SATISFACTION AND GRADUATE SCHOOL EXPERIENCES: ANALYSIS OF ACADEMIC QUALITY, SUPPORT SYSTEMS, AND MENTORING PRACTICES

SATISFAÇÃO E EXPERIÊNCIAS DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO: ANÁLISE DA QUALIDADE ACADÊMICA, SISTEMAS DE APOIO E PRÁTICAS DE MENTORIA

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Abstract

Student feedback is an important indicator of program performance, and graduate education is an important avenue for career advancement. With a special focus on academic program quality, institutional support, and the entire graduate experience, this study explored how satisfied master's and doctoral students were at a public university. It aimed to determine satisfaction levels, differences by program type, and the relationship among satisfaction domains using a mixed-method convergent parallel design that combined a quantitative descriptive–correlational survey with qualitative thematic analysis. It was guided by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, SERVQUAL, and Tinto's Student Integration Theory. Eighty-three students from education, business, engineering, computer technology, and physical education programs participated (61 Master's and 22 Doctoral). Qualitative responses were thematically analyzed using Saldaña's coding and Braun & Clarke's framework, while

Resumo

O feedback dos alunos é um indicador importante do desempenho do programa, e a pós-graduação é um importante caminho para o avanço na carreira. Com foco especial na qualidade acadêmica do programa, no apoio institucional e em toda a experiência de pós-graduação, este estudo explorou a satisfação de alunos de mestrado e doutorado em uma universidade pública. O objetivo foi determinar os níveis de satisfação, as diferenças por tipo de programa e a relação entre os domínios de satisfação, utilizando um delineamento paralelo convergente de métodos mistos que combinou uma pesquisa quantitativa descritiva-correlacional com análise temática qualitativa. O estudo foi guiado pela Teoria Sociocultural de Vygotsky, SERVQUAL e pela Teoria da Integração Estudantil de Tinto. Participaram 83 alunos dos programas de educação, administração, engenharia, tecnologia da computação e educação física (61 de mestrado e 22 de doutorado). As respostas qualitativas

quantitative data were examined with descriptive statistics, Mann-Whitney U tests, and Kendall's tau-b correlation. The results demonstrated high satisfaction across domains, particularly in instruction, research mentoring, and library support, while academic responsiveness, online platforms, and timely grade submission were areas for improvement. There were no significant differences between the PhD and master's groups. A correlation study showed that overall satisfaction, institutional support, and academic quality were strongly correlated. These findings were supported by qualitative data, which also revealed issues with adviser availability and administrative delays while pointing out the advantages of faculty collaboration, mentoring, and assistance. In summary, graduate students expressed a high level of satisfaction in general; however, to maintain academic quality and improve graduate output, ongoing improvements in digital assistance, faculty participation, and administrative efficiency are necessary.

Keywords: Graduate School. Student Satisfaction. Academic Quality. Institutional Support. Mentoring.

foram analisadas tematicamente utilizando a codificação de Saldaña e o modelo de Braun & Clarke, enquanto os dados quantitativos foram examinados com estatística descritiva, testes U de Mann-Whitney e correlação tau-b de Kendall. Os resultados demonstraram alta satisfação em todos os domínios, particularmente em ensino, orientação em pesquisa e suporte bibliotecário, enquanto a capacidade de resposta acadêmica, as plataformas online e a entrega pontual de notas foram áreas que precisam ser aprimoradas. Não houve diferenças significativas entre os grupos de doutorado e mestrado. Um estudo de correlação mostrou que a satisfação geral, o suporte institucional e a qualidade acadêmica estavam fortemente correlacionados. Essas descobertas foram corroboradas por dados qualitativos, que também revelaram problemas com a disponibilidade de orientadores e atrasos administrativos, ao mesmo tempo em que apontaram as vantagens da colaboração, orientação e assistência do corpo docente. Em resumo, os alunos de pós-graduação expressaram um alto nível de satisfação em geral; no entanto, para manter a qualidade acadêmica e melhorar a produção da pós-graduação, são necessárias melhorias contínuas na assistência digital, na participação do corpo docente e na eficiência administrativa.

Palavras-chave: *Pós-Graduação. Satisfação Do Aluno. Qualidade Acadêmica. Suporte Institucional. Mentoria.*

1 INTRODUCTION

For graduate school programs to truly provide quality education and enriching experiences, students must be well-prepared, and policies must be implemented. Graduate education can help individuals secure a better future, achieve career advancement, and make meaningful contributions to society and the university that shapes them. This is why it is important to understand how satisfied graduating students are, especially at the point of exit, when their opinions are based on their whole experience. These can help improve academic quality, supervision, and student services.

Recent studies show that most postgraduate students are generally satisfied, but weak spots remain. Areas like progress through the program, sense of community, and support services often feel the strain of challenges such as the high cost of living and mixed online and in-person learning (Advance HE, 2024). Because of this, checking student satisfaction at the program level can reveal which parts are working well and which need more attention. Previous reports show that student satisfaction depends on many connected factors. The quality of the academic program, such as a clear curriculum and fair assessment, strongly influences how students see the value of their studies (Haverila *et al*., 2021). Modern facilities and clear policies, along with the support provided by the university, contributed a lot to making the students successful, as identified in the study of Mendoza *et al*. (2024). Tikkanen *et al*. (2024) and Wu *et al*. (2024) reiterated that when it comes to supervision, timely feedback, availability of supervisors, and helping students are considered very important. Studies with bigger populations also found that supervisor and financial support may affect doctoral students' satisfaction and productivity by keeping them academically and socially engaged (Feizi *et al*., 2023). On the other hand, good mentoring helps students level up their confidence in their research skills and prepares them better for professional careers (Amador-Campos *et al*., 2023).

Although there are minor shortcomings in terms of facilities, studies in the Philippines, such as Pizarro (2019), indicate that universities strongly support graduate school students. On the other hand, Pontillas (2024) also conducted a study on the experiences of graduate school students. The findings revealed that while some challenges were encountered, proper adherence to processes and strong institutional support extensively addressed these issues. Despite these advances, several gaps remain. First, many studies examine single predictors (e.g., supervision or services) rather than integrating academic program quality, institutional support, and the overall learning environment within one graduate student satisfaction model. Secondly, the previous study was limited in using a mixed-method design, in which students' experiences were gathered and thematically analyzed, but their readiness for academic writing was not considered yet (Grohnert *et al*., 2024).

Addressing these gaps is significant for institutional leaders and program chairs. Integrating thematic analysis and mentoring while examining different programs and disciplines is indispensable to understanding the research thoroughly. Guided by this

rationale, the study aims to determine the extent of satisfaction of graduating master's and doctoral students with academic quality, institutional support, and the overall graduate experience, and to test differences and relationships among key variables.

