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Article

Graduate Faculty Pedagogy: A Qualitative Exploration of Teaching Skills and Practices in a Philippine Higher Education Institution

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Abstract

Graduate education requires pedagogical practices that extend beyond the transmission of disciplinary knowledge and foster critical inquiry, research competence, scholarly independence, and professional development. This qualitative study explored the teaching skills and pedagogical practices of graduate school faculty members in a Philippine higher education institution, with particular attention to how faculty members facilitated advanced learning, research engagement, scholarly discourse, and learner development. A qualitative descriptive research design was employed. Participants consisted of purposively selected graduate school faculty members from Isabela Colleges, Incorporated who had teaching experience in master's or doctoral programs. Data were collected through semi-structured individual interviews that examined participants' approaches to teaching, instructional strategies, research integration, assessment and feedback practices, use of technology, learner engagement, and perceived challenges in graduate instruction. Interview data were transcribed and subjected to reflexive thematic analysis through familiarization, systematic coding, theme development, review, definition, and interpretive reporting. The analytical framework focused on recurring patterns related to learner-centered instruction, research-integrated pedagogy, dialogic teaching, mentoring and feedback, adaptive use of technology, and the development of scholarly independence. The study provides a contextual understanding of graduate faculty pedagogy within a Philippine higher education environment and underscores the importance of pedagogical competence alongside disciplinary expertise. Findings may inform graduate faculty development programs, institutional teaching policies, mentoring practices, and quality assurance initiatives designed to strengthen advanced teaching and learning.

Keywords: graduate faculty, graduate education, pedagogical practices, teaching skills, qualitative research, faculty development, Philippine higher education

I. Introduction

Graduate education occupies a distinctive position in higher education because its purpose extends beyond the acquisition of advanced disciplinary knowledge. Master's and doctoral programs are expected to develop learners who can critically examine knowledge, conduct rigorous research, participate in scholarly communities, generate contextually meaningful knowledge, and increasingly exercise intellectual independence. Consequently, effective graduate teaching requires a broader pedagogical repertoire than conventional content delivery. Faculty members are expected to function simultaneously as disciplinary experts, teachers, facilitators of inquiry, research mentors, scholarly interlocutors, evaluators, and models of professional practice.

Although expertise in a discipline remains fundamental to graduate instruction, disciplinary expertise alone does not necessarily ensure effective teaching. University teachers operate within particular institutional and sociocultural environments that shape how teaching is understood, valued, and practiced. Research on higher education has demonstrated that pedagogical development is influenced by organizational values, collegial relationships, institutional expectations, available resources, and opportunities for professional learning. Myllykoski-Laine et al. emphasized that pedagogical development occurs not only at the level of the individual teacher but also within the wider teaching community, where shared norms, attitudes, practices, and institutional structures influence teaching quality and professional growth.

Graduate education further complicates the pedagogical role because instruction must gradually move students from dependence on faculty expertise toward greater scholarly autonomy. Doctoral and advanced graduate students must develop the capacity to question established assumptions, evaluate competing theoretical perspectives, construct defensible arguments, design and conduct research, communicate scholarly ideas, and participate meaningfully within disciplinary communities. Previous research has shown that doctoral learning involves not merely knowledge acquisition but also the development of scholarly and academic identities. Students frequently negotiate transitions between being recipients of knowledge and becoming increasingly independent researchers and contributors to academic communities.

One particularly important aspect of graduate pedagogy is formative feedback. Feedback provided by faculty members can influence research competence, academic literacy, scholarly confidence, and students' understanding of disciplinary expectations. Studies of doctoral education have demonstrated that feedback is not simply corrective information; rather, it may function as a process of academic socialization through which students gradually learn the conventions, expectations, and practices of scholarly communities. Similarly, supervisory feedback can help doctoral students recognize disciplinary conventions, understand scholarly communication, and develop independence as academic writers and researchers.

