



# Quality of Graduate Education of a Private University in the Philippines through the years: Employability of Graduate Students and their Online Learning Experience

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**Abstract.** This study determined the University of the Northeastern Philippines, Iriga City, Philippines' Quality of Graduate Programs offered through the years: Employability Graduate Students and their Online Learning Experience during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The descriptive research design was used, and two (2) types of respondents involved in this study the 660 graduates from the Academic Year 2016 to 2021 who were asked to answer their employability and the second group of respondents, the 374 graduate students enrolled for the second semester of School Year 2021-2022 who answered the Online Learning Experience during COVID-19 Pandemic survey. The majority of the respondents are Female, Married, with a monthly income of 20,001 to 30,000 pesos, were employed during their studies at UNEP, with a present job status as Permanent, working at Public (and the majority are Professional Teachers. Moreover, they Highly Agreed that their skills learned from the graduate program taken are related to their present job; they were promoted after they graduated from UNEP. They highly agreed that their learned skills from the UNEP could be applied to their profession in enhancing their team spirit/people skills, improving their communication/ interpersonal skills, learning efficacy, personality development, and information technology skills. They further evaluated that UNEP School of Graduate Studies

offers high-quality graduate programs that are relevant to professional requirements, with quality teacher-student relationship, professor's knowledge of the major subjects, quality of instruction, range of the subjects offered, problem-solving, teaching and learning environment, interdisciplinary learning and premium given to research.

**Keywords:** Quality, Graduate Education, Graduate Schooling, Master's Students, Doctorate Students; Quality of Learning, pandemic, Philippines

## I. INTRODUCTION

Because the COVID-19 Pandemic affected all aspects of society, it had a significant impact on all educational systems, resulting in significant changes to the traditional classroom setup. Online, blended, flexible, home-schooling, modular, asynchronous, synchronous, and technology-assisted learning have supplanted face-to-face learning. Furthermore, as the number of positive COVID-19 cases in the Philippines rises, the government has implemented policies through the Department of Education and the Commission on Higher Education of the Philippines to encourage the use of alternative modalities in delivering basic education content to higher education institutions. COVID-19 required teachers and educational institutions to transform and equip their classrooms to support online and remote learning, a practice known colloquially as



"New Normal Teaching" (Avila and Genio 2020). With these, various platforms were institutionalized that brought changes to the usual classroom set-up (Avila & Lavadia, 2019; Avila & Cabrera, 2020; Avila et al., 2021)

According to Eldeen A. I. G. et al. (2018), employability is the capacity of a person to find employment suited to their educational level, which aids in the development of their personality and ability to interact with others. Su, W., & Zhang, M. (2015) stated in their study that governments worldwide are concerned that higher education delivers the most significant potential impact on human capital due to a global shortage of competent workers. This was also shown in the study of Chhinzer, N., & Russo, A. M. (2017), which stated that employers are hesitant to provide remedial education or training that is aimed toward developing specific skills as firms implement more dynamic and flexible approaches to labor. To reflect student outcomes concerning 21st-century skills and capacities, universities are transforming their fundamental purpose from transferring knowledge to a more relevant and employment-focused curriculum. (Oraison, H., et al., 2019). With this, according to Pinto, L. H., & He, K. (2019), graduate employment patterns appear to have changed globally, as employers' decisions to hire graduates are based on the graduate's qualities and abilities, as well as training knowledge and skills. Employers choose to employ a graduate based on the graduate's traits, skills, knowledge, and expertise in their particular area (Khadila et al., 2018).

Graduate students experience developmental and life difficulties (Benshoff, J. M. et al., 2015). As higher education increasingly promotes internationalization, it is more important to understand their needs (Girmay M. et al., 2019). Thus, examining graduate students' experiences with the challenges that often prevent them from succeeding in graduate school will be done with the perspective of fulfilling the needs of various people (Smith, T. C., & Virtue, E. E., 2019). The need for flexible workspaces and storage space among graduate students is a crucial factor, and the degree to which external stimuli affect students' academic performance varies substantially (Kinsley, K., 2015). According to Magliaro, J., & Munro, S. (2018), analysis and assessment of programs, services, and resources are now necessary due to evolving criteria for graduate program reviews.

