

## **Academic Experiences of Teachers as Graduate Students: Basis for a Proposed Graduate School Development Plan**

Hannah Grace R. Lumahan, Philippine Normal University, Philippines  
Jose M. Ocampo, Jr., Philippine Normal University, Philippines

The Asian Conference on Education 2025  
Official Conference Proceedings

### **Abstract**

This study identified the academic experiences of graduate students who are also full-time teachers. The phenomenological research design was used in this study to fully understand their experiences and interpret the themes that arose from the qualitative data that were gathered through individual interviews and focus group discussions. Using purposive sampling, participants were selected from the different programs in the graduate school of a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in the Philippines, both Master's and Doctorate degrees with a total of forty-two (42) participants across programs. Based on the findings, plans for the enhancement of the Graduate School Development Program were proposed. The findings of this study are important to inform and guide the HEIs and the education department on future innovations and further studies toward policy recommendations.

*Keywords:* graduate students, teachers, graduate school development program, academic experiences, challenges

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## Introduction

At present, a rapid change in our world is taking place with the issues left by the pandemic and its effect on industries, countries' economies, and the lives of individuals. Among all the disrupted activities of humankind, one of the sectors hit the most was the education sector (Tria, 2020), wherein educational establishments encountered stagnation, employee turnover, and a worldwide quarantine (Kaufman & Stedman, 2022; Sage & Matteucci, 2022). Given the various situations brought about by the crisis, this study looked at the academic experiences of graduate students who are also full-time teachers, even beyond the effects of the pandemic.

In this context, one of the resolutions of the Philippines' Department of Education's Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan in the Time of COVID-19 (2020) is to strengthen teacher training and development through professional development programs, scholarships, and workshops to further enhance teacher quality and teaching quality in the country.

Provided with the changes in education brought about by the crisis of the pandemic, this study magnified and elaborated details on the academic experiences of graduate students enrolled in a higher education institution (HEI) in the country, which could reveal gaps in the existing graduate school program of the university. Moreover, this study aimed to contribute to the enhancement of the university's graduate program to continuously deliver quality teacher education and training for teachers.

## Literature Review

Teachers as graduate students have had different contexts, backgrounds, and experiences in their respective fields or disciplines, and in the professional development area they pursue through a graduate program. Needless to say, they have undergone various challenges in their professional journey.

Given the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, changes occurred at the national level and in the personal lives of people. One of which that have experienced issues is the education sector, where students and educators struggled with their engagement in a face-to-face teaching and learning setup (Guiamalon et al., 2021). Studies show that teaching is one of the professions that improve the condition of society (Ulla et al., 2017; Vásquez, 2017). Providing capacity-building sessions and available graduate programs for educators addresses the need to attain the required skills of teachers on the demands of the world at present, and should be recognized as important as nation-building (Gepila, 2020).

One of the professional development programs that educators pursue is through a graduate program, which provides an opportunity for teachers to gain an understanding of the significance of quality research as a contributory factor for handlers of knowledge and doers of developmental support in society (Moulding & Hadley, 2010). The graduate program helps teachers to be more trained in preparing and guiding the learners in the classroom to be holistically ready for the future. This also helps them use their passion for teaching as an instructional tool and as a professional motivation for teachers and motivator for learners (Palmer, 2017; Ruiz-Alfonso & León, 2016); to gain professional competence level as contribution and support to the field of education (Vural & Basaran, 2021); and to achieve satisfaction in job promotion, raised pay, and privilege of supervision or management (Tanwar & Gard, 2020). Moreover, graduate school is progressing towards altruism and is addressing global problems (Kaufman et al., 2023; Kaufman & Stedman, 2022).

