Pandemic Online Learning Experiences of Graduate Students in Education: Motivations, Hurdles, and Coping Strategies

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Abstract
This study describes the graduate students' experiences amidst the hurdles of a covid-19 pandemic in the Philippines, their coping with the varying demands of full-time teaching in the basic education and higher education, tasks and responsibilities in the family, personal, and graduate schooling. Thirty-three education graduate students in a prestigious university in the Philippines were surveyed using online questionnaires and were interviewed via online video chat. These students attended distance online learning classes that were offered in the evenings and weekends beyond office work hours. Manual coding finalized the concepts and themes related to online teaching and learning experience, motivational factors to earn graduate degree and title, perceived academic strengths and values realized in coping with full-time teaching and graduate schooling. The difficulties encountered like attending to immediate needs and concerns, and technological problems like internet connectivity were surpassed with the support from immediate work supervisors, university professors and classmates, and immediate family members and relatives. Findings suggest the interplay of factors like personal and family, work, and the wider community connectedness that leverage the struggles and survival during a trying situation like a pandemic. Findings suggest further the applicability and consistency of graduate students' experiences across university cultures and environments using mixed methods cross-case analysis, comparing reflective dialogue before, during, and after a global health-related ordeal that helps in understanding graduate schooling and redesigning graduate programs evaluation approaches.

Keywords: online teaching, graduate schooling, motivation, strengths, values

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Introduction

Graduate students in education are mostly basic education teachers, college and university instructors, and school administrators The pandemic brought about major adjustments both in the work of the graduate students as teachers and in their learning experiences as a student. Graduate degrees and continuing research in education are encouraged among educators in the Philippines for career advancement and promotion.

In the Philippines, graduate programs enhance the culture of research with a substantial research component for masters and advance research qualifications and submission of research work of publishable quality (Philippines CHED Memo #15, 2019). As quality research outputs are expected among graduate students, the covid-19 pandemic posed great challenges and limitations especially when data gathering is limited to available research participants who are willing to accomplish the online google questionnaires and have stable internet access to participate in online interviews.

Research on the impact of the covid-19 pandemic includes effects on teaching and learning (Schleicher, 2020; Pokhrell & Chhetri, 2021), impact on students' emotional and psychological experiences (Kee, 2021), issues, problems, challenges among students and teachers due to covid-19 (Tria, 2020; Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Marqueza et al, 2020), the importance of instructional technology on pedagogy and educational activities (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Diaz et al, 2020; Beane, 2020; Gantner & Campbell, 2020), the e-learning and entirely distance learning during the covid-19 pandemic (Dhawan, 2020; Mulyani, et al, 2021; education union response to covid-19, 2020) and influence on the higher education sector as well (UNESCO IESALC technical team report, 2020). Reports reveal that the educational crisis in 188 countries becomes worst (United Nations, 2020) in which ninety percent of the learners are affected worldwide (Education International Research, 2020).

This researcher found limited research on the graduate students 'coping with the demands of graduate studies and full-time e-teaching during a pandemic. Zahneis & Williams (2020) reported that graduate students found themselves confronted with the challenges of navigating a new educational environment both in teaching and learning and trying to maintain productivity in a time of social unrest during the global public-health crisis, thereby affecting mental health. The graduate students' coping strategies in their online learning experience include acceptance of virtual teaching and learning, coping with the experiences of disappointments, loss of power and control, feelings of anxiety and fear, and seeking relief (Kee, 2021).

This study focused on the first-hand experiences of students pursuing graduate degrees in education who amidst the many concerns like full-time teaching in basic education and higher education were able to surpass the hurdles owing to the motivating factors, academic strengths and values realized as they reflect on their experiences. Themes generated from concepts that are grounded

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on the data were unique shared experiences that were discussed along with the extant literature.