Moreover, according to Tezel, K. V. (2021), quality is not an easily assessed dimension in education; instead, it is assessed through collecting and analyzing relevant data to make

evaluative judgments about a program. Moreover, with this, David A. P. et al. (2020) emphasized that countries must develop vital educational policy initiatives on quality assurance to retain performance in large-scale assessments of student achievement. Therefore, those educational institutions instill the principles for complying with tertiary education objectives; the graduate program must provide leadership and intricate knowledge for improving human well-being and identify changing demands and situational factors (Nunez S. J. L. et al., 2022). One of the main reasons graduate students reported sticking with the program was that the level of learning was considered to be immediately applicable to their professional work (Littenberg-Tobias, J., & Reich, J. 2020). Also, Osea, E. A. (2022) stated that graduate students encompass a variety of variables that may influence their views on why they sustain to pursue Graduate Schooling. Developing a quality system while minimizing and preventing unsafe acts necessitates organizations adopting a culture that values quality and safety and must have leaders and personnel committed to high quality with the necessary knowledge and skills to lead quality improvement practices (Oglesby, W. H. et al., 2021).

The Philippines' pursuit of technical, sociological, technological, and scientific advancements continues. Republic Act 10912, also known as Continuing Professional Development, was passed (Congress of the Philippines, 2016). The law aims to develop and promote professional practice in the country by requiring professionals to continuously improve their competencies in accordance with global practice norms. Professionals in the country must obtain CPD credits, which can be obtained through formal schooling or learning through educational institutions and arrangements, as well as informal learning through seminar and training attendance accreditation. This can ensure that the learning outcomes benefit the overall well-being, economic growth, and development of the country.

This study revolved around how the said graduate school being studied shifted rapidly to online education (Cavanaugh & Deweese, 2020), and how the graduate students responded and how the professors in the graduate education teach (Hartshorne et al., 2020). Teaching at all levels, whether elementary, undergraduate, or graduate levels, is constantly challenged by various constraints in teaching and learning that are blended, remote, online, or modular; the resources and preparation in online schooling should be evaluated (Trikoilis & Papanastasiou, 2020).



As a result, the avenues for improving educational landscapes through the use of innovative information and communication technologies necessitate that teachers, educational institutions, and learners be prepared in this regard (Avila & Cabrera, 2020, 2021; Trust et al., 2020). Furthermore, as the country's higher education institutions transitioned to distance learning, content preparation, access to device and internet connectivity, and learning management systems applicable for the New Normal School Year should be implemented (Clausen et al., 2020; Evmenova et al., 2014), as it can help not only educators but graduate students develop their competencies and skills despite the abrupt academic shifts. Graduate school professors, lecturers, and teachers, as well as their administrators, must improve the services they provide. As a result, before incorporating learning platforms into their program offerings, teachers should be taught how to use them, and their ICT competency level should also be considered (Avila, Nepomuceno, et al., 2021; Pattanayak&Pattnaik, 2016). During the Pandemic, students enrolled in graduate programs saw distance and online learning as a necessity to continue their professional development (Avila, Abin, et al., 2021). While much research on online learning has been conducted, particularly during the COVID-19 Pandemic, no study has been conducted to assess the impact, perspectives, and impact of online or distance learning on graduate schooling in the Philippines during the Pandemic. As a result, the goal of this research is to better understand that aspect, as well as how Graduate School teachers and students can fully engage in utilizing available tools for teaching and serving the best knowledge to their students while also developing themselves.

## II. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

This study determined the Quality of Graduate Education at the University of Northeastern Philippines through the years: Employability Graduate Students and their Online Learning Experience during the COVID-19 Pandemic at the University of Northeastern Philippines, Iriga City, during the Second Semester of the Academic Year 2021-2022.