Government policies and guidelines in the Philippines were crafted to continuously support the needs and progression of teachers pursuing professional development opportunities, particularly graduate studies (CMO No. 15, s. 2019; CMO No. 53, s. 2007). According to the Philippines' Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 53, s. 2007 titled "Policies and Standards for Graduate Programs in Education for Teachers and Other Education Professionals", discusses that graduate school in teacher education is a way of expanding the capacities of professional educators who seek to contribute to the progress of education processes, specifically in teaching and in the management of educational programs. In support of this policy, CMO No. 15, s. 2019 titled "Policies, Standards, and Guidelines for Graduate Programs Policy", explains the role of urging and sustaining competencies for educators, like creative and effective ways of learning and teaching, scientific and technological advancement, and leadership and innovation as education leaders during the pandemic.

However, despite interventions, teachers still experience challenges being concurrent graduate students. Some of these challenges are their responsibilities in their roles as a family member (Bhamani et al., 2020; Nodine et al., 2021; Weaver & Swank, 2021), their digital capability and technological issues experienced (Aboagye et al., 2020; Viola et al., 2019), the demands in their graduate school and in their workstations (Housel, 2020), their physical and mental health concerns (Blatchford, 2020; Collo, 2021; Nixon et al., 2011), and their financial limitations (Adle, 2020; Asgari et al., 2021).

Using these factors from the literature, the study focused on the academic experiences of the graduate students and developed recommendations for the graduate school programs and interventions of HEIs in the Philippines, and maybe to an extent, to the other nations.

### **Theoretical Underpinnings**

In this study, Andragogical Theory served as the framework for understanding and interpreting the lived experiences of teachers who are simultaneously pursuing graduate studies. Knowles' assumptions about adult learners—self-direction, readiness to learn, prior experience, relevance of learning, and internal motivation—align closely with the participants' circumstances as practicing teachers enrolled in graduate programs.

By foregrounding these principles, the study recognized that teachers bring substantial professional experience, which shapes how they engage with coursework, manage academic demands, and assess the relevance of graduate-level learning to their teaching practice. Their reflections, challenges, and coping strategies are viewed not merely as isolated experiences but as expressions of adult learning processes. This theoretical lens enabled the research to capture:

- how their prior knowledge influences their learning preferences,
- how their dual roles affect their readiness and motivation to study, and
- how they perceive the applicability of graduate education to their professional growth.

In essence, the use of Andragogical Theory allowed the study to translate adult learners' experiences into policy-oriented insights, ensuring that the resulting proposed plans are not only evidence-based but also aligned with the fundamental characteristics of adult learning.

## **Research Aims and Statement of the Problem**

This study examined the lived academic experiences of teachers who are simultaneously pursuing graduate studies, using their insights as the foundation for recommending enhancements to the Graduate School Development Program, i.e., their academic and research support plan to the students. Specifically, it sought to:

1. Describe the academic experiences of teachers as graduate students, and
2. Use these findings to recommend enhancements to graduate programs' academic and research support plan.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

Using a phenomenological approach, the researchers sought to understand the participants' "lifeworld", or their everyday academic experiences (Creswell, 2013). The research design brought out meaning and interpretation from the stories of each participant (Leavy, 2017).

### **Selection Criteria and Participants**

The research was conducted in a graduate school in the Philippines. Participants were purposively selected based on their active enrollment in a master's or doctoral program and their progress toward completing academic or thesis requirements. Out of 197 invited students, 42 met the criteria and participated. 41 out of 42 chose online interviews and FGDs for convenience, while only 1 chose a face-to-face interview.

### **Data Collection**

Ethical approval from the HEI in the Philippines was secured by the researchers. Participants were also provided with detailed informed consent (see Appendix) and were asked to choose their preferred schedule and interview modality. The invitation to the participants includes (1) the extent of participation, (2) question flow, (3) the truthfulness of their responses, and (4) the confidentiality clause.

On the day of the FGD/ interview, the researcher discussed the informed consent form and emphasized that all interviews and FGDs would be recorded through note-taking and/or audio and video recording. This helped the researcher in transcribing and analyzing the data that was collected. Moreover, the discussion of the confidentiality agreement was also conducted before the start of the interview. Interview sessions took thirty to sixty minutes for each participant (Fox, 2009), while FGDs were conducted for one to two hours (Morgan, 1996).

