Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College Graduate School
Tagudin, Ilocos Sur

Thriving Among Graduate School Students: The Case of Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College Tagudin Campus

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Master of Science in Education
Major in General Education

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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis titled "**THRIVING AMONG GRADUATE SCHOOL STUDENTS: THE CASE OF ILOCOS SUR POLYTECHNIC STATE COLLEGE TAGUDIN CAMPUS**", conducted and submitted by   **WINSTON E. PADSING** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree **Master of Science in Education** major in General Education, has been examined and passed by the Graduate Thesis Review Committee on June 27, 2023 composed of:

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

WINSTON E. PADSING was born on the 29th day of March 1997. He is the first born son of Mr. Jorge D. Padsing and Mrs. Aida E. Padsing of San Elias, Sigay, Ilocos Sur. They exceptionally bestowed upon him the true essence of love and care during his growing years of equally important parental guidance and enduring growth. Inspired by his parents, he stood tall taking initiatives over the great challenges of life.

He took his first formal education at San Elias Primary School from Grade I until Grade IV and finished his elementary education at Sigay Central School in 2009 and his secondary education at The Sisters of Mary School Boystown Inc., Adlas, Silang, Cavite Campus in 2014.

Coming from an out-of-pocket family, life for him has never been easy. However, the Lord Almighty is always good, and everything works according to his plan. He was chosen as one of the recipients of the Expanded Students' Grants-in-Aid Program for Poverty Alleviation   (ESGP-PA) program. These blessings from up above together with his eagerness and strong determination to get out from the trap of poverty was the reason why he was able to finish his baccalaureate degree, Bachelor of Elementary Education at Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College, Tagudin Campus, Tagudin, Ilocos Sur on June 1, 2018.

He passed the Board Licensure Examination for Professional Teachers in September 2018. On February 26, 2019, he was hired at Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College, Tagudin Campus, Tagudin, Ilocos Sur as Job Order and was given permanent status as Administrative Officer I (Records Officer I) on December 1, 2020, to November 1, 2022, at the same institution. On November 2, 2022, he was given the chance to teach young children in the Department of Education up to present.

To grow professionally, he enrolled in the Graduate School of Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College, Tagudin Campus, Tagudin, Ilocos Sur and pursuing Master of Science in Education major in General Education.

He is indeed a living testimony that poverty is never a hindrance but a key factor to attain success and who believes that the harder one works for something, the greater he will feel when he achieves it.

WINSTON E. PADSING

ABSTRACT

PADSING, WINSTON E. (2023). THRIVING AMONG GRADUATE STUDENTS: THE CASE OF ILOCOS SUR POLYTECHNIC STATE COLLEGE TAGUDIN CAMPUS. Master of Science in Education major in General Education. Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College, Graduate School, Tagudin, Ilocos Sur.

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The goal of graduate programs is to support the growth of the following generation of researchers, scholars, professionals, and leaders across many different fields. Higher education institutions must respond to the current crisis affecting graduate students by promoting student thrive.

Through interviews with eleven (11) with the aid of aide-mèmoire, the study produced extended texts as a result of transcribing the interview recordings. These extended texts were subjected to cool and ward analyses which revealed that the participants view thriving in the graduate school as Balancing Responsibilities, Building Bridges and Connections, Bringing Positivity, Acquiring Skills and Knowledge, Striding towards Personality Development and Enrolling for Professional Development and Career Progression. With these, the Process Improvement Plan in thriving in the graduate school was developed.

Finally, the study recommends the following: As a way of addressing the challenges of thriving in the graduate school, **that the Ilocos Sur** *Polytechnic State College and its officials may use the data findings to provide the students with relevant interventions or programs as a way of addressing their challenges. ISPSC Officials may formulate long term Process Improvement Plan that shall solve the identified challenges in the graduate school. The Proposed Process Improvement Plan in thriving in the graduate school may be pilot tested or used for improvement. Further studies should be conducted to test the effectiveness of the proposed plan.*

Keywords:- Thriving, Process Improvement Plan

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DEDICATION

This worthwhile piece of work crafted by passion, commitment, dedication, patience, and love is heartily dedicated to:

My **parents**, who have been my source of inspiration and gave me strength when I thought of giving up, who continually provide my moral, spritual, emotional, and financial support.

My **siblings**, **relatives**, **workmates**, and **friends** who shared their words of advise and encouragement to finish this study.

And lastly, I dedicated this book to the **Almighty God**, thank you for the guidance, strength, power of mind, protection and skills and for giving me healthy life. All of these, I offer to you.

W.E.P

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Education is widely recognized as a vital factor for achieving success in life, as it empowers individuals to excel and receive recognition and rewards. Additionally, education fosters critical thinking skills, enabling individuals to make informed decisions and effectively navigate diverse challenges. Beyond undergraduate studies, many professionals choose to enrol in graduate school programs to further develop their expertise and expand their career opportunities. These graduate programs not only aim to advance knowledge and skills but also play a crucial role in nurturing the future generation of researchers, scholars, professionals, and leaders across various fields (Co-Nesbitt *et al.,* 2021; CAGS, 2012).

However, graduate students encounter distinct challenges and stressors that can significantly impact their well-being and retention rates. Factors such as financial burdens, supervisory relationships, and scholastic pressures, including the demanding "publish or perish" mentality and tenure expectations, contribute to heightened levels of distress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues (Evans *et al.,* 2018). Recognizing the urgency of this concern, there has been an identification of a mental health crisis among graduate students, emphasizing the need to investigate and establish supportive learning environments (Charles *et al.,* 2021).

As graduate programs continue to grow (AUCC, 2011; Okahana and Zhou, 2017; Universities Canada, 2020), it becomes increasingly imperative to address systemic pressures that negatively affect student well-being and foster an environment where students can thrive within their programs. Consequently, there is a critical knowledge gap in understanding how graduate students can thrive in their degree programs and how institutions can effectively support their well-being (Co-Nesbitt *et al.,* 2021). In ISPSC Graduate School of Tagudin Campus, it was an observation that many students are wanting to thrive towards their graduate education but due to the pandemic, family problems, transfer of residence, lack of finances, unfriendly distance of their residence to the higher learning institution and other factors, they are thwarted to prosper in their chosen courses.

The current study aims to bridge this research gap by exploring the experiences of graduate school students, providing an in-depth understanding of how they thrive within their programs. By collecting and analyzing pertinent data, this research seeks to inform the development of evidence-based policies and interventions that enhance graduate school programs and create more supportive learning environments. It is paramount to address the well-being of graduate students as it directly influences their ability to contribute to a brighter future for humanity (Co-Nesbitt *et al.,* 2021).

Considering the observed decline in enrolment at Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College, it is evident that various obstacles, such as work-related or health-related issues, hinder students' attendance and may even result in dropout rates. Therefore, investigating the well-being of these students, as per Co-Nesbitt *et al.* (2021), becomes crucial as it not only impacts their individual success but also their potential contributions to society.

In summary, this study explores the experiences of graduate school students and shed light on their ability to thrive within their degree programs. By generating essential data, this research aims to support the formulation of policies and interventions that foster responsive and supportive graduate school programs, ultimately promoting student well-being and success.

B. Framework of the Study

This study focuses on understanding the concept of human thriving and its application within post-secondary institutions, specifically graduate programs. Previous research has explored thriving across different contexts, such as lifespan and workplace settings, but its relevance to graduate students has been largely overlooked until recently (Schreiner, 2010). The study aims to address this gap by examining how graduate students conceptualize and understand thriving within their programs.

The study was anchored on the Social Cognitive Theory of Bandura and Walberg's theory on educational productivity. The social cognitive theory states that learning occurs in a social context with dynamic and reciprocal interaction of environment and behavior. The theory considers the person's past experiences, which factor into whether behavioral action will occur. These experiences influence reinforcements, expectations, and expectancies, all which shape whether a person will engage in specific behavior and why a person engages in that behavior (Lamorte, 2016).

The theory on educational productivity of Walberg (1981) states that affective, cognitive, and behavioral skills for optimization of learning affect the quality of academic performance such as aptitude (ability, development, and motivation); instruction (amount and quality); and environment (home, classroom, peers, and television). Graduate students' attitude towards research, the challenges they encountered, the coping strategies they employed while doing research, and their research performance is influence by the dynamic and reciprocal interactions with family members, friends, teachers, and other people in their environment. Thus, their home and school environment could also affect their research performance; their attitude plays a significant role in excelling in their research endeavors.

Schreiner and colleagues (2010) describe a thriving student as someone who is fully engaged intellectually, socially, and emotionally, emphasizing the importance of thriving beyond mere survival in college. Despite some groundbreaking work on student thriving, particularly within undergraduate contexts, there is still limited understanding of the factors influencing graduate students' sense of fulfillment, work-life balance, quality of life, and goal achievement.

To fill this research gap, the current study seeks to explore thriving among graduate students at Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College Graduate School Tagudin Campus. By obtaining the experiences of graduate students, the researchers aim to how students thrive in their graduate school classes. The findings from this study provide, valuable insights into student thriving and the graduate student experience, ultimately contributing to the development of a data-driven definition of graduate student thriving to inform future research and practice in this field.

It is important to study the graduate students' well-being and motivation, as they face unique challenges in less structured environments and often juggle multiple responsibilities alongside their academic pursuits. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) offers a measure for understanding graduate students' well-being within the context of their education, focusing on the innate needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In addition to SDT, the concept of thriving is relevant, defined as a state in which individuals experience vitality and learning (Schreiner, 2010).