Specifically, this paper will answer the following research questions

1. What is the level of satisfaction of graduate students in terms of:

a. Academic program quality

b. Institutional support and responsiveness

c. Overall graduate school experience and learning environment

2. Are there significant differences in graduate students' satisfaction levels according to their program level?

3. Is there a significant relationship between satisfaction with institutional support and overall graduate school experience and learning environment?

4. Is there a significant relationship between satisfaction with academic program quality and the overall graduate experience?

5. How do students describe their thesis/dissertation mentoring experience?

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study draws upon three key theoretical foundations: Tinto's Student Integration Theory (1993), Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), and the SERVQUAL Model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985). Tinto emphasizes academic and social integration as crucial to persistence and satisfaction. In this study emphasizes that academic and social integration are two aspects of integration that significantly impact students' perseverance and level of satisfaction in higher education. In graduate studies, the overall graduate school experience is shaped by academic program quality and institutional support. Higher satisfaction is more likely to be reported, programs are more readily engaged, and studies are more completed when students are academically and socially supported. Created to gauge customer satisfaction with service quality, the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985), originally designed to measure service quality, is applied here to assess educational services in five simplified dimensions: tangibles (facilities and resources), reliability (consistency of service), responsiveness (prompt assistance), assurance (faculty competence), and empathy (supportive environment). Since institutional responsiveness

frequently predicts students' entire graduate school experience and motivation to achieve, this service-based satisfaction is crucial in professional training. Another theory applied to this study is Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978). Through the idea of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) emphasizes the value of mentorship and social contact in learning. Students who get mentoring or advice from more experienced people attain greater competency levels. Thesis and dissertation mentoring approaches support graduate education, helping students close the gap between their present skill set and what is needed for independent study or professional practice. Thus, healthy mentoring relationships improve students' perceived preparedness for research and professional advancement and increase their satisfaction.

Collectively, these frameworks explain how academic quality, institutional support, and mentoring jointly shape the overall graduate school experience.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-method convergent parallel design, combining a quantitative, descriptive–correlational research design with a qualitative component to examine the extent of satisfaction of graduate students with academic quality, institutional support, and overall graduate experience. This design allows for both the measurement of associations across satisfaction domains and the analysis of students' lived experiences through open-ended responses.

The study population consisted of 83 graduates of master's and doctoral programs from a State University in the Philippines. The sample included two program groups: Master's Programs (n = 61, 73.5%) and Doctor of Philosophy (n = 22, 26.5%). The master's graduates were mainly enrolled in the Master of Arts in Education with various specializations, along with students from the Master in Engineering Program, the Master in Information Technology Management, and the Master of Science in Physical Education. On the other hand, the doctoral graduates were from the PhD programs in Educational Management, Business Administration, and English Language Studies. The survey was conducted online through Google Forms from June to September 2025, ensuring accessibility for all respondents.

The survey instrument used in this study was adapted from established tools that assessed graduate student satisfaction across three domains: academic program quality,

institutional support, and overall graduate experience. Items were contextualized for the Graduate School setting while retaining alignment with validated instruments in the literature. The instrument consisted of two main sections. The first part was quantitative, containing 19 items to assess students' satisfaction with the three domains. Each item employed a five-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 ("Not Satisfied") to 5 ("Extremely Satisfied"). The domains and their corresponding number of items were as follows:

1. Academic Program Quality (9 items) – measuring satisfaction with curriculum content, instructional delivery, relevance of coursework, and research mentoring. This construct draws from studies highlighting the role of curriculum alignment, academic rigor, and research supervision in graduate student satisfaction (Amador-Campos *et al*., 2023; Cutillas *et al*., 2023).

2. Institutional support (5 items) – focusing on administrative services, library and research resources, technological support, and responsiveness of offices to student needs. This domain was grounded on frameworks evaluating service quality and institutional responsiveness in graduate schools (Barrios-Ipenza *et al*., 2024).

3. Overall Graduate Experience (5 items) – covering peer collaboration, academic culture, personal growth, and satisfaction with the overall graduate journey. This domain reflects broader student experience surveys linking mentoring, institutional environment, and perceived program quality to overall satisfaction (Nabi *et al*., 2023).

To establish reliability, a pilot test was conducted with 10 graduate students who completed their degrees in 2022. Using Cronbach's alpha, the instrument yielded an internal consistency coefficient of 0.7867, which is considered acceptable based on the guidelines of Nunnally (1978).

The second part of the survey was qualitative, and the participants were asked to provide written responses to three open-ended questions. These questions asked students to identify the aspects of their graduate program that contributed most to their academic and professional growth, the challenges they encountered that the institution should address, and their suggestions for improving programs and services for future students. All responses were automatically recorded in a spreadsheet through Google Forms. The data were screened and cleaned before analysis to ensure accuracy and reliability. Duplicate responses were removed.

Data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative procedures. Quantitative data were analyzed using Jamovi software. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were computed to provide an overview of satisfaction levels. To examine differences between groups, Mann-Whitney U Tests were performed, while Kendall's tau-b correlation was employed to assess associations among academic program quality, institutional support, and overall graduate experience. This test was selected because it is a non-parametric measure of association that is particularly appropriate for ordinal data, is robust when analyzing ranked data, and does not require assumptions of normality. All inferential tests were conducted at a significance level of $p < .05$, and effect sizes were reported where appropriate. For the qualitative component, data were gathered through an open-ended structured question administered via Google Form. Respondents who obtained scores lower than 5 in specific parts of the quantitative section were asked to elaborate on the possible reasons for their low ratings. Three questions were included, and the responses were synthesized to explore and interpret the experiences of graduates in thesis and dissertation writing.

In analyzing the responses, the researcher applied Johnny Saldaña's (2013) coding methods, particularly Emotion Codes, Descriptive Codes, and Process Codes. In vivo codes were also employed to highlight participants' exact words and strengthen the findings. The coding and thematic analysis adhered to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework for thematic analysis, which consists of: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. This systematic procedure ensured a rigorous and credible interpretation of the qualitative data.

