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## Teachers' Narratives on Professional Growth and Career Advancement

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### Abstract

**Aim:** This study examined the experiences of teachers pursuing master's degrees, highlighting their motivations, challenges, and the degree's impact on their professional growth. Recognizing the link between the teaching crisis and the global learning crisis, the study emphasizes the need for highly qualified educators. Research suggests that teachers with graduate degrees demonstrate greater effectiveness, making it crucial to understand their experiences for policy development.

**Methodology:** Using a qualitative narrative inquiry, the study collected data from five teachers in rural or geographically isolated areas of Eastern Samar through semi-structured interviews. These participants, selected via purposive sampling, were either currently enrolled in or had recently completed a master's program. The gathered data were transcribed and analyzed through inductive thematic analysis to identify emerging themes.

**Results:** Findings revealed that teachers were highly motivated to pursue graduate studies, but they faced significant challenges, including time constraints, financial difficulties, and external disruptions. To overcome these, they relied on personal planning, support systems, and institutional assistance. Despite these challenges, pursuing a master's degree contributed to their professional and personal growth, enhancing their skills, confidence, and sense of fulfillment.

**Conclusion:** The study underscores teachers' dedication to self-improvement and their commitment to quality education despite adversity. Strengthening support systems can help them reach their full potential. Therefore, institutions should create equitable and effective learning environments for educators. Future research should explore specific challenges and benefits in greater depth to develop more accessible and relevant support mechanisms for teachers pursuing advanced education.

**Keywords:** lived experiences, master's degree program, narrative inquiry, career advancement, professional growth

### INTRODUCTION

The global education crisis has intensified, with 70% of 10-year-olds in low- and middle-income countries struggling to read (World Bank, 2022). In the Philippines, 9 out of 10 children face similar difficulties. Experts argue this crisis stems not only from the pandemic but also from long-standing systemic issues. The Philippine education system struggles with backlogs and new challenges, necessitating adaptation to global reforms like K to 12 and ASEAN integration.

Panth and Tulivuori (2021) link the learning crisis to a teaching crisis, emphasizing that highly qualified teachers are crucial. Research highlights that teacher quality significantly impacts student achievement (Viac & Fraser, 2020; Goldhaber, 2016). Studies further indicate that teachers with advanced degrees enhance student outcomes (Chang et al., 2020).

Graduate education equips teachers with research, communication, and instructional skills, fostering professional growth (Sevim & Akin, 2021). Motivations for pursuing a master's degree include career advancement,



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salary increase, self-esteem, and intrinsic growth (Cruz & Ramirez, 2016; Jung & Li, 2021). However, challenges such as financial constraints and perseverance deter many from completing graduate studies (Abellana & Abadiano, 2020).

This study explored the lived experiences of teachers in rural Eastern Samar pursuing master's degrees. Understanding their motivations, challenges, and professional growth can inform policies that empower educators, ultimately improving education quality and addressing the global learning crisis.

### Objectives

This study's primary purpose is to explore the lived experiences of the teachers in the southern part of Eastern Samar Division pursuing or having recently completed (within the past 2-3 years) a master's degree, focusing on those who are teaching in either rural or geographically isolated areas such as upland and island schools.

Specifically, it aimed to provide a detailed narrative of their experiences, addressing the following questions:

1. What are the narratives of teachers regarding their motivations for pursuing master's degrees?
2. What challenges do teachers encounter as they balance graduate studies with their existing teaching responsibilities?
3. How do teachers perceive the impact of master's programs on their professional growth and teaching practice?

### METHODS

#### Research Design

In the field of educational research, understanding the human element is necessary. Narrative inquiry is one powerful means through which to achieve this objective. This qualitative method delves into the subjective experiences of individuals, allowing them to share their own stories in their own words. It is an approach to studying human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experience as a source of essential knowledge and understanding (Clandinin, 2022). The "lived experiences" in narrative inquiry are often overlooked by conventional research methods, such as teacher motivation and challenges faced by teachers pursuing master's degrees.

