

## Research Article

### SILENT RACE' EXPERIENCES OF ADULT LEARNERS DURING PANDEMIC

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#### ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored silent race experiences of graduate school students during the pandemic. Utilizing a narrative inquiry of deductive approach to discover the perceptions and experiences of the participants on adult learning, challenges met, motivations held, and support needed, activities for program enhancement were proposed. It employs purposive sampling identifying the participants and adopted a systematic thematic analysis to analyze and interpret data coming from twelve volunteered students from Master of Arts in Education Program of six disciplines. Diverse narratives highlighted adult learning to be hard and challenging; identified challenges fixated to concerns on time management for academic, personal, and professional endeavor; Motivations pointed on promotion and personal and professional advancement; Lastly, the needed support was on writing workshop, capacity building seminar. Professional Development Activities (PDAs) were proposed to capacitate learners with experiences and journey. In conclusion, graduate school students are facing silent race experiences, not just at the middle of the journey but as they join the program; Actual experiences significantly enlightened on the transitioning challenges, seen as opportunities rather than difficulties; Noticeably to conclude, motivation may be fluctuating changeable drive, yet adult learners never lose such a motivation and still positive to finish the degree.

**Keywords:** silent race, adult learners, pandemic, graduate school, qualitative research.

#### INTRODUCTION

Graduate school, often referred as grad school (GS), awards advanced academic programs such as master's and doctorate degrees. It has a general requirement to have earned a previous undergraduate or bachelor's degree. Its coursework is more advanced and focused on developing advanced knowledge and skills through more direct, specific, advanced, and professional experiences. It has a culminating long piece of academic writing called thesis or dissertation. Also, learners in the graduate schools are commonly referred to as adult learners who are primarily in charge of their own learning, based on the concept of 'andragogy'. Adult education literally means 'leading man' in its derivational term andragogy; therefore, this refers to the methods and principles used in adult learning (Leif Martin, 2013).

Theoretically, adult learning concepts originally coined by a German educator Kapp in 1893, which later became very popular in the US by the American educator, Malcolm Knowles in 1989, suggesting four principles that are applied to adult learning: adults learning as involved in planning and evaluation of their instruction; as learning experience; as more interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance and impact to their job or personal life; and as a problem-centered than content-oriented. This principle later stated six assumptions related to the motivation of adult learning: Reasons to learn, foundation or experience, self-concept, readiness, orientation, and motivation (TEAL, 2011). According to Pappas (2013), adult education is known as andragogy, from the Greek and  $\rho$ -, which means "man" and agogos which means 'leader of'. Therefore, it literally means the leading man. Andragogy therefore refers to the methods and principles used in adult learning. (Oxford Dictionary) As elaborated, there are two primary understanding of andragogy: the science of understanding (theory) and supporting (practice) lifelong

education of adults; and the tradition of specific and practical approaches based on a humanistic conception of self-directed and autonomous learners as well as teachers as facilitators of learning. This is interpreted broadly throughout academic literature, such as "adult education practice", "desirable values", "specific teaching methods" "reflections", and academic discipline", with many authors claiming it to be better than traditional adult education. In connection, with the denotative meaning of adult learning, it is stated by Lambert (2013) that there are some crucial things to know about graduate school that are not typically discussed out in the open, but that could make all the difference for the graduate students and faculty members. It ultimately boils down to this, that the ultimate key to graduate school is transitioning from a "student" to a "professional" mentality. He presented five important truths to assist in making transition such as: adult learners being a "professorial apprenticeship"; the professional mentality with a goal of the course is to write and publish; focus on best scholar not with best grades; thesis writing can actually hamper progress, but this is the ultimate achievement an adult learner should strive for.

Most graduate school students may or may not be aware that they are experiencing a deep silent race, as Farkas (2019) stated, especially when they are near to thesis or dissertation writing. Pressures, as they increase, were caused by both internal and external: being the last to graduate, funding issues, strain on personal life, time management, and all other concerns which actually took a toll on the health of these adult learners. Describing the process, the beginning and end of the projects are relatively straight-forward: beginning displays enthusiasm to get ready for the journey ahead, and at the end they are relieved and proud of themselves pulling it all together. The middle of the project, however, is tough, because the original enthusiasm has worn off, but students are too far from the end to be excited. This is when students are most likely to lose motivation, but it is also their greatest opportunity for growth and learning. This is the silent race very crucial to stop or to continue the run- to finish graduate school.

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Sad to say, Farkas (2021) mentioned that when a global pandemic had upended daily life, graduate degree programs take time and energy that seemed in shorter supply. Starting or continuing during a pandemic requires adaptability. The new normal setting might be an ideal time to refresh skills. This has been emphasized in connection with his description of the word 'Silent Race' as adult learners start having confusion and uncertainties on the perception of adult learning and start to lose motivation in completing the course. He further discussed that dropping out of graduate school is a silent epidemic, and finding out the reasons of quitting, the reasons of losing motivation and how to get it back are significant to discover (Farkas, 2019). Relatively, CMO#4 s.2020 on the Guideline on the implementation of flexible learning- adopts and promulgates the guidelines on FL to be implemented by the public and private HEIs to respond to the unprecedented disruptions brought by COVID-19. The conduct of the face-to-face classes needed to be immediately suspended and the great challenge then was how to continue teaching and learning beyond the usual kind of instruction. Thus, it has become an urgent need to explore other innovative learning modalities that will facilitate migration from traditional to flexible teaching and learning options, new paradigm shifts adopted and necessitated the collaboration among all stakeholders while achieving leadership and solidarity to defeat and survive the pandemic. In a virtual meeting of the House committee on higher and technical education PASUC President Tirso Ronquillo reported an estimated over 6,300 GS students under the SUCs will not be enrolling, based on the 108 out of 112 SUCs in the country, that participated in the survey. (PASUC, SEP 10, 2020, 2:42). Based on the submission of HEIs regarding the distribution of higher education programs by program level in AY 2019-2020, concentrating on Region III alone, SUCs got 2, 679 enrollees in the master's degree (CHED, June 2020) and 2,671/578 distribution of HE programs by program level & Type during the AY 2018-2019, based on the submission of HEI, as compiled by OPRKM-Knowledge Management Divisions of August, 2019. Apparently in the new normal setting, the pandemic has posed a unique set of challenges for graduate students, finding themselves navigating a new educational environment as both students and instructors. The survey was done among 4,000 graduate students at 11 institutions and was provided findings focused on food insecurity and struggles in housing insecurity which hinders their capability of finishing the course. It is emphasized in the study that graduate school culture feels so toxic, a student may rather have delayed his degree to provide educational support for his children, said Zahneis and June (2020). As many are working parents, they are actually taxed and haggle multiple roles, many live far away from familiar support systems and are building new ones especially international graduate students who were navigating a foreign culture, language and institutions. When pandemic started, they have been pushed to their breaking point. With grit and determination, these students are truly persevering, but never been easy. (PURDUE University, 2021).