It specifically sought answers to the following:

1. What is the Graduate Students' demographic profile:
  - 1.1 Sex,
  - 1.2 Civil Status,
  - 1.3 Monthly income,
  - 1.4 Program Taken from UNEP,
  - 1.5 Work status while studying at UNEP,

- 1.6 Present job status,
- 1.7 Type of organization of the affiliation, and
- 1.8 Occupational classification?
2. What is the employability of the respondents
  - 2.1 Relatedness of the skills learned from UNEP to the present job
  - 2.2 Promotion Status after graduating from UNEP
  - 2.3 Waiting Period Before Promotion
  - 2.4 Promoted Position
  - 2.5 Profile of graduates on modes to find a job/be promoted after graduation from UNEP?
3. What is the perception of respondents towards the extent of applications of the skills learned to the personal and professional growth of the graduates?
4. What is the overall rating of the graduate programs offered by UNEP and their Recommendations to improve the services of the graduate school?
5. What are the perspectives of the Graduate Students of the University of Northeastern Philippines concerning the quality of their graduate schooling during the Pandemic?
6. What are the challenges met by the students in achieving quality graduate programs during the New Normal School Year?



### III. METHODS AND PROCEDURE

#### A. Methodology

The descriptive research design was used. The descriptive design describes the degree of a quantifiable variable. This study was used to explore the Quality of Graduate Education at the University of Northeastern Philippines by analyzing the employability of Graduate Students and their Online Learning Experience during the COVID-19 Pandemic at the University of Northeastern Philippines, Iriga City.

#### B. Respondents

There were two (2) types of respondents involved in this study. The first set was the 660 graduates from Academic Year 2016 to 2021 who were asked to answer their employability, and the second group of respondents was the 374 graduate students enrolled for the second semester of School Year 2021-2022 who answered the Online Learning Experience during COVID-19 Pandemic at the University of Northeastern Philippines, Iriga City. Therefore, this study had 1074 respondents.

#### C. Data Gathering Instrument

The instrument used in gathering the data was a structured researchers-made questionnaire checklist. The first type of research instrument is about the employability of the graduates of graduate programs UNEP from 2016 to 2021. Their categorical ratings were verbally interpreted as 5-Strongly Agree (SA), 4-Moderately Agree (MA), 3-Agree (A), 2-Fairly Agree (FA), 1-Not at all (NAA). The second set of the instrument is about graduate students' perspectives on the quality of their graduate schooling during the Pandemic along identified variables during the New Normal School Year. The weighted mean, rank, and verbal interpretation were used to describe the Graduate Students' graduate schooling experiences during the Pandemic. It was interpreted using the following scale: 5-Strongly Agree (SA), 4-Moderately Agree (MA), 3-Agree (A), 2-Fairly Agree (FA), 1-Not at all (NAA). While for the Challenges of Graduate Students regarding their graduate schooling experiences during the COVID-19 Pandemic, the scale was: 5-Always Encountered (AE), 4-Often Encountered (OE), 3-Sometimes Encountered (SoE), 2-Seldom Encountered (SeE), and 1-Not Affected at all (NAA).

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 1. The Graduate Students' demographic profile

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the graduates of the graduate programs offered by UNEP who answered the survey.

**Table 1:** Demographic Profile of the respondents

Sex		
Male	197	29.8
Female	463	70.2
Civil Status		
Single	206	31.2
Married	422	63.9
Widowed/er	32	4.8
Monthly Income		
10,000 to 20,000 pesos	50	7.6
20,001 to 30,000 pesos	348	52.7
30,001 to 40,000 pesos	141	21.4
40,001 and up	121	18.3
The program is taken from UNEP		
Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) Major in Educational Management	80	12.1
Doctor in Public Management	19	2.9
Doctor in Business Management	7	1.1
Doctor of Philosophy in Human Resource Management	27	4.1



