



Philippine Graduate Students' Perspectives On CMO No. 15 Series 2019 As Basis For A Conceptual Model

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the perspectives of graduate students on the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 15, Series of 2019, which mandates the publication of research in peer-reviewed journals as a graduation requirement. The study aimed to understand the implications of this policy on students' academic experiences and to develop a conceptual model for addressing the challenges and opportunities it presents. Employing purposive sampling, twelve newly enrolled graduate students from different colleges and universities in La Union, Philippines, were interviewed using a developed interview guide, and thematic analysis was conducted on the transcribed data, revealing three main themes: "Into the Wilderness," "Blessings in Disguise," and "Breaking the Chain." "Into the Wilderness" captured the students' feelings of being lost and overwhelmed due to a lack of academic preparation for research publication. "Blessings in Disguise" reflected a positive reframe of the publication requirement, viewing it as an opportunity for personal and academic growth. "Breaking the Chain" highlighted the financial burdens associated with publishing, suggesting a need for institutional support to alleviate these barriers. The study's findings align with recent literature, underscoring the need for enhanced academic support and financial assistance for graduate students. The IDA Conceptual Model was proposed, integrating the themes with the dynamics of academic mandates and student experiences. This model serves as a basis for policy adjustments and the development of support mechanisms to facilitate the successful implementation of CMO No. 15, Series 2019, contributing positively to the quality of graduate education in the Philippines. The study's limitations include a small sample size and potential researcher bias. Future research directions and dissemination plans are also discussed.

Keywords: graduate education reform, academic publication requirement, thematic analysis, financial barriers, mentor-mentee relationship, research skills development, policy implications

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The trajectory of Philippine graduate education, which led to the issuance of CMO No. 15 in 2019, reflects a series of reforms and developments to enhance the quality and global competitiveness of higher education in the country. This trajectory can be traced through various policy initiatives, academic trends, and the evolving needs of the nation's education system. Prior to CMO No. 15, the Philippine education system had already begun to undergo significant reforms. Introducing the K to 12 programs and adopting outcomes-based education (OBE) as a teaching-learning framework in higher education were pivotal steps in aligning the country's education system with international standards. The enactment of RA 10931, or the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act, expanded access to higher education, increasing the demand for quality and relevance in graduate programs.

In 2013, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) created the Task Force on Graduate Education Reform (TFGER) to review the state of graduate programs in the Philippines. The TFGER identified the need to rationalize graduate programs to address the wide gap in the availability of and access to quality graduate programs in various disciplines critical for national development. This led to the recognition that some areas of specialization were oversubscribed while others were underdeveloped, limiting the growth potential of certain sectors. A key aspect of the reforms was cultivating a culture of research and innovation in graduate programs. The revised policies, standards, and guidelines (PSGs) governing graduate programs aimed to foster advanced competencies that could spur and sustain leadership, innovation, scientific and technological growth, and inclusive economic development. The emphasis on research and innovation was essential for the Philippines to achieve sustainable development and to contribute meaningfully to the global knowledge economy. CMO No. 15, Series of 2019, culminated these efforts, setting a new standard for graduate education by requiring the publication of research in indexed and high-impact journals as a graduation prerequisite (CMO 15, Section 9). This policy was intended to ensure that graduate research contributes to knowledge acquisition, generation, sharing, and exchange, distinguishing it from undergraduate studies and aligning graduate education with the nation's innovation, research, and development goals.

