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ACCEPTABILITY, ATTAINABILITY, RELEVANCE, AND CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY THE STAKEHOLDERS ON GRADUATE SCHOOL PROGRAMS: BASIS FOR ENHANCEMENT PLAN

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Abstract

Facing rapid technological and professional evolution, higher education institutions, particularly the Graduate School at Cagayan State University Aparri, struggle to maintain and enhance the standards of their programs. This study aimed to evaluate the acceptability, attainability, and relevance of the graduate school programs and the challenges encountered by stakeholders, serving as a vital basis for an institutional Enhancement Plan. Employing a descriptive exploratory case analysis, the methodology involved gathering data from stakeholders including faculty, current students, and alumni of the CSU Aparri Graduate School. Respondents were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure diverse representation across different program types. Salient findings indicate that the graduate programs are overwhelmingly rated as Highly Acceptable and Highly Relevant to stakeholders' personal growth, professional development, and industry needs, reflecting strong alignment with current demands. However, despite this high relevance, the programs' attainability is rated only Moderately Attainable. This lower rating is primarily attributed to significant financial constraints faced by students and increasing challenges associated with complex academic requirements, particularly thesis and dissertation completion. The primary recommendation derived from these findings is for the University Administration to establish a dedicated, aggressively marketed, need-based scholarship fund to directly mitigate the identified financial barriers.

Keywords: Acceptability, Attainability, Relevance, Challenges Encountered, Enhancement Plan.

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions face increasing pressure to sustain and enhance the quality of graduate programs amid rapid technological change, evolving industry demands, and rising stakeholder expectations. Cagayan State University Aparri recognizes the need to systematically assess its graduate offerings to ensure their continued relevance, effectiveness, and alignment with quality standards. This study stems from recent accreditation recommendations calling for a comprehensive evaluation of graduate programs, focusing on their acceptability, attainability, and relevance.

Graduate education plays a crucial role in developing competencies for personal growth, professional advancement, and societal contribution. Research shows that higher education significantly influences career outcomes, often linked to increased income and career mobility (de Brey et al., 2018; Schneider & de Alva, 2018). Supporting this, Maghamil (2025) reported that 36% of graduates received promotions, 83% experienced salary increases, and 85% pursued graduate studies primarily for professional development. These findings highlight the importance of ensuring that graduate programs remain responsive to labor market needs and societal expectations.

This study examines four key dimensions: acceptability, attainability, relevance, and stakeholder challenges. Acceptability refers to how students, alumni, and faculty perceive and value the programs. Attainability concerns the feasibility of meeting program requirements given institutional resources and student capacities. Relevance evaluates the alignment of programs with industry demands and real-world applications.

The framework of this study is anchored on the Philippine Qualifications Framework, which standardizes learning outcomes and positions Master's and Doctorate degrees at Levels 7 and 8 under Republic Act No. 10968. Complementing this, CHED Memorandum Order No. 15, Series of 2019 outlines guidelines on curriculum, faculty qualifications, and student support, ensuring program quality and accessibility. Additionally, Tinto's Theory of Student Integration emphasizes that alignment between student goals and institutional support enhances persistence and completion. Together, these frameworks guide the evaluation of graduate programs toward continuous improvement and academic excellence.

Statement of the Problem

This study evaluated the graduate school programs at Cagayan State University Aparri Campus by examining their acceptability, attainability, relevance and Challenges encountered by the stakeholders. Specifically, it sought to answer to the following queries:

1. What is the level of acceptability of the graduate school programs by the stakeholders?
2. What is the level of attainability of the graduate programs by the stakeholders to;
   - 2.1. Program Objectives
   - 2.2. Socio-Economic Status of Students
   - 2.3. Professional Background
3. What is the level of relevance of the graduate programs in relation to;
   - 3.1. Personal needs
   - 3.2. Professional development
   - 3.3. Industry-related needs
4. What are the challenges encountered by the stakeholders;
   - 4.1. Accessing Graduate School Programs
   - 4.2. Completing Graduate Degree
5. What Enhancement Plan can be deduced from the findings?

METHODOLOGY

This section presents the methodology employed in the study, outlining the systematic procedures and approaches used to gather and analyze data. It describes the research design, participants, instruments, data collection procedures, and methods of data analysis, ensuring that the study is conducted in a rigorous and ethical manner. Through this methodological framework, the researcher aims to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings while addressing the research objectives effectively.

Research Design

A descriptive exploratory: case analysis approach was used in this study to look into the relevance, acceptability, accessibility and challenges encountered by stakeholders on graduate school programs. The descriptive exploratory approach was appropriate for this study to understand the graduate school programs and gain initial insights. This approach enabled researchers to gather full information on the present situation while evaluating potential enhancement plan for the programs from the opinions of participants.

Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at Cagayan State University Aparri Campus Graduate School in Maura, Aparri, Cagayan, which offers diverse undergraduate and graduate programs serving 5,749 undergraduates and 145 graduate students. It was selected due to accreditation recommendations to assess program acceptability, attainability, and relevance, and to support continuous improvement and future program development.

