JOURNAL
OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH, INNOVATION, AND MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES
An Academic Journal Publication
Website: | https://jerimspublication.com

INTERNATIONAL STANDARD SERIAL NUMBERS
PRINT ISSN 3116-5559
ONLINE ISSN 3116-5567

Volume 1, Issue 8, pp 48-54, October 2026

Research Article

Thriving in the Era of Graduate Education: A Lived Experience

Geograce A. Lagmay
Department of Education

Article History:

Submission: August, 2026
Revised: September, 2026
Accepted: September, 2026
Published: October, 2026

Originality: 98%
Similarity Index: 3%
Grammarly Score: 98%

*Corresponding Author:
lagmaygeograce29@gmail.com

Recommended Citation:

Lagmay, G., (2026). Thriving in the Era of Graduate Education: A Lived Experience. *Journal of Educational Research, Innovation, and Multidisciplinary Studies, 1(8), 48-54.*

https://doi.org/10.67001/jeri.2026.01.M9R5WP

ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and anticipated teaching practices of 15 Master of Arts in Education (MAEd) students at Southern Capital Colleges during Academic Year 2025–2026. Purposively selected participants completed semi-structured interviews, and responses were analyzed through Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic framework. Three groups of findings emerged: eleven themes describing academic, emotional, professional, financial, technological, and identity-related experiences; ten themes reflecting time management, adaptive learning, social support, self-direction, motivation, spirituality, and financial coping; and nine themes concerning anticipated pedagogical transformation, learner-centered instruction, contextualization, innovation, reflection, technology integration, inclusion, and professional ethics. The findings suggest that thriving in graduate education involves the interaction of individual resilience, purposeful learning, and supportive relationships, while graduate study shapes participants' aspirations for more responsive teaching. Graduate programs may use these insights to strengthen mentoring, flexible learning support, and research-to-practice opportunities.

Keywords: *graduate education; lived experiences; MAEd students; phenomenology; professional identity; thriving.*

Copyright Notice:

2026 Author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), allowing third parties to copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format and to remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially, provided the original work is properly cited and states its license.

Introduction

Graduate education provides educators and aspiring teachers with opportunities for professional advancement, research competence, and leadership development. Yet the journey toward an advanced degree is rarely limited to coursework. Students negotiate academic deadlines, work and family commitments, financial pressures, changing digital demands, and questions about their professional identity. Understanding how students navigate these demands is essential to designing graduate programs that foster meaningful growth rather than mere completion.

In the context of Master of Arts in Education (MAEd) programs, academic learning is expected to connect educational theory, reflective practice, and the realities of teaching. Graduate students may approach this task from different positions: some are experienced classroom practitioners, whereas others are preparing to enter formal teaching roles while undertaking other forms of employment. Such diversity creates different needs for mentoring, academic support, and opportunities to apply learning. The source study focused on the voices of MAEd students enrolled at Southern Capital Colleges in Oroquieta City during Academic Year 2025–2026.

The study was anchored in Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness as foundations of sustained motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020). It also drew on Social Cognitive Career Theory to interpret the role of self-efficacy and contextual support in educational and career development. From these perspectives, thriving is not simply the absence of difficulty; it is an active process of maintaining purpose, developing capacity, and drawing on supportive relationships while confronting academic challenges.

Existing scholarship described in the thesis identifies work–study pressures, academic writing demands, burnout, and the value of supportive learning environments. However, the interplay of lived experiences, coping strategies, and prospective changes in teaching practice remains particularly important in localized graduate-school settings. A phenomenological approach allows participants to explain how they interpret these intersecting experiences in their own terms.

Accordingly, the study addressed three questions: (1) What are the lived experiences of MAEd students in preparing for teaching while pursuing graduate studies? (2) What coping mechanisms do they employ to thrive and sustain well-being? and (3) What aspects of graduate education influence their future teaching styles? The article presents the themes reported in the original thesis and discusses their implications for graduate education and teacher preparation.

Methods

The study employed a qualitative phenomenological design involving 15 purposively selected MAEd students enrolled at Southern Capital Colleges, Oroquieta City, during Academic Year 2025–2026. Participants had completed at least two semesters of graduate study and were selected for their ability to describe their academic and professional experiences. Data were collected through validated semi-structured, in-depth interviews after obtaining the necessary permissions and informed consent. Interview accounts were transcribed and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis to identify recurring meanings and organize them into emergent themes. The researcher attended to voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the ethical handling of participants' accounts.