Master in Business Administration	20	3
Master of Public Administration	58	8.8
Master of Arts in Education	449	68
<b>Work status while studying at UNEP</b>		
Employed	654	99.1
Not employed	6	0.9
<b>Present job status</b>		
Permanent	656	99.4
Contractual	4	0.6
<b>Type of organization of the affiliation</b>		
Non-Government Organizations	9	1.4
Public (SUC/LUC/DepEd)	591	89.5
Public (other government agencies)	53	8
Private Institutions	7	1.1
<b>Occupational classification</b>		
Professional Teacher	630	95.5
other government positions (Engineer, Nurse, etc.)	21	3.2
Managing Proprietor	3	0.5
Office Staff	6	0.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>100</b>

It revealed that the majority of the 660 graduates of the UNEP School of Graduate Studies who responded to the survey are Female with 463 or 70.2%; Married with 422 or 63.9%; with a monthly income of 20,001 to 30,000 pesos with 348 or 52.7%; the majority of the graduates across programs responded; were employed during their studies at UNEP with 654 or 99.1%; with a present job status as Permanent with 656 or 99.4%, and working at Public (SUC/LUC/DepEd) with 591 or 89.5%, and the majority are Professional Teacher with 630 or 95.5% of 660.

## 2. The employability of the respondents

The profile of the employability of the respondents is

presented in Table 2.

Table 2 revealed that the majority of the 660 respondents highly agreed that their skills learned from the graduate program taken from UNEP are related to their present job, with 658 or 99.7%; the majority also were promoted after they graduated from UNEP with 446 or 67.6%; then 208 or 31.5% were promoted after one year to less than two years; then majority was promoted to Higher Level Rank (Administrative Position) with 376 or 57.0%; then 208 or 31.5% waited for a year to less than two years before getting promoted, and 481 or 72.9% of 660 were promoted after they submit themselves for application/Ranking.

**Table 2:** The profile of the employability of the respondents

<b>Relatedness of the skills learned from UNEP to the present job</b>		
Yes	658	99.7
No	2	.3
<b>Promotion Status after graduating from UNEP</b>		
Promoted	446	67.6
Not Promoted	214	32.4
<b>Waiting Period Before Promotion</b>		
Less than one year	179	27.1
After one year to less than two years	208	31.5



After two years to less than three years	171	25.9
After three years or longer	102	15.5
<b>Promoted Position</b>		
Higher Level Rank (Administrative Position)	376	57.0
Teacher Rank to Administrative Position	225	34.1
Higher Level Rank	59	8.9
<b>Waiting Period Before Promotion</b>		
Less than one year	179	27.1
After one year to less than two years	208	31.5
After two years to less than three years	171	25.9
After three years or longer	102	15.5
<b>Modes to find a job/be promoted after graduation from UNEP</b>		
Application/Ranking	481	72.9
Through friends	71	10.8
Former Professors	27	4.1
Through a call from an administrator	32	4.8
Through relatives	29	4.4
Advertisements in media	11	1.7
Through written inquiries	7	1.1
Job opening	2	.3

### 3. Respondents' perceptions of the extent to which skills learned are applied to the personal and professional development

Table 3 shows the Respondents' perceptions of the extent to which skills learned are applied to the personal and professional development of graduates

Table 3: the extent of applications of the skills learned to the personal and professional growth of the graduates

Indicators	Average
Enhanced academic profession	4.82
Enhanced problem-solving abilities	4.81
improved research abilities	4.79
Enhanced learning effectiveness	4.84
Enhanced communication and interpersonal skills	4.86
enhanced information technology abilities	4.83
Improved team spirit and interpersonal skills	4.88
Exposure to the local community in one's field of expertise	4.80
Exposure to the international community in one's field of expertise	4.68
Critical thinking abilities	4.75
Salary advancement and promotion	4.70
Opportunity to work abroad	4.37
Development of one's own personality	4.84
Average	4.77
Verbal Interpretation	HA