4 RESULT

4.1 Level of satisfaction of graduate students

Table 1

GS Students' Satisfaction with Academic Program Quality

	Masters (n=61)		PhD (n=22)		Total (n=83)	
	f	*%*	f	*%*	f	*%*

The quality of academic instruction met my expectations as a graduate student.	VS	10	16.4	1	4.5	11	13.4
	ES	51	83.6	21	95.5	72	87.8
The curriculum addressed the relevant theories, practices, and issues in my professional field.	MS	1	1.6	0	0.0	1	1.2
	VS	8	13.1	2	9.1	10	12.2
	ES	52	85.2	20	90.9	72	87.8
Course materials were timely, well-selected, and enhanced my understanding of the subject.	MS	2	3.3	1	4.5	3	3.7
	VS	12	19.7	2	9.1	14	17.1
	ES	47	77.0	19	86.4	66	80.5
Teaching strategies used throughout the program effectively supported my learning.	MS	2	3.3	0	0.0	2	2.4
	VS	10	16.4	2	9.1	12	14.6
	ES	49	80.3	20	90.9	69	84.1
The learning environment fostered critical thinking and open academic dialogue.	MS	1	1.6	0	0.0	1	1.2
	VS	8	13.1	2	9.1	10	12.2
	ES	52	85.2	20	90.9	72	87.8
The level of academic rigor and challenge matched my expectations for graduate-level training.	VS	7	11.5	1	4.5	8	9.8
	ES	54	88.5	21	95.5	75	91.5
Learning objectives in each course were clearly stated and aligned with assessments and activities.	MS	1	1.6	0	0.0	1	1.2
	VS	8	13.1	2	9.1	10	12.2
	ES	52	85.2	20	90.9	72	87.8
Opportunities were provided to give feedback on improving the academic program.	MS	3	4.9	0	0.0	3	3.7
	VS	8	13.1	1	4.5	9	11.0
	ES	50	82.0	21	95.5	71	86.6
The program offered sufficient support for completing thesis or dissertation requirements.	MS	0	0.0	1	4.5	1	1.2
	VS	13	21.3	2	9.1	15	18.3
	ES	48	78.7	19	86.4	67	81.7

(MS- Moderately Satisfied, VS- Satisfied, ES- Very Satisfied)

This study examined graduate students' satisfaction across nine core dimensions of academic program quality, including instruction, curriculum relevance, learning materials, teaching strategies, learning environment, academic rigor, alignment of assessments with learning objectives, feedback mechanisms, and support for thesis/dissertation completion.

The study results indicate consistently high levels of satisfaction among graduate students across nine dimensions of academic program quality. Overall, a significant proportion of respondents expressed very high satisfaction with the quality of academic instruction, with 83.6% of Master's and 95.5% of PhD students selecting the highest rating, culminating in a combined satisfaction rate of 87.8%.

In terms of curriculum relevance, 85.2% of Master's and 90.9% of PhD students reported that the program effectively addressed the theories, practices, and professional issues pertinent to their fields, again resulting in a cumulative satisfaction rate of 87.8%. Likewise, satisfaction with the course materials was intense, with 77.0% of Master's and 86.4% of PhD students rating the materials as timely, well-selected, and helpful, leading to an overall satisfaction rate of 80.5%.

The use of teaching strategies throughout the program was also well received. Specifically, 80.3% of Master's and 90.9% of PhD students reported being very satisfied, with only 2.4% expressing moderate satisfaction. Regarding the learning environment, which focused on fostering critical thinking and open academic dialogue, the results showed 85.2% of Master's and 90.9% of PhD students rated their experience at the highest level, bringing the total delighted group to 87.8%.

For the dimension assessing academic rigor and challenge, 88.5% of Master's and 95.5% of PhD students expressed that the difficulty level matched their expectations, yielding a combined very satisfied rate of 91.5%, the highest among all evaluated categories. Similarly, regarding the alignment of learning objectives with assessments, 85.2% of Master's and 90.9% of PhD students indicated the highest level of satisfaction, again resulting in a cumulative score of 87.8%. Regarding opportunities to provide feedback on the academic program, 82.0% of Master's and 95.5% of PhD students reported high satisfaction, yielding 86.6%. Finally, regarding support for completing thesis or dissertation requirements, 78.7% of Master's and 86.4% of PhD students rated this component as "Very Satisfied," resulting in an overall satisfaction rate of 81.7%, with only 1.2% expressing moderate satisfaction.

These findings suggest a broadly positive perception of the academic experience across all measured aspects of program quality, with minimal discrepancies between Master's and PhD respondents. The survey conducted among the graduate students revealed generally high levels of satisfaction across five key domains of institutional support and responsiveness.

Table 2

GS Students' Satisfaction with Institutional Support and Responsiveness

		Masters (n=61)		PhD (n=22)		Total (n=83)	
		f	*%*	f	*%*	f	*%*
Academic concerns and challenges were addressed promptly and appropriately by faculty or administrators.	MS	2	3.3	1	4.5	3	3.7
	VS	14	23.0	4	18.2	18	22.0
	ES	45	73.8	17	77.3	62	75.6
The responsiveness of the academic and administrative staff supported my academic journey.	MS	2	3.3	1	4.5	3	3.7
	VS	13	21.3	2	9.1	15	18.3
	ES	46	75.4	19	86.4	65	79.3
The institution handled my academic or personal concerns with appropriate care and timeliness.	MS	2	3.3	1	4.5	3	3.7
	VS	14	23.0	2	9.1	16	19.5
	ES	45	73.8	19	86.4	64	78.0
Communication from the institution was clear, timely, and transparent throughout my studies.	MS	2	3.3	1	4.5	3	3.7
	VS	14	23.0	5	22.7	19	23.2
	ES	45	73.8	16	72.7	61	74.4
The resources provided (e.g., library, online tools, advising) were adequate to support my success.	MS	1	1.6	1	4.5	2	2.4
	VS	14	23.0	2	9.1	16	19.5
	ES	46	75.4	19	86.4	65	79.3

(MS- Moderately Satisfied, VS- Satisfied, ES- Very Satisfied)

Communication from the institution was also rated positively. A total of 74.4% of students indicated they were *delighted* with the clarity, timeliness, and transparency of institutional communication. However, satisfaction varied more noticeably in resources such as libraries, advising, and online tools. While 79.3% of respondents overall were *delighted*, a closer look revealed that only 6.6% of Master's students were "Satisfied" and 1.6% "Moderately Satisfied," compared to 9.1% and 4.5% of PhD students, respectively.