Respondents and Sampling Technique

The study involved faculty, current students, and alumni (2020–2024) of Cagayan State University Aparri Campus Graduate School to assess acceptability, attainability, relevance, and stakeholder challenges. Using stratified random sampling, 102 respondents were selected from 265 participants across programs. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, percentages, weighted means, and standard deviations. This approach effectively captured stakeholders' perceptions and ensured representation of diverse groups. The method aligns with the study's descriptive design, providing reliable quantitative summaries of experiences and supporting the development of an evidence-based enhancement plan for graduate programs.

Research Instruments

The Researcher used a validated constructed questionnaire to gather data which is divided into four parts. Part I was to identify the level of acceptability of graduate school programs. Part II wase the level of attainability of the graduate programs. Part III was the level of relevance of the graduate programs. Part IV was the Challenges Encountered by the Graduate School Students on the graduate programs.

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Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher drafted a formal letter addressed to the Office of the Campus Executive Officer of the School, seeking permission to conduct a study. Additionally, a separate request was made to the Campus Registrar to obtain a roster of graduates from CSU Aparri Graduate School for the years 2020 to 2024. To facilitate data collection, a Google Form was utilized to reach out to graduate school students and the graduates from previous years.

Data Analysis

After the retrieval of questionnaire through online and in-person, the data were collated, tallied, tabulated and analyzed using the following tool:

Frequencies, percentages, ranks, means and standard deviations were used to identify the responses of the stakeholders.

Five-point Likert Scale and weighted means were used to analyze the Level of Acceptability, Attainability, and Relevance of Graduate School Programs to the stakeholders. The following matrix presents the interpretation of the responses:

Numerical Inputs	Range Interval	Descriptive Value Acceptability	Descriptive Value Attainability	Descriptive Value Relevance
5	4.21 – 5.00	Highly Acceptable	Highly Attainable	Highly Relevant
4	3.41 – 4.20	Moderately Acceptable	Moderately Attainable	Moderately Relevant
3	2.61 – 3.40	Acceptable	Attainable	Relevant
2	1.81 – 2.60	Fairly Acceptable	Fairly Attainable	Fairly Relevant
1	1.00 – 1.80	Poorly Acceptable	Poorly Attainable	Poorly Relevant

Ethical Consideration

The researcher employed Informed consent procedures where all participants (faculty, students and former students) received detailed information about the research purpose, methodology, and intended use of findings, an inception meeting to the Graduate School Faculty and Students were conducted before gathering data. Participation was entirely voluntary, with explicit communication that participants can withdraw at any time without negative consequences. Data collection instruments were maintained strict confidentiality. Consent was also be secured before the floating of questionnaire. To ensure privacy, all data were kept strictly confidential in accordance with RA 10173, also known as the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results and discussion of the study, highlighting the key findings derived from the data analysis and providing their corresponding interpretations. It examines the results in relation to the research objectives and existing literature, offering insights into their implications and significance. Through this discussion, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the issues investigated and to support evidence-based conclusions.

Level of Acceptability of the Graduate School Program Objectives by the Stakeholders

Doctor of Philosophy in Education- major in Educational Management

The PhD in Education–Educational Management objectives garnered a weighted mean of 4.75 (“Highly Acceptable”), with top emphasis on ethical leadership (4.78), research advancement (4.75), and contextual analysis (4.72). These findings reflect strong stakeholder confidence in the program’s rigor and relevance. Supporting this, Yihong Peng et al. (2024) highlight stakeholder feedback as vital in ensuring program quality, responsiveness, and alignment with global standards, reinforcing the importance of culturally responsive and research-driven doctoral education.

Table 1a. Weighted means and level of acceptability of the Graduate School program objectives by the stakeholders of PhD in Education- major in Educational Management

Program Objectives	Weighted Mean	Descriptive Value
1. Critically examine the broader, cultural, institutional, organizational, and social contexts relevant to education across the lifespan.	4.72	Highly acceptable
2. Advance the role of scientific research in education policy, reform and practice and apply research skills in the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of public policy and largescale reforms in education.	4.75	Highly acceptable
3. Provide sound and ethical educational leadership at all levels with the ability to drive significant and sustainable improvement in educational institutions.	4.78	Highly acceptable
Program Mean	**4.75**	**Highly acceptable**

Master of Arts in Education- major in Educational Management

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The MAEd EM objectives obtained a weighted mean of 4.73 ("Highly Acceptable"), with the highest rating (4.76) reflecting graduates' ability to conduct research and function effectively in educational settings. Leadership competence (4.72) and ethical administration (4.71) were also highly rated. These results indicate a comprehensive and relevant program. Supporting this, Jamison and Flores (2025) found that MAEd-EM graduates demonstrate strong application of acquired competencies, particularly in leadership and research, affirming the program's alignment with industry demands and professional expectations.

Table 1b. Weighted means and level of acceptability of the Graduate School program objectives by the stakeholders of MA in Education- major in Educational Management

Program Objectives	**Weighted Mean**	**Descriptive Value**
1. Demonstrate effective and informed leadership at the school and district level to meet the educational needs of learners from diverse backgrounds and cultures.	4.72	Highly acceptable
2. Administer their educational systems or their school assemblages in a legally and ethically defensible manner.	4.71	Highly acceptable
3. Conduct productive researches and serve as systematic workers across various educational and administrative settings.	4.76	Highly acceptable
Program Mean	**4.73**	**Highly acceptable**

Master of Arts in Education- major in English

The MAEd in English objectives obtained a weighted mean of 4.69 ("Highly Acceptable"), with highest ratings (4.70) in curriculum leadership and pedagogical material development, while collaborative teaching approaches received 4.66. Despite being slightly lower than other programs, it remains highly regarded, reflecting strong stakeholder appreciation. Supporting this, Almazan et al. (2024) found that well-designed courses in pedagogy and curriculum development enhance learning outcomes, reinforcing the program's relevance while indicating areas for further improvement.