The study was anchored on the Social Cognitive Theory of Bandura and Walberg's theory on educational productivity. The social cognitive theory states that learning occurs in a social context with dynamic and reciprocal interaction of environment and behavior. The theory considers the person's past experiences, which factor into whether behavioral action will occur. These past experiences influence reinforcements, expectations, and expectancies, all which shape whether a person will engage in specific behavior and why a person engages in that behavior (Lamorte, 2016). The theory on educational productivity of Walberg (1981) states that affective, cognitive, and behavioral skills for optimization of learning affect the quality of academic performance such as aptitude (ability, development, and motivation); instruction (amount and quality); and environment (home, classroom, peers, and television). Graduate students' attitude towards research, the challenges they encountered, the coping strategies they employed while doing research, and their research performance is influence by the dynamic and reciprocal interactions with family members, friends, teachers, and other people in their environment. Thus, their home and school environment could also affect their research performance; their attitude plays a significant role in excelling in their research endeavors.

Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs also provides a lens through which to understand the concerns and stressors of graduate students. Unmet physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization needs can become barriers to their well-being and hinder their learning processes (Maslow, 1943). It is crucial to recognize these barriers and facilitators to support graduate student wellness and motivation, as they play a critical role in shaping the next generation of scholars in education and health.

Astin's student development theory, based on student involvement, offers a theoretical framework for the research project. Involvement theory emphasizes the physical and psychological energy that students devote to their academic experiences. It highlights the importance of student involvement in various activities, such as co-curricular and academic pursuits, for positive learning outcomes (Astin, 1999). Experiential education, aligned with Dewey's theories, also underscores the significance of personal engagement for learning (Dewey, 1938).

Thriving Theory, emerging from the positive psychology movement, describes healthy functioning in adolescents and college students. It emphasizes positive human development and encompasses academic, intrapersonal, and interpersonal domains (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Thriving overlaps with constructs like flourishing, psychological sense of community, psychological well-being, and belonging, but differs from engagement in its focus on interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects (Schreiner, 2010).

By exploring the concept of thriving and its connection to graduate students' experiences, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of student well-being in higher education. It draws on multiple theories, including SDT, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Astin's student development theory, and engagement theory and thriving theory to provide a comprehensive framework for examining graduate student thriving and its impact on their academic and personal lives.

Concepts on thriving are likewise indispensable to be known. Thriving has been studied in such disciplines as medicine, sociology, philosophy, economics, education, and in a variety of other settings. While thriving is an active area of scholarly exploration, there are many different definitions and approaches to studying thriving, as well as variations in measurements (Brown *et al.,* 2017). Even though thriving existed as a concept prior to the start of the 21st century, thriving was expanded as an area of inquiry after the advent of positive psychology as a movement (Brown *et al*., 2017).

Thriving was linked to positive organizational outcomes for both individuals and institutions. Spreitzer and Sutcliffe (2007) contended that thriving mattered because "it serves as an adaptive function that helps individuals navigate and change their work contexts in order to promote their own development" (p. 77). Thriving supported the health of individuals since employees who were thriving were less likely to feel anxious or depressed when they experienced a sense of vitality and aliveness when thriving 8 (Spreitzer & Sutcliffe, 2007). In addition to mental health benefits, the sense of learning inherent to thriving supported physical health benefits. In the presence of learning at work, thriving individuals developed new knowledge and skills to improve functioning at work. Spreitzer and Sutcliffe (2007) speculated that work performance was positively impacted by healthier and more energized individuals. Thriving in the workplace served as a catalyst for others to become energized and positively impact the energy of the unit and workplace. There was the possibility for thriving at work to be carried over into personal spaces such as home and community. Substantiating the importance of thriving at work, Kleine *et al.* (2019) in their meta-analysis of thriving research concluded that thriving at work was "positively related to various important work outcomes, including employee health, favorable job attitudes, and performance-related outcomes. Consequently, practitioners should aim for established working conditions that foster thriving at work." (Kleine *et al.*, 2019, p. 992). An exploration of thriving in the workplace for student affairs professionals benefits a variety of audiences and supports a sustainable workplace environment for current and future student affairs professionals.

On the other hand, intervention programs are necessary whenever challenges persist but these interventions are to be evaluated for better outputs and outcomes. Evaluating intervention programs is essential to many educational and clinical psychologists' research agenda (Achenbach, *et.al* 2017). In the education parlance, intervention programs are essential to remediate reading difficulties, reading comprehension, poor numerical skills and other gauged negative results. These need interventions and embedded approaches and strategies to address the encountered educational challenges. Further, evaluation of an intervention program is a remarkable undertaking so as to likely resolve whatever negative results or impact found.

Academic interventions differ depending on the needs of the students as well as their strengths and weaknesses. Implementing effective intervention strategies is essential by identifying areas of weakness to help students to improve their academic proficiency. To enhance student performance in academic achievement and skill performance, relevant approaches such as short intervention programs can be used to boost student confidence (Rosenzweig *et al.,* 2016). Intervention techniques are a set of activities for promoting progress in a specific region where it is required (Mahlo *et al.*, 2012). These approaches help to enhance student's perception about the importance of knowledge that they gained in the classroom and help to increase student intellectual, motivational, achievement and attitudes (Benjamin *et al.*,2018).
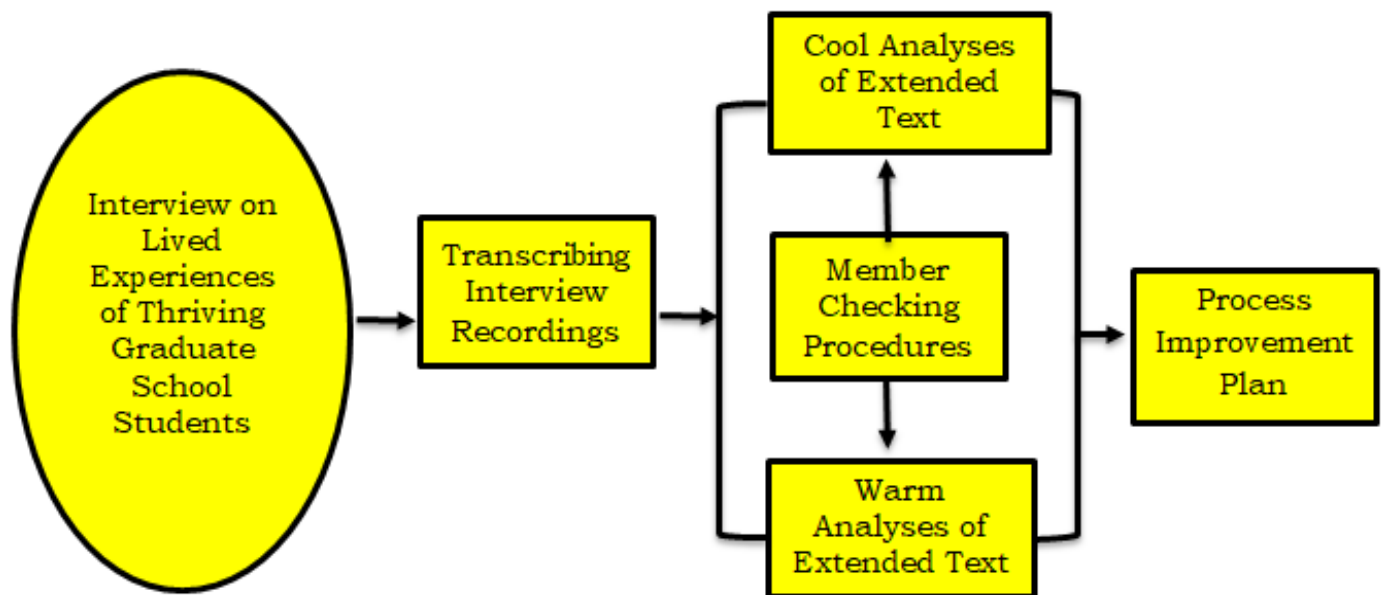
Fig 1 The Research Paradigm

As depicted in Figure 1, this study employed a qualitative approach with narrative as its research design. The figure illustrates that interviews were the primary data gathering tool utilized in the study. Velasco (2022) highlights interviews as a cornerstone of qualitative research. The interviews focused on capturing the lived experiences of thriving graduate school students, serving as essential inputs for this study. Subsequently, the interviews were transcribed, and the resulting extended texts before proceeding to the cool and warm analyses, along with member checking procedures. Through these analyses, themes emerged. Ultimately, as shown in the figure, the study's output is a process improvement plan, derived from the insightful narratives shared by the participants regarding their lived experiences. The research paradigm was patterned from Velasco (2022).

C. Statement of the Problem
This study aimed to describe thriving among graduate school students at Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College-Tagudin Campus. Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

- What experiences do graduate school students share about thriving in their degree programs?
- What valid intervention program could be developed based on the findings?

D. Limitations of the Study
This study was limited only into describing the thriving experiences of graduate school students in Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College - Tagudin Campus. Specifically, this study was delimited into determining their lived experiences as a basis in the formulation of a Process Improvement Plan. Furthermore, this phenomenological study considered only to those students who experienced thriving in their graduate studies and are willing to participate in the study. In collecting the data, the researcher was only limited to using *aide- mémoire* which was based on the developed interview guide. Finally, cool and warm analyses of data were used.