Methodology

This study used a convergent parallel mixed-method design in which both qualitative and quantitative data were obtained, analyzed, and synthesized to gain a more complete picture and a better understanding of the graduate students' experiences. Thirty-three students who were enrolled in the different graduate courses such as research seminar in education, qualitative educational evaluations, quantitative research methodologies, and other research-related courses that were offered in the evenings and weekends after their full-time teaching works, volunteered to share their experiences via emailed questionnaires with closed-form and open-ended items. All the graduate courses were online because of a pandemic. Responses to the questionnaire were followed-up through an invitation to participate in the individual interviews via video and audio chat and meetings via zoom. Participation in the interview was entirely voluntary with the assurance of anonymity and confidentiality. The data were discarded once they were analyzed for security purposes.

Questionnaire items focused on students' experiences of online teaching and learning during a pandemic, the motivating factors to conduct and finish graduate course research paper, academic strengths and values learned and realized in coping with the online classes during a pandemic. The education graduate students were further interviewed to get the context of their answers, to elaborate on their responses in the questionnaire administered online.

Theoretical sampling with more data collected to further refine themes was applied. (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Birks and Mills, 2015; Denzin and Lincoln, 2015). Ethical considerations such as respect for individual opinions, identities concealed and anonymity secured, and data privacy and confidentiality were strictly observed.

Coded responses to the open-ended questionnaires and informal online interviews via video chat identified recurring keywords and phrases and provided categories and concepts about graduate schooling experiences during the covid-19 pandemic. Member-checking was done to clarify with the participants the interview notes after an iterative process of data analysis.

Results and Findings

Questions like "*how do you find your full-time teaching and attending graduate schooling at the same time during a pandemic? what motivates you to finish your final research paper in an online class amidst a pandemic? what did you learn about yourself, your academic strengths and values in attending an online course during a pandemic*?" spawned categories of responses that formed concepts and generated themes. A deeper understanding of the stories about graduate schooling experiences during the covid-19 pandemic shed light on the importance of motivation and determination to survive and succeed, and earn

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graduate degrees be it masters or doctoral. It redounded to student-teacher/professor relationship and connectedness, support of family members, immediate relatives, present work supervisor, and colleagues as important to thrive in the challenging experiences of the students given various concerns like work-related, family, health, and personal concerns. The following discussions are divided into themes particularly the synchronous and asynchronous online teaching and learning experience, motivating factors amidst trials and difficulties during the pandemic, and academic strengths and values realized in coping with graduate schooling during the covid-19 pandemic.

In online learning mode either asynchronous or synchronous, students and teachers interact virtually with the use of technology such as laptops, personal computers, cellphones, or tablets via internet connection (Wa-Mbaleka, 2020). Some synchronous delivery can become asynchronous like chat and conversation which uses the internet and telephonic communication that can be saved and used for future discussions. Instructional technology played a major role in pedagogy and educational activities (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Diaz et al, 2020; Beane, 2020; Gantner & Campbell, 2020). Attendance and participation in the synchronous or asynchronous online learning mode were influenced by the graduate students' preoccupations as both full-time teachers, and many as full-time parents attending to their students and their children, respectively.

1. Synchronous and asynchronous online teaching and learning experience

The students expressed that synchronous online class sessions promoted collaborative real-time learning, deeper understanding of unfamiliar topics, and helped address right away similar concerns and issues most importantly the graduate course research paper. The sessions enhanced critical thinking and active listening among students as the professor's facilitated discussion encouraged sharing of experiences and stimulated ideas and chain of ideas related to course goals and objectives, topics, lessons, assessments, and accomplishment of course requirements. The coded responses regarding synchronous online teaching and learning generated the following themes such as immediate feedback and advice in writing a course research paper, facilitating compliance with the course requirements, and easing technology discomfort in an online classroom.

a. Immediate feedback and advice in writing a course research paper

Almost all the participants mentioned that real-time sharing of ideas, thoughts, and experiences among classmates and the professor helped in writing the current course research paper. The synchronous session was an occasion for them to clarify with the professor things they feel so unsure of like the data collection procedures and other research writing-related matters. The students exerted and spent more time in accomplishing the course research paper. They expressed the need for guidance and advice regarding urgent and immediate concerns in the conduct of the research. In the graduate research courses, the professor supervised closely the research process including formulation of

specific research questions anchored on the research topic, framing theoretical framework, research instrumentation, online data gathering, online interviewing with the participants, data analysis until the writing stage of the final research paper.