Table 1c. Weighted means and level of acceptability of the Graduate School program objectives by the stakeholders of MA in Education- major in English

Program Objectives	**Weighted Mean**	**Descriptive Value**
1. Assume leadership in curriculum development and pedagogical planning in the field of English Language Teaching.	4.70	Highly acceptable
2. Construct dynamic, collaboratively negotiated methods of teaching and learning in literature, writing, and the language arts.	4.66	Highly acceptable
3. Produce effective pedagogical aids and approaches for the benefit of both students and teachers.	4.70	Highly acceptable
Program Mean	**4.69**	**Highly acceptable**

Master of Science in Teaching Mathematics

The MST Mathematics objectives obtained a weighted mean of 4.70 ("Highly Acceptable"), highlighting strengths in applying current teaching practices and utilizing advanced research skills (4.70), with learner development also rated highly (4.69). These results reflect strong stakeholder support for its pedagogical and research focus. Supporting this, Magcalen (2025) found that the program enhances professional growth, research capability, and teaching competence, affirming its relevance and role in developing highly capable mathematics educators.

Table 1d. Weighted means and level of acceptability of the Graduate School program objectives by the stakeholders of MS Teaching Mathematics

Program Objectives	**Weighted Mean**	**Descriptive Value**
1. Examine the behavioral cognitive and social emotional development of learners across all ages with the end view of designing effective learning technologies methods in Mathematics.	4.69	Highly acceptable
2. Apply current development in Mathematics teaching to curriculum planning and supervision.	4.70	Highly acceptable
3. Utilize advanced research skills and knowledge to address the perennial challenge in Mathematics Teaching.	4.70	Highly acceptable
Program Mean	**4.70**	**Highly acceptable**

Master of Science in Information Technology

The MSIT program obtained a weighted mean of 4.73 ("Highly Acceptable"), with strengths in technical research skills (4.76) and innovation in information systems (4.74), while leadership competencies (4.68) ranked slightly lower. This indicates strong

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stakeholder approval, particularly in technical areas, with room to enhance leadership skills. Supporting this, Tan et al. (2018) identified gaps in managerial and interpersonal competencies among IT graduates, emphasizing the need to balance technical expertise with leadership and communication skills.

Table 1e. Weighted means and level of acceptability of the Graduate School program objectives by the stakeholders of MS in Information Technology

Program Objectives	Weighted Mean	Descriptive Value
1. Initiate advanced and cutting edge information systems in a broad range of settings and occupations.	4.74	Highly acceptable
2. Apply technical research skills and critical understanding of the fast growing field of information technology in the development and management of tools and technologies for exchanging information primarily in the business context.	4.76	Highly acceptable
3. Effectively assume leadership positions in work systems that handle information technology and related endeavors.	4.68	Highly acceptable
Program Mean	**4.73**	**Highly acceptable**

Summary of Level of Acceptability

The consolidated results show an overall mean of 4.72 ("Highly Acceptable"), with the PhD in Education–Educational Management ranking highest (4.75), followed by MAEd–Educational Management (4.73), MSIT (4.73), MST Mathematics (4.70), and MAEd English (4.69). These uniformly high ratings indicate strong stakeholder affirmation of the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of program objectives. The findings suggest that the graduate programs are well-designed, future-oriented, and aligned with professional demands. Supporting this, Diamse et al. (2022) found that stakeholders highly accepted clearly defined and attainable institutional goals, reinforcing these results.

Table 1f. Summary of program means and level of acceptability of the Graduate School program objectives by the stakeholders

Programs	Program Mean	Descriptive Value
1. PhD in Education- major in Educational Management	4.75	Highly acceptable
2. MA in Education- major in Educational Management	4.73	Highly acceptable
3. MA in Education- major in English	4.69	Highly acceptable
4. MS in Teaching Mathematics	4.70	Highly acceptable
5. MS in Information Technology	4.73	Highly acceptable
Overall Mean	**4.72**	**Highly acceptable**

Level of Attainability of the Graduate School Programs as Assessed by the Stakeholders

Graduate School Goals

As shown in Table 2a, stakeholders rated Graduate School goals very highly with an overall weighted mean of 4.78 ("Highly Attainable"). Research stimulation and self-reliance obtained the highest mean (4.81), followed by provision of advanced studies (4.79) and consultancy services (4.75). These results indicate that stakeholders view the goals as realistically achievable and well-integrated into institutional practices through programs, faculty competence, and research culture. Supporting this, Genovate and Madrigal (2021) found high stakeholder satisfaction in graduate education quality, emphasizing the importance of strong academic systems in achieving institutional goals.