E. Importance of the Study
This study is important to the following:

Students. They are the graduate students who may actively engage in research studies conducted within their academic programs. These students typically serve as subjects or participants in various research projects, contributing to the advancement of knowledge in their respective fields. This would help them find ways to continue their study and develop a positive perspective and interpersonal relationship.

Teachers. The result of this study would be used to enlighten the school administrators about the issue on thriving. It could also help them in planning ways on how to thrive in the institution. They serve as mentors, advisors, and facilitators of research activities for graduate students.

School Administrators. They are responsible for overseeing and managing the overall operations of the graduate school. They play a crucial role in ensuring the smooth functioning of various academic and administrative processes.

Researchers. This would encourage him to have a wide understanding on the factors of dropouts of the institution. They are individuals who conduct systematic investigations to discover new knowledge, generate insights, and contribute to the existing body of knowledge in a particular field or discipline.

Future Researchers. This may serve as a guide in making their own research and will have an idea especially when their target is focus on of this research. These students are actively engaged in conducting original research and contributing new knowledge to their disciplines. However, graduate school students often face a set of unique challenges in their research journey.

F. Definition of Terms
The following terms are defined operationally and conceptually for a clearer understanding of the variables used.

Lived Experiences of Thriving Graduate School Students. The lived experiences of thriving graduate school students refer to the personal and subjective accounts of graduate students who are not only successfully progressing in their academic pursuits but also experiencing overall well-being, personal growth, and satisfaction in their graduate school journey. These experiences are characterized by positive and fulfilling aspects that contribute to the students' overall sense of thriving and flourishing during their time in graduate school.

Process Improvement Plan. This pertains to the output of this study. This is a document in which it defines how to improve the processes after analyzing and identifying to help them getting better at what you do. The Process Improvement Plan includes the Rationale and Main Objectives with Key Resource Areas, Objectives, Strategies, Budgetary Requirements and Persons –in-charge are embedded in the matrix.

G. Review of Literature
This chapter presents the review of related literatures and studies that could further enrich the background of the study.

A review of various literatures and documents related to the problem and the studies conducted by the several researchers, which have significant bearing on the subject under study brought out some enlightening facts and interesting observations which enabled the researchers to gain deeper insight into the objective of the study.

➢ *Studies on Thriving of Graduate School Students.*

In the Philippines, the experience of COVID 19 pandemic becomes a machinery to accelerate this transformation in education system resulting to review the current educational practices in curriculum and instruction; competencies of teachers and educational leaders; institutional and policy reforms in education and Philippine Qualifications and learning outcomes. PQF was developed as a call for comparability of competencies at various educational levels within the ASEAN region (Ogena, 2015). This is partly supported in April 28, 2021 in an online forum facilitated by the Philippine Chamber of Commerce Incorporated' Education Task Force with their Philippine Education Development Model to identify the different issues concerning each of the educational practices which highly raise the need to reassess education system; harmonizing each of the elements of education from the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Department of Education (DepEd), and Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) to comprise what legacy to live for the next generation.

Leading the way to Higher Education Transformation—Universities across the country which are operating in a rapidly changing global context. More so, The Commission on Higher Education or CHED of the Philippines as the regulatory body of Education focusing on higher learning institutions, envisions of making the Philippine higher education system equitable and producing locally responsive, innovative, and globally competitive graduates and lifelong learners. This lead to mandating higher education institutions align its vision and mission that gradually translated among its graduates; graduates that thereby use as metrics of defining quality education as outcomes of the university. Believing in Latif and Bahroom (2010) findings focusing that the quality of a university can be determined by the evaluation made by its own graduates. Having gone through the system and graduated from it, they are in a very good position to appraise the quality of education which they have received in terms of preparing them to become more holistic individuals equipped with relevant lifelong learning skills.

During the pandemic, first-generation students were more likely than second-generation students to face financial difficulties. Students also experienced higher rates of mental health disorders. Students in the first year of generation are also less likely to live in safe surroundings devoid of physical and psychological abuse, drugs, and alcohol (Soria *et al.*, 2020). The flexible accessibility of learning resources, time, hard work, and monetary savings, acquiring and improving technical and self-learning skills, health, safety, interaction without shyness, and better academic accomplishment were all indicated as benefits of e-learning. On the contrary, draw backs included a lack of technology that facilitates online learning, a bad internet connection, and educators' and students' lack of technological skills.

Furthermore, there were insufficient or no practical classes, no clear unified policy for the conduct of online classes and exams, and limited online exam time (Al Zahrani *et al.*, 2021). The learning systems of college students are crucial, and the level of engagement can differ depending on the educators and technology utilized. In preparation for any future crisis, such as COVID 19, an active and efficient emergency remote teaching system that maintains academic achievement comparable to traditional classroom teaching can be developed (Shim & Lee, 2020). Additionally, excessive screen time can cause various physical problems, such as bad posture and headaches.

As a holistic concept, thriving is comprised of various interactions among students, faculty, and the environment (Scobey, 2016). In the higher education context, student thriving can be further complicated by the diverse backgrounds brought by students, creating an increasingly diverse and dynamic environment. Thus, cultivating thriving in universities requires deliberate actions on the part of the institution (Schreiner, 2016).

At first point, it is easy for students to move from undergraduate to graduate study but then again there are salient factors that could affect students' performance in graduate school. Graduate education is focused on efficiency rather than effectiveness and quality. Graduate students are expected to participate in the game of academic enculturation. They face challenges and struggles in textual, social, and political arenas. Learning in and from graduate school requires more than just intelligence, strategic social, cultural, and political participation, and constructing a professional identity are at least as important (Casanave & Li, 2009). Academics have adequate priorities like family, friends, and et cetera. Unsatisfactory combinations of work and home duties can result in various unfavorable individual and organizational outcomes for scholars (Putnik *et al.*, 2018). Lack of intellectual stimulation, lack of facilities and materials, excessive red tape, lack of opportunity and time to do research are whys and wherefores of scholar's failure to finish graduate schooling.

Therefore, there should be sustainable supervisor-student relationship to help achieve greater successes in graduate education (Ezelibo, 2012). There is a need for the development of theoretical frameworks that take cultural context into account in relation to work-home interface (Putnik *et al*., 2018). Desire to acquire better expertise in field of study, thirst for higher qualification and the need to meet requirements for choice career/job are needed factors in motivating oneself to finish post graduate studies (Fadairo & Ogundipe, 2016). Student employment status significantly affects academic performance thus the institution should focus much more effort on helping students adopt strategies that will enable them balance their studies with employment. The coping strategies used by the respondents include seeking for help from colleagues and asking for more support from supervisors (Ezelibo, 2012). Forms of commitment can be distinguished by considering different combinations of student identity. Understanding these motivations are important because they can account for students' regulatory focus on studies (Johnson et.al., 2010)

Mbogo (2016) identified teacher friendly interactions, inspiration for further studies, family responsibilities, language proficiency, age, gender and lack of finance as some of the factors identified to be affecting academic performance of students. The challenges included problems related to facilities, social environment, and academic system (Talebloo & Bin Baki 2013). On the other hand, financial status and marital status insignificantly affect the academic performance of graduate students (Kasaija, 2009). Graduate students' choice in educational studies particularly the characteristics of the program enrolled can be a form of motivation. Whereas postgraduates' enthusiasm towards finishing their studies can be affected greatly by their program choice (Saiti, Papa, & Brown, 2017). Student employment status significantly affects academic performance thus the institution should focus much more effort on helping students adopt strategies that will enable them balance their studies with employment (Kasaija, 2009).

In Canada, graduate education typically consists of two types of programs: Masters programs, which are often one to two years in length full-time and follow an undergraduate degree, and Doctoral or PhD programs, which are usually completed in four to six years full-time following a Masters degree. The experience of graduate students differs significantly from that of their undergraduate peers, necessitating unique attention and support from higher education leaders, stakeholders, and researchers (Canadian Association for Graduate Studies [CAGS], 2012).

Unlike undergraduate students who often study within tightly defined course schedules, graduate students frequently operate within less structured environments, requiring self-motivation and self-directed independent study (Owens *et al.,* 2020). Additionally, most graduate programs involve working alongside a supervisor, whose supportiveness (or lack thereof) has been shown to predict graduate student satisfaction (Haccoun *et.al,* 2020).

In addition to their academic responsibilities, graduate students are more likely to have familial and professional obligations compared to undergraduate students (Cliff *et al.,* 2018), which can pose challenges and reduce the likelihood of program completion (Declou, 2016). Furthermore, despite constituting a significant proportion of students on university campuses, graduate students often receive fewer resources for facilitating their sense of belonging compared to primarily undergraduate students (Pascale, 2018).

Given the challenges that graduate students face in completing their academic obligations, supporting student well-being should be a priority for those involved in graduate programs and post-secondary institutions. The current "mental health crisis in graduate education" emphasizes the need for leaders to act and advocate for student thriving, recognizing that attending to student well-being is a fundamental purpose of higher education (Soleas *et al.,* 2019).

Finally, supporting graduate students in their ability to thrive requires an understanding of what such an experience entails within the contexts of higher education and graduate programs. Student thriving and retention have been suggested as significant factors related to student success (Schreiner, *et.al.,* 2010). While retention is an important measure, thriving has been empirically established as a predictor of retention (Schreiner *et al*., 2010), making it a crucial area of exploration in this study.