Results and Discussions

1. Lived Experiences of MAEd Students

Emergent Themes	Sub-Themes
Emotional and Psychological Experiences	Rollercoaster Experience (pressure, excitement, uncertainty); Feeling Under Pressure to Master Theories
Role Conflict and Multiple Responsibilities	Dual Role (student vs professional / parent / worker); Living Two Lives (work by day, study by night)
Time Management and Workload Demands	Strict Schedules and Time Management; Studying Late at Night / Limited Rest
Financial and Practical Challenges	Financial Constraints (tuition, resources, no stable

	income); Self-Supporting Education (business, freelancing, savings)
Technological and Resource Challenges	Lack of Resources (devices, internet, materials); Struggles with Digital Tools and Platforms
Social and Environmental Experiences	Feelings of Isolation and Loneliness; Limited Face-to-Face Interaction (online learning)
Academic and Professional Pressure	Intimidation Among Experienced Peers; Feeling Inadequate Compared to Practicing Teachers
Professional Preparation and Identity Formation	Viewing Graduate Studies as Preparation for Teaching; Treating Presentations as Practice Classroom
Personal and Professional Development	Growth in Confidence and Professional Identity; Increased Maturity and Discipline
Motivation and Purpose	Motivation Driven by Career Goals (DepEd, academe, stability); Desire for Career Shift or Advancement
Meaning-Making and Reflection	Viewing MAEd Journey as Investment or New Beginning; Seeing Education as Path to Fulfillment

P The findings revealed that participants experienced graduate education as both emotionally demanding and professionally meaningful, characterized by psychological pressure, role conflict, time management difficulties, financial constraints, technological challenges, and academic expectations. Balancing responsibilities as students, employees, parents, and aspiring educators created competing demands that affected their academic engagement and personal well-being. Participants also encountered difficulties related to overlapping deadlines, thesis preparation, tuition expenses, limited technological resources, and uneven opportunities for social interaction. These findings are supported by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), who explained that competing responsibilities across multiple roles can generate conflict when the demands of one role interfere with another. Similarly, Goode (1960) emphasized that individuals occupying multiple social roles may experience strain because of limited time, energy, and resources. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) further explained that psychological stress arises when individuals perceive environmental demands as exceeding their available coping resources. These perspectives reinforce the findings that graduate students encounter interconnected emotional, academic, financial, and practical challenges while pursuing advanced education.

Despite these challenges, participants described graduate education as an opportunity for personal growth, professional preparation, increased confidence, resilience, and a stronger sense of career purpose. Their experiences of overcoming academic difficulties and managing competing responsibilities contributed to their developing professional identities and perceptions of competence. Bandura (1997) emphasized that successful experiences in overcoming challenges can strengthen individuals' self-efficacy and confidence in their capabilities. Likewise, Schlossberg (1981) explained that individuals' adaptation to life transitions is influenced by their personal characteristics, available support systems, and coping strategies. Mezirow (1991) further highlighted that adult learning can promote transformative changes in perspectives through critical reflection on experiences and assumptions. Overall, the findings suggest that graduate education involves a complex interaction of psychological, social, academic, and professional experiences. Although participants encountered substantial challenges, their accounts indicate that these experiences also provided opportunities for developing resilience, strengthening professional identity, and preparing for future educational responsibilities.

2. Coping Mechanisms for Well-Being and Thriving

Emergent theme	Representative codes
Time Management Strategies	Strict Scheduling and Time Blocking; Studying During Specific Hours (night study, weekends)
Adaptive Learning Strategies	Using Work/Experience as Learning Platform; Treating Presentations as Practice Classroom
Self-Directed Learning	Continuous Self-Study and Research; Reading Journals and Academic Materials

Social and Emotional Support	Seeking Support from Family (emotional, financial); Encouragement from Spouse, Parents, and Loved Ones
Psychological and Emotional Coping	Maintaining Positive Mindset and Resilience; Acceptance of Challenges and Limitations
Motivation-Driven Coping	Using Motivation and Goal Orientation; Viewing Degree as Investment or Ticket to the Future
Spiritual Coping Mechanisms	Faith and Spiritual Beliefs; Trust in God and Purpose
Personal Management and Responsibility	Practicing Self-Discipline and Accountability; Treating Studies Like a Job or Responsibility
Practical and Financial Coping	Managing Finances (budgeting, side jobs, business); Engaging in Part-Time Work or Freelancing
Reflective and Growth-Oriented Coping	Accepting and Learning from Struggles; Viewing Challenges as Opportunities for Growth

The findings revealed that graduate students employed various coping mechanisms to maintain their well-being, manage academic demands, and sustain their motivation toward achieving educational and professional goals. These mechanisms included time management, adaptive learning, self-directed learning, social and emotional support, psychological resilience, motivation-driven coping, spiritual practices, personal responsibility, and practical financial management. Participants emphasized the importance of establishing study schedules, prioritizing academic tasks, and maintaining self-discipline to balance graduate studies with employment, family responsibilities, and other personal commitments. They also utilized workplace experiences, classroom presentations, independent reading, and continuous research as opportunities to strengthen their academic competencies and professional preparation. These findings are supported by Zimmerman (2002), who emphasized that self-regulated learners actively manage their learning through goal-setting, strategic planning, self-monitoring, and reflection. Similarly, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) explained that individuals employ problem-focused coping strategies to manage stressful situations and reduce the demands associated with challenging circumstances. Furthermore, Bandura (1997) highlighted that self-efficacy strengthens individuals' confidence in their ability to overcome difficulties and accomplish demanding tasks. These perspectives suggest that effective coping among graduate students involves purposeful self-management, adaptive learning behaviors, and confidence in their capacity to achieve academic success.