According to Riessman (2008), as cited by Meraz et al. (2019), narrative inquiry reveals the rich texture and depth of human experience. Quantitative approaches are useful but may be based on standardized measures that fail to see small details or deeper meanings embedded in individual journeys. Narrative inquiry enables participants to narrate their stories with all their complexities, offering a more comprehensive picture rather than just surveying data points on motivations for pursuing a master's.

This method is especially useful in exploring what educators live through. In a world of ever-changing dynamics that educators navigate every day, these narratives can shed light on why some teachers pursue master's degrees or how they struggle to strike a balance between work and studies, or even what impact these programs have had on their personal growth as professionals. Personal stories such as these can be far more impactful than any number derived from surveys (Clandinin, 2013, as cited by Blix et al., 2025).

In conclusion, narrative inquiry provides a glimpse into the soul of human existence. Thus, emphasizing individual stories and participants' voices allows this research to reveal a deeper understanding of the "how" and "why" underlying human actions and decisions. This is particularly critical in educational research where teachers' lived experiences may inform policies, support systems, and ultimately improve education quality.

#### Population and Sampling

The purposely selected participants of the study are five (5) teachers in the southern part of Eastern Samar Division who are currently enrolled in a Master's degree program, or who have recently completed one within the past two to three years and are teaching in either rural or geographically isolated areas such as upland and island schools.

#### Instrument

The study employed a semi-structured interview guide as the primary tool for data collection, aiming to explore the lived experiences of teachers in rural Eastern Samar pursuing master's degrees. Probing questions were included to gather in-depth narratives. An interview guide, consisting of seven probing questions, was designed to address three core research questions. The first core question explored teachers' motivations for pursuing advanced education, addressing personal and professional aspirations. The second focused on the challenges of balancing



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graduate studies with teaching responsibilities, examining workload management and support systems. The third investigated the perceived impact of a master's program on professional growth and teaching practice.

Interviews were chosen due to their ability to capture participants' in-depth experiences, beliefs, and opinions (Virginia Tech, 2023). The semi-structured format allowed for open-ended responses, facilitating a nuanced exploration of personal insights (Dejonckheere & Vaughn, 2019) and offering a comprehensive understanding of teachers' motivations, challenges, and the transformative effects of graduate education.

To ensure the questions effectively captured the necessary information and were clear, relevant, and appropriate for the participants, the interview guide underwent several validation steps. First, the researcher reviewed relevant literature to align the questions with existing knowledge in the field. Second, the instrument was reviewed by the research adviser and three Human Resource Officers and senior faculty for feedback on its relevance and clarity. Third, a pilot study was conducted with two non-participant teachers with the same characteristics of informants to test the questions and make revisions based on their feedback. Finally, the questions underwent a peer review by colleagues familiar with qualitative research methods, further refining their structure and wording.

### Data Collection

The study's primary data source was interviews with participants, conducted with their consent. Before the interviews, the researchers carefully selected a one-on-one format, established a recording system, and developed an interview protocol. With the participants' approval, all interviews were recorded and transcribed. The researchers assured participants of strict confidentiality, emphasizing that the collected data would be used solely for the study.

### Data Analysis

After the data gathering, the researchers transcribed the data. The transcripts were then coded using an inductive-thematic analysis to identify, review, and refine themes. Thematic analysis, according to Crosley (2021), is the study of patterns to uncover meaning. In other words, it's about analyzing the patterns and themes within your data set to identify the underlying meaning. Moreover, the researcher used an inductive approach to develop themes from facts without prior assumptions and let the data determine the themes (Dovetail Editorial Team, 2023).

The researchers reviewed the transcripts and clarified the initial coding structure to ensure the representativeness of emerging categories. Multiple transcript reviews were conducted to enhance the findings' validity. Long-term communication and clarification with the interlocutors led to the development of credibility and trustworthiness.

Through open coding, the researchers analytically broke the transcripts up into discrete, bite-sized pieces of data, interpreted each piece of data, labelled it based on the properties of the data, and ensured that any two pieces of data that relate to the same subject, are labeled with the same codes (Saldana, 2009, as cited in Gordon et al., 2022). The last stage of narrative thematic analysis is the interpretation of the data, or simply making meaning from the data (Crosley, 2021). Core themes were analyzed according to their significance in answering the research questions. Additionally, the data were prepared and presented in a theme narrative format.