From the different indicators on the respondents' perception towards the extent of applications of the skills learned to the personal and professional growth of the graduates, the respondents highly agreed that their learned skills from the UNEP could be applied to their profession. As arranged from ascending mean, it yielded that their learned skills from UNEP enhanced their team spirit/people skills (4.88); improved their communication/ interpersonal skills (4.86); improved their learning efficacy (4.84); Improved their personality development (4.84); improved their

information technology skills (4.83); enhanced their academic profession (4.82); improved their problem-solving skills (4.81); exposed them to the local community within the field of specialization (4.80); improved their research skills (4.79); improved their critical thinking skills (4.75); essential in their salary improvement and promotion (4.7); exposure to the international community in one's field of expertise (4.68); and they agreed that obtaining a graduate degree from UNEP gave them opportunity abroad (4.37).

4. The overall rating of the graduate programs offered by UNEP and their Recommendations to improve the services of the graduate school

Table 4: the ratings that the respondents gave on the services and programs offered by the UNEP School of Graduate Studies

Indicators	Average
The Variety of Subjects Offered	4.80
Program Relevance to Professional Requirements	4.89
Extracurricular pursuits	4.67
Problem-solving	4.80
Research output published is being rewarded.	4.75
Interdisciplinary education	4.78
Environment for Teaching and Learning	4.79
Instructional Effectiveness	4.83
Relationship between Teacher and Student	4.85
Library Materials	4.56
Resources for the Laboratory	4.49
Class Dimensions	4.61
Infrastructure and Services	4.61
Knowledge of the Major Subjects by the Professor	4.85
Average	4.73
Verbal Interpretation	HA

*Overall rating.* Table 4 shows the overall rating of the graduate programs offered by UNEP and their Recommendations to improve the graduate school services.

According to the overall ratings of the respondents on the services and programs offered by the UNEP School of Graduate Studies as high quality that conforms to CHED and other standards.

*The Recommendations to improve services of the graduate school.* The respondents gave the following recommendations to improve the services and programs offered by the UNEP School of Graduate Studies.

Table 5: The Recommendations that the respondents gave to improve the services and programs offered by the UNEP School of Graduate Studies

Indicators	Average
Offer other doctoral programs	4.68
Offer other master's program and specializations	4.71
Partner with other private institutions	4.61
Offer distance learning	4.81
Improve sports facilities and equipment	4.55
e-library and distance learning facilities	4.69



Proper scheduling of subject	4.63
Offer webinars/seminars regularly	4.73
Improve buildings, ICT, and laboratory	4.67
Enhance curriculum	4.68
Hiring more qualified professors	4.63
Time management	4.64
Average	4.67
Verbal Interpretation	HA

The respondents gave the following recommendations to improve the services of UNEP Graduate School, namely: Offer distance learning (4.81); offer webinars/seminars regularly (4.73); Offer other master's programs (4.71); Construct e-library and distance learning facilities (4.69); Enhance curriculum (4.68); Offer other doctoral

programs (4.68); Improve buildings, ICT, and laboratory (4.67); Time management (4.64); Proper scheduling of subject (4.63); More qualified professors in some programs (4.63); Partner with other private institutions (4.61); and Improve sports facilities and equipment (4.55).

#### 5. The perspectives of the Graduate Students of the University of Northeastern Philippines concerning the quality of their graduate schooling during the Pandemic

*Quality of professional learning experiences.* Table 6 shows the respondents' perspectives on the quality of Graduate Schooling they received from the graduate school being studied.

