



## TEACHERS' ENGAGEMENT IN THE GRADUATE STUDIES DURING PANDEMIC FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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### ABSTRACT:

The researchers came up with this topic because it is very timely. Many teachers took the opportunity to study online distance learning even afar – here and abroad. Even working from home, teachers will not travel and will not encounter traffic congestion along their way to school. It will address the gap in the problem of time and location through technology. Thus, teachers' careers will be more productive in the world of academe. This study focused on thirty (31) respondents engaged in continuing professional development in graduate studies during the pandemic. The researchers followed a descriptive research design and utilized a mixed-method process. Based on the responses gathered from the participants located in the Philippines and USA; they revealed that pursuing professional development amidst the pandemic made them confident and proficient in their workplace. Also, having collaboration and being resourceful had led them to cope with new normal trends in educative pedagogy marked by current innovation to suffice what is needed for bringing quality education as well. As recommended by the researchers, teacher-respondents must finish the program and encourage more teachers to partake in the graduate studies not only to learn but to share their expertise or best practices professionally.

**Keywords:** *pandemic, teachers' engagement, professional development, graduate studies*

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## INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 pandemic has caused remarkable trials and has challenged the educational system of all the countries, and not a single person tells when it will stop [1]. Amidst the Pandemic, teachers find ways to make themselves more productive and can jive into the new trends in education. Valuing time here and afar made them realize still to pursue their studies in graduate schools. Pandemic has resulted in the shift from face-to-face to fully online learning, readiness, and satisfaction [2, 3, 4, 5, 6]. Through technology, online distance learning made everything possible. Teachers' engagement [7,8] will be more possible and ease; in as much, proved to give a positive impact on the process of organizing education [9]. The siege of traveling, the cost of fare, and time were no longer hindered which made teachers more comfortable while working and learning at home.

This, professional development can be used as a tool to increase teacher confidence and competence. Consequently, it may improve the quality of education available to students [10]. Initial teacher preparation and teachers' continuing professional development are two significant pillars of the teacher education enterprise [11]. It manifested adaptability and innovation to meet the demands of the current situation. With the forced transition from face-to-face interaction to remote learning, they have tried their best to maintain a balance of digital and life skills [12].

Moreover, teachers' selected profiles such as educational attainment, the field of specialization, and years in service [13]; motivation to participate in professional learning is a significant factor in explaining the effectiveness of continuous professional development programs [14]. Also, information and communications technology have created new opportunities for professional development among teachers, and online learning programs provide new spaces for teachers to share, interact, reflect and collaborate online, meeting other teachers, supervisors, or professionals in their development processes [15].

Pursuing graduate studies makes sense; alongside the current demand for advanced degrees, teachers are often compelled with the professional duty to study further [16]. Also, describes the benefits of postgraduate studies for their practice [17]. Another, the focus on graduate teacher education is needed because of the need to capacitate teachers to meet the demands of the K to 12 curriculum which makes it imperative for teachers to develop competencies that are more advanced than what is being developed in undergraduate programs

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[18, 19]. Furthermore, teachers' quality enhancement and upholding quality teaching standards is of great importance for the long continuous nation-building [20].

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research utilized a descriptive design and a purposive sampling approach was applied in determining respondents. There were 31 participants engaged in online graduate classes; currently located in the Philippines and USA. Followed with an invitation letter to selected teachers to participate in the said study. Also, the ethical standard was observed in accordance with RA 10173 or the Data Privacy Act of 2012 that personal information was kept confidential.

Moreover, the teacher-made survey questionnaire was also validated. Also, mixed method was used wherein, data were gathered through the said survey questionnaire via Google form. Lastly, frequency, percentage, weighted mean, and standard deviation for the scale responses were used.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the interpretation and analysis of data on the demographic characteristics of the respondents and their experiences in pursuing graduate studies during the pandemic period. Hence, professional development programs are used to support teachers in this regard [21].

### Respondents' Profile Information

The table reveals the combined demographic characteristics of the participants who are pursuing graduate studies during the pandemic period and are attending online graduate classes. It can be seen that the majority of the participants are females (N= 26; 83.87%). Information about the age group where the respondents belong discloses that 45.16% (N= 14) of the respondents belong to the 31 to 40 years old group. Eight respondents belong to the 21 to 30 years old group, comprising 25.81%. Online Graduate School students in the 41 to 50 age group make up 22.58% (N= 7), while there are two respondents whose age ranges from 51 to 60 years old. Results also disclose that a large portion of the respondents (93.55%; N= 29) are currently located in the country, while the remaining portion (6.45%; N= 2) are in the USA.