➢ *Implementing Effective Intervention.*
When groups engage in this process, they prioritize and implement intervention strategies based on what has been learned through research and experience in community contexts. "Best practices" are proven programs or policies shown to be effective with a particular issue and specific population. Despite evidence indicating their effects, "best practices" are not always effective in new or different situations. For example, increasing access to health services by lengthening clinic hours may not improve outcomes if language issues are the actual barriers.

Implementing Effective Interventions often requires assuring technical assistance and adapting interventions to different or changing conditions, especially when programs or policies are applied in different populations, places, and situations. The process of Implementing Effective Interventions can help community initiatives combine their understanding of what has worked elsewhere with local conditions and opportunities to improve outcomes for a "real-world" impact.

Extensive resources have been devoted to prevention research for over 20 years, and programs and strategies that work have been identified. A number of online resources have been developed to increase access to these evidence-based programs and practices and to disseminate effective "program packages" such as curricula manuals and technical assistance guidance (See Best Practices: Links to Intervention Reviews and Recommendations). Review and use of "best practices" can increase selection and application of effective strategies by decision-makers, practitioners, and program funders who must choose among potential innovations to address complex and challenging problems (Gillespie *et al.*, 2003). Yet, there is no perfect program package that can be directly applied across all communities and achieve desired effects.

The strict application of evidence-based interventions that emerge from science to community practice does not guarantee success. A "one-size-fits-all" approach will not work (Estabrooks *et.al,* 2003;). Different settings and populations present a range of cultural, economic, and other environmental circumstances that affect behavior and outcome. As such, the process of implementing interventions that work includes respect for both scientific evidence regarding effective programs and experiential knowledge of what would likely work in a particular context.

Matching intervention strategies to fit needs, objectives, and context is critical for the success of community change and improvement efforts. Few community mobilization efforts have developed and implemented the kind of "upstream" environmental changes (e.g., social and policy influences) that can provide the necessary strength and penetration to effect population-level improvements (Merzel & D'Affliti, 2003). For example, many substance use prevention partnerships in the 1990s gravitated toward "Red Ribbon" and other public information and awareness campaigns (despite no evidence that these information-provision strategies reduced alcohol or drug use); and these activities often occurred at the expense of more intensive social policy or regulation efforts to reduce access to alcohol and other drugs (Young *et.al*, 2000).

CHAPTER TWO
METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research design, population and locale of the study, research instrument, and analysis of data to be employed in the study.

A. Research Design

This study employed the qualitative research method, specifically the narrative research design aims to explore and conceptualize human experience as it is represented in textual form. Aiming for an in-depth exploration of the meanings people assign to their experiences, narrative researchers work with small samples of participants to obtain rich and free-ranging discourse. The emphasis is on storied experience. Generally, this takes the form of interviewing people around the topic of interest, but it might also involve the analysis of written documents (Bueno, 2016). Since the study looked into the experiences of graduate school students as they thrive in their respective degree program, the researcher found the design appropriate for the study.

B. Population and Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at Tagudin Campus of Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College, located in Tagudin, Ilocos Sur. The participants in this study consisted of 15 graduate school students who turned out to be 11 students only after the saturation phase. The selection of two participants per program in the graduate and post graduate courses was based on purposeful criterion sampling, which involved two specific criteria. First, the participants are currently enrolled as graduate school students. Second, they needed to express willingness to be interviewed and participate in the study.

The researcher concluded the population of the study with a final sample size of 11 participants. Data saturation signifies the point in qualitative data analysis when the researcher has collected and analyzed enough data to thoroughly understand the phenomenon under investigation, reaching a point of informational redundancy (Prancis *et al.*, 2010).

C. Research Instrument

The data collection process followed a systematic progression. First, an interview guide was developed, incorporating priori codes as the foundation for formulating interview questions. This guide was then used to construct an aide-mémoire, which served as the primary tool for gathering data. The structure and mechanics of the interview guide, aide-mémoire, and consent form were adapted from the study conducted by Azarias and Capistrano (2019) and Azarias *et al.* (2020), ensuring consistency in approach.

To begin the study, permission to conduct the research was obtained from the relevant officials at Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College - Tagudin Campus. Subsequently, the interview guide, containing the priori codes, was finalized, and the aide-mémoire was prepared. Following this, the participants were selected based on criterion sampling. Prior to their involvement in the study, the research participants were provided with a consent form and were briefed on the nature and objectives of the research, hence their participation was voluntary.

Once consent was obtained, interviews were scheduled at the participants' convenience. Some interviews were conducted face-to-face, while others received printed copies of the questions due to scheduling conflicts. For face-to-face interviews, with the participants' consent, the interviews were recorded to ensure accurate capturing of the data.

After the interviews, the recorded sessions were transcribed, converting them into written form for further analysis. To ensure the accuracy of the data and interpretation, member checking procedures were employed, involving follow-up interviews and cross-referencing the interview transcripts with the participants. This step aimed to validate the findings and ensure the participants' perspectives were accurately represented.

Finally, a qualitative narrative analysis of the collected data was conducted. This involved carefully examining and interpreting the information obtained from the interviews, identifying patterns, themes, and insights relevant to the research objectives.

D. Analysis of Data

The process of analyzing the collected data involved several steps to ensure coherence and clarity. First, the tape-recorded interviews and written answers of the participants were transcribed individually, resulting in extended texts. These texts served as the basis for the subsequent analyses.

The cool analysis approach was employed, where specific anchors and phenomenal referents within the text were marked. This marking process aimed to facilitate the identification of themes relevant to the research objectives (de Guzman & Tan, 2007). Simultaneously, the warm analysis was conducted, focusing on the highlighted words or phrases within the text. These highlighted elements were carefully proofread and analyzed to formulate categories and themes (Valdez *etal*., 2012).

The emerging themes from the cool and warm analyses formed the foundation for further validation. Member checking procedures were employed, using a correspondence technique recommended by Lincoln and Guba (as cited in de Guzman & Guillermo, 2007). This involved individually approaching each study participant to verify the consistency of the transcription and interpretation of their responses. By engaging participants in this manner, the researcher ensured both the trustworthiness and truthfulness of the reported data (de Guzman & Tan, 2007).

Overall, this rigorous analytical process ensured that the data analysis was thorough and reliable, leading to accurate and meaningful findings in the study.

E. Ethical Consideration

The participants were given a written consent form that clearly outlined their rights and ensured their full participation in the research. The consent form explicitly stated that all the information provided by the participants would be used solely for research purposes, emphasizing the importance of maintaining their security, privacy, and dignity throughout the study. Additionally, it was clearly stated that participants had the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

Furthermore, the participants were assured that they would be given the opportunity to access the results of the study and review their own interview transcripts. This commitment to transparency and communication fostered a sense of collaboration and respect between the researcher and the participants, ensuring their involvement in the research process went beyond data collection and extended to the dissemination of findings.

By implementing these measures, the researcher prioritized the ethical treatment of participants, recognizing their autonomy and protecting their rights throughout the study.

CHAPTER THREE
RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the study as a result of the cool and warm analyses of the extended texts. The conclusions and recommendations of the study are also manifested in this chapter. The developed indigenized and contextualized program is also exemplified in this chapter.

➤ *Lived Experiences of Thriving Graduate School Students*

The findings presented in this paper shed light on the experiences shared by graduate school students, referred to as participants coded as 'T' for anonymity, as they navigated their journey as thriving graduate school students. The rich and comprehensive nature of the extended texts enabled the researcher to capture the essence of their lived experiences in this context. Despite the diverse range of contexts in which these experiences took place, the cool and warm analyses conducted revealed commonalities and provided a holistic picture of what it means to be a thriving graduate school student.

To address the first research question, the responses of the participants, encompassing their lived experiences, were carefully examined through the lens of cool and warm analyses. Through these analyses and the subsequent interpretation of the extended texts, themes surface which are tagged as **B³ASE**: **B**alancing responsibilities, **B**uilding Bridges and Connections, **B**ringing Positivity, **A**cquiring Skills and Knowledge, **S**triding towards Personality Development, and **E**nrolling for Professional Development and Career Progression.

These themes offer valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of thriving in the graduate school setting, encompassing aspects such as personal growth, satisfaction, active engagement, establishing connections, and achieving a sense of balance. By exploring these themes, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors and experiences that contribute to the thriving of graduate school students.

• *Balancing Responsibilities.*

The theme Balancing Responsibilities emerges as a crucial aspect of thriving in graduate school. It encompasses the ability of graduate students to establish and maintain a balanced lifestyle amidst various academic and non-academic responsibilities. The data presented highlights the challenges faced by graduate students in achieving this balance and sheds light on their experiences and perspectives.