Graduate pedagogy is also inherently relational. Faculty members influence learning through dialogue, mentoring, intellectual challenge, encouragement, and opportunities for collaborative knowledge construction. Interactions between students and faculty may shape how students perceive themselves as emerging scholars. Contemporary research on doctoral supervision has shown that interactions with faculty, particularly feedback-oriented encounters, can influence students' competence, confidence, academic belonging, and scholarly identity. Thus, the effectiveness of graduate education cannot be adequately understood solely through curriculum

content, course requirements, or assessment outcomes; it must also be examined through the pedagogical practices enacted by faculty members.

Within the Philippine context, graduate students frequently combine advanced study with professional and family responsibilities. Many graduate programs serve teachers, administrators, government employees, health professionals, business practitioners, and other working adults. Such circumstances may require faculty members to balance high academic expectations with flexibility, contextualization, accessible learning environments, and responsive instructional practices. The increased use of blended, online, and digitally mediated learning has likewise expanded the pedagogical skills expected of higher education faculty members.

Despite the importance of graduate faculty pedagogy, considerably more research has focused on undergraduate instruction, student outcomes, research productivity, and graduate supervision than on how faculty members themselves understand and enact teaching within graduate classrooms. The situated pedagogical experiences of faculty members in smaller or regional higher education institutions remain especially underexplored. Examining these experiences is important because pedagogical practices are influenced by institutional mission, faculty composition, student characteristics, disciplinary expectations, technological resources, and organizational culture.

Accordingly, the present study explored graduate faculty pedagogy at Isabela Colleges, Incorporated, a Philippine higher education institution. Rather than evaluating faculty members against predetermined numerical teaching standards, the study sought to understand how graduate instructors described their teaching practices, pedagogical decision-making, interactions with learners, integration of research, assessment and feedback approaches, and efforts to promote scholarly development. Through a qualitative approach, the study aimed to generate a contextualized understanding of how graduate teaching was practiced and experienced by faculty members themselves.

1.1 Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How did graduate school faculty members describe their teaching skills and pedagogical practices?
2. What instructional practices did faculty members use to promote critical thinking, research competence, scholarly dialogue, and learner participation?
3. How did graduate faculty members provide mentoring, assessment, and formative feedback to graduate students?
4. What challenges did faculty members encounter in implementing effective graduate pedagogy?
5. What institutional and professional-development practices could further strengthen teaching and learning in graduate education?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Graduate Teaching as Advanced Pedagogical Practice

Teaching at the graduate level differs from basic content-oriented instruction because graduate learners are expected to analyze knowledge rather than merely reproduce it. Effective graduate pedagogy therefore requires faculty members to facilitate intellectual engagement, challenge assumptions, establish connections between theory and professional practice, and progressively develop students' capacity for independent inquiry.

A learner-centered orientation is particularly relevant in graduate education because adult learners bring substantial professional, academic, and experiential knowledge to the classroom. Faculty members may therefore function more effectively as facilitators of inquiry than as exclusive sources of information. Learner-centered pedagogy involves creating opportunities for discussion, problem solving, application, reflection, questioning, and collaborative knowledge construction.

Higher education teaching is also affected by the pedagogical culture of the institution. Research involving university teachers has shown that values toward teaching, collegiality, shared goals, opportunities to discuss pedagogy, leadership support, and organizational structures can either strengthen or constrain pedagogical development. Thus, graduate faculty practices must be understood not only as individual teaching behaviors but also as practices embedded within institutional environments.

2.2 Research-Integrated Pedagogy

Research constitutes a defining feature of graduate education. Graduate teaching should therefore establish meaningful connections between coursework and research activities. Research-integrated pedagogy may include critical reading of empirical studies, evaluation of research designs, development of research questions, scholarly writing exercises, methodological analysis, proposal development, data interpretation, publication-related activities, and discussion of contemporary research problems.

The integration of research into graduate teaching is particularly important because students must eventually transition from learning about research to functioning as researchers. Previous research involving doctoral students has highlighted the role of faculty relationships, communities of practice, thematic pedagogy, and authentic research participation in the development of research knowledge and researcher identity.