Table 3

GS Students' Satisfaction with Overall Graduate Experience and Learning Environment

		Masters (n=61)		PhD (n=22)		Total (n=83)	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
The campus (or virtual) environment positively influenced my personal and professional growth.	MS	1	1.6	0	0.0	1	1.2
	S	10	16.4	2	9.1	12	14.5
	VS	50	82.0	20	90.9	70	84.3
A reasonable and healthy balance between academic workload and enrichment opportunities (e.g., seminars, organizations, or wellness activities) existed.	SS	1		0			0.0
	MS	2	3.3	1	4.5	3	3.6
	S	10	16.4	2	9.1	12	14.5
	VS	48	78.7	19	86.4	67	80.7
My overall experience in the graduate program has been fulfilling and worthwhile.	MS	1	1.6	0	0.0	1	1.2
	S	10	16.4	3	13.6	13	15.7
	VS	50	82.0	19	86.4	69	83.1
I recommend this graduate program to others pursuing similar academic goals.	MS	1	1.6	0	0.0	1	1.2
	S	8	13.1	2	9.1	10	12.0
	VS	52	85.2	20	90.9	72	86.7
The program met or exceeded my personal expectations for graduate-level education.	MS	1	1.6	0	0.0	1	1.2
	S	10	16.4	2	9.1	12	14.5
	VS	50	82.0	20	90.9	70	84.3

(SS- Slightly Satisfies, MS- Moderately Satisfied, VS- Satisfied, ES- Very Satisfied)

The results reveal overwhelmingly positive satisfaction levels among Master's and PhD students regarding their graduate program experience. For instance, over 84% of all respondents (82% of Master's, 90.9% of PhD) were *satisfied* that the campus or virtual environment contributed positively to their personal and professional growth. This positive trend is consistent across all five dimensions, including academic enrichment balance (80.7% very satisfied), program fulfillment (83.1%), recommendation to peers (86.7%), and meeting personal expectations (84.3%). Interestingly, PhD students consistently reported slightly higher percentages of "Very Satisfied" responses compared to Master's students, particularly in program fulfillment (86.4% vs. 82%) and the learning environment (90.9% vs. 82%). The data shows minimal dissatisfaction; only a small

fraction indicated moderate satisfaction. These results strongly agree on the quality and impact of the graduate programs.

4.2 Significant differences in graduate students' satisfaction levels according to their program level

Table 4

Level of Difference According to Program Level

Independent Samples T-Test

		Statistic	p
Academic Program Quality	Mann-Whitney U	611	0.330
Institutional Support and Responsiveness	Mann-Whitney U	605	0.345
Overall Graduate Experience and Learning Environment	Mann-Whitney U	651	0.750

Note. H_a $\mu_{Masters} \neq \mu_{PhD}$

The findings show that, across all three analyzed categories, there were no statistically significant differences in the satisfaction ratings of master's and PhD students. Both groups reported similar satisfaction levels with academic program quality (U = 611, p =.330), indicating that curriculum and instructor quality are viewed uniformly across program levels. The results show that master's and PhD students have comparable experiences with the help and responsiveness offered by the graduate school in terms of institutional support and responsiveness (U = 605, p =.345). Master's and PhD students exhibited the same levels of satisfaction with the overall graduate experience and learning environment (U = 651, p =.750), suggesting that their experiences in graduate school are similar overall. The null hypothesis cannot be rejected because all p-values have values greater than.05, indicating that program level does not influence satisfaction.

4.3 Relationship between satisfaction with institutional support and overall graduate school experience and learning environment

Table 5

Kendall's Tau-B Correlation Coefficients Between Students' Satisfaction with Institutional Support and Their Overall Graduate Experience

		Learning Environment	Academic-Life Balance	Program Experience	Recommending Program	Program Expectations
Issue Resolution	Kendall's Tau B	0.563***	0.669***	0.683***	0.661***	0.722***
		<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Responsiveness	Kendall's Tau B	0.563***	0.601***	0.782***	0.655***	0.746***
		<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Student support	Kendall's Tau B	0.622***	0.577***	0.674***	0.720***	0.711***
		<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Institutional communication	Kendall's Tau B	0.571***	0.474***	0.771***	0.672***	0.660***
		<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Resource Availability	Kendall's Tau B	0.642***	0.669***	0.785***	0.659***	0.734***
		<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001

Note: All correlations are significant at p < 0.001. Asterisks (***) denote high statistical significance.

Kendall's tau-b correlations indicate that every dimension of institutional support is positively and significantly associated with each facet of the overall graduate experience (all p < .001). Notably, program experience shows a high association with responsiveness ($\tau \approx .782$) and resource availability ($\tau \approx .785$), while *responsiveness* is likewise strongly associated with program expectations ($\tau \approx .746$). *Student support* also correlates highly with program experience ($\tau \approx .674$). Associations with *recommending the program* are consistently strong across indicators ($\tau \approx .661–.720$). For *academic-life balance*, the largest associations emerge for *issue resolution* and *resource availability* (both $\tau \approx .669$), followed by *responsiveness* ($\tau \approx .601$) and *student support* ($\tau \approx .577$); *institutional communication* shows the smallest extent with balance ($\tau \approx .474$), but is still significant. Across outcomes, correlations with the *learning environment* remain moderately high ($\tau \approx .563–.644$), led by resource availability ($\tau \approx .642$) and student support ($\tau \approx .622$).

4.4 Correlation Coefficients Between Graduate Program Quality and Overall Graduate Experience Domains

Table 6

Kendall's Tau-B Correlation Coefficients Between Graduate Program Quality Dimensions and Overall Graduate Experience Domains

		Learning Environment	Academic-Life Balance	Program Experience	Recommending Program	Program Expectations
Quality of instruction	Kendall's Tau B	0.712 ***	0.551***	0.679***	0.685***	0.712***
		<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Curriculum	Kendall's Tau B	0.587***	0.406 ***	0.479 ***	0.455 ***	0.506***
		<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Course materials	Kendall's Tau B	0.516 ***	0.648 ***	0.575 ***	0.669 ***	0.684***
		<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Teaching strategies	Kendall's Tau B	0.613***	0.543***	0.664***	0.778***	0.783***
		<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Learning environment	Kendall's Tau B	0.528 ***	0.444***	0.686***	0.796***	0.814***
		<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Academic rigor	Kendall's Tau B	0.539 ***	0.367***	0.621***	0.598***	0.649***
		<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Clear learning objectives	Kendall's Tau B	0.426 ***	0.614***	0.585***	0.582***	0.614***
		<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Feedback opportunities	Kendall's Tau B	0.665 ***	0.583***	0.634***	0.740***	0.754***
		<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Thesis/dissertation support	Kendall's Tau B	0.614 ***	0.519***	0.675***	0.794***	0.710***
		<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001

Note: All correlations are significant at p < 0.001. Asterisks (***) denote high statistical significance.

Using Kendall's Tau-B correlation coefficients, the analysis revealed statistically significant associations across all domains (p < .001). Several variables exhibited strong correlations ($\tau \geq .70$), highlighting a substantial degree of association between perceived program quality and students' overall graduate experience. Among the strongest correlates were quality of instruction, teaching strategies, feedback opportunities, and thesis/dissertation support. Quality of instruction demonstrated strong positive associations with the learning environment ($\tau = .712$), program expectations ($\tau = .712$), program experience ($\tau = .679$), and likelihood of recommending the program ($\tau = .685$). Teaching strategies showed similarly high correlations with program expectations ($\tau = .793$), recommending the program ($\tau = .778$), and program experience ($\tau = .664$). Feedback opportunities were also strongly associated with program expectations ($\tau = .754$), recommending the program ($\tau = .740$), and the learning environment ($\tau = .665$). Thesis/dissertation support, a critical component of graduate-level studies, correlated

highly with recommending the program (τ = .794), program expectations (τ = .710), and program experience (τ = .675).