During the interview day, participants were recognized for taking part and making time to participate in the study. Before the researcher started the recording, the participants who were interviewed online were asked to turn on their microphones, and, if they were comfortable, their videos as well. For those who were interviewed face-to-face, the researcher asked permission to use and start the audio recording.

## **Data Analysis**

The researchers used thematic analysis following the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). Transcripts and recordings were repeatedly reviewed, coded, and organized using NVivo and manual coding. Codes were then grouped into subthemes and overarching themes that directly answered the research questions.

Through this process, the study surfaced meaningful insights into the academic experiences, challenges, and support needs of teacher-graduate students. These findings informed proposed enhancements to the Graduate School Development Program, particularly in strengthening academic and research support for working professionals.

## **Results and Discussions**

Results of this study highlighted two (2) main themes. First is “Teachers’ Academic Experiences as Graduate Students”, with 2 subthemes: (a) lived-academic experiences, and (b) challenges and support needs; and the second main theme is “Recommendations for the Strengthening Academic and Research Support in Graduate Programs”.

### **Teachers’ Academic Experiences As Graduate Students**

#### ***Lived-Academic Experiences***

Participants shared that their most meaningful experiences came from engagements outside the four walls of the classroom. They were invited as speakers, facilitators, validators, and participants in various trainings and workshops. These opportunities allowed them to apply theories in real-life settings, broaden their perspectives, and deepen their understanding of their field. Many described these engagements as enriching, fulfilling, and central to their growth as educators.

Second is that they were able to build networks and professional connections. They also emphasized the value of collaborating with peers from different programs, institutions, and disciplines. Learning alongside teachers from both public and private schools, and from basic and higher education, gave them wider insights into diverse educational contexts. These networks led to new partnerships, extension activities, and professional linkages that strengthened their practice.

They also talked about their personal and professional development. Participants noted that graduate school also shaped their character. They spoke about developing humility, self-awareness, courage, and perseverance, especially when facing moments of exhaustion or discouragement. Despite challenges, they remained committed to completing their programs, viewing graduate studies as essential to their professional growth.

Lastly, they were able to translate their learning into practice. The participants described how their graduate school learning directly influenced their teaching and leadership roles. Many applied theories in their classrooms, mentored colleagues in research, and took on leadership responsibilities in their schools and communities. Their growing competence in research and leadership allowed them to contribute to policy conversations, school improvements, and educational innovations.

Establishing networks with other programs and other institutions is also considered important for the teachers, as they share their differences with others. Being able to learn other perspectives and to immerse themselves in various communities gives them a wider grasp of education in disparate contexts. According to Burbank and Hunter (2022), building connections and collaboration to facilitate intellectual discussions opens pathways leading to an active society. They added that through the initiatives of stakeholders and other partners from the local level to national and international organizations, a common goal among communities can be developed.

Personal realizations and their challenges are part of their educational and academic development, where many participants claimed that they have worthwhile experiences that pushed them to do more for education and taught them to develop their character as human beings. As mentioned in the study of Riby and Rees (2024), personal development is defined as one's contemplation of the different components of self, which include cognitive, social, psychological, moral, and inner being. This could enhance their overall academic experience and foster a positive learning environment in their graduate school community and their workstations. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) stated that an outstanding advancement in one's profession opens doorways for educators to discuss propositions and work together in the individual contexts in their workstations, i.e., effective teaching approaches in their classrooms and beyond. Based on their stories, their academic experience being a teacher and a graduate student at the same time is not an easy path, but a worthwhile one. Different factors made them sacrifice and prioritize things that needed to be done, hence their full-circle experiences.

In terms of the HEI's research and development functions, one of the qualities that graduate students have to manifest is being a research scholar, where students' learning experience has to be translated to "innovations in teaching and learning processes and other forms of education practice" (Philippine Normal University, 2015). Similar to this context are the findings in the study of Sevim and Akin (2021), wherein learning in the graduate school has added expertise to the students' competencies and mastery in their discipline. Consequently, the most significant components students gain are critical thinking and analytical expertise, which graduate students can use in teaching their learners and in developing their future research works. The graduate students being engaged in research development, handling research-related courses or subjects, and taking the initiative to write their academic papers show their interest in translating theories into practical actions that contribute to policy recommendations in their workstations, their communities, and the University, among others.