Moreover, major challenges were identified. Some common obstacles whether in the classroom or on the job, include- Time- as in there has never enough of it; Confidence- which is competing against a younger, more agile workforce or student peer group can undermine any experienced professional's confidence; and Money- since going back to school is an investment and while the payoff can be worth it, making that initial financial commitment can feel daunting, said Fairbanks (2021). Likewise, Calhoun *et al.*, (2020) described the pandemic's destructive impact on education as 'severe and unprecedented', and as graduate students assume full-time work, they are confined to juggle classes, research, and academic-related tasks with a limited amount of time left after they attend to their respective jobs. With work from home faced by the graduate students as they study, and work are now squeezed at home. As mentioned,

Uribe (2020), she learned that the first year in the graduate school is the hardest but supportive friends and mentors have been instrumental in any journey of success. They reaffirm the decision to positively impact the journey It is important that mentors see their mentees as more than just students. While school is a full-time job, many students are also facing challenges outside of the classroom. Knowing that you have faculty cheering you on can make all the difference. It is noted too by Zhang (2020), COVID-19 has created a mild stressful impact as the health crisis posed serious challenges to the nation's economy, one's socio-emotional aspects, and lifestyle, and concerns related to academic pursuits are inevitably the last things one would like to worry at the onset of COVID-19. In fact, as the pandemic exploded across the nation, a survey reveals a marked increase in graduate and undergraduate students' mental health struggles. Signs of depression among graduate students in the US have apparently doubled during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the survey that drew responses from more than 15,000 GS students, conducted by Student Experience in Research University (SERU) Consortium. The survey revealed that indications of anxiety among graduate students rose by 50% (Chirikov, 2020).

Apart from the silent race of adult learners concentrating on the andragogical concerns, it is also mentioned that the pandemic has posed a unique set of challenges for adult learners who find themselves navigating a new educational environment. The pandemic experience has taught them the importance of technology, the significance of revisiting one's values, and the reflection on their quest to finish their graduate studies (Zahneis& Williams 2020) Motivation is the desire to act toward of a goal, which is a fluctuating state, not a permanent personality trait, fluid and changeable. Across the long timeframe of graduate studies, the level of motivation a person experiences changes in response to the myriad of experiences and changing levels of confidence (Morton and Thornley, 2001). Traditionally motivation has been described as a uni-dimensional concept, having intrinsic, inner, belonging naturally, viewed very important for surviving the multiple stages within the graduate school journey. Drive to act comes from values-based rewards while extrinsic, operating from outside. Both forms of motivation are appropriately used in different situations. A number of studies have shown that people with higher levels of intrinsic motivation are happier creativity is fostered through intrinsic motivation, associated with lower levels of burnout. However extrinsic motivators can increase the output of work, at least temporarily extrinsic motivators are useful in teaching new skills; also, increasing the level of incentives reduces internal drive, and performance. (Queen's University, 2013). In relation, it is stated that in goal orientation theory, most human behavior is directed by goals and needs. Goals range from personal to professional, from being happy to doing well in school, from short-term to long-term and the list could go on and on. Needs can be objective and physical or subjective and psychological. Long-term goals help direct behavior toward achievement and success while short-term goals, referred to as proximal goals, are more concrete and can be accomplished within a short time period. One can think of proximal goals as a steppingstone toward a longer-range goal (Hurst, 2021).

Likewise, McCollum (2007) provides a viable framework that goal orientations are defined as "a set of behavioral intentions that determine how students approach and engage in learning activities". Motivation is a key element for academic and professional success. Considering all the pressures in attending graduate school where uncertainties seem to block the way, quitting is the only way out for others. But with the best goal in mind where there may have a little positivity, that could be the starting point of regaining the motivation within, to continue to surpass the pressures and accept challenges for

professional growth that awaits- the glorious destination. That intrinsic motivation for an adult learner is enough to keep going. (Julep, 2009).

Farkas (2019) emphasized that losing motivation is not a sign of failure. Getting started with enough enthusiasm is a big thing, even as one discovers and realizes more complexities and mistakes happen that may set you back, either bring confusion or overwhelmed, giving up is not the option to finish the run. Some adults have trouble dealing with uncertainty, yet better adult learners know how to keep taking actions to put everything in order, never losing sight of the goal and succeed. Once focused and motivation picked up, the tendency is to get a burst of energy or adrenaline rush to move on forward. Losing motivation is an opportunity to hold on. It is the greatest opportunity for growth and learning. As it says:

*When you lose motivation it is a sign that you are pushing the limits of comfort zone, and the only way to get your motivation back is to take action and keep moving forward.*

It is concluded by Houde (2006) that motivation theories of self-determination theory and socioemotional selectivity add depth and perspective to andragogy. Using the theories, much of the underlying assumptions of andragogy could be validated through empirical research. Self-determination theory opens up the internal motivators that Knowles refers to in the principles of andragogy. Internal motivators are often believed to be a great factor to succeed in graduate school. More recently, Perry (2020) in his paper on thriving-flourishing in graduate degree programs during pandemic stated that this global pandemic had upended daily life and graduate degree programs take time and energy that seemed in shorter supply. However, emphasized that this period might be an ideal time to refresh skills through adaptability. Pursuing a graduate degree can help learners to develop the skills needed to succeed in a work-from-home environment, and it can help them seize new opportunities, such as a big commitment and will thrive through settling on a routine, learning to prioritize well, set clearly defined goals, and finding anchor point- a cue or something to perform in a daily basis mindset. Cruz & Ramirez conducted a study to determine the motivation, satisfaction and difficulty encountered by HEI in Manila graduate school students in pursuing graduate studies. Since most of the respondents are in the teaching profession, upgrade qualification and increase self-esteem were perceived extremely influential by the respondents. Difficulties come from both working and studying where pressures from additional works and assignments. Graduate school is a journey, aside from the title which brings such different tone when being addressed. Supporting family also pushes hard, wanting to give parents back the way they have always provided is one greatest motivator (Alonso, 2020). Eventually, motivation is described by as something that causes a person behaves in a certain way, the desire and passion to do something a learner wants but may not be easy. Motivation can hold various definitions for everyone and requires a subjective aspect for each individual, but one thing that can be agreed on is that motivation is what keeps graduate school students going—this can their family, cohort, or simply people encountered along the way. This journey is different, and it may not be perfect, but as long as the students enjoy what they are doing, then it is all worth it (Camreo, 2020). With such concerns, there are still some areas in which universities could better tailor their graduate programs to align with the responsibilities of the employment sectors that their learners will enter upon graduation. Thus, it is imperative likewise that graduate schools provide their adult learners not only with comprehensive training in a specialized field and the ability to successfully navigate and contribute to the employment sector, but also ensure that they cope up with the challenges they certainly meet along the journey of learning. (Council of Graduate School, 2011).