Moreover, participants identified family encouragement, emotional support, spiritual beliefs, financial resourcefulness, and reflective learning as important mechanisms for sustaining psychological well-being and academic persistence. Support from spouses, parents, classmates, and colleagues provided reassurance and practical assistance, while prayer and faith helped some participants maintain hope and a sense of purpose during challenging circumstances. Participants also demonstrated resilience by accepting personal limitations, learning from setbacks, maintaining positive attitudes, and viewing graduate education as an investment in their future careers. Deci and Ryan (2000) emphasized that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fundamental psychological needs associated with motivation and well-being, while House (1981) highlighted the importance of social support in helping individuals manage stressful experiences. Likewise, Pargament (1997) explained that religious and spiritual coping can provide meaning, emotional comfort, and psychological resources when individuals encounter difficulties. Mezirow (1991) further emphasized that critical reflection on challenging experiences can contribute to transformative adult learning and personal development. Overall, the findings suggest that graduate students' well-being and capacity to thrive are supported by the interaction of individual determination, effective self-management, supportive relationships, spiritual resources, and reflective growth. These coping mechanisms demonstrate how participants navigated academic and personal challenges while sustaining their commitment to professional advancement.

3. Influence of Graduate Education on Future Teaching Style

Table 3. Emergent themes and illustrative codes from the participants' accounts.

Emergent theme	Representative codes
Pedagogical Transformation	Shift from Traditional to Student-Centered Teaching; Use of Data-Driven Instruction
Contextualized and Experiential Teaching	Development of Practical and Real-World Teaching Approaches; Application of Andragogy and Lifelong

	Learning Principles
Humanistic and Learner-Centered Approach	Increased Empathy and Patience Toward Learners; Understanding Learners' Diverse Backgrounds
Innovation and Creativity in Teaching	Adoption of Innovative and Modern Teaching Strategies; Openness to New Methods and Technologies
Reflective and Professional Teaching Identity	Development of Reflective and Evidence-Based Practice; Continuous Self-Assessment and Improvement
Teacher Identity Formation	Strengthened Professional Confidence and Identity; Feeling Prepared and Competent to Teach
Digital and Technological Pedagogy	Integration of Technology in Teaching; Becoming Tech-Savvy Educators
Inclusive and Responsive Teaching	Emphasis on Inclusivity and Cultural Responsiveness; Adapting to Diverse Learners and Contexts
Professional Values and Work Ethics	Focus on Discipline, Organization, and Professionalism; Structured and Organized Teaching Approach

The findings revealed that graduate education shaped participants' anticipated teaching styles by strengthening their commitment to student-centered, contextualized, inclusive, and research-informed instructional practices. Participants expressed intentions to move beyond traditional teaching approaches by integrating experiential learning, evidence-based strategies, and innovative instructional methods that address learners' diverse abilities, backgrounds, and emotional needs. They emphasized the importance of empathy, patience, creativity, and cultural responsiveness in creating supportive learning environments. Furthermore, participants recognized the value of integrating educational technologies, real-life applications, and differentiated learning activities to enhance learner engagement and understanding. These findings are supported by Knowles et al. (2015), who emphasized the importance of experiential and practical learning in adult education, and Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), who highlighted the role of professional learning in strengthening instructional knowledge and practices through active learning, collaboration, and reflection. Similarly, Ladson-Billings (1995) underscored the significance of culturally relevant pedagogy in responding to learners' diverse backgrounds and experiences. These perspectives suggest that graduate education provides opportunities for aspiring educators to develop more inclusive, responsive, and meaningful approaches to teaching.

Moreover, participants associated graduate education with increased professional confidence, reflective practice, technological competence, and a stronger sense of professional responsibility. Their experiences encouraged continuous self-assessment, critical reflection, and the application of theoretical knowledge to anticipated classroom situations. They also emphasized discipline, organization, professionalism, and lifelong learning as essential characteristics of effective educators. Schön (1983) explained that reflective practice enables professionals to critically examine their experiences and improve their professional judgments, while Beijaard et al. (2004) emphasized that teacher professional identity develops through the interaction of personal experiences, professional knowledge, and educational contexts. Likewise, Mishra and Koehler (2006) highlighted the importance of integrating technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge to support meaningful technology-enhanced instruction. Overall, the findings suggest that graduate education contributed to participants' perceived professional growth and aspirations for more reflective, innovative, ethically responsible, and learner-centered teaching. Across the three research questions, participants' experiences reflected an interconnected process in which academic challenges encouraged adaptive coping mechanisms, while graduate learning strengthened their professional aspirations and developing teacher identities. However, these findings represent participants' perceptions and intended instructional practices rather than independently observed changes in classroom performance.