### ***Challenges and Support Needs***

The next subtheme is on the challenges and needed support of the teachers. First, based on their narratives, they experienced the strain of multiple roles. Participants consistently described the difficulty of balancing their responsibilities as full-time teachers, graduate students, and family members. Their work obligations often conflicted with graduate school schedules, forcing them to miss classes or rush academic requirements. Many shared that despite their desire to focus on their studies, workplace expectations always came first. The volume of overlapping tasks, constant deadlines, and lack of institutional support, such as limited access to study permits or deloading, resulted in stress, sleep deprivation, and health issues. This struggle to manage time and competing priorities deeply affected both their well-being and academic performance.

A second major challenge involved their interactions with professors and the learning environment in graduate school. Participants recounted experiences of unclear instructions,

unread emails, inconsistent class schedules, and faculty members who were frequently unavailable due to other commitments. Some felt intimidated or unsupported, and several noted that core and specialization courses were equally heavy in workload, leading to frustration and discouragement. Miscommunication, such as late feedback, sudden changes, or faculty who failed to read submissions, added to their anxiety. These experiences weakened their motivation and affected their confidence in the program.

The third subtopic centered on administrative concerns within the HEI. Participants struggled with limited online services, slow email responses, errors in the student portal, and inconvenient onsite processes—especially for those living outside Metro Manila. Issues such as dissolved classes, limited class offerings, unclear program standards, and irregular examination schedules caused delays in their academic timelines. Many also cited the difficulty of accessing library resources and research materials. These administrative barriers contributed to additional stress, financial challenges, and doubts about continuing in the program.

Found in the study of Amida et al. (2020), it is valuable that students learn to organize their priorities to enhance proficiency and be more adept at fulfilling the expectations of their multiple roles. However, due to the many deliverables and academic obligations of the teachers, most of them somehow failed to perform in their jobs and in their graduate studies. As stated in the study of Prendergast et al. (2023), these academic obligations were described as laborious and most difficult in completing the program, such as participation in classes, browsing of academic journals, fulfilling managerial roles, completing the research paper, organizing activities/ programs, and training material production.

The claims of Nicklin et al. (2020) said that the dispute among factors in career, education, and experiences is notably linked to anxiety, while education and personal experiences are the most significantly linked with anxiety. This was also stated in the study of Solon et al. (2024), which says that inadequate self-care is one of the crucial factors that a working graduate student can experience, given the urgent work responsibilities and academic course requirements. Relatively, not having enough sleep is mostly the teachers' issue in not attending to their well-being. They honestly said that the suffering they experience in their physical health is also because they fall short of managing their time well. However, this aspect is also because of the numerous tasks expected of them, which results in losing sight of taking care of their health. Literature presented that insufficient time to finish, or even to begin many tasks, due to time constraints, affects graduate students' welfare and efficiency (Giurge et al., 2020; Prendergast et al., 2023; Whillans & West, 2022).

In the study of Albalawi and Nadeem (2020), they stated that a successful imparting of message or “communication” among learners and teachers creates a pleasing learning environment, yet sometimes, teachers fall short of doing so. In the study of Omar et al. (2021), they also discussed that one of the components of successful learning is the planning of an enriching experience for graduate students. They must receive enough support from the community they can grow to be able to continue with their journey in their career and graduate school. Furthermore, the advisers must be thoughtful in terms of recognizing the circumstances their advisees experience, particularly those who have been in the graduate school for a long time, those who exceeded the allowed years of residency period (Rungduin & Miranda, 2018).

The inefficient processes shared by the participants lead to frustrations among students, missed deadlines, alternative conceptions, and wastage of time, money, and other resources. Alternative conceptions, as defined by works of literature in the most simple way, are incorrect

interpretations of established scientific facts and proven knowledge (Adebayo et al., 2021; Horton et al., 2007; Stojanovska et al., 2015). As a result, this could lead to setbacks and failures for the graduate students.