Students A, D, and L mentioned: "*the real-time sharing and discussion of experiences greatly helps, the applications and relatable examples help clarify some misconceptions, therefore help me write my paper better.*" Similarities among the responses of Students V, W, X, Y, AB, AC, and AD were noted that collective and common understanding of the research process was made possible in the synchronous class session. "*It was made clear to us the accuracy of procedures we used, the data analysis, so gaining much insights from the discussion, explanations of my professor and classmates*" (Student AB). *I am now relieved of my worries about what I should do regarding the online interview*" (Student V). "*I also have that concern, I worry about the confidentiality of the interviews that the sponsoring institution, my institution would have a way to identify the participant, but I am enlightened now, thank you*" (Student AD). *My concern is, one participant I can no longer reach despite constant follow-up while other participants were very cooperative sharing stories of assisting their children online learning during the pandemic, I don't know how to proceed?*" In this instance, the professor provided guidance, offered possible solutions, and encouraged students to share their insights also regarding the issues and concerns. Students U and Z further mentioned that "*as more ideas we heard, more examples, everything substantial we all wish to share, making us learn more and make the most of our experiences in this virtual classroom.*"

Students B, G, I, and E preferred the synchronous session as they mentioned: "*We miss the kind of interaction with classmates, we love to listen and hear more in synchronous face-to-face online interaction and discussion, we have so many questions to ask, we need guidance, whenever we listen on how our professor responded to the queries of classmates, we learn all the more.*" Student R shared that, "*Listening to the presentation of my classmates made me think of my research paper and invite us all to share our paper too.*" The participants further reiterated the importance of synchronous sessions as understanding the reading topics and the references together with their classmates and professor became more meaningful and insightful.

b. Facilitate compliance with the course requirements and research paper

Real-time active and interactive discussion deemed it important as graduate students attend to duties and responsibilities in their full-time teaching works and their families are concerned about doing and finishing their course research paper because graduate program courses are research-oriented. Direct quotations that supported this claim were as follows: Student M stated: "*It is harder to study alone without the real-time feedbacking by the instructor and classmates. Reading is one method of learning, discussing the readings with my professor and classmates is enhancing, the social interaction and exchange of*

ideas fostered further intellectual growth in me, in synchronous sessions, questions are raised, more questions, more learning happens." On some occasions, students raised concerns about the course requirements specifically the major research paper that was expected and demanded as evidence of research capability among graduate students. This was reflected in the following direct quotations. "*Ma'am, can we move the submission deadlines of the research paper? I hope you understand us, we also have deadlines in our school, so many papers to submit to our coordinators and principal, attending online meetings, conferences, seminars, talking to parents, faculty meetings*" (Student M). Almost all students expressed similar concerns during the synchronous session and apparently, the professor was open to settling the matters thereby resulting in mutual understanding and agreement to adjust the deadlines considering that professor's concerns such as the university grade submission deadlines, the number of course load, and the number of students to attend to.

The real-time student-professor consultations during synchronous sessions promoted a positive classroom atmosphere that fostered among students the desire to comply with the requirements and to finish and submit a quality research paper. "*We come to know and understand each other better when we have this kind of discussion, especially providing us clear directions on how to cope with the course requirements in this very hard semester, to produce quality research papers despite the difficult situation we are experiencing*" (Student Q). This scenario showed that both the students and the professor struggled to cope with the demands of online instruction during the pandemic. The synchronous online sessions settled the compelling matters and provided direction and guidance to address immediate concerns.

c. Easing technology discomfort in an online classroom

Twenty-one participants who considered themselves average to below-average technology users felt uncomfortable with the online classroom where interaction with classmates took place as they called it "*laptop screen interaction*." The feeling of discomfort and uneasiness diminished slowly as they became comfortable with the setup. They considered the situation as "*no choice but embrace*."