### Ethical Considerations

Protection of participants' rights, according to Ryan, Coughlan, and Cronin (2009) as cited by Butkutė et al. (2024), will be regarded as "a fundamental aspect of conducting research," and the issues of informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality will be of paramount importance in the conduct of this study.

This study was first presented for approval by the research committee at Eastern Samar State University to determine if it would not harm anyone or the university as a whole. The researchers always respected the rights of the interlocutors to withdraw. Additionally, the informants were asked to sign a consent form and informed that their participation would solely be intended to support this academic endeavor. Codes were used to maintain the anonymity of the participants during the data analysis. Furthermore, the confidentiality and security of the audio recordings were also ensured by the researchers.

### RESULTS and DISCUSSION

This section addresses the themes that emerged throughout the analysis and interpretation of data acquired from in-depth interviews with the participants. To validate the general findings that resulted from the data analysis, direct quotations from the transcribed data have been provided.



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Furthermore, to present the findings and answer the research questions, the discussion was divided into five (5) major sections derived from the overall themes that were developed through the process of thematic analysis, namely: Motivational Factors in Pursuing a Master's Degree, Challenges Encountered in Pursuing a Master's Degree, Coping Strategies of Teachers in Pursuing Master's Degree, Perceived Impact of Master's Program to Teachers, and Supporting Teachers' Pursuit of Master's Degrees.

### 1. Motivational Factors in Pursuing a Master's Degree

The data collected provides an entrancing overview of the key factors that motivated teachers to pursue their master's degrees. Their narratives were intricately intertwined on Career Growth, Teaching Enhancement and Professional Development, Personal Development and Fulfillment, Social Influences, and Contribution and Impact.

#### Sub-Themes

*Career Growth*

*Teaching Enhancement and Professional Development*

*Personal Development and Fulfillment*

*Social Influences*

*Contribution and Impact*

#### 1.1 Career Growth

Career Development Theory emphasizes the importance of aligning educational pursuits with career goals. In the context of this study, teachers viewed a master's degree as a strategic tool for career advancement, including promotions and salary increases. This perspective aligns with Cruz's (2024) assertion that career growth encompasses upward mobility, additional benefits, and salary enhancements. The following narratives from the key informants illustrate this connection.

**KI 5: Career advancement. It's general knowledge that a degree or units in a master's can be used for promotion.**

**KI 3: Qualification for promotion because it is now required to have a degree or at least earn units in a master's program. Practically speaking, I am doing it for my promotion, for with promotion comes a salary increase. I will study so that I will not be stuck in Teacher I.**

**KI 4: For my career advancement. We know that earning a master's degree can help with promotion... It's a good thing for DepEd to also make the years of experience not the sole basis for promotion. You do not need to wait for fifteen years, twenty just to be promoted. Now, as early as one (1) year as long as you have the required number of units in master's and especially if you have a master's degree, you can apply for promotion.**

The information narrated by the informants highlighted the importance of earning a degree or units in a master's in the career advancement of teachers. They viewed a master's degree as a tool to achieve their career goals.

#### 1.2 Teaching Enhancement and Professional Development

In line with the Self-Determination Theory by Ryan and Deci (2000), which asserts that one of the three psychological needs of a human is "competence," referring to the experience of mastery and effectiveness. The narratives of the teachers in this study demonstrate that pursuing a master's degree directly addresses this need, driving their motivation for professional development. Overall, the participants expressed a strong desire to improve their teaching skills, gain advanced knowledge, and adapt to the evolving needs of their students. As they put it:

**KI 2: What motivated me to pursue my master's degree ... my desire to enhance my expertise in the field. Through the MAED Math program, I hoped to gain advanced pedagogical strategies, skills in planning effective learning experiences, and have deeper understanding of mathematical concepts to enhance my teaching effectiveness as a Math teacher.**

**KI 3: I persevere in pursuing my master's to gain knowledge and skills that I can use in my job as a teacher and**



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*school in charge... As someone who is still a newbie in the field who was assigned to an upland school and appointed as school-in-charge after just three (3) years of teaching experience through the master's program, I hope to gain expertise in educational management that I can use in managing the school and my teachers.*