Moderate correlations (τ = .406–.649) were identified for curriculum design, academic rigor, clarity of learning objectives, and all the domains of the student's overall graduate experience. Curriculum design was moderately associated with the learning environment (τ = .587), program experience (τ = .479), and program expectations (τ = .566). Academic rigor displayed moderate correlations with program experience (τ = .621), program expectations (τ = .618), and recommending the program (τ = .598). Similarly, clarity of learning objectives showed moderate associations with program experience (τ = .558) and recommending the program (τ = .582). While these domains remain essential, their comparatively lower coefficients suggest they may exert a less leading influence on overall student satisfaction relative to instructional quality, teaching practices, feedback mechanisms, and research support.

4.5 Students' experiences in academic and thesis/dissertation writing

The results of the coding process are presented below, which employed Emotion Codes, Descriptive Codes, and Process Codes following the method of Johnny Saldaña (2014). The final column presents the central theme derived after generating similar categories.

Table 7

Graduates' experiences that contributed to academic and professional growth

Inf	Categories	Similar Categories and Main Theme
1-5	Professors' guidance and support (D1, D9, D10) Research and learning application (D6, D7, D8) E: Confident E: Grateful In-Vivo Codes: IV1: "They made me more confident in my career." IV2: "My greatest success is not just getting my diploma but applying what I have learned." Research and academic skills (covers D11, D13, D19) Collaboration and support (covers D14, D17, D18) E: Empowered E: Supported	Similar Categories (from D1–D19): 1. Faculty Support and Mentorship 2. Research and Academic Development 3. Collaborative Learning and Peer Engagement Emotion Codes (from E1–E10): Confident (E1, E14) Grateful (E5) Empowered (E6) Supported (E9) Motivated (E8) Accomplished (E10) In-Vivo Codes:

6-10	In-Vivo Codes: IV3: "Engaging in research writing, participating in seminars and workshops" IV4: "Academic Support from professors and staff" Academic rigor and thesis writing (covers D20, D22) Mentoring and ethical guidance (covers D23, D28, D29) E: Proud	"They made me more confident in my career." "Engaging in research writing, participating in seminars and workshops" Similar Categories (from D20–D37): 1. Academic Rigor and Research Excellence 2. Professional Growth and Leadership Skills 3. Values and Ethical Formation
11- 15	E: Inspired In-Vivo Codes: IV5: "The academic rigor and commitment made my Master's journey enjoyable and remarkable." IV6: "Working closely with faculty mentors and peers played a crucial role in my growth." Advanced knowledge and research strengthening (covers D30, D34, D36) Professional and leadership development (covers D31, D33, D37)	Emotion Codes (from E11–E20): In-Vivo Codes: "The academic rigor and commitment made my Master's journey enjoyable and remarkable." "The rigorous training, supportive mentors, collaborative learning with peers" **Main Theme** Graduate programs contributed most to academic and professional growth.
16 - 20	E: Confident E: Empowered In-Vivo Codes: IV7: "BulSU contributes to deeper expertise in my field" IV8: "The rigorous training, supportive mentors, collaborative learning with peers"	

The graduate experiences related to academic and professional growth primarily revolve around the continuous implementation of mentoring programs, wherein faculty members provide guidance and support to students in developing their research until the completion of their thesis and dissertation. Another identified form of support is the conduct of seminars and other Graduate School activities focused on research, which foster a collaborative relationship between faculty and students. Emotion codes such as Confident (E1, E14) and Grateful (E5) indicate that respondents were satisfied with the support and programs offered by the Graduate School. This is further substantiated by positive emotional reactions and in-vivo codes such as "The academic rigor and commitment made my Master's journey enjoyable and remarkable" and "The rigorous training, supportive mentors, collaborative learning with peers", which are direct evidence from the respondents.

Table 8

Challenges encountered by the Graduates during their studies

Inf	Categories	Similar Categories/ Main Theme
1-5	Advisory and Guidance Issues (P2, P3) Research Process Delays (P1, P4, P5)	1. Advisory and Research Process Challenges In-vivo Codes: "I did not experience it, but my colleagues shared that their research advisers are hard to contact whenever they need guidance."
6-10	Administrative Inefficiencies (P6, P8) Scheduling Challenges (P7, P10) Work–Study Balance (P9) IV3: "Engaging in research writing, participating in seminars and workshops" IV4: "Academic Support from professors and staff"	"Slow ethical review." 2. Administrative and Scheduling Issues In-vivo Codes: "Prompt reply to different concerns." "There are some gaps in my scheduling for the Title and Proposal Defense, which can be improved further."
11- 15	Workload Strain (P11, P12) Resource Availability Issues (P13) Communication Gaps with Faculty (P14, P15)	**Main Theme:** Administrative and Academic Process Barriers Hindering Graduate Student Success
16 - 20	Enrollment and Grading Delays (P16, P17) Heavy Academic Load (P18) Personal and Professional Balancing (P19, P20)	

Table 8 shows that the identified challenges are system-related. A common barrier is the slow ethics review process before students can obtain an ethics certificate and proceed with data gathering. This is supported by the in-vivo code cited by several respondents: *"Slow ethical review."* Another challenge highlighted is the limited availability of advisers to respond to their advisees promptly. Some advisers were reported to be difficult to contact, as expressed by one respondent: *"I did not experience it, but my colleagues shared that their research advisers are hard to contact whenever they need guidance."* These systemic delays affect students' research timelines and increase stress and uncertainty during critical stages of thesis and dissertation writing. Addressing these issues through streamlined processes and improved faculty-student communication could significantly enhance the graduate research experience.