Both the professor and students observed the eagerness among the participants in the online classroom that resulted in lively, fruitful discussion and dynamic learning particularly conducting research during the pandemic. Live on the laptop screen, and missing the face-to-face physical classroom, students I and N mentioned, "*this discussion is more interesting in the physical classroom, I miss that*" which all members of the class agreed. "*Very lively discussion though we are all on our laptop screen, we are getting used to this, very uncomfortable at first, but no other ways really, no choice but to try to contribute to a rich, interesting discussion. Well, that's how this should be, embrace the situation*" (Students AE, AF, and AG). *Of course, there will always be the first time, I mean the first time having this entirely online classes, it's ok the blended, some*

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occasions online and meeting in the classroom to discuss things, it's different the physical presence discussion" (Student AF).

As earlier discussed, the synchronous session enhanced interactive learning among students and provided immediate feedback on urgent concerns in doing research. However, problems like internet connectivity, work-related and family concerns during the pandemic were impediments to attending the synchronous online class sessions, thus the asynchronous modality was deemed useful for many students. In asynchronous online learning, the communication stored on the internet was made available and can be accessed when the instructor or learner is ready, or when the information is needed (Mehrotra et al., 2001; Simonson et al., 2000; Wahlstrom et al., 2003), and may require the use of printed materials, audiotapes, videocassette recordings, radio and educational television systems, electronic files on magnetic or optical media, list servers, bulletin boards or discussion groups (Yates & Tilson, 2000). In this study, recorded meetings and zoom conferences were sent to students via emails. Coursepack, learning materials, other documents including announcements and reminders were also sent via emails and uploaded in the google classroom. Students' responses regarding the usefulness of asynchronous online teaching and learning generated themes as convenient, conducive, self-directed online learning enhancement during a pandemic.

d. Convenient, conducive, self-directed online learning enhancement during a pandemic

The asynchronous sessions were not in itself very favorable as some students still preferred the synchronous real-time discussion but the positive thing about it as students expressed was the self-directed learning enhancement as a characteristic worthy of graduate students. Graduate students considered themselves autonomous readers, self-directed learners, dedicated, independent, and responsible for their learning and working on research papers. "*There are course topics that can be easily followed using the references. I believe that actual research is asynchronous learning just what we did, flexibility with time puts more quality on the research. We can manage to do research tasks by ourselves, individual consultations with the professor would be enough"* (Student AG). On some occasions, students and the professor experienced intermittent, unstable internet connections thus, those information and course materials uploaded and saved on the internet platforms like google classroom were useful, proven effective, and convenient for asynchronous online learning. "*I am anxious about this internet, I lost connection in the middle of the zoom meeting session, I just have to rely on the recorded sessions and learning materials stored on the internet, but I am learning very helpful as well, we are expected to be independent learners anyway"* (Student AE). The course pack was made available to students a week before the start of the semester that contained weekly activities, a list of assignments and expected output, rules and regulations for compliance with the course research paper and related requirements, references, and external links.

This gave the students ample time to peruse and express course-related concerns, pressing work-related and family concerns.

There were several factors the students considered motivating that contributed to survival in the online graduate schooling during a pandemic with all the hurdles along the way. These included the strong desire to earn a graduate degree and title, publication of course research papers relevant to teaching work, immediate people support, and the professor's traits and communication. "*The concern and response of the people, big or small, are very important, my children, my whole family, colleagues, and the professor always there for us*" (Student AF). They tried to reflect on their experiences, how they managed to hang on and embraced the reality with the hurdles that made them even more determined and strong.