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The data reports that majority (83.87%) of the students enrolled in online graduate school programs are teachers. The other respondents also work in schools, not as teachers, but as non-teaching personnel; as school head; as education program specialist; as an administrative officer; and/or a school registrar.

Variable	Characteristics	frequency	percentage
Gender	Male	5	16.13%
	Female	26	83.87%
Age Group	21-30 years old	8	25.81%
	31-40 years old	14	45.16%
	41-50 years old	7	22.58%
	51-60 years old	2	6.45%
Country /Location	Philippines	29	93.55%
	USA	2	6.45%
Employment Status	Regular/Permanent	30	96.77%
	Contractual	1	3.23%
Occupation	Teacher	26	83.87%
	School Head	1	3.23%
	Specialist	1	3.23%
	Administrative Head	1	3.23%
	Registrar	1	3.23%
	Non-teaching Personnel	1	3.23%
Level Teaching	Elementary	4	12.90%
	Secondary	23	74.19%
	Tertiary	2	6.45%
	Graduate/Post-Graduate	2	6.45%
Graduate Program	Masteral Program	19	61.29%
	MAEd	14	45.16%
	MBA	1	3.23%
	MAELT	1	3.23%
	MAEd-As	1	3.23%
	MAT	1	3.23%
	MPA	1	3.23%
	Doctorate Program	12	38.71%
	Doctor of Education	10	32.26%
	Doctor of Philosophy	2	6.45%
Number of Units Earned	9 units	1	3.23%
	27 units	4	12.90%
	36 units	8	25.81%
	45 units	10	32.26%
	51 units	1	3.23%
	54 units	6	19.35%
	completed the degree	1	3.23%
Graduate School	Ateneo De Manila University	1	3.23%
	Bulacan State University	5	16.13%
	EARIST	3	9.68%
	Good Samaritan College	3	9.68%
	La Consolacion C College	2	6.45%
	National Teachers College	9	29.03%
	TIP-Manila	3	9.68%
University of Cebu City	5	16.13%	

Those reported as teachers (N= 26) are teaching at different levels. Eighteen of these are secondary school teachers (74.19%). Four teachers teach at the elementary level (12.90%). Two teach at the tertiary level (6.45%), while the other two hold classes at the graduate/post-graduate level (6.45%).

Findings on the graduate program that the respondents are pursuing show that the number of students pursuing online graduate education leading to a master's degree (N= 19; 61.29%) is greater than the number of students enrolled in a graduate program leading to a doctorate degree, either in Education or in Philosophy, (N=12: 31.71%).

Another profile characteristic reported in Table 1 shows the number of units earned in the online graduate program. Results reveal that most of the respondents have already taken beyond the academic requirements and are close

to obtaining the degree that the program they are pursuing leads to and have already earned units ranging from 45 to 54 (58.06%; N= 18). There are online graduate education students, who have already earned 27 units at the least (38.71%; N= 12). The data also reveals that there is a respondent who earned 9 units.

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## Online Graduate Education Experience during the Pandemic

### Reason for Pursuing Online Graduate Education

Primary Reason for Pursuing Graduate Studies in the Pandemic Period	Frequency	Percentage
... it is an opportunity	15	48.39%
... collaborate and share expertise	1	3.23%
... improve knowledge and skills	8	25.81%
... for promotion purposes	6	19.35%
... improve job performance	1	3.23%
N = 31		100.00%

Respondents were asked the reason why they are pursuing graduate education amidst the pandemic. The table provides the responses on the primary reason for studying in graduate school. With the highest frequency (N= 15), respondents admit that it is the opportunity that drives them to pursue graduate studies. Taking graduate studies will help improve knowledge and skills according to 25.81% of the respondents, while 19.35% of the respondents admit that they want to get a promotion. The remaining portion of the respondents said that they pursued graduate studies because they want to improve their job performance and to collaborate and share expertise, at 3.23% apiece. Attending graduate and post-graduate school certainly can contribute to one's development and advancement. The School of Advanced Studies in the Philippines is one of the leading institutions, that caters the academic needs of professionals and employees from different fields of specialization [22].