Table 9

Suggestions to improve the graduate program and graduate school services for future students

Inf	Categories	Similar Categories and Main Theme
1-5	Improving Administrative Processes P1: Scheduling defenses promptly P2: Allowing flexible deadlines P6: Responding promptly to concerns Enhancing Research Guidance P3: Continuing mentoring program P5: Providing thesis writing workshops P7: Strengthening adviser support	Improving Administrative and Organizational Processes Related codes: Streamlining enrollment, automating grade encoding, scheduling defenses systematically, and digitizing workflows Codes referenced: P1, P5, P15, P30
6-10	Streamlining Digital and Enrollment Systems P12: Implementing online submissions P15: Automating grade encoding P18: Improving the enrollment process Expanding Academic Support and Training P11: Conducting research training P14: Organizing seminars on publishing P19: Enhancing curriculum updates	Enhancing Research Guidance and Mentorship Related codes: Continuing mentoring program, providing adviser support, conducting kumustahan sessions, improving the availability of professors Codes referenced: P3, P12, P27, P31 Increasing Access to Resources and Support Services
11- 15	Strengthening Communication and Feedback P21: Providing timely feedback P23: Improving faculty-student communication P27: Responding faster to inquiries Increasing Access to Resources P24: Offering digital library services P26: Providing updated materials P28: Expanding access to Enhancing Mentoring and Advising P31: Improving adviser availability P33: Continuing research guidance P35: Supporting thesis revisions	Related codes: Offering digital libraries, updating curriculum, improving communication, and providing feedback channels Codes referenced: P8, P14, P21, P24 **Main Theme:** Graduate students recommend strengthening administrative efficiency, research guidance, and resource accessibility to enhance academic support and overall student experience. E1: gratitude E2: frustration E3: hope
16 - 20	Improving Program Organization P30: Scheduling defenses systematically P32: Coordinating better with faculty P38: Clarifying program requirements	

Respondents emphasized the need to enhance the efficiency of the Ethics Committee processes, ensure timely scheduling of defenses, and strengthen the research mentoring program. Furthermore, they suggested that faculty members allocate sufficient time and consistently support students during thesis and dissertation writing. Some

respondents also highlighted the importance of improving communication channels and digitalizing administrative processes for greater convenience. This is reflected in in-vivo codes such as "Scheduling defenses systematically" (P30) and "Improving adviser availability" (P31). One respondent expressed, "I know that you have many things to do, but I would suggest that either you hire more staff or allot more time to attend to the concerns of GS students." These responses indicate a strong desire for efficiency and better student support, as captured by the emotion code Hopeful (E18), which reflects students' expectations for more responsive and structured services.

4.6 Meta - Inference of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Table 10

Meta-Inferencing of Quantitative and Qualitative

Focus	Quantitative Findings	Qualitative Findings	Meta-Inference
Overall Satisfaction	a high level of satisfaction across domains such as instruction, research mentoring, library resources, and administrative services.	Students appreciated supportive faculty, accessible research resources, and responsive staff.	Graduate students perceive the Graduate School as generally effective in meeting their academic and support needs.
Areas for Improvement	Lower ratings were noted in faculty responsiveness, timeliness of grade submission, and online learning support.	Recurring issues include delays in grade release, a need for proactive mentoring, and limited efficiency of online platforms.	Integration reveals strong agreement that institutional improvements are needed in digital support, faculty engagement, and timely academic processes.
Differences by Profile Variables	No significant differences across gender, age, or program in satisfaction levels.	Students across diverse profiles voiced similar strengths and concerns, reflecting a shared graduate school experience.	Findings suggest that satisfaction is consistent across groups, with improvements benefiting all students equally.
Satisfaction and Academic Performance	A positive but modest correlation was found between satisfaction and academic performance.	Motivation and academic progress were enhanced when they felt supported by faculty and the institution.	Higher satisfaction fosters stronger engagement and academic success

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Satisfaction of graduate students.

The findings high satisfaction with instructional quality reaffirms the critical role of pedagogical design in student engagement and learning efficacy. This finding supports existing research by Talebi *et al*. (2025), underscoring the importance of interactive and student-centered teaching methodologies, especially in postgraduate education. The findings highlight the central role of curriculum relevance, well-curated materials, and effective teaching strategies in fostering graduate student satisfaction. Alignment with industry practices and experiential learning, as emphasized by Widyakusama and Hakim (2024), ensures that theoretical knowledge remains applicable and meaningful. Similarly, as supported by Septianto *et al*. (2025), updated and relevant resources directly enhance student performance and engagement. The program's pedagogical approaches also promote autonomy, reflection, and dialogue, aligning with Akbaş (2025), while strong ratings in academic rigor suggest that the program successfully balances challenge with support to sustain persistence and skill development.

In addition, clarity in communicating learning objectives and assessments strengthens motivation and outcomes, echoing the findings of Septianto *et al*. Positive perceptions of feedback mechanisms further underscore the importance of institutional responsiveness in fostering trust and student agency. Further, support for thesis and dissertation completion emerged as a crucial contributor to satisfaction, consistent with Politi *et al*. (2025), who emphasized the value of mentorship, supervision workshops, and structured guidance in postgraduate research. Given that they have more access to mentorship and supervisory engagement than Master's students, PhD students reported higher satisfaction levels in every category (Mai *et al*., 2025; Sobba, 2025). These supervisory models reinforce the importance of faculty-student engagement in graduate school by improving academic performance and building emotional resilience. Equally important is the role of institutional communication, where advisors' responsiveness and proactive interaction significantly influence perceptions of care and satisfaction (Schlosser *et al*., 2011). Recent findings by Zaccariotto Batista (2025) highlight that the quality of administrative support services strongly predicts students' perceptions of communication effectiveness, underscoring the link between service delivery and

institutional trust. The current results support these observations because communication was among the highest-rated categories. However, the relatively lower satisfaction of Master's students with resources signals a need for more inclusive strategies. The high satisfaction rates on the GS students' overall graduate experience and learning environment underscore the importance of a well-structured academic environment supporting *academic rigor* and *personal growth*. Feldman *et al*. (2025) state that integrated curricular design emphasizing learner-centered environments improves student engagement, especially with technological and wellness initiatives. The respondents' satisfaction with the academic workload and enrichment balance echoes this, suggesting that the institution may have adopted such inclusive, wellness-oriented pedagogies. Another key implication is the strong student approval of hybrid and virtual learning environments, which aligns with the findings of Almusharaff and Khahro (2020), who reported that well-structured online learning systems significantly improve graduate student satisfaction, academic engagement, and perceived learning during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. This adaptability, combined with targeted wellness initiatives as noted by Airth-Kindree & Lu (2025), results in enhanced academic experiences even amid technological transitions.

5.2 Differences in graduate students' satisfaction levels according to their program level

The fact that Master's and PhD students' satisfaction evaluations are consistent indicates that graduate schools' institutional policies regarding program quality, support services, and the general educational environment are applied equally. According to Lee and Sabharwal (2021), educational satisfaction is influenced by several factors, including institutional responsiveness, communication clarity, and resource accessibility, which seem to be continuously maintained in the university.