Table 2a. Weighted means and level of attainability of the Graduate School programs as assessed by the stakeholders in terms of the Graduate School goals

Statements	Weighted Mean	Descriptive Value
1. To provide advanced studies for the molding of development oriented, administrators/managers in the public service.	4.79	Highly attainable
2. To stimulate and encourage researchers geared toward social, educational scientific and technological development and simultaneously inculcate a sense of responsibility and commitment to achieve self-reliance; and	4.81	Highly attainable
3. To provide consultancy and professional assistance to inter-agency linkages along education, agriculture, rural development, public administration, science, technology and allied fields.	4.75	Highly attainable
Dimension Mean	**4.78**	**Highly attainable**

Socio-economic Status

Stakeholders' socio-economic profile shows most belong to Status C (43.1%), followed by Status B (24.5%), Status D (15.7%), Status

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A (12.7%), and Status E (3.9%). The overall dimension mean of 3.26 ("Moderately Attainable") indicates reduced accessibility compared to other indicators. This suggests that financial constraints may limit full participation, highlighting the need for stronger scholarships, financial aid, flexible payment schemes, and support systems. Supporting this, Munir et al. (2023) found that socioeconomic status significantly affects academic outcomes and contributes to achievement gaps, reinforcing the need for equity-focused interventions in education.

Table 2b. Level of attainability of the Graduate School programs as assessed by the stakeholders in terms of their distribution as to socio-economic status

Status	**Frequency (n=102)**	**Percentage**
5 - Status A (Rich)	13	12.7
4 - Status B (Upper-income class but not rich)	25	24.5
3 - Status C (Upper middle-income, Middle middle-income, and Lower middle-income classes)	44	43.1
2 - Status D (Low-income class)	16	15.7
1 - Status E (Poor)	4	3.9
Dimension Weighted Mean = 3.26 (Moderately attainable)		

Professional Background

The data in Table 2c shows an overall mean of 4.67 ("Highly Attainable"), indicating that stakeholders perceive the Graduate School programs as highly achievable across professional and academic outcomes. The highest rating was for clarifying career and academic goals (4.74), followed by communication and teamwork skills (4.71), research and analytical skills (4.69), and professional networking (4.69). Leadership experience (4.68), knowledge enhancement (4.64), and time management (4.63) also remained highly attainable, while financial accessibility received the lowest rating (4.57), suggesting a need for stronger financial support mechanisms. Overall, the results reflect a well-structured, supportive, and professionally relevant program, though economic barriers remain a concern. Supporting this, Cruz (2024) found that graduate studies enhance career growth, skills, and professional opportunities, reinforcing the high attainability of program outcomes.

Table 2c. Weighted means and level of attainability of the Graduate School programs as assessed by the stakeholders in terms of their professional background

Statements	**Weighted Mean**	**Descriptive Value**
1. Increased relevant knowledge and expertise in my field.	4.64	Highly attainable
2. Developed my research and analytical skills.	4.69	Highly attainable
3. Helped me develop a clearer career path and academic goals.	4.74	Highly attainable
4. Cultivated my time management and self-discipline abilities.	4.63	Highly attainable
5. Enhanced my communication and teamwork skills.	4.71	Highly attainable
6. Provided me with relevant leadership experience.	4.68	Highly attainable
7. Allowed me to make connections and network with professionals in my field.	4.69	Highly attainable
8. Improved my ability to secure financial resources for my education.	4.57	Highly attainable
Dimension Mean	**4.67**	**Highly attainable**

Summary of Level of Attainability

The combined results indicate that the Graduate School programs are generally perceived as highly attainable, particularly in terms of institutional goals and professional development opportunities. Stakeholders believe that the programs provide meaningful training, strong research development, and relevant academic experiences.

However, the moderate rating in the socio-economic dimension highlights that financial constraints remain a significant factor affecting the attainability of graduate studies. This prevents some stakeholders from fully maximizing the benefits of the program.

Rungduin and Miranda (2018) suggests that factors like professional development and administrative support from the institution positively influence attainment, while non-academic factors such as finances, health considerations, and family-related concerns were major life factors that hindered students' capacity to complete their degrees, directly mirroring your observation that financial constraints significantly impact attainability.

Table 2d. Summary of dimension means and level of attainability of the Graduate School programs as assessed by the stakeholders

Dimension	**Mean**	**Descriptive Value**
1. Graduate School goals	4.78	Highly attainable
2. Socio-economic status	3.26	Moderately attainable
3. Professional background	4.67	Highly attainable
Overall Mean	**4.24**	**Highly attainable**

Level of Relevance of the Graduate School Programs as Assessed by the Stakeholders

Personal needs

Stakeholders rated the relevance of graduate school programs for personal needs as "Highly Relevant," with a dimension mean of 4.74. The highest rating was for intellectual fulfillment and specialization (4.78), followed by personal growth and self-improvement (4.77), network expansion and community (4.72), and alignment with life goals (4.68). These results indicate that graduate education is perceived as both professionally and

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personally meaningful, supporting holistic development. Allan Cruz (2024) affirms that graduate studies enhance personal aspiration, professional growth, and career advancement through specialized knowledge and stronger professional networks.