"As a graduate student, I have established a routine to effectively manage my studies. Friday evenings are dedicated to completing graduate studies requirements and paperwork, while Saturdays are reserved for attending classes. It is my responsibility as a student to diligently attend my classes, although it can be challenging at times due to the distance between my house and the school. Additionally, the overlapping activities at work occasionally affect my class attendance. Alongside my academic commitments, I have also been elected as part of the student leader organization, which requires me to allocate time for various school activities. The graduate school education system at ISPSC demands extra time from our weekdays and Sundays to fulfill the laborious activities and requirements of different subjects, ranging from reporting to research and hands-on activities to extension programs." (T5)

"Enrolling in graduate school is both a privilege and a responsibility. It is a privilege to join an institution that offers quality education at a minimal fee. However, it also comes with the responsibility of treating graduate school as a full-time job, requiring a significant amount of time dedicated to research and other requirements. Students spend a substantial portion of their time working on research projects and fulfilling program obligations." (T10)

"Upon enrolling in graduate school, research emerged as the activity that truly developed me professionally. Research is a process that demands effort, commitment, patience, knowledge, and more. It cannot be completed in a single sitting or accomplished within a short period of time. However, through engaging in research, I gained valuable experiences that improved not only my academic studies but also my overall career development. Furthermore, attending workshops and conferences to acquire new skills and demonstrate a commitment to personal growth, continuous learning, and professional development is essential for showcasing a thriving mindset in graduate studies." (T11)

The data provided suggests that balancing is a key factor in thriving as a graduate student. It encompasses the ability to establish and maintain a balanced lifestyle while juggling academic and non-academic responsibilities. The experiences shared by the student reflect the challenges faced in achieving this balance, such as managing time for classes, work, and extracurricular activities. The demands of graduate studies, including various requirements and activities, require additional time commitment during weekdays and weekends.

The student's initial days as a graduate student were characterized by nervousness and feelings of inadequacy due to being among classmates who already had teaching careers. However, the student's motivation to actively participate in class discussions and engage in school activities demonstrates a proactive approach towards personal growth and skill development.

Enrolling in graduate school is seen as both a privilege and a responsibility. While it offers quality education at a minimal fee, it also demands treating graduate school as a full-time job. The student mentions the significant time dedicated to research and other program requirements, indicating the intensive nature of graduate studies.

The student emphasizes the significance of research in their professional development. They acknowledge that research requires effort, commitment, and patience, and it cannot be accomplished quickly. Engaging in research has provided them with valuable experiences that have contributed to their academic and career growth. The student also recognizes the importance of attending workshops and conferences to acquire new skills and demonstrate a commitment to continuous learning and professional development, which contributes to thriving in graduate studies.

Declou (2016) conducted a study that explored the experiences of graduate students in managing their academic and personal lives. The findings of this study align with the data provided, emphasizing the challenges faced by graduate students in achieving a balance between their academic responsibilities and other aspects of their lives. The study highlighted the importance of effective time management and self-care practices for maintaining a balanced lifestyle in graduate school. These findings support the notion that balancing is a crucial aspect of thriving as a graduate student.

Similarly, the study by Coe-Nesbitt *et al*, (2021) investigated the experiences of graduate students in relation to work-life balance. The results of this study further support the data presented, emphasizing the struggles faced by graduate students in managing their academic commitments alongside other responsibilities, such as work and personal life. The study highlighted the negative impact of imbalances in work-life integration on students' well-being and academic performance. These findings corroborate the challenges mentioned in the data, particularly in terms of juggling work activities, class attendance, and extracurricular involvements.

Together, the studies conducted by Declou (2016) and Coe-Nesbitt, et al. (2021) provide additional evidence to support the significance of balancing in graduate school. They reinforce the notion that establishing and maintaining a balanced lifestyle is essential for graduate students to thrive academically and personally. These studies shed further light on the experiences and perspectives shared in the data, enhancing our understanding of the challenges and importance of balancing in graduate studies.

The data has important implications for graduate students aiming to thrive in their studies. One key aspect is finding a balance between academic and non-academic responsibilities. Effective time management and prioritization are essential, including attending classes, meeting work obligations, and engaging in extracurricular activities. Graduate studies come with various demands, requiring additional time commitment on weekdays and weekends.

- *Building Bridges and Connections.*

The theme Building Bridges and Connections underscores the significance of relationships, interpersonal interactions, and support systems in fostering student thriving. The participants shared that their graduate school experiences allow them to meet people who became their friend, linkages, and network. To support this claim, the verbalizations of the participants below are quoted.

"As a graduate student of ISPSC Graduate School, I consider it a great honor. The experience has not only broadened my horizons in the field of teaching but has also enriched my perspective on life. With ISPSC, I have come to believe that everything is achievable and possible." (T1)

"My ability to thrive in my Graduate Studies can be attributed to the supportive classmates and dependable teachers who have played a vital role in my journey. Additionally, serving as an officer in the Graduate School has further empowered me to thrive." (T2)

"Graduate students often have opportunities to present their research findings at conferences, seminars, or departmental events. Thriving graduate students actively engage in these presentations, showcasing their work, participating in discussions, and receiving valuable feedback from peers and faculty members." (T6)

"The graduate school organizes various events such as orientations and seminars, which not only provide valuable learning experiences but also foster camaraderie among students. These events also enable us to discover new teaching techniques and styles." (T7)

In the study conducted by Evans et al. (2018), the researchers explored the role of influence in creating supportive learning environments and its impact on graduate student engagement and success. The findings of the study strongly align with the data presented, providing additional evidence to support the assertion that graduate students who perceive their experiences in graduate school as a great honor and recognize the broadening of their horizons are more likely to exhibit higher levels of engagement and achieve greater success in their academic pursuits.

Moreover, Evans et al. (2018) also emphasize the crucial role of supportive classmates and dependable teachers in fostering graduate student thriving. The study underscores that these interpersonal relationships within the learning environment significantly contribute to the students' ability to thrive and excel academically. This further corroborates the observations made in T1 and T2, emphasizing the importance of such relationships in facilitating graduate student success and overall well-being.

Further, Charles et al. (2021) investigated the influence of experiential learning opportunities on the development and thriving of graduate students. The findings of the study align closely with the data presented, further emphasizing the significance of actively presenting research findings at conferences, seminars, or departmental events. The research highlights that actively engaging in these opportunities, including showcasing work, participating in discussions, and receiving feedback, positively contributes to graduate students' overall sense of thriving and personal growth.

Furthermore, the study conducted by Charles et al. (2021) underscores the importance of events such as orientations and seminars organized by the graduate school. These events not only foster camaraderie among students but also provide valuable learning experiences. Importantly, they expose students to new teaching techniques and styles, enhancing their skill set and professional growth. These findings strongly corroborate the observations made in T6 and T7, further supporting the notion that actively participating in academic activities and engaging in collaborative events contribute significantly to graduate students' sense of thriving and success in their academic journey.

The data suggests that thriving in graduate school is closely linked to the theme of connecting, which emphasizes the significance of relationships, interpersonal interactions, and support systems in fostering student thriving. The participants' experiences and perspectives shed light on the importance of various factors in their thriving journey.

First, the participants express a sense of honor and privilege in being graduate students at ISPSC Graduate School. This indicates a positive perception of the institution, which has contributed to their overall growth and development. The participants highlight how their horizons have been broadened, not only in the field of teaching but also in their perspective on life. They attribute this positive transformation to the connections and experiences they have gained within the graduate school environment.

Supportive classmates and dependable teachers play a vital role in facilitating student thriving. The participants acknowledge the significant impact of these relationships on their ability to thrive in their graduate studies. The presence of a supportive network and the opportunity to serve as an officer in the Graduate School further empower them to excel academically and personally.

Presenting research findings at conferences, seminars, or departmental events is a key aspect of graduate studies. The participants recognize the importance of actively engaging in these opportunities, as it allows them to showcase their work, engage in discussions, and receive valuable feedback from peers and faculty members. This active involvement in academic activities contributes to their sense of thriving.

The graduate school organizes events such as orientations and seminars that foster camaraderie among students. These events not only provide valuable learning experiences but also create an environment conducive to connection and collaboration. The participants highlight how these events expose them to new teaching techniques and styles, enhancing their skill set and professional growth.

Building connections is identified as a significant aspect of thriving in graduate school. The participants highlight the acquaintance activity as a platform for showcasing skills and capabilities, inspiring one another, and promoting personal growth. This atmosphere of support and encouragement helps them recognize their strengths and strive towards becoming the best version of themselves.

Participation in outreach programs is another notable aspect of graduate studies. The participants describe how these activities broaden the perspectives of children and provide them with essential support. Engaging in such initiatives challenges the graduate students to make a positive impact on the lives of others, reinforcing their sense of purpose and contributing to their overall thriving.

The data also emphasizes that graduate school extends beyond classroom attendance. The participants recognize the importance of seeking out diverse training experiences and dedicating ample time and energy to research and studies. This active engagement in personal and professional development outside the confines of traditional learning is deemed essential for thriving.

Finally, being a student in the Graduate School is regarded as a privilege and honor due to ISPSC's reputation for producing professional graduates and high-caliber professors. This recognition adds to the participants' motivation and contributes to their sense of pride in their graduate school journey.

- *Bringing Positivity.*

The data provided highlights the positive views and experiences of graduate students, focusing on the theme of bringing positivity. Participants express their satisfaction with their studies, personal growth, and the transformative nature of thriving in graduate school. They view it as an opportunity to pursue their goals, improve themselves, and advance in their careers. The quotes from participants illustrate their positive emotions, sense of fulfillment, and enthusiasm towards their graduate journey.