The academic community has expressed diverse opinions regarding this mandate. On the one hand, it is seen as a step towards enhancing the research culture among graduate students, providing them a platform to contribute globally to their fields. Floyd et al. (2019) found that the traditional graduate education programs dedicated to community college studies prioritizing scholarly and practical aspects over faculty preparation by emphasizing leadership, research, and doctoral requirements shifted to encouraging students and faculty to publish their research outputs. This further turns into an increasingly better mentor-mentee relationship. Blair et al. (2020) discussed in their study that one of the evaluation standards in graduate education is research publication, which he extended on citations of these published research outputs, expressing the quality of the work responsive to the role of graduate education in knowledge production. The requirement for publication as a graduation prerequisite reflects a shift towards a more competitive academic environment where the value of research is partly determined by its visibility and impact within the academic community. On the other hand, concerns have been raised about the feasibility of this requirement, considering the various hurdles graduate students face, including but not limited to the lack of academic preparation for research publication, financial constraints, and the added academic burden (Caborero et al., 2023; Pangket et al., 2023). Diocos (2022) found that the extremely serious problems faced by graduate students in conducting research are poor time management, financial problems, lack of cooperation of respondents, difficulty in identifying research issues, lack of ICT facilities to analyze the data, contradicting/ conflicting ideas between researcher and adviser, and lack of commitment of researcher. In response to these challenges, Hotaling (2018) opined that good organizational skills, diligent writing habits, and mentoring can help graduate students successfully publish papers and achieve work-life balance in their academic careers.

Furthermore, the policy has implications for the mentor-mentee relationship in graduate studies. Effective mentorship has been identified as a crucial factor in navigating the challenges of research publication. Mentors play a pivotal role in guiding students through the process, from developing research ideas to the intricacies of the publication process (Quinto, 2022). The quality of mentorship can significantly influence the graduate students' ability to meet the publication requirement, impacting their academic and professional trajectories. In the study of Merga et al. (2019), which explored the publication journey of doctorate students who were required to publish their master's thesis as a requirement of their Ph.D. programs, the team found difficulty in these students in producing their theses requirements due to writing competence and other technical skills needed in scholarly research writing. However, with an efficient mentor-mentee relationship, the work is doable.

Given this context, there is a pressing need to explore the perspectives of graduate students toward CMO No. 15, Series of 2019, particularly Section 9. Understanding their views, experiences, and challenges about this mandate is essential for assessing its impact on graduate education. This qualitative study aims to delve into these aspects, providing insights into how the policy affects graduate students' research endeavors and academic journey. Through interviews and focus group discussions, this study will gather in-depth data on the students' perceptions, the available support systems, and the strategies they employ to fulfill the publication requirement. The findings of this study could inform policy adjustments and the development of support mechanisms to facilitate the successful implementation of CMO No. 15, Series of 2019, ensuring that it contributes positively to the quality of graduate education in the Philippines.

Objective of the Study

This study shed light on the graduate students' perspectives on the provision of CMO No. 15, Series of 2019, which states that research publication in indexed high-impact journals is required for graduation as an input to a conceptual model for graduate schools.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed purposive sampling to select 12 participants who had recently enrolled in various graduate programs in different graduate schools in La Union, in the northern Philippines, recruited through a referral from fellow educators. Participants were chosen based on specific criteria that align with the research objectives, including their status as newly enrolled graduate students and their potential to provide diverse perspectives on the research publication requirement.

An interview guide was developed to ensure consistency across interviews while allowing for the exploration of individual experiences. The guide included open-ended questions to elicit detailed responses about the participants' perceptions of the research publication requirement. Questions were formulated based on a literature review and pilot-tested with a small group of graduate students at Union Christian College to refine their clarity and relevance. Interviews were conducted in person in a private setting to ensure confidentiality and to facilitate a comfortable environment for participants to share their thoughts freely. Each interview was audio-recorded with the participant's consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The transcribed interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data. The analysis followed a six-step process: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Manual coding was employed in the analysis of the data. Several strategies were employed to enhance the rigor and trustworthiness of the study. Triangulation was achieved by comparing the interview data with the findings from the focus group discussion. Prolonged engagement with the participants allowed for a deeper understanding of the context and ensured that the findings were grounded in the participants' experiences. Peer debriefing involved discussions with colleagues who are experts in qualitative research to challenge the findings and to ensure that the analysis was credible and well-supported by the data.