**KI 1:** *I want to improve my creative thinking skills, most especially in thesis writing, because we are also encouraged by DepEd to conduct research. This will help me a lot in identifying problems that I have observed or experienced relevant to the teaching-learning process and then recommend solutions to address the identified issue that will help me as a teacher.*

**KI 5:** *As someone who has been in the field of teaching for twenty years... I want to be updated and equipped with new teaching methods that are relevant to the needs of my students today.*

**KI 4:** *I want to enhance my teaching skills more because I've been absorbed by DepEd for two years, but I have encountered a lot of challenges already; that's why it's good to know that I'm not alone... that others experience the same challenges as me. It's also good to know the interventions of the teachers who are also in the field with the same experience.*

These narratives align with the insights of Simmons School of Education (2023), which notes that pursuing a master's in education allows teachers to enhance their skills, specialize, and stay informed on pedagogical trends. The teachers in this study demonstrated a strong drive to increase their competence and become better educators.

### 1.3 Personal Development and Fulfillment

Beyond career advancement, the key informants in this study revealed that personal development and fulfillment served as significant motivators for pursuing a master's degree. This aligns with Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes the need for autonomy and personal growth. The teachers viewed their graduate studies as an opportunity to become better versions of themselves, both personally and intellectually. As the informants stated:

**KI 4:** *Through the master's program, I hope to improve my skills, specifically my critical thinking, communication, and presentation. And even though I've been teaching already, I still want to develop my confidence.*

**KI 5:** *As someone who decided to continue my master's in my 40s, I also see it as a personal challenge to achieve higher education and intellectual growth.*

These qualitative data highlight the intrinsic value teachers place on personal growth and intellectual stimulation. The pursuit of a master's degree provides them with an opportunity to not only enhance their professional skills but also to achieve a sense of personal accomplishment and fulfillment.

### 1.4 Social Influences

Aside from the aforementioned factors, the participants in this study also cited social influences as a significant factor in their decision to pursue a master's degree. This aligns with the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Ryan and Deci (2000), specifically the need for 'relatedness,' which refers to the human desire to feel connected and have a sense of belonging. The following narratives illustrate how these social connections motivated the teachers.

**KI 2:** *The encouragement from my mentors because they say that I should pursue my master's while I'm still young to enhance my capabilities.*

**KI 3:** *I can see my former college classmates and colleagues taking up master's, which motivated me to enroll too.*

**KI 5:** *Peer influence is one reason why I pursued my master's. My colleagues and I decided to enroll together.*

*Maybe without them, who are almost the same age as me, maybe I would not have tried because of my age, I'm 40 plus... though there is no age limit in master's but of course most of the students are fresh graduates or those who are new in the teaching field. For example, our memory is way better when we were young compared to now. Another is mentorship from our heads and other school leaders. They encouraged us to pursue further studies.*

These narratives feature the power of social connections in motivating teachers to pursue professional



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development. The feeling of relatedness, created by the participants' peers and mentors, was a strong motivator for them.

### 1.5 Personal Factors

In this study, personal factors are defined as the individual characteristics that influenced the teachers' behavior and decision-making process in pursuing a master's degree, including their age, academic ability, financial capability, and personality traits. Some of the interlocutors expressed that their motivation for pursuing their master's is rooted in their willingness to make a meaningful contribution and impact on the community through their students. These factors emerged as significant influences in the narratives shared by the informants.

*KI 4: First were my age and academic ability. I convinced myself to pursue a master's while I was still young and still had a good memory. Another was because of the expectations of my family, former teachers, and friends... they try to persuade me to enroll in a master's, all for the same reason, while I'm still young.*

*KI 1: The tuition fee. As time goes by, the cost of tuition for a master's degree is also getting more expensive, which made me enroll while it is still affordable.*

*KI 2: I also want to help contribute to solving challenges encountered by the students and teachers too... to inspire my students to say: 'even ma'am pursued her studies to learn more how much more myself that I am still a student.'*

These narratives shared by the participants highlight the complex relationship of personal factors that influence teachers' decisions to pursue advanced education. These factors range from individual concerns about age and finances to a broader desire to contribute to the community and inspire students.