Additionally, participants also experienced challenges with the availability of academic courses and other issues in the academic-related programs of the institution, specifically on the enrollment process and academic terms, program offerings, tutorial classes, comprehensive examinations, shortage of teachers, and writing term defense. In a similar context, in the study of Iqbal et al. (2021) and Tworek (2018), they found that there could be issues with the reliability of online resources from different web directories as a result of unrelated or unreliable sources. Thus, the participants' experiences in terms of the administrative processes were composed of many narratives. Provided with works of literature, these processes play a vital role in the academic success of the students, not only to help them finish the degree but also to make their academic experience remarkable.

### **Recommendations for Strengthening Academic and Research Support in Graduate Programs**

In addressing the challenges faced by teachers pursuing graduate studies, the participants proposed several recommendations shown in the second theme.

The participants emphasized the need for flexible academic scheduling and program adjustments. Recommendations included properly planning onsite and online classes to avoid costly and frequent travel, offering research courses in regular academic terms rather than short-term schedules, and aligning the institutions' calendars with the Department of Education (DepEd) in the country. Based on their narratives, this will help minimize conflicts with teaching responsibilities. They also proposed a pre-research course for students without a prior research background and the use of individual academic plans to guide course enrollment and deadlines. Additionally, financial support such as tuition discounts and scholarships was suggested to reduce stress and encourage continuous academic engagement.

Participants also highlighted the importance of mentoring and peer support systems. They recommended strengthened orientations, providing primers to clarify academic expectations, and implementing a buddy or peer system for discussion, peer teaching, and exam preparation. Mentorship programs, including a sustainable "Mentorship Exchange Program", were also proposed to monitor progress and ensure no student is left behind. Another key recommendation was integrating applied learning to link theoretical knowledge with classroom practice, fostering collaboration between faculty and students, and enhancing practical outcomes in teaching.

They also suggested improving administrative efficiency and support infrastructure. This includes enhancing online transactions and communication channels, creating physical spaces like graduate student hubs or thesis labs for collaborative work, and decentralizing some classes for students outside Metro Manila. They also proposed strengthening partnerships with DepEd offices, other HEIs, and international institutions to expand research opportunities and showcase student work. Finally, participants also emphasized the need to regularly review program statistics, course offerings, and institutional systems to prevent dissolved courses, improve program marketing, and inform evidence-based innovations in graduate education.

According to the study by Walter and Stouck (2020), it was found that there is a pressing need for those students who do not have a strong and in-depth background in research development as they begin their programs in graduate school. Alternatively, those students with prior background in research could have better knowledge, be more skilled, and be more driven in doing research work (Miller et al., 2021). Whereof, the participants mentioned that based on personal observations and experiences, offering pre-research courses for those graduate students who did not encounter a research course in their previous schools shall be designed to address the difficulty in developing a research paper.

Studies by Blanchard and Haccoun (2020) and Lorusso et al. (2020) claimed that there is a battle being a graduate student. For the teachers, as much as they would like to fully focus on their studies, they need to prioritize their jobs as teachers, considering that it is their primary source of income. Further, there is an arena of synchronizing life, work, and the rest of the demands of their other roles, hence the proposal to be more lenient in the academic course requirements. Rungduin and Miranda (2018) discussed in their study that teachers who are also graduate students need to simultaneously work on their academic course outputs alongside the work deliverables expected from them. Their responsibilities go beyond their roles as teachers and graduate students, but also as family members, a church worker, and other extra-curricular assignments as professionals. Henceforth, the participants opened the possibility of considering the alignment of the HEI's calendar with DepEd and/or with other educational institutions.

Studies also show that planning and goal setting have a beneficial impact on the improvement of students' academic performance and lessening academic anxiety (Adams & Blair, 2019; Varadarajan et al., 2021). This planning will not only help the program advisers in tracking the students' academic status and engagement but will also train the teachers in monitoring their progress and aligning their goals accordingly.