Table 6: Quality of learning experiences

Indicator	Mean	Interpretation
Quality of professional learning experiences.	4.28	Strongly Agree
Development of essential knowledge and skills, even during the Pandemic	4.50	Strongly Agree
Learning intention and success criteria	4.55	Strongly Agree
Professor's adaptation to teaching during the Pandemic.	4.59	Strongly Agree
Integrated instructional activities implemented by the graduate school during the Pandemic	4.57	Strongly Agree
Average	4.50	Strongly Agree

Based on the data in Table 6, the respondents strongly agreed that the COVID-19 Pandemic had impacted the quality of graduate education they were receiving from the University of Northeastern Philippines' School of Graduate Studies and Research. It also revealed that, despite the abrupt shifts in learning modalities used in Graduate Schools as a result of COVID-19 restrictions, they strongly agreed that the learning content is informative, the lessons delivered by their professors are engaging, and the feedback assisted them in improving their competence in their chosen profession. They also believed that current learning activities were more relevant than those used by their instructors prior to the epidemic, and that online, blended, or modular learning could help them advance in their careers. As a result, respondents strongly agreed that the quality of the learning and graduate schooling they received from the Graduate School under consideration is excellent

and that it can help them in their professional development, which they desperately need in their chosen professions and fields of specialization.

Furthermore, even before the pandemic, graduate students at the University of the Northeastern Philippines unanimously agreed on the importance of receiving regular feedback from their teachers in order to develop essential knowledge and abilities. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, the latter used it to assess their comprehension and assist them in understanding and exploring ways to improve their competence, knowledge, and skills related to their field of specialization by providing appropriate outputs and research, as well as utilizing various methods of assessing the actual learning they received from their online, blended, and modular classes.

Respondents strongly agreed, as part of the Learning intention and success criteria, that they now had a better understanding of their



specialization based on the quality of their self-paced learning. It is bolstered further by their professor's diverse teaching strategy, which includes first asking graduate students what they expect from the subject and then building their teaching strategies from the students' initial concepts about the subject matter, using online, modular, and blended learning modalities. Graduate students at the School of Graduate Studies under investigation unanimously agreed that their professors successfully adjusted to the unexpected transition to alternative teaching methods brought about by COVID-19 regulations. Graduate school professors were unanimous in their recommendation that they

use student progress as the baseline for teaching the subject, understand how their teaching strategies affect their students, incorporate research in addition to scaffolding activities, and practice providing feedback on reflection papers, case analyses, SWOT analyses, and case studies given to students enrolled in their subjects. As a result, despite the limitations of COVID-19 and the abrupt switch to other learning platforms, the University of Northeastern Philippines continues to provide high-quality education, particularly at the School of Graduate Studies, as evidenced by graduate student respondents' perceptions.

#### 6. Challenges in achieving quality graduate programs during the New Normal School Year

Table 7: The Challenges in achieving quality graduate programs as perceived by the Graduate Students

Challenges in achieving quality graduate programs	Mean	Interpretation
Lack of time to study due to office, field, and paper works.	2.97	Sometime Encountered
Lack of finances	2.91	Sometime Encountered
Lack of resources	2.54	Seldom Encountered
Barriers of communication	2.54	Seldom Encountered
Difficulty in using new technologies for modular, distance, and blended learning	2.46	Seldom Encountered
Lack of time balancing family and schooling	2.42	Seldom Encountered
Lack of instructional support	2.03	Seldom Encountered
Lack of student understanding of their disciplinary content and standards	2.02	Seldom Encountered
Lack of self-motivation to learn	2.01	Seldom Encountered
Lack of family support	1.80	Not Encountered at all
Average	2.37	Seldom Encountered

According to Table 7, a few obstacles prevented the development of high-quality professional development programs for graduate students at a private university in the Philippines. It was discovered that a lack of time to study due to office, field, and paperwork, a lack of finances, a lack of resources, communication barriers, difficulty in using new technologies for modular, distance, and blended learning, and a lack of time balancing family and schooling were the primary factors affecting Graduate School Students at the University of Northeastern Philippines. Other constraints, on the other hand, are rarely encountered by Graduate School students as part of their Professional and Personal Development.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

This research aims to Quality of Graduate Education of the University of Northeastern