## 2. Challenges Encountered in Pursuing a Master's Degree

This theme, addressing the research question 'What challenges do teachers encounter as they balance graduate studies with their teaching responsibilities?', revealed the significant obstacles that teachers in the southern part of Eastern Samar Division faced. The data collected tells a compelling picture of the challenges highlighting the demanding nature of balancing graduate studies with teaching responsibilities.

### Sub-Themes

*Time Management Challenges*

*Financial Constraints*

*Weather Conditions*

*Internet Connectivity Issues*

*Stress and Burnout*

### 2.1 Time Management Challenges

Most people consider managing time effectively as one of the biggest challenges. Likewise, with teachers, juggling time for work, study, and personal life has never been an easy task. As they shared:

*KI 2: I can say that it is really challenging to be a full-time teacher and, at the same time, a student in graduate school. Overlapping activities and then conflict of schedule. That was the biggest challenge for me, managing my time.*

*KI 3: Conflict of time between work and studies. Like if there are school activities, seminars to attend, or reports to accomplish, and it happens that I also have to attend classes.*

*KI 5: It is difficult to balance our work as a teacher and at the same time pursue a master's. The work of a teacher is very demanding since it is not finished in the classroom; sometimes, the work is done at home and even on weekends. So, mostly, there is conflict in time, and besides, I'm not only a teacher, but I also have a family too.*

The narratives shared by the participants emphasize the relentless time management challenges that teachers face when pursuing master's degrees. The conflict between work, studies, and personal life creates a significant obstacle for them. This is consistent with the study conducted by Altbach, P. G., & Salmi, J. (2020), as cited by Amahido (2024), which revealed that pursuing postgraduate courses requires students to dedicate a considerable amount of time to coursework, research, and writing their thesis or dissertation. For those who are

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employed and have family responsibilities, these demands add an extra level of complexity. The issue is twofold: not only finding sufficient time for academic tasks but also ensuring that one's career and home responsibilities are not overlooked. The findings of Altbach, P. G., & Salmi, J. (2020) and the current study both highlight the difficulty of balancing work, personal life, and graduate studies.

## 2.2 Financial Constraints

Financial constraints emerged as a significant challenge for teachers in the southern part of the Eastern Samar Division pursuing master's degrees. Despite having regular incomes, they faced financial struggles related to their studies. The following narratives illustrate these burdens.

**KI 3: *There are times when I miss my class because I don't have money to sustain my financial needs to attend classes in my master's every weekend, especially since I still need to travel from Giporlos to Guiuan just to attend my class.***

**KI 4: *Tuition fees, study materials, educational tour, and other expenses for workshops, seminars, and conferences sometimes become an issue.***

These narratives highlight the significant financial strain that teachers experience when pursuing advanced education. These findings are supported by existing literature, which shows that the cost of graduate education is a significant obstacle for many teachers. Specifically, according to Castulo et al. (2025), financial challenges pose a significant barrier to completing graduate studies in the Philippines, as the country's free higher education does not cover graduate studies and limited scholarships are offered. These findings are consistent with the experiences of the teachers in the current study, who also faced financial struggles.

## 2.3 Weather Conditions

The pursuit of a master's degree poses an additional challenge to those assigned in geographically isolated areas, such as upland and island schools, when it comes to attending classes in graduate school. The unpredictable and often severe weather conditions in these areas can significantly disrupt teachers' ability to maintain consistent attendance. As one of the key informants shared:

**KI 4: *As an island teacher, there are times when I cannot attend in-person events or classes because of unpredictable weather. There was one time when it was time to report; I was ready, but I was not able to attend the class because there were no pump boats that travelled across to the mainland because the waves were big.***

This shows the unique vulnerability of island teachers to weather-related disruptions, which can hinder their academic progress. This underscores the reality faced by teachers assigned to geographically isolated areas.

## 2.4 Internet Connectivity Issues

For teachers assigned to geographically isolated areas, limited internet connectivity poses another significant obstacle to their graduate studies. This is particularly challenging because not all graduate school classes are held offline and in face-to-face setups. There are also times when classes are done online.

