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**WORK-RELATED BARRIERS OF GRADUATE SCHOOL STUDENTS  
OF PHINMA UNIVERSITY OF ILOILO: BASIS FOR POLICY  
RECOMMENDATION**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study explores the work-related barriers faced by graduate school students who are also full-time teachers. Challenges such as time management struggles, workload overload, emotional stress, schedule conflicts, student-related challenges, and administrative demands impact their ability to balance academic and professional responsibilities. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with 22 graduate school students from PHINMA University of Iloilo during SY 2023-2024. Thematic analysis identified time management struggles, conflicting schedules, and workload overload as the most significant barriers, often leading to stress and academic difficulties. To cope, participants used time management strategies, task prioritization, self-discipline, use of scheduling tools, and seeking external support. Based on the findings, policy recommendations were proposed, including flexible academic schedules, workload adjustments, and enhanced administrative support to help working students manage their dual roles effectively.

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**Keywords:** *work-related barriers, graduate school students, full-time teachers, policy recommendations*

## INTRODUCTION

In today's demanding and competitive academic landscape, many graduate school students must balance their professional responsibilities with the pursuit of higher education. While earning a master's degree can enhance career opportunities and professional growth, it also presents significant challenges, particularly for full-time teachers who must juggle their teaching duties, administrative tasks, and academic requirements. The ability to effectively manage both work and graduate studies is critical, yet many working students face barriers that hinder their academic and professional performance. According to Fadare et al. (2023), teachers pursuing graduate studies experience various struggles and must develop coping strategies to manage the demands of both their profession and academic pursuits.

Graduate school students who are also full-time professionals often struggle with time management, workload overload, emotional and mental stress, schedule conflicts, and institutional demands. According to Johnson et al. (2024), these work-related barriers can lead to increased stress, burnout, and difficulty in meeting academic expectations, which may ultimately affect their ability to complete their graduate studies successfully. Despite these

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challenges, many persevere through resilience and effective coping strategies, demonstrating the determination to advance their education while fulfilling their professional obligations.

This study aims to explore the work-related barriers encountered by graduate school students, particularly those employed as full-time teachers. By understanding the specific challenges they face, this research seeks to provide valuable insights into the difficulties of balancing work and academic life. Furthermore, the study aims to propose policy recommendations that can help institutions and employers develop support systems that enable graduate students to manage their responsibilities more effectively.

This research aims to raise awareness and promote institutional improvements for a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. Addressing these challenges ensures teachers pursuing higher education receive the necessary resources and flexibility to excel in both academic and professional roles.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Research Methodology

This chapter presents the research method, research design, participants of the study, data-gathering procedures, research instrument, and data analysis used in this study. The purpose of this study is to determine the work-related barriers encountered by graduate school students in the PHINMA University of Iloilo during the school year 2023-2024.

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## Research Method

This study employed a descriptive research method using in-depth interviews to identify the work-related barriers encountered by graduate school students.

Descriptive research focused on exploring and explaining what occurred, to whom, and where, rather than analyzing causal relationships (Moore, 2022). This method allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of working graduate students by examining their real-life situations in detail.

## Research Design

This study utilized a phenomenological research design, which is a qualitative approach that aims to understand how individuals perceive and experience a particular phenomenon. Phenomenology focuses on exploring people's subjective interpretations of their lived experiences, providing insights into how their perspectives may differ from commonly held views. This method was applied by conducting in-depth interviews to examine the work-related barriers encountered by graduate school students.

According to Salice (2022), phenomenology examines the structures of consciousness from the first-person perspective, focusing on how experiences are directed toward objects or states of affairs—a concept known as intentionality.

In this study, phenomenology was used to explore the challenges faced by graduate school students balancing academic and professional responsibilities. To gather the necessary data, participants were encouraged to freely and meaningfully share their experiences through open-ended interview questions.

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## Participants of the Study

The participants of the study were 22 graduate school students enrolled at PHINMA University of Iloilo during SY 2023-2024. These individuals were currently employed as public school teachers under the Department of Education (DepEd) and were chosen based on their experiences in managing work-related barriers while pursuing graduate studies. Their selection ensured that the study captured meaningful perspectives on the challenges they face and the coping strategies they employ.

## Sampling Design

This study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method in which participants were intentionally selected based on specific characteristics relevant to the study. According to Nyimbili (2024), purposive sampling enables researchers to identify individuals who can provide detailed and meaningful insights into the phenomenon being studied. It is also referred to as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling due to the researcher's role in selecting participants based on predefined criteria.

In this study, this approach was used to select graduate school students at PHINMA University of Iloilo who were also public school teachers under DepEd. Their firsthand experience in balancing work and academic responsibilities made them suitable for providing relevant and in-depth insights into the work-related barriers faced by graduate school students.

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## Research Instrument

The researcher utilized an in-depth interview guide as the primary research instrument to gather comprehensive and detailed information during the interview process. The interview guide consisted of four key questions aligned with the study's objectives, specifically focusing on work-related barriers and coping strategies.

