



THE PERFORMANCE IN THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION OF THE GRADUATE STUDENTS IN THE MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION (MAED) PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to assess the performance in the comprehensive examination of the graduate students in the Master of Arts in Education program. It involved the MAED graduate students who took the comprehensive examination for the last five (5) years from 2017 to 2022. Using the corpus from the graduate school office, the data were analyzed according to the intentions as reflected in the objectives of the study. The results revealed that majority of the takers (251 out of 298 or 84%) have had "satisfactory" performance in the comprehensive examination for the last five years. It further revealed that in research, the students generally have a satisfactory rating of 2.43 and interpreted as an "average level". As to the indicators, organization has the highest mean of 2.51 and in "average level" and the conceptualization of the research problem and questions have the lowest mean of 2.34 and is interpreted as in "average level". The writing skills of the graduate students in educational management has an overall mean of 2.01 and interpreted as "satisfactory" and on the "average level." In terms of the indicators, spelling and grammar has the highest mean (2.52) and interpreted as "satisfactory" while organization has the lowest mean of 1.69 and interpreted as "poor". It is recommended to strengthen the review for the research component of the comprehensive examination focusing on how to formulate the research problem and research questions and giving a longer time allotment for it.

Keywords: *Performance, Comprehensive examination, graduate students, MAED Program*

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INTRODUCTION

Education is an influential step in staying competitive and enhancing one's skills. Whether starting out a career or returning, to continue to build upon years of experience, pursuing educational training helps one keep moving forward. By pursuing a graduate degree, one is expected to be equipped with practical skills and knowledge acquired from previous studies. This knowledge can be both factual and practical which means that the knowledge and skills will be of great use in the current role as a graduate student. These skills can broaden one's skills in communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving.

Graduate students face challenges such as time management, work-life balance, and the accompanying stress brought about by other factors. **They often struggle with the perceived need to constantly be studying while maintaining a social life.** In addition, the students are expected to balance class, studying, teaching/research, professional development, and job/job-searching obligations. It can be easy for them to feel overworked, and isolated like they are not good enough, and like they do not belong inside or outside of the institution.

After finishing the academic requirements for the master's degree program, students take the comprehensive examination which is the culmination of the students' advanced studies that evaluates the knowledge covered throughout the entire program. The examination offers each student the opportunity to demonstrate new learning, emerging skill sets and accomplishments. The questions are closely tied to the learning objectives of the program; hence, materials learned from the previous subjects will be relevant for the comprehensive examination. It is for this reason the study was undertaken to determine the performance of the graduate students in the comprehensive examination for the last five (5) years as a means of supporting the students in their quest for advancing professional life and pursuing education that can advance their career for the next level.

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Review of Literature and Studies

Brew et al. (2021) posited that it is highly significant that a human being's entire existence is commonly based on the amount of knowledge he/she acquires, and how this knowledge is utilized in developing himself/herself *personally and professionally*. This simply explains the reason underlying the need for education in which the basic thing that one gets from education is knowledge. The knowledge gained from education plays a great role in one's future life that will likely help the person to understand the happenings in a much more cohesive manner.

Ultimately, knowledge and skills are both essential foundations for a robust education that challenges students and pushes them to achieve their potential. According to Dhamdher (2015) every academic institution contributes to knowledge. The generated information and knowledge are to be compiled at a central place and disseminated among the society for further growth.

It has been observed that the generated knowledge in the academic institute is not stored or captured properly and not even known to anyone but remains as a grey literature. Dhamdher (2015) added that the main source of generation of knowledge is human efforts which are developed through conducting good educational activities, research activities, and generating innovative concepts in interest. All knowledge-generating organizations like industries, R and D centers, and higher education academics from colleges to universities are in search of new concepts in their subject of interest and contribute to knowledge through various means.