Effective training for adult learning theory (Zoller, 2007) was enumerated: Relevant – to the experience or intended experience of the adult learner. Whereas children and adolescents will attempt to learn content isolated from its application, adults learn best when they see the relevance of the taught concept to their experience; Engaged – the adult learner retains knowledge and concepts more readily if they are engaged in the process of discovery and exploration rather than being the recipient of information; Active – the learning process should be active, and replicate as closely as possible the environment within which the skill or knowledge will be applied. Rather than memorizing code sections, adults would retain and apply knowledge more effectively if they worked to discover the content, and then were able to practice its application in a simulation or scenario; Learner-centered – The traditional classroom taught concepts and prepared students to pass tests and other measures of their progress. Unfortunately, the student's retention of that knowledge was often nominal beyond the confines of the class. Qualitative research describing the experiences of Filipino graduate students as they continue with their schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic, (Ancho, 2020) presented particular challenges faced are related to technology and internet access. As graduate work is expected to be about research tasks, subscribing to paid resources is seen as an issue. It describes particular challenges causing stress which may be resolved by augmenting technological capacity, realigning and revisiting personal values and perspectives, and reflecting on their quest to finish their graduate studies. Practically, Graduate education is an investment that requires some financial sacrifice along the way. There are some clear reasons for the financial struggles and some solutions to the problem (Sullivan, 2002). Determining the needed support, during the time of unprecedented uncertainty amidst pandemic, educators must identify how to mentor effectively. Mentoring challenges should start first by understanding the current challenge related to pandemic. Mentoring strategies essential to students and mentors' effort can have a long-lasting impact which may also contribute to stay focused to finish their degrees includes: provide access to academic resources, support and empathy, grow trust and rapport, role model and teach self-advocacy (Mondisa, 2020).

The Office of Communications of Princeton University (Valenti, 2020) noted that to support students at the time of uncertainties, graduate school has expanded its sixth-year funding program, as a way to support their graduate students while facing distinct challenges yet still attempting to make up for research delays and lost funding to complete their degrees. Also, Hrichak (2022) Cornell University Graduate School posted the GS writing Boot Camp as it went virtual and broke records in attendance of 400 writers from 50 institutions in a year. This activity has the goal of developing writing habits in a supportive environment. (Ogilvie, *et al.*, 2020) The National Science Foundation Rapid Response Research (RAPID) supports research undertakings of the GS students funding multiple studies suggesting GS students facing mental health crisis, which contributes to research base for grad school administration and faculty about how to immediately help grad students during a crisis, as well as what strategies might be most effective for supporting graduate students and more broadly as they make degree and career related decisions as society emerges from the crisis. As these experiences of learners in their GS journey during the pandemic- challenges met, motivations held on to, suggest activities and inputs to support in helping out adult learners to never stop until they finish the race.

## Objectives

The study explored the 'silent race' experiences of adult learners enrolled in the graduate school of Bataan Peninsula State University-Main Campus within the pandemic period from 1st to 3rd Semester of

AY 2018-2020. Essential specific discussions were posited to achieve the said objectives.

1. To present participants' narratives on silent race experiences during pandemic
2. To discuss the emerging themes derived from the shared experiences of participants
  - 2.1. present adult learning perceptions and experiences dealt by the participants.
  - 2.2. identify the challenges being met by the participants
  - 2.3. find out the motivations being held to overcome such challenges
  - 2.4. list down needed support of the participants to complete the program
3. To propose activities as input for program enhancement

## METHODOLOGY AND MATERIALS

The study explored the silent race experiences of adult learners during the pandemic, aiming to present their perceptions and experiences on adult learning, identify the challenges met, find out the motivations held, and discuss support needed to help them survive and eventually finish the program. Based on the findings, activities are proposed as inputs to program enhancement. Phenomenological study employed deductive narrative inquiry and utilized purposive sampling to identify twelve (12) volunteered participants coming from Master of Arts in Education Program of the University. They are those who completed at least 50% of the academic units and are qualified to take a concept and proposal defense; those who repeatedly enrolled thesis writing even before the pandemic and are enrolled within the pandemic period from the first, second and third trimesters of AY 2018-2020. Two students came from each of the seven major disciplines: Language Education, General Science, Mathematics, THE, Educational Management, and Social Science. Guidance & Counselling and MPES are excluded. Research Instrument, a set of interview guided questions was used following the conceptual framework comprised of three parts: Part I is exploring the experiences through stories shared, leading to Part II with four (4) sub-parts: the concept and experiences of the participants on adult learning, the challenges met, the motivations held to overcome such challenges, and finally the support needed by the participants. Part III presents proposed activities as inputs for program enhancement. The researcher had actual virtual interview and observations to facilitate data gathering and had her follow up interview through focus group discussions.

An interview protocol and observations were also utilized to gather data, after identifying some possible participants, a consent to participate in the study was sent. There was a quick discussion on the purpose why the study is to be conducted and participants were given freedom to ask question before they were sent the guide questions to be discussed in the actual interview. Likewise, for ethical consideration, a confidential disclosure/non-disclosure agreement was signed by the researcher and each participant in order to maintain the anonymity of their identity and their experiences to assure them of the integrity of the intention of the study. As they indicated their availability, virtual interview happened so as to get deeper insights and sharing of experiences, with open-ended questions to allow participants speak or write as much as possible and making it flow like normal conversations. It was followed by some follow up questions during the focus group discussion done with the able and willing participants. Ample time was given to the participants in providing data for the survey. Systematic thematic analysis was also done to understand and treat the data, Fundamentally, it underwent steps from familiarization, coding, generating, and

reviewing themes, defining themes and writing up. Reviewing the themes hand in hand with the first data received made sure that none of the data has left behind from analysis. Thematic analysis may also present reconciliation of conflicting stories and highlight challenges or tensions which can be opportunities for resolution. The steps developed by Braun & Clarke was adopted and QDA Miner LITE v2.0.9 software was also utilized for easy organization, management, retrieval, and analysis of data.

## DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND FINDINGS

### Part I: Adult Learners' Narratives on Silent Race Experiences during the Pandemic

#### Participant 1: Surviving English Teacher

A teacher from St. Mary's Academy, Pampanga who is 25 years old is taking Master of Arts major in Language Education and had her proposal defense. She first enrolled in 2018, a pre-pandemic period. As she started her journey, her first motivation was to acquire a better position. As she described her experience, it is truly hard and requires hard work, patience, more so time as her major concern is on balancing her work and studies. Pandemic situation contributed to her uncertainties because she could hardly pay her tuition fees. She first thought of quitting and not surviving her first semester at all but with positive mind, she believed that surviving even an inch is still a progress.