The interview guide was divided into two parts. Part I collected the participants' demographic profile, while Part II contained the core questions exploring the work-related barriers faced by graduate school students and the strategies they use to manage these challenges. Participants were encouraged to freely and meaningfully express their experiences in response to the prepared questions. Additionally, a voice recorder was used for data gathering and documentation, subject to the permission of the participants to ensure ethical research practices.

### Validity of the Research Instrument

Prior to the determination of the validity of the interview schedule made by the researcher, the adviser, Dean of the Graduate School then a panel of jurors who were considered for their expertise in the field of research, testing and assessment, and English, was requested to validate each question for review and modification.

Validity refers to the appropriateness, meaningfulness, correctness and usefulness of inferences that a researcher makes. In content-related evidence of validity, the content and format must be consistent with the definition of variables and sample of subject to be

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measured and is also helpful in validating the items in the questionnaire (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2007).

The researcher-made interview guide was first submitted to the adviser for review and revision, then to a panel of experts for content and face validation.

### Data Gathering Procedures

The researcher secured permits from the adviser, Dean of the Graduate School, and individual participants to conduct the study. The researcher then personally visited PHINMA University of Iloilo to carry out the interviews with the participants.

A convenient interview schedule was arranged with each participant to ensure their availability. During the data collection process, minimum health protocols mandated by the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF), Department of Health (DOH), and DepEd Orders were strictly followed. The researcher asked participants to respond to the interview guide questions, encouraging them to share their experiences freely. Participants were assured that their responses would be treated with the utmost confidentiality.

After completing the series of interviews, the researcher consolidated all collected data, transcribed the responses, and conducted a comprehensive analysis to extract meaningful insights into the work-related barriers faced by graduate school students.

### Data Analyses

The data gathered for the study were transcribed, interpreted, and analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method used to identify patterns or themes within data. According to Braun and Clarke (2022), thematic analysis is a widely used

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method in qualitative research that involves systematically identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. This approach allows researchers to organize and describe data in rich detail, facilitating a deeper understanding of the research topic. To ensure a structured and effective analysis, the researcher followed the six-step process of thematic analysis, which is widely regarded as a systematic and influential approach in qualitative research. These steps included becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. By following this approach, the researcher was able to systematically analyze the work-related barriers encountered by graduate school students and identify key insights to support the study's conclusions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Summary

This study explored the work-related barriers faced by graduate school students who are also full-time teachers in the Department of Education. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with 22 graduate students from PHINMA University of Iloilo, and thematic analysis was used to identify key barriers and coping strategies.

Findings revealed that participants encountered time management struggles, workload overload, schedule conflicts, emotional and mental stress, administrative demands, and student-related challenges, leading to stress and exhaustion. To manage these challenges,

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they employed strategies such as effective time management, prioritization of tasks, self-discipline, motivation, the use of scheduling tools, and seeking external support from colleagues, mentors, and family members.

The study highlighted the need for institutional support, emphasizing flexible learning options, workload management policies, and mental health programs. Collaboration between graduate schools and employers was also deemed essential to creating a supportive environment. Based on these findings, policy recommendations were developed to enhance institutional support, ensuring graduate school students can successfully balance their academic and teaching responsibilities while continuing to excel in their profession.

### Insights

The study revealed that graduate school students who are also full-time teachers face challenges such as time management struggles, workload overload, emotional stress, schedule conflicts, administrative demands, and student-related difficulties. Despite employing strategies like time management, prioritization, and self-discipline, many still struggle due to demanding workloads and overlapping responsibilities.

Institutional support is crucial in helping teachers succeed in graduate school. Schools and employers that offer flexible schedules, workload adjustments, and professional development opportunities enable teachers to manage their responsibilities more effectively. Mental health programs are also essential in preventing stress and burnout.

Collaboration between graduate schools and employers is necessary to create a supportive environment. Aligning academic coursework with professional responsibilities

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makes graduate education more manageable and relevant. Policy interventions are needed to institutionalize support systems that address these challenges and ensure long-term assistance for teachers pursuing further education.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To support teachers pursuing graduate studies, schools and graduate programs should offer flexible learning options, such as weekend or evening classes, hybrid learning models, and adjusted deadlines. These will allow teachers to fulfill their academic requirements while continuing their professional duties.

Schools and employers should develop workload management policies, including redistributing tasks, reducing administrative workload, and allowing academic leave for teachers enrolled in graduate school. Providing these adjustments will help prevent burnout and improve productivity.

Mental health programs should be strengthened by offering counseling services, stress management workshops, and peer support groups to help teachers cope with the pressures of both work and school.

Graduate schools and employers should collaborate in developing policies that support teachers pursuing further education. Work flexibility, professional development incentives, and financial assistance programs should be provided to make graduate education more accessible and manageable.

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Lastly, further research should be conducted to explore additional factors that affect the experiences of graduate school students who are also teachers. This will help refine policies and create more effective solutions to support their academic and professional growth.



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