Conclusions

The MAEd students' experiences reveal that thriving in graduate education is shaped by emotional demands, competing responsibilities, resource limitations, social relationships, and the formation of professional identity.

Students responded through purposeful time management, adaptive and self-directed learning, social and spiritual support, financial strategies, and reflective resilience. They also associated graduate study with aspirations for student-centered, contextualized, inclusive, technologically informed, and ethically responsible teaching. These findings position thriving as a relational and developmental process requiring both personal commitment and institutional support.

Recommendations

Graduate schools may strengthen flexible scheduling, mentoring, research-writing assistance, digital learning support, and peer-learning communities responsive to the varied circumstances of MAEd students. Faculty members may provide structured opportunities to connect graduate coursework and research with authentic instructional problems. Students may benefit from sustainable study plans, collaborative support networks, and reflective self-monitoring. Education stakeholders may consider the needs of working and transitioning graduate students in professional development policies. Further studies should explore similar experiences across institutions and examine whether anticipated teaching practices are enacted in classrooms.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

[1] Abdallah, J. C., & Guhao, E. S., Jr. (2025). Filipino graduate students in foreign universities: A phenomenological inquiry. European Journal of Education Studies, 12(2), 270–288. https://doi.org/10.46827/ejes.v12i2.5827

[2] Agbayani, G. P., & Paglinawan, J. L. (2025). School, work, life: The challenges and strategies of graduate working students. International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science, 9(5). https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.90500085

[3] Ahammad, F. (2023). Self-directed learning: A core concept in adult education. The Online Journal of Distance Education and e-Learning, 11(3), 2058–2066. https://www.tojdel.net/journals/tojdel/articles/v11i03/v11i03-16.pdf

[4] Antonsen Y, Toom A, Ulvik M, Drageset OG, Olsen KR, Hjardemaal FR and Sæther K-A (2024) Research approaches in master-based teacher education preparing student teachers for professional work. Front. Educ. 9:1418398. doi: 10.3389/feduc.2024.1418398

[5] Ashour, S., Al-Mannai, H. M., Al-Mannai, H. M., & Al-Fedalah, N. K. (2025). Work-Study-Life Balance: Gender-Specific Challenges for Non-Conventional University Students in the GCC. The Journal of Continuing Higher Education, 1-16. DOI:10.1080/07377363.2025.2513188

[6] Bandura, A. (1997). Self-efficacy: The exercise of control. W. H. Freeman.

[7] Beijaard, D., Meijer, P. C., & Verloop, N. (2004). Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. Teaching and Teacher Education, 20(2), 107–128. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2003.07.001

[8] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77-101.

[9] Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). Effective teacher professional development. Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/effective-teacher-professional-development-report

[10] Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. Psychological Inquiry, 11(4), 227–268. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01

[11] Goode, W. J. (1960). A theory of role strain. American Sociological Review, 25(4), 483–496. https://doi.org/10.2307/2092933

[12] Greenhaus, J. H., & Beutell, N. J. (1985). Sources of conflict between work and family roles. Academy of Management Review, 10(1), 76–88. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1985.4277352

[13] House, J. S. (1981). Work stress and social support. Addison-Wesley.

[14] Knowles, M. S., Holton, E. F., III, & Swanson, R. A. (2015). The adult learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development (8th ed.). Routledge.

[15] Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. American Educational Research Journal, 32(3), 465–491. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312032003465

[16] Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). Stress, appraisal, and coping. Springer Publishing Company.

[17] Mezirow, J. (1991). Transformative dimensions of adult learning. Jossey-Bass.

[18] Mishra, P., & Koehler, M. J. (2006). Technological pedagogical content knowledge: A framework for teacher knowledge. Teachers College Record, 108(6), 1017–1054. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9620.2006.00684.x

[19] Pargament, K. I. (1997). The psychology of religion and coping: Theory, research, practice. Guilford Press.

[20] Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2020). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions. Contemporary Educational Psychology, 61, Article 101860. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101860

[21] Schlossberg, N. K. (1981). A model for analyzing human adaptation to transition. The Counseling Psychologist, 9(2), 2–18. https://doi.org/10.1177/001100008100900202

[22] Schön, D. A. (1983). The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action. Basic Books.

[23] Zimmerman, B. J. (2002). Becoming a self-regulated learner: An overview. Theory Into Practice, 41(2), 64–70. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4102_2