Several recent studies have also indicated the importance of institutional support and service quality in shaping graduate students' overall experience. For instance, Kim *et al*. (2021) found that online education quality and student immersion significantly affect satisfaction, particularly in cases where flexible learning has gained importance. Although no discrepancies were found between the two groups in the current investigation, sustaining balance necessitates ongoing institutional efforts. According to

Seitova *et al*. (2024), service quality, responsiveness, and fairness continue to be significant drivers of satisfaction, and the university must guarantee that these factors are consistently enhanced to meet the changing expectations of students. This continuous improvement approach protects fairness while fostering an inclusive graduate school culture that benefits both master's and PhD students. This is in line with Vygotsky's theory (1978) that learning and enjoyment are socially created through interactions in the academic setting. Graduate students interact with teachers, peers, and institutional structures that support their learning. The identical level of satisfaction across Master's and PhD students suggests that the sociocultural context provides equally supportive scaffolding at all program levels. This means that collaboration, mentorship, and engagement possibilities are regarded as equitable, making both groups feel supported within their zone of proximal growth.

5.3 Institutional support and overall graduate school experience and learning environment

The results demonstrate that institutional support dimensions, particularly resource availability, responsiveness, and student support, greatly influence students' overall graduate experience. Strong relationships between program experience and institutional support show how the availability of adequate resources and prompt resolution of issues affect graduate students' assessments of the quality of their education. Hese results align with those of Mendoza-Villafaina *et al*. (2024), who highlighted how having access to adequate resources greatly improves perceptions about the quality of education and the institution's reputation. Similarly, De-Juan-Vigaray *et al*. (2024) noted that academic staff responsiveness promotes satisfaction and loyalty, particularly in the post-pandemic period when adaptability and flexibility are most valued. Such data points out how important institutional services and infrastructure are in meeting the changing needs of graduate students. Similarly, there is a strong correlation between student support, responsiveness, and the willingness of students to recommend the program. That supportive, caring, and responsive support predicts satisfaction and advocacy highlights the importance of building a student-centered organization. Students experience enhanced academic progression through personalized advising models (Bowles, 2024). Walia *et al*. (2025) found that agency advocacy practices, such as the willingness to refer the program

to others, are associated with satisfaction with program services. This congruence between experiences at the program level and intentions to recommend on the outside not only impacts the internal level of satisfaction for the students, but also has consequences for the university's reputation from the perspective of others. The linkage enhances the institution's stature and competitive situation for graduate education and strengthens the institution's reputation and competitiveness in graduate education. Moreover, the moderately strong yet lower associations with institutional communication suggest that communication is important, but that it supplements, rather than substitutes for, concrete support and personal faculty mentorship to increase student satisfaction.

Moreover, the correlations with academic-life balance point to the centrality of institutional care in sustaining student well-being amidst demanding academic requirements. This is consistent with Khatri *et al*. (2024), who emphasized the influence of institutional initiatives on promoting well-being and avoiding academic burnout. The findings advance the argument that graduate student satisfaction is multidimensional and best supported by a holistic strategy that integrates responsive service delivery, resource sufficiency, and personalized support systems. Hence, the institutions aiming to strengthen their graduate programs should adopt policies and practices that ensure access to quality resources, actively resolve challenges, and cultivate supportive academic relationships.

5.4 Academic program quality and the overall graduate experience

The results on the association between graduate program quality dimensions and overall graduate experience domains revealed that instructional quality, teaching strategies, feedback opportunities, and thesis/dissertation support are the most influential factors associated with graduate students' perceptions of overall program quality. These domains exhibited the strongest correlations with program expectations, learning environment, program experience, and the likelihood of recommending the program. This pattern reinforces the notion that graduate education is evaluated not only through the structure of its curriculum but also through the relational and pedagogical dimensions students encounter. This pattern supports the notion that graduate education is assessed based on the pedagogical and relational aspects students experience relevant to the curriculum. According to recent research, instructors' ability to create a welcoming and

interactive environment and the teachers' feedback are crucial to students' happiness and engagement (Solis *et al*., 2025). Educational institutions can directly influence students' academic confidence and professional preparedness by placing a high priority on the caliber of delivery and feedback procedures.

Equally noteworthy is the strong correlation between thesis/dissertation support and multiple aspects of graduate satisfaction, particularly program recommendation. Graduate students often view the thesis or dissertation as the culmination of their academic trajectory, and the quality of supervisory guidance plays a critical role in their success (Krauss & Ismail, 2010). The quality of supervisory guidance is crucial to the success of graduate students, who frequently see their thesis or dissertation as the peak of their academic journey (Pavliuk & Zhuchkova, 2025). Strong support networks, such as organized mentoring, accomplishment monitoring, and institutional support, increase the likelihood that students will advance successfully, stay motivated, and have a positive program perception. On the other hand, poor supervisor support has been linked to attrition and late completion (Mwagi, 2022). In order to reduce delay in the research progress, these findings highlight the need for institutions to enhance supervision practices and establish organized support systems (Haley *et al*., 2024).

Though curriculum design, academic rigor, and learning objective clarity are still crucial for maintaining program reputation and intellectual challenge, their relatively low correlations imply that they serve more as baseline expectations than as distinguishing satisfaction characteristics. According to Aman *et al*. (2023), although important, some academic components serve more as baseline expectations for students than as significant factors influencing their level of satisfaction. The reason is that the students expect a certain degree of academic excellence and curriculum coherence from a trustworthy graduate program. Also, what distinguishes their overall satisfaction is how these structural features are brought to life through pedagogy and support. Thus, curriculum innovation without parallel investments in teaching practices and feedback systems may have limited effects on graduate students' holistic experience.

These results have some implications for practice and policy in higher education. Institutions should invest in faculty development that goes beyond academic expertise, giving them the tools they need to support instruction, feedback, and mentoring. Policies must also develop ways to motivate faculty to communicate with their mentees meaningfully while ensuring fair access to institutional resources, considering the

importance of thesis and dissertation support. Such recommendations align with larger global trends toward support-intensive, student-centered graduate education, which have been demonstrated to improve program reputation, decrease attrition, and increase persistence (Mai *et al*., 2025).

This further emphasizes that the dynamic, relational, and support-driven aspects of graduate programs have a greater influence on students' overall experience than the fixed aspects of curriculum design. Higher rates of degree completion, graduate employability, and student satisfaction are more likely to be observed at institutions that improve teaching quality, feedback systems, and thesis/dissertation supervision. Digo (2022) states that graduate programs can stay relevant, responsive, and satisfactory in the ever-changing higher education landscape by combining a rigorous curriculum with strong administrative, mentoring, resource, and communication support.

6 STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN ACADEMIC AND THESIS/DISSERTATION WRITING

6.1 Graduates' experiences that contributed to academic and professional growth

Based on the results of the graduate responses, collaborative learning, rigorous learning, involvement in research, and faculty mentoring were the main factors that assisted in their academic and professional development. Respondents emphasized experiences including involvement in seminars and workshops, thesis/dissertation mentoring, and instructors' advice and support. These aspects enhanced their confidence, leadership potential, ethical principles, and academic achievements. Positive feelings such as pride, empowerment, thankfulness, and confidence reinforce the importance of organized academic programs and connections between teachers and students. The transforming potential of graduate education is exemplified by in-vivo codes as stated by the participant, and quoted "They made me feel more secure in my career (R10) " and "The rigorous instruction and commitment made my Master's journey enjoyable and remarkable (R3)."