**KI 4: *Remote islands like Homonhon have slow internet access; that's why some of the online classes and output submissions become a challenge, for example, when you have to present your report.***

This underscores the digital divide that these teachers face, which can significantly hinder their academic progress and increase their stress levels. The lack of reliable internet access limits their ability to fully participate in online learning and submit assignments on time.

## 2.5 Stress and Burnout

Considering the challenges encountered as mentioned by the teachers in their narratives in their pursuit of a master's degree, the combined pressures of teaching, studying, and other responsibilities caused them stress and burnout.



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**KI 5: It is difficult to balance our work as a teacher and at the same time pursue a master's. So, I can say that balancing teaching and graduate studies can lead to stress and burnout, which I experienced.**

This narrative accentuates the significant risk of stress and burnout among teachers pursuing master's degrees, which can negatively impact their overall well-being and teaching effectiveness. This also highlights the high levels of stress experienced by teachers when they are also students.

### 3. Coping Strategies of Teachers Pursuing a Master's Degree

It can be gleaned from the findings of this study that teachers employ a range of strategies in pursuing a master's degree with a full-time job as a public school teacher alongside.

#### Sub-Themes

*Strategies for Achieving Work-Study-Life Balance*

*Support and Accountability*

*University or College's Support and Commitment in Education*

#### 3.1 Strategies for Achieving Work-Study-Life Balance

To navigate the challenges of work-study-life imbalance, teachers in the southern part of the Eastern Samar Division developed and employed various strategies. The following narratives illustrate these coping mechanisms.

**KI 1: I set time for my work and studies. For example, on weekdays, I focus on my work, and on weekends, I focus on my studies.**

**KI 2: To manage my workload and time commitment, I prioritize my tasks both in my work and in the master's program. I also set a schedule so that I will not forget or overlook important tasks.**

**KI 4: To balance my responsibilities, I plan my to-do activities and then set goals daily and weekly. And then I try my best to stick to my plan and schedule.**

**KI 5: Even if the work-life balance itself is already a struggle, I also need to pursue my master's for additional knowledge and promotion, what I did was develop and apply an effective time management strategy to efficiently manage my teaching, studying, and personal commitments.**

By implementing time management strategies, the teachers were able to successfully balance their work, studies, and personal lives.

#### 3.2 Support and Accountability

When it comes to managing their workload and time commitment in their studies alongside their teaching responsibilities, some of the strategies they shared are seeking support from colleagues and family members and also being accountable for one's actions and decisions. As the key informants stated:

**KI 2: It was very overwhelming, mostly, but I can say that I was lucky because my colleagues and family members were very supportive of me. Without them, I don't know if I would have been able to finish my master's.**

**KI 3: For me, discipline has been my guiding force. If you have discipline, then you can provide all your commitments with your attention. Through discipline, I learned how to prioritize my tasks as a school in-charge, classroom teacher, student, father, husband, etc... and to also remind myself to stay on track in times when I am tempted to procrastinate, for example.**

The vital role of both social support and personal accountability in helping teachers navigate the challenges of graduate studies has been emphasized in these narratives. The support from colleagues and family provided emotional and practical assistance, while personal discipline enabled teachers to effectively manage their time and prioritize their responsibilities.

#### 3.3 University or College's Support and Commitment in Education

Pursuing a master's degree becomes significantly more manageable when universities or colleges actively support their students, particularly those who are working full-time. The following narratives highlight the positive impact of institutional support.





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*KI 2: I'm grateful to the university for their support to graduate students who, at the same time, work full time like me. They offered us flexible scheduling, accessible resources, and practical teaching skills.*

*KI 5: For me, it is such a big help that they have designed the classes for the program to be conducted on weekends.*

*KI 3: Our professors and dean are very committed to providing guidance and interventions for us to finish our studies. There are instances that because of the challenges of studying master's, teaching full-time, and your personal life, you will get discouraged to enroll or continue.*

Flexible scheduling, accessible resources, and encouraging faculty created a supportive learning environment that helped teachers balance their professional and academic responsibilities, showing the importance of the positive impact of university support on teachers' ability to pursue master's degrees.

#### 4. Perceived Impact of a Master's Program on Teachers

The qualitative data gathered provides a summary of the perceived impact of the master's program on teachers, revealing a strong sense of positive transformation.