Further, HEIs could provide more financial grants and support to graduate students to help and encourage them to finish their degrees. Studies show that granting financial aid to graduate students can enhance their academic achievement. It was found that this consequently leads to high student involvement and continuity in taking up professional studies (Facchini et al., 2020; Herbaut & Geven, 2020).

As found in the study by Walter and Stouck (2020), the most popular component that graduate students need is mutual support with their peers. It was presented that this will help the students in building their community, self-development, and cultivation of academic knowledge and intellectual practices among peers. The study by Omar et al. (2021) also claims that the success of students' learning is with the company of their peers. It says that through that kind of community, graduate students stay and continue the program, and feel safe being themselves and meeting the same people with the same experiences as them. They also added that this develops logical inquiry among themselves. In different studies, the involvement of peer mentors will help the students, especially those new enrollees to be more familiar with the university's processes and other expectations in the graduate school, which will consequently result in sustaining the education progress of the students (Byers et al., 2014; Chester et al., 2013; Lorenzetti et al., 2023; Murdock et al., 2013; Outhred & Chester, 2013). Therefore, the need to strengthen the designs and implementation plans of the support mechanisms for the students' well-being is important.

Provided with these narratives, the graduate students have varying proposals, yet all are considered essential to fully support them in their academic success. As found in the study of

Collier and Blanchard (2023), professors have to be familiar with the various needs of their learners based on their status, background, and culture. It was also mentioned that there should be continuous professional advancement for faculty members to embody their vital role in teaching teachers, training trainers, and leading educational leaders. Therefore, the need to study the data of the graduate students is important to be able to understand and design appropriate activities and interventions for them.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of the study reveal that pursuing graduate studies profoundly enhances teachers' professional competence and personal development. Through advanced learning, research engagement, and reflective practice, teachers expand their pedagogical knowledge and critical thinking skills, which in turn enrich their instructional effectiveness and leadership potential. Graduate education thus serves as a transformative process that cultivates both intellectual and personal growth among educators.

However, this study also exposes the complex realities of balancing professional responsibilities with academic demands. Teachers who are concurrently employed and enrolled in graduate programs often encounter overlapping challenges such as time constraints, workload pressures, and limited institutional support. These difficulties can compromise not only their academic performance but also their overall well-being, underscoring the need for more responsive and flexible graduate school systems.

Moreover, the study highlights that faculty competence, mentoring quality, and academic guidance play pivotal roles in shaping graduate students' learning experiences. Supportive mentorship, relevant instruction, and constructive feedback contribute significantly to student motivation and persistence. In contrast, inconsistent faculty engagement and lack of structured support systems may hinder academic progress and research productivity.

Administrative issues further compound these challenges. Inefficiencies in communication, scheduling, and policy implementation often delay academic transactions, frustrate students, and impede timely completion of program requirements. These systemic concerns point to a need for institutional review and reform to ensure that graduate programs operate with transparency, efficiency, and academic rigor.

In light of these findings, the study underscores the importance of designing strengthened, flexible, and evidence-based development plans for graduate schools. Such plans should integrate the voices and lived experiences of teacher-graduates, align with contemporary educational demands, and promote equitable access to professional growth opportunities. A strategic student-centered framework will not only improve academic processes but also sustain the transformative potential of graduate education in advancing the teaching profession.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, here are the proposed recommendations to enhance the quality and responsiveness of graduate education for teachers. Foremost, graduate schools should implement flexible and teacher-responsive academic scheduling and pacing. Flexibility in course delivery and program pacing can help alleviate scheduling conflicts and promote sustained engagement.

Graduate institutions should also strengthen their mentoring, advising, and faculty development systems. Establishing structured mentorship and peer-support networks will encourage collaboration, confidence, and scholarly growth among students. Simultaneously, providing continuous training for faculty on research supervision, inclusive pedagogy, and standardized instructional practices will ensure consistency and quality in graduate instruction. Strengthened academic relationships between faculty and students create more meaningful and productive learning experiences.