#### Participant 2: Pursuing English Teacher

With five years teaching experience at Jose C. Payumo National High School is 24 years old is a Master of Arts in Language Education explicated her reasons in aspiring to finish the degree as a way of paving the way to migrate to Canada. She simply referred adult learning to adults pursuing education and the practice teaching and educating students, mainly influenced by factors such as work, time, financial stability, self-doubt, and more. Taking MA is a goal which does not leave even with the ultimate challenge having hard time balancing her studies and work. She considered the pandemic challenging but did not feel enough pressure and that despite of the great impact of the pandemic she needs to convince herself that she has to proceed until reaching the finish line.

#### Participant 3: Achiever Science Teacher

Participant 3 is a teacher of Balanga City National Science High School, enrolled in the MA-General Science. Upon realizing that she is getting old, she enrolled for wanting to achieve another milestone in her life at the age of 30, saying that there is no easy way to achieve great things, and she is doing this for her students, family, and for herself- just some of the motivations that keep her move forward despite of hardship in studying, especially during pandemic. Adult learning is a type of learning where in the purpose or goal why we are studying is highlighted in order for individuals to be motivated on what they are doing. She mentioned that studying now is more flexible on the part of students having this distance learning. For her, the challenge is really the toxic schedule and so many responsibilities, at home, at school, being a tutor at home, being a teacher at school, and being a student in the graduate school. She wished to have perhaps online apps where students can engage themselves for enjoyment and learning activities which are truly needed by students for mental health issues.

#### **Participant 4: New Science Teacher**

A Senior High School Science teacher from B. Camacho National High School is on his 30s, enrolled in MAEd General Science. Enrolling in the GS would give additional points for getting a position in the DepEd. Soon after being called for an item, he has experienced problems on the adjustment of his time for both teaching and studying. This new hired teacher stated that adult learning is a situation where adults are pursuing education, specifically those who are working and studying for career advancement. Teachers really have tremendous works to be done, he explained. On the other hand, he believed that learning is a continuous process and realized that his knowledge is not enough. The major challenge being experienced was on financial constraints.

#### **Participant 5: Older Math Teacher**

Participant 5 is a Mathematics Senior High School teacher at Bataan National High School, married, 45 years old and first enrolled in the GS in 2018. Going through his stories, it was revealed to me that decided to get CPTP to make him eligible to take the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET), thinking of it also as an avenue aimed at teaching career in the future, which he survived successfully. Now he aspires just like others, to complete his master's degree to make him qualified for promotion as Master Teacher or even higher. With his age, he fears of not being able to cope up but later on, he admitted that he finds learning both easy and hard. The strike of correct balance between work and studies is still the major concern hence every day is full of uncertainties.

#### **Participant 6: Focused Math Teacher**

Another Mathematics SHS teacher, also came from Bataan National High School has been teaching between 6-10 years, and in his middle 20s. He started his stories mentioning his desire to learn new things, to uplift his profession of being a teacher to refine his knowledge and skills in his areas of interest and to impart this learning to his students. Continuing education has the possibility to be promoted or reclassified to much higher position. He also believes that whatever struggles being faced when it comes to professional career, one needs to keep moving and keep the feeling that no matter how difficult towards a chosen destination, he learns many things each step of the way. Adult learners seek out learning based on personal needs. Recalling his experiences in the GS, he tended to be more autonomous and self-directed, curious about other specialization, especially in Computer Education. Connected with the impact of pandemic, tuition fees tended to be a major concern, followed by the unstable internet connection because his learning space is not conducive to learning. Knowing pandemic as uncertain times, he ensured to give focus on hard situation because of simultaneous modular online teaching and modular mode. Every teacher must deal with these modifications and adjustments to cope to the needs of teaching in the New Normal setup.

#### **Participant 7: Challenged THE Teacher**

A major in Technology and Home Economics, 36 years of age and teaching at the university within 1-5 years, shared the motivation, his colleagues and family who pushed him up to continue, together with himself since he desires to share his knowledge to students. Learning new things is enough for him to get inspired and move forward. He also explicated that he is motivated in everything he does with his own principle in life of finishing what has been started, no matter how hard it is. This makes him keep moving forward no matter how difficult the journey is and would be. The only challenge this participant encounter is related to time management. He said he always strikes

him to meet problems in his studies and his duty as a teacher. Handling online classes may be challenging but it is not to consider uncertainties because it is more advantageous, he guessed, not only to him but to his students as well. Although he believes this as advantageous, he also agreed that pandemic created uncertainties to all, that with all the restrictions, it really made everyone worried and wish everything will still go well after its end.

#### **Participant 8: Decided THE Teacher**

A teacher handling THE at ECBernabe National High School is on her early 40s, female and is teaching for almost 10 years now. Her first goal upon entering the graduate school is to continue her professional development and be able to share knowledge to class. Having realized, pursuing MA is difficult. She thought that if she decided to stop because of difficulties, she knows that she would be going back, just because that is her dream- to finish MA. The motivation she kept holding on is the opportunity to be promoted, gained more knowledge to share. Comparing andragogy to pedagogy, adult learners have the desire to learn something new and specific, which will lead the learners to reach a certain goal unlike other kinds of learning which is focused on general knowledge. In connection with the participant's line of discipline, she knows that it is not easy to understand and acquire other skills if in online mode of teaching but approachable and understanding professors lessen these concerns.

#### **Participant 9: Anxious EM Teacher**

At 25, participant 9 first enrolled way back 2018 for educational management line and now working on her final paper for defense. Jokingly, she just mentioned she just wants to have a longer name, that finishing her master's degree will fulfill her childhood dream and then seriously saying that acquiring higher position became her greatest motivation. She discussed further that motivation is the best thing she needs to pursue her thesis. She clarified that adult learning is not the typical learning to be gained inside the four corners of the classroom but rather lesson gained outside. Learning's which develop a learner holistically. Anxieties along the way were too visible and they created uncertainties which she truly feels. She admitted that there were times that she wanted to quit. The pandemic itself which restricts almost all movements added as another great challenge. As she neglected to write for quite sometimes, she kept telling herself that she needs to graduate with a feeling of anxiety. Significantly, she laughingly emphasized that this is as important as providing webinars to mental health.