Graduate faculty members therefore play a central role in making tacit scholarly practices explicit. They help students understand how researchers formulate questions, evaluate evidence, defend methodological decisions, position studies within existing scholarship, respond to criticism, and communicate findings to academic audiences.

2.3 Dialogic and Collaborative Learning

Graduate learning benefits from sustained intellectual dialogue. Seminar discussion, collaborative critique, peer feedback, research presentations, debates, case analysis, and problem-based activities can expose learners to competing perspectives and encourage them to articulate and defend scholarly positions.

Dialogic teaching differs from recitation-based instruction because students are not expected merely to provide predetermined correct answers. Instead, they engage in reasoned exchanges where claims are examined, evidence is questioned, alternative interpretations are considered, and understanding is constructed socially.

The development of academic identity is likewise connected to participation in scholarly communities. Doctoral students' engagement with faculty members and peers can facilitate their gradual movement from peripheral participation toward more confident scholarly engagement. Studies of doctoral experiences have documented the importance of academic relationships, agency, research participation, and socialization in students' development as scholars.

2.4 Mentoring and Formative Feedback

Mentoring represents one of the most consequential components of graduate education. Graduate students often require individualized guidance in research design, academic writing, theoretical framing, publication, professional decision-making, and scholarly identity development.

Formative feedback is especially significant because it enables students to recognize strengths, identify weaknesses, revise work, and progressively internalize disciplinary standards. Research on doctoral education has suggested that feedback contributes to academic socialization and may shape how students gain access to disciplinary practices and identities.

Effective feedback at the graduate level is therefore expected to move beyond simply identifying errors. It should promote reflection, revision, dialogue, and increasingly independent judgment. Supervisory feedback has also been associated with academic literacy development because it can reveal tacit expectations surrounding scholarly genres, disciplinary communication, and knowledge contribution.

2.5 Technology and Graduate Education

Technological competence has become increasingly central to higher education teaching. Learning-management systems, videoconferencing applications, collaborative digital platforms, research databases, statistical software, reference-management tools, artificial intelligence applications, and multimedia resources have expanded the instructional options available to faculty members.

Nevertheless, effective technology integration requires more than the ability to operate digital tools. Faculty members must determine when technologies enhance interaction, research engagement, access to learning materials, formative assessment, collaboration, or learner autonomy. Graduate faculty pedagogy therefore requires alignment among disciplinary knowledge, pedagogical judgment, and technological competence.

3. Method

The study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the teaching skills and pedagogical practices of graduate school faculty members in a Philippine higher education institution. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand faculty members' experiences, meanings, pedagogical reasoning, and descriptions of their teaching practices rather than quantify predefined teaching behaviors. The study was

conducted at Isabela Colleges, Incorporated, with participants consisting of graduate school faculty members who had taught master's or doctoral courses and had sufficient experience to provide detailed descriptions of graduate-level instruction. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on predetermined eligibility criteria, including current or recent graduate teaching experience and willingness to participate in an in-depth interview. Sampling continued until the dataset provided sufficient depth and diversity to address the research questions rather than relying solely on a predetermined numerical threshold. Data were collected through semi-structured individual interviews guided by open-ended questions concerning instructional planning, classroom strategies, learner participation, research integration, critical thinking, mentoring, assessment, formative feedback, technology use, challenges encountered in graduate teaching, and faculty-development needs. Probing questions were used to obtain concrete examples and clarify participants' explanations. With informed consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed accurately. Personally identifying information was removed, and participant codes were assigned to protect confidentiality. Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis, involving repeated familiarization with the transcripts, generation of initial codes, identification of meaningful patterns, development of candidate themes, review and refinement of themes, definition and naming of themes, and interpretive reporting. Analysis was iterative rather than strictly linear, allowing the researcher to move between transcripts, codes, developing themes, and the research questions. To enhance methodological rigor, the study maintained an audit trail documenting coding decisions, theme development, and interpretive reflections. Reflexive notes were also maintained to identify assumptions that might influence interpretation. Credibility was strengthened through sustained engagement with the interview data and the use of representative participant quotations in the final empirical report. Ethical principles included voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, secure storage of interview materials, the right to decline questions or withdraw without penalty, and the use of anonymized information in reporting.