These results are consistent with Amador-Campos *et al*.'s (2023) study; mentoring substantially boosts doctoral students' research self-efficacy and confidence, eventually preparing them for professional responsibilities. In line with respondents' reports of

placing gained concepts into practice, Grohnert *et al*. (2024) stressed that incorporating workplace learning and research participation into graduate programs improves career preparedness and lifelong learning skills. According to Wu *et al*. (2024), supervisory assistance and faculty visibility are important factors affecting students' academic performance and emotional well-being. Ultimately, Genovate and Madrigal (2021) verified the focus on mentorship and collaborative learning identified in this study by proving that academic rigor and faculty-student interaction greatly promote general fulfillment and professional development.

6.2 Challenges encountered by graduates during their studies

Graduates talked about system-related issues that hampered academic development, aside from favorable experiences. These included schedule conflicts, administrative inefficiencies, delays in the advising and research processes, and balancing work and study requirements. Slow ethical review procedures and adviser availability were among the most frequently mentioned challenges, as evidenced by in-vivo codes such as "Slow ethical review" and "Advisers are hard to contact whenever they need guidance." These issues not only prolonged the study timelines but also compounded anxiety and worry during crucial phases of writing theses and dissertations. Administrative delays also affected timely completion, especially when arranging defenses and recording grades.

The results are in line with those of Tikkanen *et al*. (2024), who pointed out that pressure and a lack of available advisers are two factors that hinder research success. Like the problems mentioned by respondents, Feizi *et al*. (2023) found that poor communication and ineffective academic procedures adversely impact research output and student satisfaction. Similar issues were identified by Pontillas *et al*. (2024) in the Philippine context, mainly about academic accessibility and administrative efficiency, indicating an underlying issue across institutions. Additionally, Advance HE (2024) acknowledged the value of process improvements in graduate schools by stating that immediate input and efficient administrative procedures are vital for sustaining postgraduate satisfaction and decreasing attrition.

6.3 Suggestions to improve graduate school services

These recommendations reinforce the need for automation of systems and simplified scheduling, which are consistent with Mendoza-Villafaina and López-Mosquera's (2024) claim that administrative effectiveness and resource accessibility have an essential effect on student fulfillment and the credibility of an institution. In line with respondents' emphasis on better communication and feedback, Haverila *et al*. (2021) presented a comprehensive model of student satisfaction in which program organization and institutional response are essential. Digital platforms and organized communication channels improve responsiveness and the postgraduate experience overall, according to the Advance HE (2024) report, which supports the urgent need for technology-driven solutions in graduate programs. Furthermore, to maintain high levels of student satisfaction, Pizarro (2019) emphasized the significance of continuous advancement in graduate school services in the Philippines, supporting the respondents' demand for improved academic and administrative support.

7 SYNTHESIS

The findings suggest a twofold reality of graduate school: although students recognized significant advancements in their academic and professional lives, they also encountered procedural and structural difficulties. Professional excellence, research participation, faculty mentoring, and collaborative learning have all been identified as essential elements of success that help students develop their confidence and prepare them for the workforce. In line with Amador-Campos *et al*. (2023), Wu *et al*. (2024), and Grohnert *et al*. (2024), who stress that good mentoring and opportunities for practical learning enhance confidence in research and career readiness, these findings illustrate the importance of structured academic programs that offer encouraging supervision. The concerns indicated by Tikkanen *et al*. (2024) and Feizi *et al*. (2023) on the impact of institutional impediments on advancement and well-being, on the other hand, were reflected in the increasing number of administrative inefficiencies, advisory delays, and inflexible procedures. In order to improve communication and support systems, respondents suggested automating the processes, doubling the availability of mentors, making it easier to schedule, and conducting periodic "Kamustahan" sessions. Having

been considered, graduate education thrives as academic rigor, responsive assistance, and effective management come together. Enhancing the graduate school experience and creating an atmosphere where intellectual challenge and institutional responsiveness coexist can be achieved by solidifying these fundamentals with technology-driven solutions, constant mentoring, and proactive communication, like Kamustahan sessions. This will increase student satisfaction and professional competence.

8 META- INFERENCE

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings confirms that graduate students report a generally high level of satisfaction, particularly with instruction, mentoring, and administrative support, while also highlighting concerns about faculty responsiveness, online support, and the timeliness of grade submission. These results suggest that satisfaction is shaped by measurable institutional services and how students experience day-to-day academic processes. This aligns with Jadrić, Koludrović, and Reić Ercegovac (2025), who found that students' satisfaction is strongly influenced by the perceived quality of institutional support and the fulfillment of psychological needs within the academic environment. Similarly, Carmona-Halty, Schaufeli, Llorens, and Salanova (2019) reported that satisfaction of basic psychological needs positively impacts academic performance through enhanced psychological capital, underscoring the importance of supportive and responsive learning contexts. These findings strengthen the conclusion that continuous improvements in academic services and institutional responsiveness are vital to sustaining student satisfaction and promoting graduate success.

9 CONCLUSION

Quantitative results revealed that students generally expressed high satisfaction with instruction, research mentoring, library resources, and administrative services. However, some areas, particularly online learning support, faculty responsiveness, and timeliness of grade submission, were identified as needing improvement. The analysis also established a positive correlation between satisfaction and academic performance, suggesting that institutional services contribute to stronger student engagement and

achievement. Qualitative responses reinforced these findings by highlighting students' appreciation for supportive and approachable faculty, accessible library and research services, and responsive administrative personnel. At the same time, recurring concerns echoed the quantitative gaps, such as delays in grade releases, limited online platform efficiency, and the need for more proactive faculty mentoring. These narratives validated the survey outcomes and provided more profound insight into the lived experiences of graduate students, emphasizing areas where policies and practices could be enhanced.

Taken together, this study confirms that graduate students are generally highly satisfied with academic instruction, mentoring, and institutional support. However, areas such as online platform efficiency, faculty responsiveness, and timeliness of grade submissions require ongoing improvement. By addressing these gaps, the Graduate School can further strengthen its culture of academic excellence and student-centered service.

10 RECOMMENDATION

To further enhance graduate students' experiences, the Graduate School should strengthen its online system for grade tracking, enrolment and defense scheduling. Likewise, continuous mentoring, improved administrative support, and the institutionalization of regular feedback mechanisms are recommended to sustain high levels of student satisfaction and promote academic success.

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Authors' Contribution

Both authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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