#### **Participant 10: Adjusting EM Teacher**

Another teacher enrolled in Educational Management has been teaching within the span of 1-5 years, and in mid 20s. Her main goal is to widen her knowledge, completing the program will add up to her certificates and credibility as a teacher. She pointed out that adult learning is somehow different from the other kind in a way where learners tend to correlate new learning's to their background knowledge unlike in the previous learning where a learner starts from absorbing new knowledge and in the process, will add up for future learning's. "Nothing is easy in life", as this particular respondent emphasized, but considerate professors, family and friends have been very supportive and helpful since she started her journey, not to mention the guidance of the Lord. Her idea of dealing with the pandemic issue started negatively since it made all feel uncertain for everything, but as times go by, she managed to keep on track with her struggles and to deal with her doubts, believing that adjusting still matters.

### Participant 11: Unfocused AP Teacher

First enrolled in 2018, participant 11 is a Social Studies teacher at Hermosa National High School, 24 years old and teaching in the department for four years now. She was done with her concept paper just as the pandemic started. Sharing her first goal was to be promoted and to develop her learning progress. This motivation to be promoted someday may also lead to many achievements and get accessed with bigger opportunities, she said. This participant made focus on the importance of keeping herself disciplined and consistently hold the proper mindset because according to her, the moment one got distracted, she cannot easily get back the willingness to continue. She defined adult learning as a process focuses on different approach such as self-directed learning, transformative learning, experiential learning, etc. In graduate school, more time is spent on independent studies, can be difficult sometimes yet very fulfilling, she continued. She highlighted the idea of the need to stay focused and to find and keep a lot of motivation for to continue the learning process.

### Participant 12: Confident AP Teacher

Another Social Studies teacher is teaching in Olongapo, 24 years old, married and have teaching experience within the scope of 1-5 years. She thought of her thirst for learning more about her line of discipline pushed her to pursue her graduate study, to get out of her comfort zone, and getting a diploma is a part of it. She anticipated that after completing the degree, she knows that a bright future awaits her. Notably, she expressed that it is more an emotional desire of making society ease poverty and illiteracy, and she expects that when she goes through, she could offer bigger help to them. Adult learning more systematic and has a sustainable self-paced acquisition. It's the overlapping deadlines that only daunt her all the time since being a full-time public-school teacher and a graduate school student at the same time is quite tough. One major challenge is more on financial instability. With a positive outlook, she declared to be confident enough that she can finish her studies since aside from being determined, she knows herself that if there may have some reasons for the derail of attaining her goal, all she needs to do is to find means to redirect herself to get the momentum back.

## Part II: Thematic Representation Derived from the Participant's Narratives

With the experiences shared and discussed by 12 participants of the study, details revealed the following emergent themes:

### 1. Adult Learning Perceptions and Experiences *Hard and Challenging*

The study found out that graduate school students consider adult learning as tough and challenging. (Zahneis&June, 2020) In a survey done among 4,000 graduate students at 11 institutions, the pandemic has posed a unique set of challenges for graduate students, who find themselves navigating a new educational environment for both students and instructors. This confirms the emphasis made in this current study that graduate school culture feels so toxic and a student may have delayed his degree to provide educational support for the family, instead.

Pappas (2013) may support this challenging journey as he presented the primary understanding of what adult learning known as andragogy is. As a science of understanding and supporting lifelong education, the main aspects of both theory and practice lead to self-directed and autonomous learners as well as teachers as facilitators of learning. It is further revealed in the present study, that the concept

of "adult education practice" is not easy and requires understanding and practice different from previous learning situations. Thus, learners in the graduate school should have that mind set of what truly a graduate school journey is all about.

This mindset which is the ultimate key to graduate school is transitioning from a "student" to a "professional" mentality, (Lambert, 2013) important truths were recommended to assist the transitioning: that GS is not a school at all but an apprenticeship, that career actually starts on the first day in graduate school; Grades do not really matter; there is no long breaks; and last is that thesis can really hamper the progress but considered as the ultimate objective not to mention the publication of the paper. The following focuses presented by Lambert are found in the result of the current study. It is therefore understood that students tend to find graduate studies challenging and tough because they never are aware of these transition truths or never had the chance of reflecting and internalizing how to be adult learners. Such interpretation is done anticipating that if they understand that GS is more of "professorial apprenticeship" having the previous characteristics, they probably have that certain mindset and will consider these things normal experiences to bear within the journey.

Furthermore, based on the findings of the study, it can be interpreted that the concept of adult learning must be internalized first before an adult learner joins in a very different learning situation compared to the previous learning concentrated on pedagogical aspects. Challenges do not actually occur at the middle of the journey where students find difficulties to continue and finish their thesis, rather they immediately and significantly appear from the time they enrolled and experience the process. This is clarified too by Victoria Uribe (2020), as she mentioned her experiences of learning that the first year in the graduate school is the hardest but instrumental in any journey of success are supportive friends and mentors who reaffirm the decision to positively impact the journey.

### Principle Application

Current study revealed concept that GS is more of principle application, based on the narratives of the twelve participants. These were exposed as they tried to discuss their experiences being graduate school students. Knowles (1989) who originally suggested the four principles applied to adult learning, can give affirmation of this particular result. According to these principles, adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction, noting that experiences including mistakes, provide the basis for learning activities; adults are more interested in learning things with relevance as to their personal or professional life; problem-centered and not content-oriented; instruction should be task-oriented instead of promoting memorization. All these findings were mentioned by most participants. Such result of the current study under this principle is considered relevant response which may not only help them acquire the exact perspective of being adults learning to polish their line of expertise but to develop thorough practice of being self-directed in the learning process. Relatively, principles to develop students' self-directed adults may tend to be a sort of training. Zoller and Harrison (2007) likewise enumerated effective trainings for adult learning theory: relevant, engaged, active, and learner centered. As the current study unveiled, through experiences, these inevitable principles, it may serve as point of reflection that student grasps that learning is best when he sees the direct relevance to his career, that each can have retained knowledge if engaged in exploring and discovering activities; that ultimate learning is through application, and that real retention of knowledge is beyond the confinement in the classroom.

## Goal-oriented

In the discussion of Hurst (2021) concerning the goal orientation theory and how goals affect student motivation and behavior, she stated that most of human behavior is directed by goals and needs. Goals range from personal to professional, from short-term to long-term. Needs can be objective and physical or subjective and psychological. Explained further that goal orientation theory is a social-cognitive theory of achievement motivation, examining the reasons why students engage in their academic work. A core goal is a long-term goal that drives much of what an individual does. These long-term goals help direct behavior toward achievement and success, however, short-term goals, referred to as proximal goals, are more concrete and can be accomplished within a short time period. One can think of proximal goals as a stepping-stone toward a longer-range goal. Linking this to the findings of the study, this indicates that striving with difficulties and surviving with challenges may be brought by the specific goal set by the learner. As they experience how to be in an adult learning scenario, all they need to do is to keep thinking of the goals which they had even before they started their studies- whether proximal or core goals. This also implies that despite of the delay or derail in their journey, they still hope that the same goal will push them forward, no matter what. In relation, goal orientation theory of motivation cited by McCollum & Kajs (2007) provides a viable framework to study the aims of graduate students in the domain of educational leadership. Goal orientations are defined as "a set of behavioral intentions that determine how students approach and engage in learning activities". Goal orientations. They can further be described as a set of beliefs students have concerning their goals that explain why the goal is important to them. The purpose of the said article is to explore the motivation of graduate students in an educational leadership preparation program. Motivation is a key element for academic and professional success because without it little learning or performance takes place. The concept of this previous study was concentrated with educational leadership which is very applicable to ponder since the participants in the present study are also leaders and aspiring leaders. This specific finding of the study is very vital since participants can essentially see that GS entails every student to be goal-oriented individuals, also, developing in them enough determination, perseverance, and resilience.