2. Motivating factors and coping with the pandemic

A large number of students experienced difficulties and limitations during the covid-19 pandemic online learning besides internet connection problems, constraints in the conduct of course research papers, coordinating with the research participants, and limited research data collection. The accomplishment of the course requirements amid the global pandemic was made possible with a strong focus and desire to earn a graduate degree, and the dream to have the graduate title. The students mentioned that the hurdles in attending online graduate research courses were so overwhelming with the pressing need to prioritize the family and work. The support and assistance of the people including their relatives, friends, and the professor lightened the load and made them conquer the seemingly unbearable ordeal. "*Everyone has been preoccupied adjusting to new normal education, unfamiliar virtual landscape, accessing the internet, attending to various duties and responsibilities in the family, work, graduate course requirements have been so taxing*" (Student A). *A hard semester really during the pandemic, the adjustment I have to make, transitioning to online teaching and learning, working alone and feeling left-out, uncertainties, anxieties, stress, internet fatigue, all those things because of a pandemic, but no other way out, I need to survive*" (Student O). *Accomplishing the research paper during the pandemic was a challenge, if not covid-19, an online course is a good, potential opportunity to do research* (Student J).

a. Strong desire to earn graduate degree and title

Some students were almost done with the required academic courses in their respective graduate programs before thesis writing, while others were midway. The strong desire to pursue and earn a graduate degree and title for career advancement and professional growth were driving forces to survive the hurdles of an online remote classroom during the covid-19 pandemic. Looking at reality in the graduate school framework and pedagogical paradigm enkindled appreciation of being a graduate student, a positive outlook despite difficulties as students G, H, I and O, mentioned, "*becoming a successful professional in*

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prestigious university where everything was laid, education is specialized, expertise evident." Almost all students mentioned, *"becoming successful in my career is challenging, to create a setup making me creative to have rich and enhancing online instruction realistic."* Tantamount to earning a graduate degree is research productivity as graduate research courses entail conducting research and culminating in thesis or dissertation writing. The student's determination to earn a graduate degree title can be attributed to a person's need to make choices and take action. Self-determination theory postulated that a person can manage their own life which is very important to psychological health (Cherry, 2021). Finishing a degree and the determination to contribute to an area of specialization through research reflect a personal decision and need to make a difference in the teaching profession. People usually are driven by a need to gain fulfillment and grow (Deci and Ryan, 1985) in the situation where they are in. A sense of accomplishment and fulfillment in one's career is like a panacea to dwindling psychological health during a pandemic.

b. Publication of course research paper relevant to teaching

The graduate program requires high competencies in knowledge production in the form of research, application, and utilization (CHED Memo #15, series 2019). The relevance of course research papers to full-time teaching work and the entire school system is very important with the support of the school's administrators, immediate supervisor, and colleagues. *New insights I learned in conducting my research are important to my work, the new experiences improve my skills and effectiveness in my work* (Student AD). *I was eager to learn the steps on how to conduct an assessment, the research paper I am doing is of most value to me* (Student I). *As a college instructor, the results of my research paper in this time of pandemic would be useful, significant contribution, applicability to my present work, provide documentation in our institution that can be used as inputs for remote learning* (Student B). *My research paper contributes to an efficient and effective program amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, the outcome of my study is helpful to my teaching jobs* (Student R). Most of the student's course research papers were commissioned by their institution. Others mentioned that the researches were related to their institution's educational programs and meaningful to accomplish. The students tried to find meaning in their research endeavors which they considered a form of self-actualization. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, self-actualization is the second to the highest growth needs (McLeod, 2020). The uniqueness of each individual leads to different directions as they are motivated to self-actualize (Kenrick et al, 2010). The graduate students found themselves navigating every possible means to finish the course research paper amidst the pressing concerns in the family and work.

c. Immediate people support

Support from people alleviated the seemingly negative experiences due to the covid-19 pandemic. Student K mentioned: *My immediate work supervisor and*

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colleagues supported me, school administrators, and co-teachers, the encouragement of our university dean made things possible for me during these hard times. With the help of my colleagues, I was able to pursue all the processes involved in conducting research. Family and immediate relatives' support contribute significantly to the accomplishment of course works and final papers. "*I am with my family in the accomplishment of course research, their perseverance, moral support, initiative, and finding solutions to my problems"* (Student T). The concerted effort and support of immediate work supervisor and colleagues, relatives and friends, and course professor alleviated if not surpassed the problems and difficulties during a covid-19 pandemic. Ryan and Deci (2000) alluded to the tendency of the person to become either passive or proactive which is influenced by their interactions with people in the community, the present social conditions, and the people support around. Social connectedness and relationships foster self-determination and motivation to become productive, effective, and make a difference in society. Field and Hoffman (cited in Morgan & Williams, 2017) stated that self-determination is a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs toward goal-directed, self-regulated, and autonomous behavior.