Table 3a. Weighted means and level of relevance of the Graduate School programs as assessed by the stakeholders in terms of their personal needs

Statements	Weighted Mean	Descriptive Value
1. Personal growth and self-improvement: Graduate programs provide a structured environment for intentional self-improvement by challenging students to push their boundaries intellectually and personally.	4.77	Highly relevant
2. Intellectual fulfillment and specialization: For many, graduate school is a direct path to intellectual fulfillment, allowing them to dive deeper into a subject they are passionate about.	4.78	Highly relevant
3. Network expansion and community: Graduate school fosters the development of both professional and personal relationships with like-minded individuals, professors, and industry experts.	4.72	Highly relevant
4. Alignment with life goals: For some, a graduate degree helps them achieve specific life aspirations, such as setting a positive example for their family or transitioning to a more fulfilling career.	4.68	Highly relevant
Dimension Mean	**4.74**	**Highly relevant**

Professional development

This Relevance in Terms of Professional Development obtained a "Highly Relevant" rating (4.72), indicating strong stakeholder recognition of graduate education as a pathway to career advancement. Specialized expertise (4.77) was rated highest, followed by transferable skills development (4.75), career change and flexibility (4.70), career advancement and increased earnings (4.69), and networking and credibility (4.68). These results show that graduate programs effectively support skill enhancement, mobility, and professional growth. Cruz (2024) affirms that graduate studies strengthen careers by providing specialized knowledge, expanding professional networks, and improving credentials, reinforcing their role in professional development.

Table 3b. Weighted means and level of relevance of the Graduate School programs as assessed by the stakeholders in terms of their professional development

Statements	Weighted Mean	Descriptive Value
1. Specialized expertise: Graduate-level education enables professionals to develop deep expertise in a specific field, often required for specialized industries like healthcare or education, through programs that apply research to real-world problems and enhance practical skills.	4.77	Highly relevant
2. Career advancement and increased earnings: A graduate degree serves as a key to higher-level positions and greater lifetime earnings by providing advanced qualifications that distinguish candidates in competitive job markets.	4.69	Highly relevant
3. Networking and credibility: Graduate studies expand professional networks through peers, mentors, and alumni while enhancing credibility and demonstrating commitment, perseverance, and intellectual capability to employers.	4.68	Highly relevant
4. Development of transferable skills: Graduate programs build essential transferable skills such as critical thinking, research, data analysis, communication, and problem-solving that are valuable and adaptable across industries.	4.75	Highly relevant
5. Career change and flexibility: A master's degree offers professionals the knowledge and credentials to transition	4.70	Highly relevant

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into new fields while flexible study options, such as online or part-time programs, support work–life balance.		
Dimension Mean	**4.72**	**Highly relevant**

Industry-related needs

Although slightly lower than the previous dimensions, Relevance in Terms of Industry-Related Needs remains "Highly Relevant" with a mean of 4.62. Stakeholders strongly value lifelong learning opportunities (4.69) and professional development initiatives (4.68), while also recognizing the importance of research partnerships (4.62). Slightly lower ratings in curriculum co-design (4.57) and experiential learning (4.56) suggest areas for enhancement in industry integration. Overall, programs are still perceived as aligned with labor market demands but with room for stronger practical exposure. Perrin (2022) emphasizes that industry partnerships and real-world problem-based learning are essential in producing future-ready graduates through applied, experiential education.

Table 3c. Weighted means and level of relevance of the Graduate School programs as assessed by the stakeholders in terms of their industry-related needs

Statements	**Weighted Mean**	**Descriptive Value**
1. Experiential learning: Integrating co-op programs, internships, and project-based learning to give students hands-on, real-world experience.	4.56	Highly relevant
2. Curriculum co-design: Involving industry leaders in the design of curricula to ensure course content is up-to-date and reflects current workforce needs.	4.57	Highly relevant
3. Professional development: Offering micro-credentials, certifications, and career coaching focused on in-demand technical and soft skills.	4.68	Highly relevant
4. "Pull" research partnerships: Collaborating with companies on research projects initiated by specific industry needs rather than purely academic interests.	4.62	Highly relevant
5. Lifelong learning: Providing options for reskilling and upskilling the existing workforce, not just new graduates.		
Dimension Mean	**4.62**	**Highly relevant**

Summary of Level of Relevance

The overall mean relevance score across all dimensions is 4.69 (Highly Relevant). This result clearly demonstrates that stakeholders perceive graduate school programs as highly meaningful, useful, and aligned with both personal and professional objectives, as well as with industry expectations. Personal needs (4.74). Professional development (4.72). Industry-related needs (4.62).

This pattern suggests that while stakeholders strongly value professional and industry alignment, their personal motivations and intellectual aspirations remain the strongest drivers of graduate school engagement. It also indicates that graduate programs are successful in addressing the multidimensional needs of their stakeholders.

Garcia, C.M. et al. (2024) found that the effective delivery of the graduate program significantly contributes to the personal and professional growth of the graduates, with the most critical dimensions of curricular relevance being those that lead to these outcomes. Specifically, the study identified that graduates give a premium to aspects of the curriculum that develop personal skills (such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and salary improvement) and professional skills (including a strong foundation in the academic profession, research capability, and communication skills), which collectively enhance their employment opportunities.