## 2. Identified Challenges

### Time Management for Academic, Professional and Personal Endeavors

The first identified challenge of adult learners during the pandemic falls in time management among the academic, professional hand in hand with personal endeavors. Calhoun et.al. (2020) described the pandemic's destructive impact on education as 'severe and unprecedented', and as graduate students assume full-time work, they are confined to juggle classes, research, and academic-related tasks with a limited amount of time left after they attend to their respective jobs. With work from home faced by the graduate students as they study, and work are now squeezed at home. This signifies that to be able to survive with all the responsibilities and undertakings needed to attend and accomplish, continually or even simultaneously. Proper time management may pave the way not to get anxious due to cramming and failing to comply with the learning tasks the professor assigned. This further indicates that with the tremendous works to be done in a work-from-home set up, the learners need to realize the unstructured environment which requires discipline to stick to a schedule set by them, and not to get distracted by any disruptions. On the other hand, it is so important to consider learning and

practicing work-life balance to survive. This emerging theme on time management has also been an issue even before the pandemic. It is considered one of the major hindrances since teaching and all activities attached to it, does not only confined in the cycle of an official time eight in the morning to five in the afternoon. Enhancing one's time management skill and practicing fundamental options could be an indication of being great adult learners.

### Financial Constraints

Financial constraint is found to be one of the emergent themes as discussed by the participants. This is a common problem being encountered by the GS students since most of them, aside from being teachers, are married and have their own families. As Fairbanks (2021) identified major challenges of adult learning, some common obstacles whether in the classroom or on the job, include time, confidence, and money- since going back to school is an investment and while the payoff can be worth it, making that initial financial commitment can feel daunting. Previously, Sullivan and Repak (2002) also declared that Graduate education is an investment that requires some financial sacrifice along the way. Even students with generous funding often find that some expenses are not covered, and that their general standard of living is not as high as they might like. Many gifted students fail to accomplish their dreams because the reality of tuition, housing and living expenses keep them from completing their degree. There are some clear reasons for the financial struggles and some solutions to the problem. On the other hand, positive solution is shown by Valenti (2020), as he noted that to support students at the time of uncertainties, graduate school may expand funding program, knowing that they are truly facing distinct challenges yet still attempting to make up for research delays and lost funding to complete their degrees. The program, which launched in 2017, provides fellowship funding, covering tuition and fees, This implies that while financial aid and scholarships can help offset some of the costs of graduate school, those costs can still put a lot of pressure on finances of the students. As this current study found financial constraints as identified challenge specifically this pandemic period, students may consider their journey as a great investment, a venture where they can reap the fruit of their labor in the future- hard-earned but certainly secures their career with financial benefit of 'return of investment'.

### Use of Technology

Ancho (2020) in his qualitative research describing the experiences of Filipino graduate students during pandemic, presented particular challenges faced are related to technology and internet access. As graduate work is expected to be about research tasks, subscribing to paid resources is seen as an issue. It also recognized stress brought by current experiences of students. It also resolved by students' technological capacity, realigning personal values and perspectives, and resorting to free and open access journals to sustain research activities. This previous study pay justice to that same predicament the participants had realized. The emphasis of Ancho's work striving for realigning the participants' values and perspective regarding technology concerns may be out of their control since each has their own space. It is important therefore to revisit their values and reflection on their quest to finish the degree to sustain this predicament.

Likewise, for any technology solution to have a transformative impact on student learning and success, it must have as its foundation the specific goals, needs, and interests of the students themselves. While technology can be added to existing structures with the goal of making them marginally more efficient and flexible, technology also

offers the opportunity to catalyze more significant reforms to educational structures and practices (Higher-Ed-NETP 2017). Thus, challenges on the use of technology can be somewhat taken positively, where students can still see great opportunities from difficulties. This further indicates that though weak connection may be based on the available connectivity around individual spaces of the learners, when survived the process, the use of technology eventually enhances the learners' ability and skills to adapt to and adopt the new modality, whether being capacitated digital natives or digital migrants.

### 3. Motivations

#### **Promotion and professional development**

Graduate school journey is kind of different but as long as students enjoy what they are doing, for sure there is that motivation that keeps graduate school students going. Relating this to the description of Jasmine Camreo (2020), it is something that causes a person behaves in a certain way, the desire and passion to do something a learner wants but may not be easy. This, from the perspective of a graduate students, can hold many meanings. When responsibility takes couple of years staying in the program, there is a need of a lot of grit because the secret to success is not purely from talent but from perseverance. Considering all the pressures in attending graduate school where uncertainties seem to block the way, quitting is the only way out for others. But with the best goal in mind where there may have a little positivity, that could be the starting point of regaining the motivation within, to continue to surpass the pressures and accept challenges for professional growth that awaits- the glorious destination. That intrinsic motivation for an adult learner is enough to keep going. (Julep, 2009). With the primary goal divulged in this current study, getting a promotion and personal, as well as professional advancement presented a meaningful motivation for them. Such is not just the anticipated reward for a longer name, or a title attached to the name, or for salary grade advancement associated with additional figures, but more than that- is the satisfaction being felt once completed a hard-earned degree. Just enough to keep them moving.

In relation, Alberto Alonso (2020), emphasizing that graduate school is a journey, has an initial motivation for pursuing such degree came from wanting to wear the doctor regalia. Aside from the title which brings such different tone when being addressed- a level of respect and that was not always apparent in academia as a whole. Moreover, Cruz & Ramirez conducted a study to determine the motivation, satisfaction and difficulty encountered by HEI in Manila graduate school students in pursuing graduate studies. Since most of the respondents are in the teaching profession, upgrade qualification and increase self-esteem were perceived extremely influential by the respondents. As such, linking these previous findings to the current study, other participants revealed the same kinds of motivation, and a specific implication has developed. Traditional motivation, in two-fold intrinsic and extrinsic, adult learners in the study held on something any natural, innate personal satisfaction such as values-based reward and any tangible reward from the outside. These were be viewed as very significant if appropriately used, in order to survive the multiple stages within the graduate school journey. It also signifies that despite challenges, they truly are determined to finish for promotion and personal or professional advancement.