"Returning to my alma mater, ISPSC, as an alumna has been a wonderful experience. While everything has changed, the institution continues to provide a reliable foundation. ISPSC played a crucial role in shaping me into a productive individual, not only in the field of teaching but also in my personal life. I owe much of who I am today to my time at ISPSC." (T1)

"Embarking on my graduate studies has been both satisfying and challenging. Initially, my focus was on reviewing for the Board Exam, and afterwards, I faced the task of finding employment. The process has been demanding, but it has brought me a sense of fulfillment." (T2)

"As someone already at a higher level of education, I found the experience of graduate school to be extremely interesting, albeit nerve-wracking. The prospect of pursuing advanced studies pushed me out of my comfort zone, but it also sparked my curiosity and eagerness to learn." (T8)

"From my personal experiences, thriving within my graduate studies signifies fulfillment. I am driven to achieve my goals and make significant progress in my career and personal growth. The pursuit of my graduate studies serves as a means to improve myself and become the person I aspire to be. Each step I take as a graduate student brings me closer to success." (T9)

"The implementation of online learning at ISPSC due to the pandemic added an element of excitement and novelty to my graduate school journey. It presented unique challenges and opportunities for growth." (T10)

"Reflecting on my first day of school in graduate school fills me with happiness, fun, and joy. The positive atmosphere and camaraderie among everyone contributed to a memorable experience." (T11)

The studies on thriving in graduate school support the positive views and experiences expressed by the participants. They highlight the fulfillment and enjoyment associated with graduate studies. According to a study by Declou (2016), graduate students who perceive their studies as enjoyable and fulfilling are more likely to experience higher levels of well-being and success in their academic pursuits. This corroborates with the participants' emphasis on fulfillment and positive emotions in their quotes.

The participants also mention personal growth and the transformative nature of thriving in graduate school. This aligns with the findings of a study by Posselt (2021), which explores the experiences of thriving graduate students. The study reveals that graduate school provides a platform for personal growth, as students engage in intellectual challenges and develop critical skills. This supports the participants' statements about improving themselves and advancing their careers through their graduate studies.

Institutions should foster a supportive and nostalgic environment for their alumni, encouraging their return for further studies. Strengthening the connection between alumni and their alma mater can contribute to a sense of belonging and enhance the graduate student experience.

Graduate programs should strive to strike a balance between satisfaction and challenges, providing students with a fulfilling academic journey while acknowledging and supporting them through the difficulties they may encounter.

It is crucial for institutions to address the nervousness and apprehension experienced by graduate students entering higher levels of education. Providing orientation programs, mentorship opportunities, and academic support can help ease the transition and promote a positive mindset.

The emphasis on fulfillment and success within graduate studies highlights the need for institutions to provide comprehensive support and resources to assist students in achieving their goals. This includes academic support, career guidance, and personal development opportunities.

Creating an exciting and enjoyable learning environment, both in-person and online, can enhance the graduate student's experience. Incorporating innovative teaching methods, interactive activities, and fostering a sense of community can contribute to students' enjoyment and overall engagement in their studies.

- *Acquiring Skills and Knowledge.*

The participants' verbalizations and answers reveal that thriving in graduate school is strongly associated with learning. Thriving students in graduate school perceive their academic journey as an opportunity to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge essential to their roles as graduate students. The overarching theme of engagement emerges, emphasizing that thriving graduate students are actively involved and deeply absorbed in their learning, program, and diverse school experiences. The following verbalizations from the participants substantiate the development of this theme.

"My experiences in graduate school have provided me valuable insights on the nature of thriving. I have learned that life in the academic setting is not merely a competition but rather a journey that requires patience and perseverance. It involves transforming what may seem impossible into achievable goals through continuous effort and problem-solving." (T1)

"The graduate school experience has equipped me with scientific approaches, including research formulation, information analysis, study planning and execution, as well as effective communication skills and networking opportunities. These newfound knowledge and skills are seen as assets that will greatly enrich my future career." (T4)

"Through daily discussions and sharing in class, I have gained a deeper understanding of various pedagogical approaches and techniques in teaching. This exposure has broadened my professional horizons and equipped them with valuable insights into different school cultures and best practices in teaching and school management. Additionally, I have acquired research knowledge and skills that will prove valuable in their daily careers." (T5)

The result is similar with Bundick *et al.*, (2010), who underscored that when people are thriving, they feel progress and momentum, marked by a sense of learning (greater understanding and knowledge) and a sense of vitality (aliveness).

- *Striding towards Personality Development.*

The theme of personal growth and development emerges from the participants' descriptions, highlighting that a thriving graduate student brings their unique personal resources, intentions, and desires into their program of study. Their experiences and statements further illustrate the positive transformations that occur during their journey in graduate school.

To illustrate the claim, shared on the improvement in their communication skills and confidence, no longer feeling shy or afraid to share their thoughts and ideas. They attribute their growth to their experience at ISPSC, which has transformed them into wholesome and enthusiastic individuals (T1). Similarly, listed the various skills gained while thriving in graduate school, including effective communication, collaboration with diverse individuals, self-motivated and independent learning, and maintaining professionalism in their work approach (T4).

The findings of this study strongly support the assertions made by Posselt (2021), highlighting the significant role of graduate school in facilitating in-depth understanding and expertise in the chosen field of study. Graduate education goes beyond surface-level knowledge and delves into the intricacies and complexities of the subject matter. By engaging in rigorous academic pursuits, graduate students acquire a deep understanding that forms the foundation for their expertise.

Furthermore, the participants' experiences vividly illustrate the practical aspect of graduate programs. These programs not only provide theoretical knowledge but also equip students with advanced skills tailored to their specific disciplines. The development of problem-solving abilities, proficiency in mathematics, effective writing, persuasive oral presentation, and technological competence are essential components of a well-rounded graduate education. These skills enhance the participants' professional competencies and contribute to their readiness for success in their respective fields.

The participants' narratives highlight the multifaceted growth and development that occurs throughout their graduate school journey. Beyond academic achievements, their experiences demonstrate the cultivation of personal attributes such as effective communication, confidence, adaptability, independence, and critical thinking. These attributes not only contribute to their overall competence but also prepare them to navigate the challenges and complexities of their professional careers.

A corroboration of these findings can be found in a study conducted by Declou (2016) which examined the long-term impact of graduate education on career success. Their research revealed that individuals who completed graduate programs demonstrated higher levels of expertise, advanced skills, and career satisfaction compared to their counterparts with only undergraduate degrees.

Graduate education is instrumental in shaping individuals into experts in their respective fields, equipping them with specialized knowledge and skills that are highly valued in the professional world. The multifaceted growth experienced during graduate school not only prepares individuals for career success but also fosters personal and intellectual development. Graduate students emerge from their programs as confident, knowledgeable, and skilled professionals who are ready to make significant contributions to their disciplines and society as a whole.

Moreover, the acquisition of specialized knowledge and skills through graduate education has broader societal implications. Graduates are equipped to tackle complex problems, contribute to innovation and advancement in their fields, and address the evolving needs of society. The expertise and insights gained during their journey in graduate school position them to play crucial roles in research, academia, industry, and policymaking, thereby driving progress and shaping the future.

The findings of this study, conducted with graduate school students from Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College Tagudin Campus, strongly align with the research conducted by Ebel (2023), emphasizing the transformative nature of graduate education. The participants' experiences reflect the significant impact of their graduate programs on their personal and professional development.

Through their journey in graduate school, these students acquire specialized knowledge that enables them to delve deeply into their chosen fields of study. They become experts in their respective disciplines, equipped with a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. This expertise positions them for professional success and prepares them to make meaningful contributions to their fields.

In addition to specialized knowledge, the participants also acquire advanced skills that are tailored to their specific areas of study. These skills encompass problem-solving, critical thinking, research methodologies, effective communication, and technological proficiency. Such skill sets enhance their professional competence and equip them to tackle complex challenges in their future careers.

Moreover, the graduate education experience fosters the development of personal attributes that contribute to the students' overall growth. These attributes include adaptability, confidence, leadership, and a commitment to lifelong learning. The cultivation of these qualities prepares the students to navigate the ever-changing landscape of their respective fields and become valuable contributors to their disciplines.

The transformative nature of graduate education has far-reaching implications. As these students' progress in their careers, their acquired knowledge, skills, and personal attributes enable them to make substantial contributions to their disciplines. They become catalysts for innovation, progress, and positive change within their organizations and society as a whole.

The graduates from Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College Tagudin Campus, armed with the transformative experience of their graduate education, are poised to excel in their professional endeavors. They have the potential to become leaders, researchers, educators, and change agents in their communities. Their expertise and contributions will have a lasting impact on their disciplines and society, shaping the future of their fields and addressing the challenges faced by their communities.

In conclusion, this study's findings, in alignment with Ebel's research, highlight the transformative power of graduate education for the students of Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College Tagudin Campus. The acquisition of specialized knowledge, advanced skills, and personal attributes empowers these graduate students to become experts in their fields, preparing them for professional success and enabling them to make substantial contributions to their disciplines and society at large.

- *Enrolling for Professional Development and Career Progression.*
  The experiences of participants in graduate school highlight the opportunities it provides for personal and professional growth. This improvement aims to emphasize the theme which encompasses progress towards academic goals and milestones. Furthermore, it explores the significance of success and progress in academic pursuits for graduate student thriving. The participants' shared experiences also shed light on professional development, focusing on knowledge and skill enhancement, mastery improvement, and career advancement. Corroborating evidence from Patel (2019) and Venn (2019) supports these findings.