The Theory of Academic Capitalism guided the study, providing a lens for understanding the implications of the research publication requirement within market-driven higher education practices. This theoretical framework informed the development of the interview questions and the interpretation of the findings, offering insights into how the policy might influence the academic trajectories of graduate students. The study acknowledges several limitations, including the small sample size and the potential for researcher bias. The sample size may limit the generalizability of the findings, and the researchers' preconceptions and interpretations could influence the analysis. Reflexivity was practiced throughout the study to mitigate these limitations, with the researchers continually reflecting on their assumptions and the research process.

The study's findings have implications for graduate education policy and practice, particularly in supporting students' research publication endeavors. The final report will discuss recommendations for policy adjustments and the development of support mechanisms. The study also suggests areas for future research, such as the long-term impact of the publication requirement on graduate students' careers. Plans for disseminating the findings include submitting the final report for publication in a peer-reviewed educational journal and presenting the results at academic conferences. The study's findings will also be shared with the administration of Union Christian College to inform their support services for graduate students.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The thematic analysis on the perspectives of graduate students on CMO No. 15, Series 2019 provision mandating graduate students to publish their research output in a national or international peer-reviewed journal as a requirement for graduation revealed four main themes: into the wilderness, blessing in disguise, and breaking the chain.

Into the Wilderness. The theme "Into the Wilderness" encapsulates the sentiments expressed by Moses, Aaron, and Caleb regarding their perspectives on the provisions of CMO 15, Series 2019, which require graduate students to publish their research in peer-reviewed high-impact journals to graduate. The wilderness metaphor suggests a sense of being lost, overwhelmed, and ill-equipped to navigate the challenges presented by this requirement.

Moses expressed a feeling of being overwhelmed and lost in the face of this requirement. His lack of recent experience with research and publication leaves him stranded in unfamiliar territory. He expressed, "I think our graduate program should have provided more workshops and training on research publication. I feel overwhelmed by the thought of publishing my research in a peer-reviewed journal because I don't know where to start. My undergraduate program had been 8 years ago, and I had not been into research since then." The wilderness symbolizes his sense of being adrift, without a clear path forward. Aaron echoed Moses' sentiments, emphasizing the lack of preparation provided by their graduate program. Despite his experience in analysis within his company, the transition to academic research and publication feels like entering uncharted territory. He said, "We weren't adequately prepared for this. It is my first time returning to school after 5 years of finishing my undergraduate degree. We analyze our company but not meant for publication." The wilderness metaphor underscores his sense of being thrust into a challenging and unfamiliar environment. Caleb, too, expressed apprehension about the demands of publishing research in peer-reviewed journals. His previous experiences with college research were already daunting, and the prospect of navigating the

complexities of academic publication feels even more intimidating. The wilderness represents his perception of the academic publishing world as a vast and intimidating landscape he feels ill-prepared to navigate.

The theme "Into the Wilderness," representing the lack of academic preparation for research publication, captures the shared experience of Moses, Aaron, and Caleb as they confront the requirements of CMO 15, Series 2019. It conveys a sense of being lost, overwhelmed, and unprepared in the face of unfamiliar challenges, echoing their uncertainty and trepidation about the path ahead. This finding aligns with Cabonero et al. (2023), who found that graduate students struggle to complete their research papers due to a lack of writing competence, and Pangket et al. (2023), whose findings revolved around the inadequate academic background of students in conducting research. Additionally, Diocos' (2022) and Merga et al.'s (2019) findings that the extremely serious problems faced by graduate students in conducting research are poor time management, financial problems, lack of cooperation of respondents, difficulty in identifying research issues, lack of ICT facilities to analyze the data, contradicting/ conflicting ideas between researcher and adviser, and lack of commitment of researcher, put the graduate students to feel like they are in a wilderness as exemplified by the participants.