Table 3d. Summary of dimension means and level of relevance of the Graduate School programs as assessed by the stakeholders

Dimension	**Mean**	**Descriptive Value**
4. Personal needs	4.74	Highly relevant
5. Professional development	4.72	Highly relevant
6. Industry-related needs	4.62	Highly relevant
Overall Mean	**4.69**	**Highly relevant**

Challenges Encountered by the Stakeholders in Dealing with the Graduate School Programs

Accessing Graduate School Programs

The data show that stakeholders sometimes encounter challenges in accessing graduate school programs, with an overall mean of 3.30. Financial constraints (3.75) emerged as the most significant barrier, followed by workload and time management (3.58) and mental health concerns (3.33). Other challenges include inadequate resources and external partnerships (3.20), communication barriers (3.17), academic unpreparedness (3.09), and systemic biases (3.07). Overall, these indicate that while access is generally manageable, multiple interconnected factors still affect participation. Agbayani and Paglinawan (2025) highlight that financial, workload, and psychological pressures significantly hinder graduate school persistence, reinforcing the need for institutional support systems.

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Table 4a. Weighted means and extent of challenges encountered by the stakeholders in accessing Graduate School programs

Statements	Weighted Mean	Descriptive Value
1. Financial constraints burden all stakeholders, with students facing high tuition costs while administrators manage limited budgets, impacting program accessibility.	3.75	Often Encountered
2. Systemic biases, which disproportionately affect underrepresented students, can manifest as negative perceptions from some faculty and hinder efforts toward equity and inclusion.	3.07	Sometimes Encountered
3. Communication barriers, resulting from distance, different technologies, or inefficient channels, lead to misunderstandings and delays between administrators, faculty, and students.	3.17	Sometimes Encountered
4. Workload and time management issues affect students balancing school with work and family, and faculty juggling mentorship with their own academic and research duties.	3.58	Often Encountered
5. Inadequate resources, including insufficient funding, limited facilities, and a shortage of mentors, can undermine the quality and effectiveness of graduate programs.	3.20	Sometimes Encountered
6. Academic unpreparedness or skills gaps among some prospective students, as well as a lack of research capacity-building resources, can present obstacles to success.	3.09	Sometimes Encountered
7. Differing priorities and funding limitations can complicate collaborations with external partners, creating hurdles for integrating their contributions into graduate training.	3.20	Sometimes Encountered
8. Mental health issues, including stress, anxiety, and social isolation, are prevalent challenges for graduate students, impacting their well-being and academic performance.	3.33	Sometimes Encountered
Dimension Mean	**3.30**	**Sometimes**

Completing Graduate Degree

The challenges experienced during program completion are more frequent and intensive than those encountered during program access, with an overall mean of 3.50 (“Often Encountered”). The most significant issue is balancing time and priorities (3.91), followed by financial constraints (3.72), mental and emotional health concerns (3.45), resource limitations (3.40), academic skill gaps (3.39), and issues with academic supervision (3.15). These findings indicate that graduate students face greater difficulties during program completion, particularly in managing workload, finances, and well-being, which may lead to delayed graduation or attrition. April Camral (2025) supports these results, noting that academic, work, and financial pressures contribute to exhaustion and emotional stress among graduate students.

Table 4b. Weighted means and extent of challenges encountered by the stakeholders in completing their enrolled Graduate School programs

Statements	Weighted Mean	Descriptive Value
1. Balancing time and priorities: Many students and faculty struggle to juggle heavy workloads from coursework, research, teaching, and personal life, leading to exhaustion and burnout.	3.91	Often Encountered
2. Financial constraints: High tuition, rising living costs, and limited funding or stipends create significant financial stress for students.	3.72	Often Encountered
3. Issues with academic supervision: Faculty advisors can be overstretched, leading to inconsistent or delayed feedback and less-than-ideal supervision for graduate students.	3.15	Sometimes Encountered
4. Mental and emotional health struggles: Academic pressure, feelings of inadequacy	3.45	Often Encountered

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	(imposter syndrome), and isolation are common, leading to higher rates of anxiety and depression among graduate students.		
5.	Resource limitations: Institutions often face limited funding, which can result in inadequate research facilities, fewer qualified faculty, and outdated technology.	3.40	Often Encountered
6.	Academic skill gaps: Some students may lack the necessary research and writing skills for advanced degrees, finding tasks like literature reviews particularly challenging.	3.39	Sometimes Encountered
Dimension Mean		**3.50**	**Often**

Summary of Challenges Encountered by the stakeholders in Graduate School Programs

Stakeholders experience greater difficulty in completing graduate programs than in initially accessing them. Challenges become more severe as students' progress deeper into academic requirements, particularly during thesis/dissertation stages. The "Often Encountered (3.40)" overall rating indicates that these challenges are not isolated but are consistently present across stakeholders.

Omedi,, M. S. (2025) shows that graduate challenges intensify in the later stages, particularly during the research and thesis/dissertation phase, by demonstrating that the slow rate of postgraduate degree completion is significantly explained by factors like personal factors, funding constraints, the student-supervisor relationship, and institutional factors. This directly corroborates the study that challenges are consistently present and become more severe deeper into the academic requirements, as these complex, interlinked factors coalesce to impede final completion.