"For me, continuing our graduate studies, especially in the field of teaching, is not only a great help but also essential for rebuilding myself professionally and personally. It provides opportunities for promotion and enables me to become a globally innovative and competitive educator. " (T1)

"My primary purpose for enrolling in this graduate program is to enhance my chances of promotion in the near future. Additionally, I aim to broaden my knowledge, gain insights, and acquire new skills. Furthermore, I look forward to meeting new friends and expanding my network. " (T4)

"I willingly pursued graduate studies to foster both my personal and professional growth. Professionally, it allows me to enhance my mastery in teaching and boosts my confidence in the daily teaching process. The knowledge and skills gained through this program can also contribute to my career progression. On a personal level, it develops my intellectual, social, and emotional aspects. Intellectually, I acquire a broader understanding of my teaching profession and adapt to the ever-changing global landscape. Socially, I connect with peers and potential collaborators, enriching both my teaching practices and career. Emotionally, Saturday classes help break my routine as a teacher. " (T5)

"I enrolled in the graduate school to pursue a Master of Science in Education majoring in English because it aligns with my course. Besides being a requirement for entering my permanent position, it also provides an opportunity to develop and expand my knowledge." (T7)

Patel (2019) highlights the significant role of graduate school in equipping students with advanced, specialized professional skills that often lead to higher-level positions and greater opportunities. Similarly, Venn (2019) emphasizes that students pursue graduate studies for various reasons, including meeting profession requirements, seeking career change, and aiming for advancement.

In today's evolving educational landscape, continuous professional development is crucial for educators to stay updated and excel in their careers (T10). Graduate school serves as a platform for acquiring specialized knowledge, enhancing skills, and achieving personal and professional growth.

The transformative journey of thriving in graduate school encompasses academic achievement, personal growth, and professional excellence. The experiences shared by the participants, along with compelling evidence, underscore the profound importance of graduate education. It acts as a gateway to advancement opportunities and continuous improvement within the dynamic realm of education.

By embracing the challenges and opportunities offered by graduate studies, individuals equip themselves with the knowledge, skills, and networks necessary to thrive in their chosen fields and make lasting contributions. They become adept at navigating the complexities of their professions and staying abreast of emerging trends and innovations.

Graduate education empowers individuals to become leaders, innovators, and experts in their disciplines. It fosters a growth mindset, encouraging lifelong learning and adaptability. Through rigorous coursework, research projects, and collaborations, graduate students develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills that are essential for success in their careers.

Furthermore, graduate school provides a supportive environment for personal growth and self-discovery. It challenges individuals to expand their horizons, embrace diversity, and develop a deep understanding of their field of study. It nurtures resilience, self-confidence, and a sense of purpose that propels graduates towards fulfilling and impactful careers.

In summary, thriving in graduate school is a transformative journey that drives academic achievement, personal growth, and professional excellence. The participants' experiences, coupled with compelling evidence, underscore the profound importance of graduate education. It acts as a gateway to advancement opportunities and continuous improvement within the dynamic realm of education. By embracing the challenges and opportunities offered by graduate studies, individuals equip themselves with the knowledge, skills, and networks to thrive in their chosen fields and make lasting contributions.

➢ *Developed Intervention Program:*

- *Process Improvement Plan for Thriving Graduate School Students Rationale.*

The researcher came up with this Process Improvement Plan based on the findings and result of this study. The Process Improvement Plan composed of the Key Resource Areas (challenges), objectives, strategies, resources, and person-in-charge. In the first column, the problems, and objectives that the graduate school students encountered are enumerated. The second column suggests the strategies or the solution to the problems and challenges. Third, are the objectives which elaborate the purpose of strategies to be conducted. Fourth, are the resources to be used to conduct the strategy identified. Lastly, these are the persons who are responsible in the conduct of the different suggested strategies.

The conceptualized and developed Process Improvement Plain is believed to be an instrument to improve the journey of graduate and post graduate education journey to become more fruitful and enjoyable even though some educational hassles and hazards occur along the way.

- *General Objective.*
  This will help the graduate school students to address the problems and challenges they encountered.

Table 1 The Matrix of the Process Improvement Plan for Thriving Graduate School Students

Key Resource Areas	Objectives	Strategies	Resources	Person-In- Charge
Balancing Responsibilities	To provide a well-balanced environment for the students	Following time-table towards work and studies Proper scheduling or work-related and student related tasks		
Building Bridges and Connection	To give each student to improve their interpersonal relationships with other students	Establishment of MOA to different learning institutions and communities Participate in the clean up drive and other activities of GSBO activities Participate in the tree planting spearheaded by the GSBO Participation in the coastal clean-up led by the GSBO	Personal expenses	ISPSC admin GSBO and students GS Faculty Other communities
Bringing Positivity	To provide other activities for fun and enjoyment	Joining GSBO activities like seminar workshops, extension activities, intramurals, etc.	2,000.00	GSBO and students GS Faculty Other communities
Acquiring Skills and Knowledge	To develop extension programs in the Graduate School	Participation of extension activities Participation in reading and numeracy extension activities Gift-giving Feeding programs	1,000.00 500.00	GSBO and students GS Faculty Other communities
Striding towards Personality Development	To enhance the skills and widen the competencies of the Graduate School students	Conducting Re-orientation Seminar on Values and Values Restoration Holding Socializations during Christmas and other programs	2,000.00 8,000.00	Dean and Professors Student -Body Organization
Enrolling for Professional Development and Career Progression	To provide quality education to all graduate students	Conducting needed seminars, workshops and trainings for professional development Inviting national and international resource speakers during conferences and seminars Encouraging intensive reporting in the class	P15,000.00 P2,000.00	Guidance Counselor Dean and Professors Student -Body Organization Students Resource Speakers

B. Conclusion

Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College in Tagudin, Ilocos Sur has long been offering graduate studies to the teachers of Tagudin and nearby municipalities. With this long history of the ISPSC in offering graduate studies, dearth of studies pervades. This dearth alongside the interesting nature of thriving in the graduate school served as one of the compelling forces that led to the conceptualization of this study. As such, this study described thriving in the graduate school as it is lived and experienced by students of the graduate school.

The cool and warm analyses of the extended texts revealed the views of graduate school students on thriving in the graduate as they share their lived experiences. The participants acknowledged the challenging nature of thriving in the graduate school. Despite the challenges in the graduate school, the participants still manifested positive views on thriving in the graduate school. In fact, they articulated that thriving in the graduate school as Balancing Responsibilities, Building Bridges and Connection, Bringing Positivity, Acquiring Skills and Knowledge, Striding towards Personality and Development and Enrolling for Professional Development and Career Progression. Evidently, their positive views as a result of their experiences circumvent the challenges they face. Clearly, they demonstrate flexibility, passion, and dedication as they dispense their roles, duties, and responsibilities as graduate school students which led in the formulation of the Process Improvement Plan.

The Process Improvement Plan which resulted from the verbalizations of the participants highlights the vital role of professors and student body in thriving in the graduate school, to help the students.

C. Recommendations

In the light of the findings and conclusions of the study, the study recommends that the Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College and its officials may use the data findings to provide the students with relevant interventions or programs as a way of addressing their challenges. ISPSC Officials may formulate long term Process Improvement Plan that shall solve the identified challenges in the graduate school. The Proposed Process Improvement Plan in thriving in the graduate school may be pilot tested or used for improvement. Further studies should be conducted to test the effectiveness of the proposed plan.

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APPENDIX A

PERMIT TO CONDUCT A STUDY

Republic of the Philippines
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Region I
Schools Division of Ilocos Sur

TAGUDIN DISTRICT
PALLOGAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
School ID 100775

December 13, 2022

JORGE M. REINANTE,CSEE,CEO VI,CESO V
The Schools Division Superintendent
DepEd, Schools Division Office
Bantay, Ilocos Sur

Sir:

Greetings!

The undersigned respectfully requests from your good office to permit him to enroll for masteral course leading to the degree Master of Science in Education at Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College, Tagudin Campus from 1st Semester A.Y. 2022-2023 until such time that he will be able to finish the said course.

Attached herewith are photocopies Undergraduate Official Transcript of Records and General Weighted Average for your perusal.

It is hoped for your kind consideration on this matter.

More power!

Very truly yours,

(Sgd) WINSTON E. PADSING
Teacher I

Recommending Approval:

(Sgd) ROWEL D. GARCIA, EdD
Principal II

Approved:

(Sgd) JORGE M. REINANTE,CSEE,CEO VI,CESO V
Schools Division Superintendent

Appendix B

LETTER REQUEST TO FLOAT THE QUESTIONNAIRE

ILOCOS SUR POLYTECHNIC STATE COLLEGE	Document No.	ISPSC-QAD-F032a
Communication	Revision No.	1
	Effectivity Date:	March 2022
(Internal)	Page No.	1 of 3

OFFICE OF THE CAMPUS ADMINISTRATOR

May 27, 2023

DR. EDERLINA M. SUMAIL
Campus Administrator
ISPSC Tagudin Campus
Tagudin, Ilocos Sur

Ma'am:

Greetings of Peace and Joy!

I am currently conducting a thesis entitle "THRIVING AMONG GRADUATE SCHOOL STUDENTS: THE CASE OF ILOCOS SUR POLYTECHNIC STATE COLLEGE GRADUATE SCHOOL TAGUDIN CAMPUS" as partial fulfillment of the requirements leading to the degree Master of Science in Education major in General Education.

In this regard, may I request permission to administer an interview to the students of Graduate School who are presently enrolled this semester 2022-2023. Rest assured that the data gathered will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

Your kind approval and support to this study is highly appreciated. Thank you very much.