d. Professor's traits and communication mode

The online learning during the covid-19 pandemic strengthened the student-professor relationship as understanding and empathy deepened through sharing of experiences, concerns, and struggles to survive and succeed. The online classroom atmosphere fostered spontaneity, interactive and collaborative discussion, sharing of thoughts, ideas, and experiences. The course professor traits and good rapport with students encourage the accomplishment of course requirements and the research paper. In the study, the online survey included items that determined performance and behavior indicators related to professors' traits and communication during the time of the pandemic. The students were asked to rate the items from 4 as very high agreement (VHA) down to 1 as very high disagreement. (VHD). The weighted averages and corresponding interpretations are shown in table 1.

Table 1. Online Professor's Traits and Communication

Item	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
Encourages participation during a synchronous online session	3.76	Very high agreement
Provides references, external links, and online referrals to facilitate the accomplishment of research paper	3.76	Very high agreement
Provides immediate and prompt response to inquiry/question related to research	3.69	Very high agreement
Encourages independent and self-directed	3.69	Very high

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learning		agreement
Responds promptly in asynchronous consultation via emails and text messaging	3.66	Very high agreement
Helps identify a research topic and specific problems	3.64	Very high agreement
Provides synchronous and asynchronous activities in support of research paper	3.50	Very high agreement
Available during synchronous consultation via zoom, video calls, and regular phone calls	3.33	High agreement
Provides immediate feedback to research paper	3.04	High agreement

Responses to the 9-item short online survey were followed-up in the open-ended items as "*how do you find your online research professor*" and the informal chat during an online interview. A student mentioned that the traits of the professor helped and motivated them to survive and succeed in graduate school during the pandemic. Notable traits of the professor were making himself available for consultation, providing encouraging feedback that inspired the students to strive for the best, being supportive, helpful, and exhibiting patience to accommodate and address the concerns of the students.

e. Encouraging and inspiring

The following direct quotations showed how the professor was able to inspire the students to cope with the difficulties and comply with the course research paper. *I enjoyed doing the course requirements on my own, though adjusting to this covid-19 learning mode, we could not expect ourselves to deliver the same results as before the pandemic* (Student B). *Even though you experience poor internet connectivity at times, your passion and drive towards your profession are inspiring. The feedback I received kept me going, drives me more to accomplish the task willing to listen and help regarding our concerns, very cool, shared interesting stories and experiences, encouraging, motivating* (Student D).

f. Accommodating and available for consultation

The students took delight in how the professor managed to attend to the consultation needs even beyond the official schedules. *It is a WOW! when the professor responds to my concerns even weekends, even the wee hour of the day, it was a welcoming atmosphere, the distance does not matter at all* (Student P). *Very accommodating, available in addressing our needs, to guide us in making research, always ready for a consultation I appreciate how you (the professor) give time for individual and group consultations* (Student A).

g. Supportive, considerate, patient, understanding

Students' expectations of their professors were more intricate and demanding during a pandemic. The understanding, support, and patience accorded to them were greatly appreciated. They felt strengthened when given enough consideration and provided support in any form.

The admirable values of the professor are apparent, very patient and understanding of our concerns and predicaments, seemingly endless patience in an unprecedented semester, considerate, willing to make necessary adjustments in paper submission, ... my engagement is still very evident even my delays in submission of assignments as the professor understood my concerns and queries (Students Z, AA, AB, AD). *It was reassuring to accomplish the paper with the professor's kind, calm, and mild demeanor assured me that we could still make learning meaningful even if our current situation is unforgiving* (Student J). *I deeply appreciate the reference books, resources, and external links provided online. The format provided by the professor help me a lot to shape the overall content of my research paper. My motivation to learn more becomes greater as I explored and discovered other means and resources, lecture videos that explained the topics well and made me search for other new sources* (Student S).