According to Somervell (2015), among the many techniques for performing an assessment for student outcomes, a comprehensive examination is considered an excellent choice. It is highly adaptable, easily manageable, and directly related to assessment. In a case study, he described the implementation, use, and adaptability of the comprehensive examination

On the other hand, Kadhi and Bunagan (2015) presented the importance of a well – established assessment and evaluation process to improve program delivery. They cited the success factors that included the appropriateness and coherence of the assessment process,

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careful design of the assessment tools, involvement of the stakeholders in the assessment process, availability of resources, periodicity and effective documentation of the assessment process and utilization of assessment information and dissemination of evaluation results. They added that the success factors led to the successful program delivery of the College of Engineering in Oman.

Meanwhile, Banta (2009) in a study, examined the assessment programs of nearly 150 colleges and found that only 6 percent provided evidence that their processes actually advanced student learning. The vast majority of outcomes assessment programs fell short of "closing the loop," that is, turning assessment findings into effective educational change. While still evolving and far from perfect, LaGuardia's outcomes assessment system has developed a set of approaches that effectively closed the loop. Grounded in the classroom-generated artifacts of student learning, LaGuardia's outcomes assessment process engages faculty in a process of inquiry and reflection, which helps them identify the changes in pedagogy and curricula that would improve student learning.

Moreover, Kuncel, Hezlett, & Ones (2019) using meta-analysis examined the validity of the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) and undergraduate grade point average (UGPA) as predictors of graduate school performance. The study included samples from multiple disciplines, considered different criterion measures, and corrected for statistical artifacts. The results indicated that the GRE and UGPA are generalizable valid predictors of graduate grade point average, 1st-year graduate grade point average, comprehensive examination scores, publication citation counts, and faculty ratings. GRE correlations with degree attainment and research productivity were consistently positive; however, some lower 90% credibility intervals included 0. Subject tests tended to be better predictors than the verbal, quantitative, and analytical tests.

Furthermore, Keenan and Stewart-Wells (2021) explored how a Midwestern Christian university's doctoral program aligns an authentic assessment process of evaluation, in lieu of comprehensive exams. The process of assessing "authentically" comes from the belief that evaluating students on skills they enact outside of the classroom will better reflect what they

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need to master for their chosen field or vocation. Although comprehensive exams are a staple of many doctoral programs as a way for students to express their understanding of material, synthesize their learning, and apply that learning to their fields of study, literature reviewed on the benefits/challenges of comps reflects a theme questioning the true assessment value of these exams. Through these authentic assessments, doctoral students are shaping not only their lives, but also the lives of those they touch through their doctoral work.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Assessment plays a crucial role in the education process: it determines much of the work students undertake, affects their approach to learning, and an indication of which aspects of the course are valued most highly (Rust, 2002). The study is anchored on Smith (2019) which states that many adults return to school to enhance their careers. According to Kamp (2019), many believe that “additional education will help them achieve their career goals, like making more money, advancing in their current occupation, or starting in a different one.”

In addition, Collamer (2019) said that most return to school “to bolster their range of marketable skills and credentials, which, in turn, makes them more competitive—both at their current employer and in the overall job market.” Further, students may vary in their reasons for pursuing graduate studies. The motivation to do a graduate degree often includes both personal and professional goals. While the outcomes of the degree are not entirely controllable, a graduate degree will lead to qualifications for further study or employment.

The study is premised on the concept that graduate education provides students with more advanced learning in a specialized discipline or sub-discipline. Graduate school gives an in-depth understanding such that the student becomes something of an expert in the topic of study. Promotion especially in the education sector is tight. Thereby, most millennials perceive that taking a master’s degree or graduate study helps them establish their career.

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According to the National Teachers College (NTC n.d.), being a graduate student will set oneself ahead of others; offers opportunities for career advancement and most of all one gets the benefit if one considers continuing graduate education. Some of the benefits are the following: gain specialized skills; engage in flexible and lifelong learning; build a professional network; have opportunities for a career change and have first-hand experience in your chosen field.

Statement of the Problem

The study aimed to assess the comprehensive examination outputs of the graduate students in the MAED program for the last five (5) school years, 2017 - 2022. Specifically, it will seek to answer the following questions.

1. What is the performance of the MAED graduate students in the comprehensive examination for the last five years?
2. What is the writing skill level of the students in the comprehensive examination on management and research?
3. Based on the findings of the study, what can be proposed to improve the level of performance of graduate students in the comprehensive examination?