Blessings in disguise. The theme "blessings in disguise" pertains to the respondents' views on the CMO No. 15 provision and can be analyzed through the perspectives shared by Sapphira, Ruth, and Noemi. Sapphira's viewpoint, "Although it's challenging, I think the CMO No. 15 provision is a good opportunity for us to enhance our research skills and contribute to our field's body of knowledge," reflects a positive outlook. Despite acknowledging the challenges it presents, she sees it as an opportunity to improve her research skills and make a meaningful contribution to her field. This perspective aligns with the notion of a blessing in disguise, where initially perceived challenges or difficulties lead to unforeseen positive outcomes. Ruth's response, "At first, I was really stressed about it. But now, I see it as an opportunity to contribute to my field and boost my academic profile," also echoes the sentiment of initially feeling stressed but ultimately recognizing the provision as an opportunity. Her acknowledgment of the chance to contribute to her field and enhance her academic profile suggests a shift in perspective from seeing the requirement as a burden to viewing it as a valuable opportunity for personal and professional growth. Similarly, Noemi's perspective, "It is challenging, but it forces us to aim higher and not just settle for completing a thesis or dissertation," highlights the provision's challenging nature but emphasizes its role in pushing students to aim higher and strive for excellence. This viewpoint suggests that while the requirement may demand more effort and dedication, it ultimately leads to greater academic achievement and fulfillment.

The responses of these three respondents illustrate how the challenges posed by the CMO No. 15 provision can be reframed as opportunities for personal and academic development. This interpretation aligns with the theme of "blessings in disguise," wherein what initially appears as a hurdle or obstacle ultimately proves beneficial unexpectedly. This is supported by Floyd et al. (2019), who found that the traditional graduate education programs dedicated to community college studies prioritizing scholarly and practical aspects over faculty preparation by emphasizing leadership, research, and doctoral requirements shifted to encouraging students and faculty to publish their research outputs. This further turns into an increasingly better mentor-mentee relationship. Blair et al. (2020) discussed in their study that one of the evaluation standards in graduate education is research publication, which he extended on citations of these published research outputs, expressing the quality of the work responsive to the role of graduate education in knowledge production.

Breaking the Chain. The theme of "breaking the chain" in the context of financial burden, as represented by the responses of Samuel, Jericho, and Potifar to the requirement of publishing in a peer-reviewed high-impact journal for graduation, highlights the barriers and challenges that students face in achieving their academic goals due to financial constraints.

Firstly, Samuel expressed that the high publication fees are a barrier, preventing students like him from meeting the graduation requirement. His statement, "The publication fees are too high, and limited funding is available for graduate students like us. I think our institution should provide more financial support to help us meet this requirement," highlights how financial burdens can restrict access to opportunities, effectively chaining students to their current circumstances. Samuel's suggestion for financial support from the institution reflects the need to break this chain by providing resources to alleviate the financial burden on students. Jericho echoes similar concerns, saying, "The costs are just too much. From submission fees to potential publication charges, it is a financial strain," emphasizing the overall financial strain caused by the submission fees and potential publication charges. His statement underscores the cumulative effect of various costs associated with academic publishing, further reinforcing the notion of financial chains that hinder academic progress. Potiphar extended the discussion beyond just publication fees, drawing attention to additional expenses such as research materials and editing services, saying, "And it's not just the fees. There's also the cost of additional research materials, editing services, and more." This broader perspective emphasizes the multifaceted nature of financial barriers faced by students, illustrating how these barriers can entrap individuals within a cycle of financial constraints, limiting their academic and professional growth.