Interesting experiences of graduate students revealed active and constant communication with the professor in the accomplishment of a research paper. The support of significant people during the covid-19 pandemic revealed insightful meanings relative to coping and motivation in online learning. Concomitant to motivating factors to succeed and survive the online learning during the pandemic were students' academic strengths and values learned and realized along the process of accomplishing course requirements and final research paper.

3. Academic strengths and values learned during the covid-19 pandemic

In conducting and finalizing course research papers and accomplishing other requirements, graduate students discovered that they can become better or even best online learners. They realized they have all these academic strengths and values to survive the ordeals during a pandemic. Among the questions asked in the online open-ended survey was, *"what do you think are your academic strengths and values that contributed to your survival and success in the online learning during this covid-19 pandemic?"* Random online interviews with the willing participants revealed academic strengths and values such as creativity, innovativeness, and resourcefulness, patience, humility, and self-affirmation, time management, and setting priority. These were evident during the informal sharing as shown in the following utterances.

a. Creativity, Innovativeness, Resourcefulness

Although all students mentioned that being creative, innovative, and resourceful strengthened their resolve to do quality research papers while keeping faithful and effective to their responsibilities at home and in full-time teaching, there were utterances noteworthy to mention. *I discovered that I can be very creative, innovative, resourceful, in coping with the limitations and*

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challenges like poor, weak internet connection, dealing with my children who are having difficulty as well, demanding my attention and time, preparing modules for my students, all these things (Student J). *I learned to maximize the available resources, trying to inspire my children to become creative and resourceful as well, and my students to make use of their potentials, also coping with the new normal* (Student P). *My problem-solving skills are tested, I used strategic thinking on how to hurdle the semester, I could use self-regulation, develop my ICT and tech skills, google forms, and other online platforms, self-mastery is one of the valuable things I learned* (Student M).

b. **Patience, humility, and self-affirmation**

Other remarkable strengths and values discovered were humility and acceptance of one's limitations, becoming an extra patient with the self and the people around, and being appreciative of accomplishments big or small, the students mentioned the importance of self-affirmation to be able to hang and carry on. *The pandemic made me humble to my knees, I am after all limited, I need to be patient with myself, with the people around me, perseverance and endurance is a key to survive and succeed despite difficulties encountered, I did not give up and kept on moving to each phase in conducting research, patience and greater amount of commitment are valuable traits to finish the course paper* (Student J). *I tried to understand and I affirmed myself, I realized that I have been doing great, coping in this covid-19 pandemic, moving forward, being grateful and appreciative of the available resources, to appreciate my accomplishments big or small* (Student M).

c. **Time management and setting priority**

Coping with the vast tasks and responsibilities, the students mentioned the importance of setting priorities, reflecting on what is the most urgent and compelling tasks, managing the time wisely when the luxury of time was impossible. *With the ever-changing schedules due to pandemics, I reflect on what to prioritize, what is urgent, what is needed, to provide time to my family, my work, and do the graduate course requirements. The ability to manage time, avoid distractions as confined in the home, a balance between work and studies, and set priorities* (Student B). *Cognitive and affective learning balances, managing home, work, and studies, I have learned to value and manage my time, do multi-tasking because of works, flexibility, and adaptability to adjust to new normal* (Student J).

Simply put, the academic strengths discussed pertained to creativity, innovativeness, and resourcefulness in times of scarcity as regards the available learning resources at home and what the internet could provide. The graduate students tried to teach their children and students through examples of how they managed to cope with the limitations. They showed that hurdles can be turned around to opportunities to become better and even the best students. The value of

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patience, humility, and self-affirmation were strong points to consider to surmount the seemingly impossible situations. Judicious time management and setting priorities were crucial when confronted with the pile and sometimes conflicting duties and responsibilities in the family, work, and studies, as proven evident in times of crises. Cherry (2021) stated that people take action and are motivated when they are aware of their skills, particularly their strengths needed to achieve their goals and become successful. All these things redound to the training of the mind and character as beneficial for survival during a health-related crisis such as the pandemic.