Table 4c. Summary of dimension means and extent of challenges encountered by the stakeholders in Graduate School programs

Dimension	**Mean**	**Descriptive Value**
1. Accessing Graduate School programs	3.30	Sometimes Encountered
2. Completing Graduate School programs	3.50	Often Encountered
Overall Mean	**3.40**	**Often**

Graduate School Program Enhancement Plan (GS-PEP)

I. Executive Summary

The Graduate School Programs demonstrate high alignment with stakeholder expectations, evidenced by consistently high ratings in Acceptability and Relevance. However, the data highlights critical challenges related to Attainability, primarily stemming from socio-economic factors, time management difficulties, and specific program weaknesses (e.g., leadership training in MSIT, strengthening curriculum in MAEd English).

This plan proposes a targeted, a pillar enhancement strategy focused on maximizing student success, fostering pedagogical innovation, and deepening industry relevance. The core objective is to move from "highly relevant" to "future-ready" to ensure all programs function as true accelerators for advanced professional practice and research leadership, in aligning with the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF) Levels 7 and 8 by addressing barriers to completion, strengthening financial and academic support, and ensuring curriculum remains at the leading edge of professional practice and research.

II. Goals and Objectives

Goals

1. **Attainability & Equity:** Significantly reduce socio-economic barriers to access and completion, thereby improving the overall student success and time-to-completion rate.
2. **PQF L7/L8 Competency Mastery:** Achieve 100% graduate alignment with PQF Level 7 requirements, specifically in leadership, professional application, and high independence, while establishing a defined pathway for Level 8 research capabilities.
3. **Future-Ready Relevance:** Elevate professional skills and applied research through continuous industry collaboration and integration of technology-driven pedagogies.

III. Enhancement Plan

INDICATOR	ENHANCEMENT STRATEGIES	STAKEHOLDERS ACTION
Level of Acceptability While the overall acceptability of the Graduate School Program Objectives is Highly Acceptable, slight variations in weighted means point to strategic areas for enhancement. Specifically, the MAEd in English program received the lowest acceptability rating, and the leadership component of the MS in	1. Reinforce research-oriented competencies across all graduate programs to ensure academic rigor and future-readiness. 2. Integrate updated pedagogical approaches, including technology-driven strategies and collaborative practices, particularly in programs like MAEd English.	**Faculty** • Strengthen research skills and adopt innovative, technology-driven teaching methods. • Enhance leadership competencies and promote ethical, outcomes-based

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Information Technology also suggests opportunities for strengthening. These findings imply that the enhancement efforts should prioritize curriculum innovation, pedagogical updates, and leadership development in these comparatively lower-rated programs.	3. Expand leadership and management training in both education and technology-focused programs, specifically addressing the MSIT. 4. Sustain ethical and contextualized approaches to teaching and leadership to maintain high relevance. 5. Strengthen curriculum innovation to address the slight variations and improve program design across specialties.	instruction. • Support continuous curriculum improvement through training and benchmarking. **Students** • Develop research competencies and provide modern, collaborative learning experiences. • Build leadership skills and reinforce ethical, socially responsive values. • Ensure updated curricula aligned with industry and professional standards. **Alumni** • Provide continuous professional development and access to new teaching and technology trends. • Promote leadership, networking, and mentoring opportunities. • Engage alumni in curriculum feedback to maintain program relevance.
Level of Attainability Graduate School programs are generally perceived as highly attainable, especially concerning institutional goals and professional development. However, the key low finding is the moderate rating in the socio-economic dimension. This highlights that financial constraints remain a significant obstacle, affecting the ability of some stakeholders to fully maximize the program benefits and thus lowering the overall attainability rating.	1. Prioritize and strengthen financial support mechanisms, including scholarships, grants, and flexible payment schemes, to address socio-economic barriers. 2. Sustain and further enhance research development initiatives, such as improving mentoring and access to research facilities/databases, given the strong attainability in research skills. 3. Preserve and expand successful professional development programs by linking with industry, government, and educational institutions to boost employability. 4. Reinforce inter-agency collaboration and extension services to expand program relevance and societal impact, as consultancy and linkages are highly attainable. 5. Develop mechanisms for flexible program pacing or load reduction to assist students balancing graduate studies with financial or professional demands (Implied from the need to address financial constraints and the high attainability of professional development).	**Students** • Expand scholarships, grants, and flexible payment options to address financial barriers. • Provide flexible program pacing and learning options for working students. • Strengthen access to research resources and mentoring. **Faculty** • Enhance mentoring and research collaboration initiatives. • Strengthen partnerships with industry, government, and academic institutions. • Support continuous professional development. **Alumni** • Build stronger industry linkages for employment and career growth. • Engage in research, extension, and consultancy activities. • Offer continuing education and training opportunities.
Level of Relevance	1. Deepen collaboration with industry partners	**Faculty**