In sum, the responses of Samuel, Jericho, and Potifar shed light on the theme of breaking the chain in the context of financial burden, emphasizing the need for institutions to address these barriers by providing adequate financial support and resources to empower students to pursue their academic aspirations without

THEORETICAL ASSERTION

Students' CMO 15, s. 2019 Perspectives

Positive Nuance

- Blessing in Disguise
- Positive policies create smaller challenges
- Opportunities for personal and academic growth
- Left to personal growth from bottom to opportunity
- Recognition of long-term benefits and value

Negative Nuance

- Too many limitations
- Complex and overlapping programs
- Physical, financial, and human resources
- Overlapping of programs and overlapping
- High number of programs and overlapping
- High number of programs and overlapping
- Call for institutional support and resources

Provision for Research Grants

- Individual efforts and dedication for research
- Research Capacity Program for Students
- Research Capacity Program for Students
- Research Capacity Program for Students

Curriculum Enhancement

- Research Capacity Program for Students
- Research Capacity Program for Students
- Research Capacity Program for Students
- Research Capacity Program for Students

CMO 15 s. 2019

School Programs and Support

Integrated Framework for Graduate Student Perspectives on CMO No. 15, Series 2019
Dynamics of Academic Mandates and Student Experiences
Analysis of Perspectives: Themes, Interactions, and Implications

This component represents the overarching framework that integrates the various elements of the model. It provides a structured approach to understanding graduate student perspectives within the context of CMO No. 15, Series 2019 provision. The integrated framework is a theoretical lens through which researchers analyze and interpret the data. It guides the formulation of research questions, the selection of data collection methods, and the interpretation of research findings. By incorporating elements from both thematic analysis and the dynamics of academic mandates and student experiences, the integrated framework offers a holistic perspective on graduate student perspectives. It enables researchers to explore the interconnections between individual experiences, broader institutional contexts, and larger societal dynamics. The integrated framework facilitates the synthesis of research findings and the generation of actionable insights for stakeholders involved in graduate education. It serves as a valuable tool for informing policymaking, designing interventions, and promoting the well-being and success of graduate students.

This component delves into the dynamic relationship between academic mandates, such as those outlined in CMO No. 15, Series 2019 provision, and the lived experiences of graduate students. It recognizes that academic requirements shape students' educational journeys and influence their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. Academic mandates refer to the requirements imposed on graduate students, such as publishing research outputs in peer-reviewed high-impact journals for graduation. These mandates set how students navigate their academic pursuits and contribute to shaping their academic identities.

Students' experiences encompass a range of factors, including their reactions to academic mandates, challenges encountered during the fulfillment of requirements, and the support systems available to them. Understanding these experiences provides context for interpreting graduate student perspectives and elucidates the impact of academic mandates on their academic and personal development. The dynamics between academic mandates and student experiences are complex and multifaceted. They involve negotiation, adaptation, and resilience on the part of students as they navigate the demands of their academic programs. Exploring these dynamics enriches our understanding of the interplay between institutional requirements and student realities.

3. Analysis of Perspectives: Themes, Interactions, and Implications

This component systematically analyzes graduate student perspectives regarding CMO No. 15, Series 2019 provision. It involves identifying recurring themes within the data obtained from interviews, surveys, or other research methods. These themes represent graduate students' underlying patterns, sentiments, and concerns regarding the mandated provision. The thematic analysis allows researchers to uncover the nuances of graduate student experiences, capturing both commonalities and variations across participants. Themes may include "Into the Wilderness," "Blessings in Disguise," and "Breaking the Chain," as identified in the research findings.

Additionally, this component explores the interactions between themes, examining how they intersect, overlap, or contradict each other. Understanding these interactions provides insights into the complexity of graduate student perspectives and sheds light on the multifaceted nature of their experiences. Furthermore, the implications of the identified themes are discussed within this component. Researchers analyze the implications for graduate students, academic institutions, policymakers, and other stakeholders. This analysis informs recommendations for addressing challenges, improving support mechanisms, and enhancing student success.

The IDA conceptual model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding graduate student perspectives on CMO No. 15, Series 2019 provision. It combines thematic analysis, exploration of academic mandates and student experiences, and an integrated theoretical framework to offer insights into the complexities of graduate education and inform strategies for supporting student success.

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