### Motivation for Pursuing Online Graduate Education

Inspiration/Motivation	Frequency	Percentage
Personal Choice	23	74.19%
Superiors	3	9.68%
Colleagues	5	16.13%
	31	100.00%

The table shows findings on whether the respondent's pursuit of graduate education is an extrinsically driven or intrinsically- motivated action. Clearly, the table discloses that engaging in graduate studies is a personal choice for a majority of the respondents (74.19%; N= 23). Some (16.13%; N= 5) admits that the inspiration to take graduate studies is taken from colleagues, while the others are motivated to pursue graduate studies by their superiors (9.68%; N= 3). A

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study examined the motivating factors that influenced prospective graduate students' choice in pursuing an advanced degree and choosing an institution at which to study [23].

### Online Graduate Education Experience

Description	Frequency	Percentage
Challenging...	26	83.87%
Exciting...	3	9.68%
Gained Knowledge	1	3.23%
Fulfilling	1	3.23%
	31	100.00%

Respondents provided a one-liner description of the experience they have while studying during the pandemic. The table above gives the distribution of the responses. With the largest percentage share (83.87%; N= 26) of responses, the experience of taking graduate classes during the pandemic period is described to be challenging. It is, to some, an exciting experience (N= 3); a fulfilling experience to others (N= 1; 3.23%); while others gained knowledge from the experience (N= 1; 3.23%). Indeed, graduate education can be one mechanism for teachers to develop their competence [24].

### Online Graduate Education Experience During the Pandemic

Online Graduate School Experience	Strongly Agree (5)		Agree (4)		Neutral (3)		Disagree (2)		Strongly Disagree (1)		Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation
	f	ws	f	ws	f	ws	f	ws	f	ws		
I find it more convenient to study online distance learning in times of pandemic	15	75	6	24	4	12	4	8	2	2	3.9	4.5782
I feel fulfilled as I earn units and obtain a graduate degree in terms of professional development	20	100	7	28	1	3	0	0	3	3	4.32	7.3048
Online distance learning motivates more teachers to pursue professional growth	13	65	12	48	3	9	0	0	3	3	4.03	5.2688
It is affordable and can save time to continue graduate studies in times of pandemic	9	45	17	68	2	6	0	0	3	3	3.93	6.1774
In my opinion, I consider to have face-to-face classes in graduate schools	2	10	12	48	13	39	2	4	2	2	3.32	5.1536
	TWM										3.9	

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The table above contains the distribution of scaled responses that show the extent of the respondent's agreement or disagreement with statements indicating online graduate education experience during the pandemic times.

Table discloses the findings on how respondents assess the experience of attending online graduate classes in times of pandemic, in relation to specific aspects.

Based on the data, it is evident that the respondents agree that pursuing graduate studies during the pandemic times is more convenient since classes are held online (WM= 3.90: SD= 4.58); online distance learning will be a driving force that will entice more teachers to engage themselves to professional development and growth (WM= 4.03; SD= 5.27); and pursuing and/or continuing graduate studies during the pandemic period is affordable and time-saving (WM= 3.93: SD= 6.18).

The respondents strongly agree that the experience of earning units and obtaining the degree is fulfillment in terms of professional development (WM= 4.32: SD= 7.30).

Deciding on whether to favor or not to consider having face-to-face classes in the graduate school keeps the respondents on neutral grounds (WM= 3.32: SD= 5.15).

In addition, professional learning in postgraduate education is understood as being a ceaseless process. Mirroring the way, the concept of the post digital illuminates our almost seamless relationship with digital technologies in education, the concept of lifelong learning highlights that education is now conceptualized as a continuous process of upskilling [25].

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, these are conclusions:

Respondents revealed that pursuing professional development amidst the pandemic made them confident and proficient in their workplace. Also, having collaboration and being resourceful had led them to cope up with new normal trends in educative pedagogy marked by current innovation to suffice what is needed for bringing quality education as well.

As recommended by the researchers, teacher-respondents must finish the program and encourage more teachers to partake in the graduate studies not only to learn but to share their expertise or best practices professionally.

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