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive explanatory research design was used in the study utilizing the 29 corpora of the participants. Table 1 shows the distribution of the student - participants.

Table 1

Distribution of Subjects Per School Year and Sample Size used in Analyzing the Writing Skills of the Students

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School Year	N	n
2017-2018	72	7
2018-2019	40	4
2019-2020	42	4
2020-2021	70	7
2021-2022	74	7
Total	298	29

The results of the comprehensive examination of the 298 subjects were all tabulated to determine the level of performance in the comprehensive examination while sampling was used to analyze the writing skills of the students in the examination. Ten percent (10%) of the students per school year were taken for determining their writing skills.

The data were taken from the results of the comprehensive examination of the graduate students and determined the writing skills using the designed rubrics with the following areas on content, organization, sentence structure, mechanics, crafting the research questions, and formulating the framework. Each area was quantified into four (4) categories, namely: outstanding (4), very satisfactory (3), satisfactory (2), and poor (1).

Frequency and mean were used to determine the level of performance of the students in the comprehensive exam while the mean was used to determine the writing skills of the students.

Significance of the Study

The study will be beneficial to the following.

Graduate School Dean. The results of the study can be used as a basis for planning to improve the curriculum of the MAED programs and enhance the skills of graduate students.

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Faculty of the Graduate School. The results of the study can serve as an eye-opener for them to think of ways how to improve the weaknesses of the graduate students in their classes if there are any.

Graduate Students. They can use the results of the study to make them equipped with practical skills and knowledge that they can apply to their workplace and be prepared and equipped to take the next step toward achieving their goals for professional advancement.

Future Researchers. The findings of the study will provide them additional information on the performance of the graduate students in the comprehensive examination and can be the basis for further studies by including variables not contained in the present study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Problem 1. What is the performance of the MAED graduate students in the comprehensive examination for the last five years?

Table 2 shows the level of performance of the MAED graduate students in the comprehensive examination. The following percentage scores are used based on the Graduate School standards: 90 – 100 (outstanding), 85 – 89 (very satisfactory), 80 – 84 (satisfactory), 75 to 79 (poor), and 75 and below (failed).

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Table 2

Level of Performance in the Comprehensive Examination

Level of Performance	School Year					
	2017 – 2018	2018 -2019	2019 – 2020	2020 – 2021	2021 – 2022	Total
Outstanding	1	0	0	1	1	3
Very Satisfactory	14	2	2	4	8	30
Satisfactory	51	35	35	65	65	251
Poor	6	3	5	0	0	14
Total	72	40	42	70	74	298

As shown in Table 2, majority of the takers (251 out of 298 or 84%) have had “satisfactory” performance in the comprehensive examination for the last five years. This means that the graduate students have demonstrated the level of the existing knowledge to be measured during the learning process. The results of the examination are good enough for assessing the level of knowledge gained throughout their educational experience with the MAED program. This implies that those who have completed the academic requirements for the program have met the minimum standards (Dewit, 2012).

Problem 2. What is the level of the writing skills of the graduate students in the comprehensive examination in research and management?

Rubrics were used to determine the writing skills of the students in research and management using a scale of 1 - 4 where 4 is the highest representing outstanding skills and 1 as poor. Table 3 shows the level of the writing skills of the students in the comprehensive examination in research and management.

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Table 3

Level of Writing Skills of Graduate Students in the Comprehensive Examination

Area with indicators	Mean	Level of Writing Skills
Research	2.43	Satisfactory
Content	2.46	Satisfactory
Organization	2.51	Satisfactory
Grammar	2.42	Satisfactory
Conceptualization of Research Problem and Questions	2.34	Satisfactory
Management	2.01	Satisfactory
Content	1.90	Satisfactory
Organization	1.69	Poor
Language	2.21	Satisfactory
Spelling and Grammar	2.52	Satisfactory
Purpose	1.72	Poor
<hr/> Over-all Mean <hr/>		