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The overall rating for the level of relevance is "Highly Relevant". The lowest-rated dimension, though still high, is Industry-related needs. This pattern indicates that while personal needs and professional development are the strongest drivers of engagement, the programs have an opportunity to deepen their connection with and responsiveness to evolving workforce demands.	to ensure programs remain adaptive to evolving workforce demands. 2. Strengthen experiential learning components, such as practica, internships, and applied research partnerships. 3. Involve industry practitioners in curriculum co-design to align competencies with current industry expectations. 4. Sustain and expand initiatives that build advanced competencies and transferable skills by enhancing mentorship and research engagement. 5. Continue fostering reflective, research-driven, and learner-centered pedagogies to reinforce the high relevance of personal growth and intellectual fulfillment.	• Strengthen industry partnerships for curriculum alignment. • Integrate experiential and research-based teaching. • Engage in continuous professional and industry development. • Apply learner-centered and innovative pedagogies. **Students** • Expand internships and practical learning opportunities. • Increase industry exposure through mentorship and activities. • Develop transferable and advanced skills. • Encourage participation in research and innovation. **Alumni** • Strengthen networking and industry linkages. • Provide lifelong learning and upskilling opportunities. • Involve alumni in curriculum improvement. • Support mentorship and career guidance programs.
Challenges Encountered Stakeholders experience greater difficulty in completing graduate programs than in initially accessing them. This indicates that these challenges are consistently present. The difficulty is especially severe as students progress deeper into academic requirements, particularly during thesis/dissertation stages.	1. Strengthen Financial Support Systems by providing scholarships, installment plans, research grants, and assistantship programs. 2. Implement Structured Time Management and Academic Support, including flexible scheduling, research boot camps, and writing workshops, to address completion difficulties. 3. Enhance Institutional Resources by upgrading facilities, providing research software, improving library resources, and hiring more trained faculty advisers. 4. Improve Communication and Academic Supervision through clear protocols and training for advisers on supervision best practices, crucial for thesis/dissertation stages. 5. Expand Mental Health and Wellness Services (e.g., counseling and stress-management programs) to support students facing consistent challenges and academic pressure.	**Faculty** • Improve thesis/dissertation supervision through training and clear advising guidelines. • Strengthen research support by providing better resources and reducing workload constraints. **Students** • Expand financial support such as scholarships, grants, and assistantships. • Provide academic support through workshops, flexible schedules, and time management training. • Enhance mental health services to address stress and academic pressure. **Alumni** • Support scholarships and mentoring programs for graduate students. • Strengthen alumni engagement in research collaboration and

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		program improvement.

IV. Implementation Plan

Milestone / Phase	Estimated Schedule/Timeline	Key Activity	Team/Resources Responsible
Phase 1: Financial & Support Launch	Q1 (Year 1)	Launch expanded scholarship fund, flexible payment options, and initial writing/research boot camps. Establish new mental health services.	Admin and Finance Office, Registrar, Program Coordinators, Student Wellness
Phase 2: Curriculum & Industry Alignment	Q2 – Q4 (Year 1)	Complete revision and pilot implementation of new leadership/pedagogy modules in targeted programs. Formalize 3-5 MOUs with key industry partners for co-design and consultancy.	Dean of Graduate School, Program Coordinators, Industry Partners
Phase 3: Resource & Supervision Upgrade	Q1 – Q2 (Year 2)	Upgrade research software and library access (institutional resources). Develop and execute mandatory, advanced training for faculty advisers on supervision best practices.	MIS Office, Library Services, HR, Dean's Office

V. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Focus Area	Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Target	PQF Level Link
Access/Attainability	Percentage increase in students utilizing financial aid/research grant mechanisms.	30% increase within 1 year	Directly addresses socio-economic barrier for PQF L7/L8 candidates.
Completion/Support	Average time-to-completion (TTC) for master's programs.	10% reduction in average TTC.	Measures effectiveness of time management/academic support systems.
Competency/L7	Percentage of MAEd/English and MSIT graduates who rate their specialized competency (pedagogy/leadership) as excellent.	90% positive rating in exit surveys	Measures successful delivery of Advanced Knowledge/Leadership components (PQF L7).
Research/L8	Percentage increase in externally funded/published applied research projects linked to industry MOUs.	15% increase within 2 years	Measures development of Highly Advanced Systematic Knowledge and Full Independence (PQF L8).

VI. Ways and Means

- **Internal:** Weekly updates within the Enhancement Task Force; Quarterly reports to the Academic Council and faculty body detailing progress.
- **External:** Biannual meetings with current students and alumni; Annual Report to stakeholders detailing PQF alignment and KPI performance.
- **Faculty/Advisers:** Dedicated training workshops with clear communication protocols for academic supervision and workload management.

Conclusion

The study finds that graduate program objectives are widely regarded as highly acceptable across specialties, reflecting strong alignment with current educational and professional needs and a forward-looking design.

Programs are seen as largely attainable and effective for professional advancement and research development, though socio-economic barriers especially financial constraints limit access and benefit.

Stakeholders consider the programs highly relevant, meeting personal, professional, and industry expectations, with personal motivations being the primary driver of engagement.

However, many face increasing challenges as they advance, with academic requirements and thesis or dissertation completion posing greater difficulty than initial program entry.

Recommendations

In light of the findings, it is recommended that graduate school faculty implement structured advisement checkpoints during thesis or dissertation work and provide guidance on financial aid to address completion challenges. Students should engage in early research planning and actively seek financial support to ensure timely program completion. The university administration is encouraged to establish a need-based scholarship fund, strengthen financial support systems, and conduct regular curriculum reviews aligned with program goals. Accrediting bodies may include indicators assessing institutional financial support mechanisms to reduce barriers to attainability. Researchers are advised to further explore financial and socio-economic constraints through qualitative studies, while future studies may conduct longitudinal tracer research to examine long-term graduate outcomes and career impact.

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