#### **Acquisition and Transmission of knowledge**

As discussed by Morton and Thornley (2001), motivation is the desire to act toward of a goal, it is a fluctuating state, not a permanent personality trait and is fluid and changeable. Across the long-time frame of graduate studies, the level of motivation a person experiences changes in response to the myriad of experiences and

changing levels of confidence. Undeniably, certain motivations drove all participants of this study to join and pursue their graduate studies. Based on the unveiling of the participants' stories, this previous study confirmed that motivation in each of them appeared to be in fluctuating state and majority had the same 'unchanging and changing' drives. In connection, Farkas (2019) emphasized that losing motivation is not a sign of failure. Getting started with enough enthusiasm is a big thing, even as one discovers and realizes more complexities and mistakes happen that may set you back, either bring confusion or overwhelmed, giving up is not the option to finish the run. Some adults have trouble dealing with uncertainty, yet better adult learners know how to keep taking actions to put everything in order, never losing sight of the goal and succeed. During these uncertainties, this motivation theories of self-determination and socio-emotional selectivity, mentioned in the study of Houde (2006), may add depth and perspective to adult learning process. Self-determination theory opens up the internal motivators which are often believed to be a great factor to succeed in graduate school. Revealed in the study, connected with previous studies, is the eagerness of the GS students to learn which they enjoy, resulting to the same willingness to impart the knowledge acquired to their students in their home school. This notably indicates that as they unveiled and considered this aspiration to impart as a great motivator despite meeting challenges, they strongly believe that this drive is enough to finish, soon or late.

#### **Completing a Master's Degree**

A number of studies have shown that people with higher levels of intrinsic motivation are happier creativity is fostered through intrinsic motivation; that intrinsic motivation is associated with lower levels of burnout. According to graduate students of Queen's University (2013), motivation wanes over time and they enumerated contributing factors to poor motivation, one of which is self-regulation issues or doing the thesis for external reasons like better career, grad school by default: no jobs right now, everyone's doing it, family pressure. Students fell into this subject area habitual procrastination o weak time management skills. This negates the findings of the study. Participants, having been distracted and overwhelmed by so many challenges, never thought of abandoning their dream of completing the master's degree with some extrinsic motivations yet it does not refute, however that intrinsic motivators play a great role to enjoy the ups and down in the chosen journey.

### 4. Support Needed

#### **Writing Workshop**

The result of the current study, as disclosed by the narratives, revealed an emerging support wanted and needed by the participants, focusing on how to capacitate them with regards to writing, to enable them to complete their thesis. This particular need is related to what has posted by Hrichak (2022) of Cornell University Graduate School. She posted an effective support through a GS writing Boot Camp as it went virtual and broke records in attendance of four hundred writers from fifty institutions in the year 2022. This activity has the goal of developing writing habits in a supportive environment. This is an implication of great support of the GS to students who are mostly uncertain when they start to write, so they can be more confident in the most difficult process and part of the journey. The same writer, Farkas (2021) enumerated seven reasons considered as great challenges which make students quit grad school: one is focused on thesis and some paper problems, he emphasized that the toughest part of research is not the collection of data, but the definition of the research question and the setup of the methodology. Once the research is question well-defined and the



methodology is optimized, the collection of data is straightforward. Most students start out with a well-defined thesis project, but due to many dead-ends they may switch directions several times. Discovering the present status of most MAEd students of the university, as well as the unveiled causes making them uncertain on how they can push through with their studies, this mentioned focus of Farkas truly backs up the needed support of the learners to enable them develop clearly defined research gap and writing up problems which are common. In most cases, these are caused by lack of writing experience and may lead to loss of interest upon finding themselves unable to do what is expected of them. Hands on writing workshop is a vital coping mechanism.

**Webinars**

Challenges in the pandemic include limited access to classrooms and labs, disruption to current and planned collaborations, increased stress and anxiety, and new responsibilities for children and other family members. This impact is particularly acute for graduate students with marginalized identities, these hardships confront graduate school student population that multiple studies suggest was already facing a mental health crisis. (Smith, *et al.*, 2020) The pressure of trying to graduate quickly, publish papers, time management problems and other concerns took a toll on the health of these adult learners. Truth is, anxiety attacks, depression, chronic back pain, digestion problems, weight issues, and stress-induced inflammatory conditions were common health problems which make them uncertain to a destination where they first thought and envisioned as an investment. The beginning and end of the projects are relatively straight-forward: in the beginning there is enthusiasm getting ready for the journey ahead, and at the end they are relieved and proud of themselves pulling it all together. The middle, however, is tough, because the original enthusiasm has worn off. This is when students are most likely to lose motivation and is the silent race very crucial to stop or to continue the run- to finish graduate school (Farkas, 2019). As confirmed by the previous studies of Smith and Farkas, this crucial part of the journey which created uncertainties to the participants of the present study, will definitely take a toll on the health of the learners. As indicated, adult learners who are facing

multi-roles and are hardly coping up to the many responsibilities in the workplace and school, aware or unaware, they seem to be confronting mental health issues. Providing webinars not only in writing but also on mental health issues is of great support, so they could get refreshed and get themselves back on track.

**Part III: Proposed Activities as Inputs to Program Enhancement**

Amid the unprecedented impact of pandemic, educators must identify how to mentor effectively. Mentoring challenges should start first by understanding the current challenge related to pandemic. Joi-Lynn Mondisa (2020) discussed the possible actionable tips or mentoring strategies to use during pandemic period, these are the following: provide access to academic resources, provide support and empathy, and grow trust and rapport, role model and teach self-advocacy. These strategies are essential to students and mentors' effort can have a long-lasting impact which may also contribute to stay focused to finish their degrees. Eventually, based on the silent race experiences of the participants focusing on the emergent themes, the following activities are proposed so as to help them survive the challenges and feel remotivated to continue and finish their master's degree. A simple matrix below presents the significant theme with the proposed Professional Development Activity concepts, together with the objectives of the activity, corresponding to the specific problems of the study. They are enumerated as follows: Regarding the adult learning perceptions, orientations of the concept of 'andragogy', adult learning principles-training on andragogical theory, and goal orientation theory are proposed. Concerning the identified challenges emerged, activities related to effective time management, education as investment, provision of financial aids and scholarship programs, and capability enhancement in using technology are suggested to promote. To keep the learners motivated on track, activities which may focus on fundamental motivational distinction, 'paying it forward', and benefits of master's degree in today's job market are advised to be given to learners. Finally, upon unveiling of the needed support according to the participants, it is indeed necessary to provide writing workshop and the conduct of webinars or seminars related to writing, mental health awareness and work-life balance.