##### Sub-Themes

*Professional Development*

*Personal Development*

##### 4.1 Professional Development

The informants narrated the significant contributions of the master's program to their professional growth as teachers.

*KI 1: In a master's program, most of our professors are already doctors. And then, my classmates are mostly public teachers, too. So, in class, we have exchanging of ideas when it comes to the challenges we experienced in teaching and how we solved them. I learned a lot of teaching techniques and strategies from them, both our professors and classmates. I am already applying the different techniques and theories I learned from the program. Specifically, I can also identify my students' attitudes and learn how to handle them, especially during class hours.*

*KI 2: Yes, because of the program, I can teach better now. In teaching, I've been using research-based methods and technology.*

*KI 3: As a teacher, it provided me with advanced teaching principles, which helped me identify learning gaps and make effective interventions. I became more resourceful in providing learning opportunities. Now, I am more of using research-based learning instructions and became more diligent in terms of analyzing the needs of the learners, so that I can also craft effective learning intervention/instruction. And as a school in-charge, on the other hand, I noticed that I became more decisive.]*

*KI 4: Yes. In the master's we do not just talk about theories, but we are also able to share our struggles and experiences when it comes to teaching since most of my classmates are really in the teaching field. It's on the realities faced by the teachers and not more on theories anymore like in the undergrad (undergraduate degree). Because of this, I also discovered new teaching techniques and strategies from my professors and classmates that helped me improve my teaching style. Because of the program, I keep on learning new things that I can use for a more quality and effective teaching.*

*KI 5: By helping me improve my classroom effectiveness through timely and relevant instructional strategies appropriate to the needs of my 21st century students. I've been teaching for two decades already, and I have witnessed that the youth of today are different from the youth in the past. That's why I need to refresh... update my strategies. I've adopted innovative teaching strategies and implemented the use of ICT in my class, which I learned from my studies in the master's program.]*

In a nutshell, the program provided the participants with new teaching techniques, improved classroom management skills, and enhanced their ability to address learning gaps. The program also encouraged the use of research-based methods and technology, which helped the teachers to modernize their teaching practices.



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#### 4.2 Personal Development

Aside from the positive impact on their professional development, the data collected also highlighted the effects of the master's program on their personal growth. As they stated:

*KI 2: Now that I earned my master's degree, for me, I became more effective and engaging to my students for I was equipped by the program with the necessary teaching skills and knowledge. The program also helped me improve my critical thinking, which is beneficial for me. My enhanced critical thinking skills have also been a big help in crafting HOTS (Higher Order Thinking Skills) questions for my students.*

*KI 1: Studying for my master's degree did not only deepen my knowledge but also allowed me to apply what I learned in my personal life and to my students.*

*KI 4: I am also able to self-evaluate myself in terms of my teaching performance, so I also get to recognize areas of my teaching that need improvement. Studying for a master's has been a really big help for me both academically and personally. The program provided more opportunities for me.*

*KI 5: I am one of the teachers who struggle when it comes to technology. It has been my weakness. But because of the program, I am able to manage it and slowly turn it into my strength.*

The participants shared the significant personal growth they experienced through the master's program. Based on their narratives, the program enhanced their self-efficacy, self-evaluation skills, technology proficiency, critical thinking, and decisiveness. These personal developments not only improved their teaching effectiveness but also enriched their overall lives.

### 5. Supporting Teachers' Pursuit of Master's Degrees

This theme emerged when informants were asked for their recommendations on how to improve their experience in pursuing a master's degree. Their responses conveyed a desire for more structured support and resources.

#### Sub-Themes

*Financial Considerations*

*Professional Development and Support*

*Workload Management*

#### 5.1 Financial Considerations

Financial constraints have been one of the challenges encountered by the teachers in their pursuit of further studies. Consequently, the informants provided the following recommendations:

*KI 5: I hope DepEd will have financial assistance for teachers who pursue their graduate studies.*

*KI 3: Lower the financial obligations of the teachers when it comes to pursuing master's degree.*

*KI 4: To have just and proper compensation for teachers to have additional funds to support them in pursuing further studies.*

These recommendations highlight the teachers' desire for greater financial support from the Department of Education to make graduate studies more accessible. Providing financial assistance and adjusting compensation could significantly alleviate the financial burden and encourage more teachers to pursue advanced degrees.