Very truly yours

WINSTON E. PADSING
Researcher

Noted:

TESSIE L. DELA CRUZ, PhD
Adviser/Dean, Graduate School

Approved:

EDERLINA M. SUMAIL, PhD
Campus Administrator

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE DEVELOPMENT

Problem 1: What experiences do graduate school students share about thriving in their degree programs?

Table 2 Interview Guide Development

CONCEPTS	DEFINITION	REFERENCES	A PRIORI CODE	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Experiences (in relation to thriving)	Event or activity that human being undergoes (in relation to thriving)	Kandadi (2019)	Event or Activity	Q1: What are the common events, activities, or happenings in your graduate studies that best illustrate how you thrive? Q2: From these events or activities that you usually encounter, how would you describe a student who is thriving in a graduate school? Q3: In a nutshell, what does thriving within your graduate studies mean based on your experiences?
	Knowledge and skills built up over time doing things	Thorne (2018)	Knowledge and skills	Q4: What knowledge have you gained as you thrive in the Graduate School? Q5: What skills have you gained as you thrive in the Graduate School?

APPENDIX D

AIDE- MÉMOIRE

➢ *Preamble*

Good day to you, I am working on my thesis which is focused on the experiences of graduate school students as they thrive in their degree programs at ISPSC-Tagudin Graduate School. As a vital part of this academic endeavor, I am inviting you for a short activity that will capture your experiences as a student in the graduate school. Your participation in this study will be helpful in describing the picture of graduate school students.

Profile

Your Name: Your age:

Your place of teaching: Years of Teaching Experience:

Level/Grade you teach:

This segment of the interview will account for an in-depth exploration of your experiences as a student in the graduate school. The questions here mainly focus on your experiences.

➢ *Rapport building questions:*

- What makes you enrol in your graduate studies?
- How do you describe your first days as a graduate student?

➢ *Prompt Question*

- What is it like to be a graduate student of ISPSC-Graduate School?

➢ *Experiences in relation to Thriving in a Graduate Program*

- What are the common events, activities, or happenings in your graduate studies that best illustrate how you thrive?
- From these events or activities that you usually encounter, how would you describe a student who is thriving in a graduate school?
- In a nutshell, what does thriving within your graduate studies mean based on your experiences?
- What knowledge have you gained as you thrive in the Graduate School?
- What skills have you gained as you thrive in the Graduate School?

➢ *Note:* The questions enumerated in this *aide- mémoire* serve as a guide of the researcher in interviewing the participants. Follow questions shall be asked to clarify some vague answers of the participants. Notably, open flow of interview shall be observed.

APPENDIX E

COOL ANALYSIS OF EXTENDED TEXTS

SOP 1: What experiences do graduate school students share about thriving their degree programs?

Table 3 Cool Analysis of Extended Texts

Layer of Experience	Themes	Significant Statements
Lived Exeprience of Thriving Graduate School Students	Balancing Responsibilities	"It is my routine as a student of graduate studies that Friday evening is set for graduate studies requirements and paper works, and Saturdays are for graduate studies' classes. As part of my daily activities as a student, it is my responsibility to attend my classes diligently and it was challenging meeting the class on time for my distance from house to school. Considering also the different overlapping activities at work that sometimes affects my class attendance. I am also elected as part of the student leader organization, and it is forepart to consider budgeting some of my time to the different activities of the school student body organization. Expecting from the graduate school education system of ISPSC, we need to sacrifice extra time from our weekdays and Sundays to finish the laborious activities and requirement from the different subjects we are taking (from reporting to research, hands on activities to extension programs). During the online classes, it was exhausting for we need to cope with the classes experiencing the low internet connection and low performance of our technology affecting our class activities. It was also ineffective with collaborative activities with classmates since finding time for peer collaboration was hard to find (co-students also experiencing their own challenges from work's overlapping activities and low connectivity of internet at their respective places). One more thing I am experiencing was my financial capability on financing my school tuition fees and school activities." (T5) "During my first days as a graduate student I feel nervous because I am just a newly graduate of Education and my classmates are now old in their teaching careers. I felt a little bit shy because I don't have yet the experience in the field, but I motivated myself to participate in class discussions and various school activities because I know that it will hone my knowledge and skills." (T6) "My first day in graduate school was quite scary because I stopped for how many years and I did not know what to expect and how to mingle with newly graduates then before. But I survived." (T7) "It's a privilege as well as responsibility. It's our privilege to enroll in an institution where quality educations is offered with minimal fee. A responsibility because Graduate School is more like a job that occupies all your time. You'll spend a great deal of your time working on research or other requirements." (T10)
	Building Bridges and connections	"It is an honor to be a graduate student of ISPSC Graduate School. It widens my horizon not only in the field of teaching but also in my perspective of life. With ISPSC I know that with ISPSC everything is achievable possible." (T1) "I was able to thrive in my Graduate Studies because of supportive classmates and reliable teachers. I was also able to thrive harder because I became an officer in the Graduate School." (T2)

		"Graduate students often have opportunities to present their research findings at conferences, seminars, or departmental events. Thriving graduate students may actively participate in these presentations, showcasing their work, engaging in discussions, and receiving positive feedback from peers and faculty members." (T6)
	Bringing Positivity	"Since I am an alumna of ISPSC it was good to be back in my alma mater. Everything is change but still it never fails me. ISPSC really helped me to become a productive individual not only in the field of teaching but also in my personal life. It made me who I am today." (T1) "I find it very satisfying and at the same time challenging because at first, I focus on reviewing and after the Board Exam I tried to find work." (T2) "I found it very interesting since I am already at a higher level of education though it made me too nervous." (T8) "Based on my experiences, thriving within my graduate studies means fulfillment. Because I am thriving to reach the things I wanted to. I am pursuing my graduate studies for me to improve myself, to help myself advance with my career and to be the person I wanted to be. I thrive to be fulfilled, to be successful one day. With all the experiences, I have realized that for you to meet your goals, you have to take a step and being a graduate student is that another step. Thriving within graduate studies means a step closer to success." (T9) "It was exciting and fun. That was also the time when they first implemented Online Learning in ISPSC because of the pandemic." (T10) "My first day of school in the Graduate school is very happy full of fun and joy to everyone." (T11)
	Acquiring Skills and Knowledge	"I learned in the Graduate School that life is not competition. Patience and Perseverance to continue what you have started. It is about you are going to turn things from impossible to possible that everything is learned and has a solution." (T1) "Scientific approaches, including how to formulate a research question, perform information analysis, study planning and execution, discussion, and publication. This knowledge, together with communication skills and the network constructed in graduate school, will enrich my future career." (T4) "I learn different pedagogical approaches and techniques in teaching from our daily discussions and sharing in class. It widens my horizon in my teaching profession by mastering my profession through different subjects I am taking in this course. I was also able to know the different school cultures and best practices in teaching and managing schools which I can apply in my classroom and in our school. One more thing was that I am capacitated with different research knowledge and skills that will be useful in my daily thriving in my career that for sure in the future will be an asset." (T5)
	Striding towards Personal Development	"I think my communication skills and confidence improved in the Graduate School. I am no longer that shy or afraid to share my thoughts and ideas. All I can say is ISPSC turn me to become a wholesome and enthusiastic person." (T1)

		"These are the skills I gained as I thrive in the Graduate School: Communicating your ideas effectively in different ways and to people with different levels of knowledge, working collaboratively with people from different disciplines and cultures, Being a self-motivated and independent learner and lastly, Being professional in your approach to work." (T4)
	Enrolling for Professional Development and Career Progression	"For me to rebuild myself for professional and personal growth especially now that I am in the field of teaching though it is not required but it is a great help for me to continue our graduate studies especially in terms of promotion and to become a globally innovative and competitive educator." (T1) "My major purpose is enrolling this graduate program may help me to be promoted in the near future. Another is to uplift me and gained more knowledge, insights, and skills. Next is to meet new friends and new faces." (T4) "It is my willingness to enroll graduate studies for the reason of personal and professional growth. It is for my professional growth for I will be able to enhance my mastery towards my teaching profession. It provides me enough confidence to thrive on my daily teaching process for I know I have something that is effective towards learning. With the units I will be earning, I may also use this for my career progression. I also considered my personal growth in my graduate studies for I will be developing my intellectual, social, and emotional aspect of myself. Intellectual for I will be garnering wider aspect of my teaching profession, and most specially how I will live efficiently on this everchanging system of the world. It is for my social aspect because I will be knowing more peers and possible partners/collaborators in my teaching processes and my career. It is also for my emotional aspect because Saturday classes will help me break my routines as a teacher." (T5) "I enrolled in the graduate school, took up Master of Science in Education major in English because it is aligned with my course. Aside from being one of the requirements to enter my permanent position it is also for me to develop and expand my knowledge. (T7)

APPENDIX F

CONSENT FORM

This is research on the experiences of graduate school students of ISPSC-Tagudin Campus. You will be asked to be interviewed in which the interviews will be recorded for more accurate data. All the information will be kept confidential and solely to be used in this research endeavor. The interview could last for an hour. Follow up interviews will also be done during the study.

I understand that I can contact Winston E. Padsing at _____ about any concerns I have about the research.

I understand that participation in this research study is voluntary, and I have the right to stop at any time. By completing the interviews and the observations in my classes, I also state that I am at least 18 of age and a Filipino citizen.

I understand that none of my answers will be released, and no names will be recorded and that risks of participating in the study are minimal. I understand that participating in the study will help the researcher better describe thriving among graduate school.

_____

Signature over printed name of participant