Philippines through the years: Employability Graduate Students and their Online Learning Experience during the COVID-19 Pandemic at the University of Northeastern Philippines, Iriga City, during the Second Semester of the Academic Year 2021-2022. It can be concluded that the majority of the respondents are Female, Married, with a monthly income of 20,001 to 30,000 pesos, were employed during their studies at UNEP, with a present job status as Permanent, working at Public (SUC/LUC/DepEd), and the majority are Professional Teachers. Moreover, they Highly Agreed that their skills learned from the graduate program taken from UNEP are related to their present job; they were promoted after they graduated from UNEP; were promoted after one year to less than two years; were promoted to Higher Level Rank (Administrative Position); waited for a year to less than two years before



getting promoted, and were promoted after they submit themselves for application/ranking. They highly agreed that their learned skills from the UNEP could be applied to their profession in enhancing their team spirit/people skills, improving their communication/ interpersonal skills, learning efficacy, personality development, and information technology skills. Their graduate schooling from UNEP enhanced their academic profession and helped improve their problem-solving, research, and critical-thinking skills.

Furthermore, the graduates assessed that the University of Northeastern Philippines' School of Graduate Studies provides quality graduate programs, as they evaluated that the institution provides the following services of high quality, along with the relevance of the program to professional requirements, teacher-student relationship, professor's knowledge of the major subjects, quality of instruction, range of the subjects offered, problem-solving, teaching, and research. However, while the school provides a quality program, as evidenced by the graduates who were tracked for their employability, it also revealed that there is a need to improve several aspects of graduate studies services, as these respondents firsthand experienced the said services. They suggested the following: provide distance learning, hold webinars/seminars to enhance students' professional growth and development, provide additional specializations in master's programs, build an e-library and learning resources, improve curriculum, provide other doctoral programs, improve buildings, ICT, and laboratories, and improve time management.

In terms of the Graduate Students of the University of Northeastern Philippines' perspectives on the quality of their graduate schooling during the Pandemic and the challenges faced by the students in achieving quality graduate programs during the New Normal School Year, the findings show that the Graduate School students of the University of Northeastern Philippines, Iriga City, Philippines, represent a variety of variables that may influence their perspectives on the quality of their graduate schooling during the Pandemic. As such, management should take these factors into account because they have an impact on the quality of graduate studies, which has resulted in difficulties obtaining their Master's and Doctorate degrees. Respondents strongly agreed that a sudden change in Graduate School teaching modality has an impact on the quality of professional learning experiences,

the development of essential knowledge and skills even during a pandemic, learning intention and success criteria, professors' adaptation to teaching during the Pandemic, and support and change provided to students. As a result, the professional development of students enrolled in the Second Semester of Academic Year 2020-2021 will be impacted. It was also revealed that master's and doctorate students faced challenges such as a lack of time to study due to office, field, and paperwork responsibilities, a lack of finances, a lack of resources, communication barriers, difficulty using new technologies for modular, distance, and blended learning, and so on and a lack of time spent juggling family and schoolwork, all of which hampered their graduate studies during the COVID-19 pandemic-affected semesters.

#### V. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the recommendations of this research:

1. The University of Northeastern Philippines should continue offering graduate programs through online, distance, and flexible and blended learning modalities.
2. Continuity of the institution's best practices should be ensured for the quality of instruction and graduate programs to be offered to the Bicolanos.
3. Hiring qualified professors should also be considered as they can provide new and best practices to the specializations offered in the Graduate School of UNEP.
4. The UNEP School of Graduate Studies should ensure a robust support system for the students to ensure that the professionals enrolled in graduate programs be at par with colleges and other universities offering graduate programs in the local, national and international arenas.
5. Internationalization of best practices of the school should be in place, and benchmarking to other institutions should be conducted to recognize other potential practices that can further help the UNEP School of Graduate Studies and its students achieve higher learning outcomes.
6. The UNEP School of Graduate Studies should continue its quest towards quality assurance through PACUCOA Accreditation. Hence, the administration, staff, and teaching force should consider the salient highlights that can help the institution achieve a higher level of accreditation.

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