Conclusion and Discussion

Findings highlight central themes that emerged from uniquely graduate students' voluntary sharing of experiences associated with survival and success in the graduate school online instruction during the covid-19 pandemic. Attending to overlapping concerns such as full-time teaching and family duties and responsibilities influences students' preference for online learning modalities, motivating factors, and academic strengths and values realized amidst the travails and challenges in online instruction during the pandemic. Literature mentioned the overlapping responsibilities of graduate students that added to overwhelming stress during a pandemic like teaching and attending to the undergraduates, working with colleagues and faculty members on collaborative research, continuing their research, and dealing with their own families (Smith & Ogilvie, as mentioned in Zahneis and Williams, 2020). The challenging experiences of teachers and students, and the entire education sector as they transition to entirely remote learning during the pandemic produced a wide spectrum of concerns and realizations such as the alternative but effective learning pathways to guarantee access to quality education, (Kee, 2021; Marqueza et al, 2020; Pokhrell & Chhetri, 2021; Schleicher, 2020; Tria, 2020; Education International Research Survey report, 2020) instructional technology utilization, fully digitalized remote online teaching and learning, sophisticated yet affordable education software as the ultimate solutions (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Beane, 2020; Dhawan, 2020; Espino-Diaz et al, 2020; Mulyani, et al, 2021), the significant role of instructor personality and identity (Waldeck, Johnson, & LaBelle, 2020), the needs of students during the online instruction (Norell, 2020), and the merit and worth of connectedness and support from significant people to sustain the holistic instruction during global ordeals such as the covid-19 pandemic.

Graduate programs underscored the importance of research capability and productivity (Nasser & Majdob, 2017; CHED No. 15, series 2019), and academic courses entail research works. Findings have important implications on the graduate school learning framework and pedagogy with a strong focus on research capability and productivity. Motivating factors to survive and succeed in graduate schooling during a pandemic include the strong desire to finish a graduate degree and earn a title, and course research paper relevance to current teaching work. Intrinsic motivation includes seeing research as a vehicle for professional

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development (Nasser & Majdob, 2017). People support, and professors' traits and communication are crucial to success in the online learning during pandemic. Credible instructors care about students' concerns, establish communication with students as a central role in learning (Waldeck, Johnson, & LaBelle, 2020), and focus on what students need (Norell, 2020).

Collaborative mutual learning and active discussion, immediate feedback, and guidance on the research paper are the benefits of synchronous online learning mode. The positive thing about asynchronous online learning is self-directed learning enhancement and the best alternative when attendance in synchronous online is difficult and limited due to conflicting work schedules and intermittent internet connections.

The hurdles during covid-19 remote online learning like internet access, limited resources and accessibility, screen fatigue, and information overload are also mentioned in the literature (Gantner & Campbell, 2020; Mulyani et al, 2021). Perceived academic strengths and values made possible the accomplishment of the research paper and redound to the training of the mind and character as beneficial for survival in the covid-19 pandemic. Self-discipline, self-affirmation, humility and being appreciative, and eagerness to learn are valuable traits to cope with challenging situations. Patience, perseverance, and endurance help bridge any gap in online research data gathering and communication with the research participants. Innovativeness, resourcefulness, creativity, independence, committed and being dynamic are strengths and values needed to survive in graduate school. Time management and setting priorities balance the duties and responsibilities in the family, work, and graduate studies. The study underscored flexibility and adaptability to adjust to new normal education platforms.

Future research may further explore the in-depth experiences of graduate students using mixed methods cross-case analysis across school cultures and environments. Comparative reflective dialogue regarding experiences prior, during, and after global health-related crisis would illuminate a better and effective approach in understanding the phenomenon of graduate schooling toward effective graduate program evaluation.***

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