#### 5.2 Professional Development and Support

Teachers in the southern part of the Eastern Samar Division also recommended that universities or colleges offer the master's program in alternative learning delivery modes, such as modular learning, to better support working professionals. As one participant stated:

*KI 2: Aside from the support that the university provides, maybe they can also offer modular learning options designed especially for those who have full-time jobs and want to pursue their graduate studies.*

This underscores the need for universities to adopt flexible learning approaches that cater to the unique needs of working teachers. Providing modular learning options could significantly increase accessibility and reduce the burden of traditional classroom-based learning.



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### 5.3 Workload Management

Among the key informants' recommendations was a proposal to reduce the teaching loads of teachers pursuing master's degrees during crucial study periods within the Department of Education. As a participant stated:

*KI 5: I also hope to have policies that will allow teachers to have reduced teaching loads, especially on critical study periods like thesis writing, to help teachers manage their responsibilities more effectively.*

This highlights the need for policies that acknowledge the added workload of teachers pursuing advanced degrees. Implementing reduced teaching loads during critical study periods could significantly improve teachers' ability to manage their responsibilities and complete their studies successfully.

### Conclusions

The collective experiences of teachers pursuing master's degrees, as illustrated by the thematic analysis of their stories, yield several key conclusions.

Firstly, the data reveals a highly motivated teaching force, aligning directly with the theme of 'Motivational Factors.' These teachers, driven by aspirations for career advancement, enhanced skills, and personal growth, demonstrate a profound commitment to continuous learning. However, this motivation is often tested by systemic barriers, a reality depicted in the 'Challenges Encountered' theme. Financial constraints, heavy workloads, and logistical hurdles impede their academic progress, highlighting the need for systemic reform. To overcome these barriers, the teachers rely heavily on support systems, a vital component of the 'Coping Strategies' theme. Both institutional support from universities and collegial and familial support prove crucial. The positive impact of higher education, reflected in the 'Perceived Impact' theme, validates the investment in teacher development, showcasing significant professional and personal growth. Consequently, the findings point to areas for improvement in policy and practice, as suggested by the 'Supporting Teachers' Pursuit of Master's Degrees' theme, including financial assistance and flexible learning options.

The individual stories of teachers like KI 3 and KI 5, who faced financial setbacks and age-related doubts, exemplify teacher resilience, showcasing their unwavering determination to better themselves. Moreover, the teachers' narratives, particularly those focused on enhancing pedagogical practices and inspiring students, reveal a genuine desire to make a greater impact on the educational system.

Ultimately, these findings highlight the unwavering dedication of teachers to self-improvement and their commitment to enhancing the quality of education, even amidst significant adversity, and suggest specific areas where support systems can be strengthened to foster a more sustainable and supportive environment for their professional growth.

### Recommendations

In light of the study's key findings, several suggestions can be made to enhance the experience of teachers pursuing master's degrees. For the Department of Education (DepEd), it is crucial to establish or expand financial assistance programs, including scholarships and tuition reimbursement initiatives, specifically designed to support teachers in their pursuit of advanced education. Furthermore, DepEd should develop and implement workload management policies that allow for flexible work schedules or reduced teaching loads, particularly during critical study periods. Universities and colleges, on the other hand, should prioritize flexible program delivery options, such as online courses, blended learning, or evening classes, to accommodate teachers' demanding schedules. Providing recorded lectures and online resources for asynchronous learning would also be beneficial. Establishing partnerships with DepEd to develop master's programs that align with the department's priorities and offer discounted tuition rates or scholarships for teachers is another vital step. Moreover, universities should demonstrate understanding and flexibility regarding the real-world constraints faced by teachers. Lastly, for the teachers themselves, developing effective time management strategies, building strong support networks, prioritizing self-care practices, and maintaining proactive communication with supervisors and professors are essential. These recommendations aim to create a more equitable, supportive, and effective educational environment by empowering teachers to reach their full potential through advanced education.



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