Finally, the improvement of administrative systems and the expansion of research-oriented partnerships are vital for institutional advancement. Streamlined processes, responsive student services, and effective communication mechanisms will minimize bureaucratic delays and enhance academic progression. Likewise, developing partnerships with local schools, communities, and research institutions can broaden opportunities for applied learning and professional relevance. Together, these measures will support a comprehensive and evidence-based graduate school development plan that promotes both institutional excellence and teacher empowerment.

### **Acknowledgments**

The researchers extend their deepest gratitude to the esteemed panel members—Dr. Wilfredo C. Chung, Dr. Ma. Glenda O. De Lara, Dr. Gilbert S. Arrieta, and Dr. Arlyne C. Marasigan—all are faculty members from the Philippine Normal University, for their invaluable guidance and insightful recommendations throughout the development of this study.

Sincere appreciation is also given to Mr. Erhwin Andres Clarin, the study's language editor, for his expertise, careful review, and thoughtful suggestions that enhanced the clarity and coherence of this study.

### **Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process**

The authors declare that AI-assisted technologies were used solely to support the writing process of this manuscript. The usage of these tools was limited to refining words, improving grammar, and enhancing clarity. All ideas, interpretations, analyses, and conclusions presented in this paper remain the sole responsibility of the authors. The authors reviewed and verified all content generated with the assistance of AI tools to ensure accuracy and integrity.

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**Contact email:** [lumahan.hgr@pnu.edu.ph](mailto:lumahan.hgr@pnu.edu.ph)

## Appendix

### **Informed Consent**

This form details the purpose and significance of this study, a description of the involvement required, and your rights as a participant.

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

This study aims to look into the academic experiences of graduate students and how these experiences can be used as a basis for a proposed Graduate School Development Plan of the Philippine Normal University. The results of this study are significant contributions to HEIs and the Philippine education department to enhance its graduate school program/s for graduate students, and for future innovations and further studies toward policy recommendations.

### **Number of Participants**

A total of forty-two (42) participants across course programs of a state university in Manila, Philippines, will be invited to this study and will be asked to participate during the Focus Group Discussion and interview schedules.

### **Procedure for Study**

Interview sessions would take thirty to sixty minutes (30–60 min.) for each participant, while FGDs usually take one to two hours (2 hrs.). A day before the schedule of the interview or the FGD, the researcher shall send a copy of the interview questions and a reminder via email on the scheduled session, while the participants shall send a confirmation of their attendance through email.

All interviews and FGDs shall be recorded through note-taking and/or audio and video recording. Various platforms, such as Zoom, Google Meet application, or face-to-face will be used in the data gathering.

Participants are given the flexibility to choose their preferred interview schedule and venue, to ensure their availability and convenience. To do this, they will be asked to complete a Google form upon signing the consent form, indicating their preferred schedule and venue.

### **Risks and Inconveniences**

Emotional risks or discomforts may arise during the interview and FGD sessions given that the research questions require answers on the participant's experiences; however, the researcher will respect the participant's decision in disclosing details the respondent is comfortable sharing.

### **Safeguards**

Despite the identified risks and inconveniences, the interview and FGD sessions will be a safe space between the researcher and the participant. All data shall be secured, and the identities of the participants will not be disclosed and be kept confidential.

### **Confidentiality**

All data must be stored on a personal computer and only the researcher/s will have access to such. Identities and other information of the participants, and actual names mentioned during interviews shall be kept confidential throughout the entire conduct of the study.

**THE RESULTS WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL AND ONLY BE REVEALED IF REQUESTED BY THE PARTICIPANT.**

**Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Should you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time upon prior notice to the researcher. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the researcher through the following platforms:

- Email: lumahan.hgr@pnu.edu.ph
- Mobile, Viber, and Telegram Number: 09xx xxx xxxx

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read and understood the above information. I am aware that I can discontinue my participation in the study at any time.

**Participants' signature over printed name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

I certify that I have explained the purpose of the research to the participant and consider that s/he understands what is involved and consents to participate.

**Researcher's signature over printed name:** Hannah Grace R. Lumahan (sgd.)

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_