**Table 1 Proposed Professional Development Activities (PDAs) Matrix**

Identified Areas	Professional Development Activities (Orientation, Lecture, Workshop)	Objective
<b>Adult Learning Perceptions (PDA 1)</b>		
Hard/Challenging	-the Concept of 'Andragogy'	-to give proper mindset on transitioning 'start and end' of the journey
Principle Application	-Adult Learning Principles: Training on Andragogical Theory	-to present deeper notion of adult learning theories
Goal Oriented	-Goal Orientation Theory	-to do reflection, revisit and determine their own proximal and core goals
<b>Identified Challenges (PDA 2)</b>		
Time Management Problems	-Effective Time Management	-to improve time management skills
	-Education: Investment and its Benefit	-to develop self-discipline
Financial Constraints	-Provide Financial Aids and Scholarship Programs	- to practice 'fundamental option'
		-to make easy access to education
		-to lessen the uncertainties on financial problems
Use of Technology	-Capability Enhancement on Technology	-to practice Values-Based Goal Setting Analysis
		-to empower them at any stage of efficient teaching-learning process
		-to create personalized blended learning through the use of technology
<b>Motivations (PDA 3)</b>		
Promotion/ Professional Advancement	-Fundamental Motivational Distinction	-to be acquainted with the distinction of advancement and security, promotion-prevention motivation
Acquisition & Transmission of Knowledge	-Pay It Forward, the joys of acquiring and imparting knowledge	-to practice better and genuine service to clientele
Completion Master's Degree	Benefits of Master's Degree in Today's Job Market	-to be more competitive in their profession and enhance their professional network
<b>Support Needed (PDA 4)</b>		
Writing Workshop	Thesis Writing Workshop	-to make student writers confident and capacitate them as they engaged themselves in the whole writing process from defining the problem to publishing
		-to recognize symptoms and signs of mental health problems primarily for prevention
Webinar/Seminar	Mental Health Awareness	-to practice setting boundaries, create and maintain healthy work environments between oneself and work
	Work-Life Balance	

Proposed Professional Development Activities (PDAs) presented the identified areas which are the emergent themes. Under this specific column presented the specific areas on adult learning perceptions such as being hard and challenging, principle application, and goal oriented. Across the said column presents the proposed orientation, lecture or workshop, considered as PDA 1 which are focused on the concept of andragogy, principles of adult learning theory and goal orientation theory. Such would provide proper mindset on transitioning, present deeper notion of learning theories and a chance to reflect and revisit own proximal and core goals. PDA 2 is on identified challenges on time management problems, financial constraints, and use of technology. Suggested activities are on effective time management, lecture on the benefit of education and being an investment, provision of financial aids and scholarship programs and capacity enhancement on technology. Objective would be more on developing self-discipline and time management, practice values-based goal setting analysis, empower students at any stage of efficient teaching-learning process and to create personalized blended learning through the use of technology.

PDA 3 on motivations presents promotion and professional advancement, acquisition and transmission of knowledge and completion of master's degree. Three suggested activities are the fundamental motivational distinction, the joys on acquiring and imparting knowledge and the benefits of master's degree on today's job market. This set of activities would make students acquainted with the distinction of advancement and security, practice better and genuine services and be more competitive in their profession and enhance their professional network. PDA 4 gives the support needed on writing workshop like thesis writing and seminar on mental health and work life balance, intending to develop confidence, and engage student writers in the whole writing process from defining the problem to publishing and to practice setting boundaries to maintain a healthy work environment between oneself and work.

## SUMMARY

### Part I - Adult Learners' Narratives on Silent Race Experiences during the Pandemic

Twelve willing participants who shared their experiences were all professional teachers in the department. They have started their writing journey- those successfully passed the Written Comprehensive Examination and preparing the concept paper; those done with the concept oral defense and preparing for chapters 1 to 3, and those who are just completing their chapters 4 and 5, while others are about to finish their academics and qualified to take the Written Comprehensive Examination. To sum the narratives up, all participants described adult learning to be hard and challenging as they were expected to conform with the present multi-modal teaching and learning approaches, in the workplace and at school. They discovered eventually that these actual experiences may derail their journey yet still holding on to the common goal of being promoted and have professional advancement, which was actually their first goal. They unveiled that the pandemic added more to their many uncertain feelings causing losing their track, stragglings the momentum, slacking with the world- which boils down to the 'silent race' feeling and experiences within their graduate school journey.

### Part II -Thematic Representation Derived from the Participant's Narratives

Thorough analysis done on diverse stories of selected 12 participants about their perceptions and experiences in adult learning resulted to the emergence of several themes to wit: Adult Learning Perceptions

highlighted adult learning to be hard and challenging, more on the application of principles learned and goal-oriented; The identified challenges were fixated on concerns on time management for academic, personal and professional endeavor, financial constraints, and the use of technology; Motivations held by the participants pointed on promotion and personal and professional advancement, the acquisition and transmission of knowledge, and completion of master's degree. Lastly, the support needed revealed was more on writing workshop and capacity building seminar.

### Part III - Proposed Activities as Inputs to Program Enhancement

It is the intention of this study to propose activities that may help learners continue and eventually finish their master's degree. These activities may also serve as inputs to program enhancement. After identifying the represented themes derived from the participants' stories, Professional Development Activities (PDAs)-an orientation, a lecture or a workshop- are suggested to be inclusive capacitating learners to deal positively with their graduate school experiences and journey.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, based on the findings, MAEd graduate school students are facing silent race experiences, not just particularly at the middle of the journey but as they start joining the program, as well. The perception on adult learning, together with actual experiences, positive and negative, significantly provides enlightenment on the inevitable transitioning period from being students to professionals. Participants' common challenges along the way are and can be seen more of opportunities rather than difficulties, a mindset of learning new things as they struggle towards their success of completing a degree. It is noticeable to conclude that motivation, in one way or another, may fluctuate being a changeable drive, but despite of the challenging situations, adult learners never lose such a motivation to hold on and still positive to finish the degree. Provision of the university's supportive environment, all throughout the journey, specifically during the crucial part where students start to write, may lessen the uncertainties of the participant not only during the pandemic period but in the new normal as well.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations were made:

1. The Graduate School must provide a comprehensive orientation program, discussing the theories and principles of adult learning to make GS students know what to expect and what is expected of them once they started their GS journey.
2. Graduate school students must be kept reminded that learning experiences within the journey would provide advantageous contribution to personal and professional advancement.
3. Faculty members may continually provide not only quality facilitation of learning but also consultation and proper mentoring to keep students on track.
4. Graduate school program may enhance the conduct of capacity building workshop focused on thesis writing, and other seminars for mental health issues to lessen students' anxieties during the pandemic period.
5. The university may enhance projects and linkages that may help the GS students in terms of financial aids through scholarship grants.

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