Adhere to Personalized Study Schedules**: Creating a tailored study plan that aligns with individual peak performance times and personal preferences is crucial. Examinees should experiment with different study times to identify when they are most alert and productive, and structure their study sessions accordingly. Additionally, implementing consistent study blocks and organizing topics by day can help manage time effectively and ensure comprehensive coverage of all material. Educational programs could offer guidance on how to develop personalized study schedules and incorporate techniques such as spaced repetition to enhance long-term retention.

 **Prioritize Mental and Emotional Preparation**: To bolster exam performance, candidates should focus on building self-confidence and managing stress. Adopting a positive mindset, setting realistic goals, and practicing relaxation techniques can help mitigate anxiety and improve focus. Study programs and review courses could benefit from incorporating workshops or resources on mental resilience and stress management strategies. Encouraging candidates to engage in practices that promote a positive outlook and self-belief will support their overall well-being and exam readiness.

 **Leverage Structured Review Programs and Support Systems**: Enrolling in structured review programs and seeking guidance from experienced mentors can provide valuable insights and structured learning opportunities. These programs often offer expert-led instruction, practice tests, and targeted feedback, which are instrumental in enhancing exam preparation. Additionally, establishing a support system that includes mentors, peers, and study groups can offer encouragement and diverse perspectives on study strategies. Institutions should continue to provide and expand access to such review programs and mentorship opportunities.

 **Implement Effective Time Management and Exam Strategies**: Practicing time management skills and developing effective exam strategies are essential for success. Candidates should practice answering questions under timed conditions to improve their speed and efficiency. Furthermore, adopting test-taking strategies such as reading questions before passages and completing all questions can maximize scoring opportunities. Study materials and review programs should include components that simulate exam conditions and teach time management techniques to better prepare candidates for the actual test environment.

**COMPETING INTERESTS DISCLAIMER:**

Authors have declared that they have no known competing financial interests OR non-financial interests OR personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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