Legend: 3.30-4.00 Outstanding; 2.53- 3.29 Very Satisfactory; 1.76-2.52 Satisfactory. 1.0- 1.75 Poor

It can be gleaned from Table 3 that in research, the students generally have a “satisfactory” rating of 2.43 and interpreted as an “average level”. As to the indicators, organization has the highest mean of 2.51 and in “average level” and the conceptualization of the research problem and questions have the lowest mean of 2.34 and is interpreted as in

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“average level”. Although conceptualization of the research problem is in the average level, this is the lowest among the indicators. This implies that most graduate students find difficulty in developing or formulating a defensible and researchable research problem and questions. According to Kelly (2017), the hardest part of doing research is formulating a research question.

Furthermore, Table 3 shows the writing skills of the graduate students in educational management with overall mean of 2.01 and interpreted as “satisfactory” and in the “average” level”. This means that the students have the knowledge and ability to express their concepts in educational management through written words. According to Ryan (2011), writing skills are essential for success in the academic world and in the workplace whether it is used in making project reports, emails, or other requirements. Good effective writing can be a daunting task as it demands much more than mere correct grammar. One needs to gain sufficient knowledge and skills in sentence structure, develop vocabulary and build other basic writing skills.

In terms of the indicators, spelling and grammar has the highest mean (2.52) and interpreted as “satisfactory” while organization has the lowest mean of 1.69 and interpreted as “poor”. This means that the students have an evident control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage, and sentence formation and has minimal control of content arrangement.

Problem 3. Based on the findings of the study, what can be proposed to improve the level of performance of graduate students in the comprehensive examination?

Based on the findings of the study, an action plan will be proposed to improve the level of performance of the graduate students in the comprehensive examination

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Action Plan to Enhanced Comprehensive Examination: A Seminar Workshop

Areas of Concern	Objective	Strategies	Activities/ Timeframe	Responsible Persons	Budgetary Requirement	Outcome
Formulation of Research Problem and Research Questions	To develop students' skills in formulating research problems and research questions.	Face-to-Face	Lecture on Formulating research problems and research questions and Write shop Presentation and critiquing of outputs One day	Research Instructors/ Experts in research/ Advisers	P500.00/per day to include 2 snacks and a lunch Plus honorarium of the resource person @ P2,000 per day	Students' skills in formulating research problems and research questions enhanced
Organization- use of transitional devices, introduction, and conclusion	To develop students' skills in organizing paragraphs, use of transitional devices etc.	Face-to-face	Lecture & Write shop on how to use transitional devices or words in a paragraph One day	English Instructors	P500.00/per day to include 2 snacks and a lunch Plus honorarium of the resource person @ P2,000 per day	Students' skills in organization and use of transitional devices

Conclusions

A comprehensive examination is an assessment tool given to graduate students towards the end of their coursework, with the goal of determining how ready a student is for the next step of their academic career. It is one step closer to writing a scholarly work - the thesis. As an assessment tool, the comprehensive exam provides the level of attainment of the graduate program outcomes that gives direct, usable feedback to the program.

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Recommendation

It is recommended to strengthen the review for the research component of the comprehensive examination focusing on how to formulate the research problem and research questions and giving a longer time allotment for it. As to the management component, there is a need to consider building-up students' skills in writing content especially in developing and sustaining within and across paragraphs using transitional devices.

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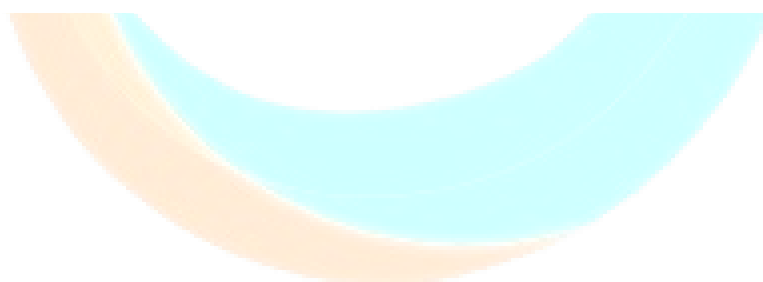
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