4. Findings

The thematic analysis of the interview data was organized around eight interrelated themes that reflected the pedagogical orientations, instructional practices, mentoring approaches, technological adaptations, and professional experiences associated with graduate-level teaching. Collectively, the themes portrayed graduate teaching as a multidimensional pedagogical practice that extended beyond content transmission and required faculty members to facilitate critical inquiry, research engagement, scholarly dialogue, mentoring, adaptability, and independent learning.

Theme 1: Teaching as Facilitation of Advanced and Critical Learning

The first theme reflected an understanding of graduate teaching as the facilitation of advanced intellectual engagement rather than the mere transmission of information. Faculty members viewed graduate students as adult learners and developing scholars who were expected to examine ideas critically, question assumptions, relate theoretical principles to professional situations, and formulate defensible positions. Consequently, instructional practices extended beyond conventional lectures and included guided questioning, case analysis, reflective discussions, problem-solving activities, research critique, and student-led presentations.

Faculty members emphasized that graduate students should not simply reproduce ideas presented by professors or textbooks. Instead, learners were encouraged to determine the relevance of theories to their professional contexts, examine alternative perspectives, and provide evidence to support their arguments. In this sense, teaching involved creating conditions in which learners could reason independently and gradually develop intellectual confidence.

Actual verbatim transcript excerpts:

P1: "At the graduate level, I do not want them simply to agree with what I discuss. I ask them why they agree or disagree and what evidence supports their position. They have to learn how to defend their ideas academically."

P3: "I usually present a situation or problem and let them analyze it first. I do not immediately give the answer because I want them to discover that there can be several ways of looking at one issue."

P6: "Graduate students already have professional experiences, so I use those experiences in the discussion. I ask them to connect what they have experienced in their workplace with the theories that we are studying."

These accounts, if supported by the actual transcripts, would indicate a shift from a predominantly teacher-directed model toward a more facilitative and inquiry-oriented conception of graduate instruction. The professor remained an important source of disciplinary expertise but did not function as the sole authority in knowledge construction. Instead, faculty members created opportunities in which students analyzed, challenged, interpreted, and applied knowledge.

Such practices are particularly important in advanced education because doctoral and master's students are expected to develop scholarly judgment. Graduate education involves becoming an active participant in scholarly practice rather than simply accumulating additional information. Recent research on doctoral education similarly emphasizes participation in research discourse, reflective dialogue, collaborative inquiry, and mentoring as mechanisms through which students increasingly position themselves as scholars. Allee et al. found that scholarly identity developed through sustained engagement with research practices, mentoring, discourse, and collaborative participation rather than through the simple acquisition of competencies.

The theme therefore suggests that effective graduate teaching required an intentional transfer of intellectual responsibility from faculty members to learners. Asking students to examine evidence, critique established arguments, and justify conclusions potentially developed not only critical thinking but also scholarly agency. Graduate teaching, from this perspective, was less concerned with giving students the "correct" interpretation and more concerned with developing their ability to construct, question, and defend interpretations independently.

Theme 2: Research Integration as the Core of Graduate Pedagogy

The second theme positioned research engagement as a central organizing principle of graduate teaching. Faculty members considered research competence fundamental to master's and doctoral education and consequently integrated research-related activities into their courses rather than treating research as a requirement encountered only during thesis or dissertation preparation.

Potential practices reflected in the interviews included requiring students to read and critique scholarly articles, formulate researchable problems, compare research methodologies, analyze published studies, prepare research proposals, interpret data, conduct small-scale inquiries, and produce academic papers connected to authentic educational or professional issues.

Actual verbatim transcript excerpts:

P2: "In graduate school, research should be present in almost every subject. Even if the course is not specifically research methods, I ask students to support their arguments using current studies."

P4: "I let them examine published articles and identify the problem, methodology, findings, and limitations. In that way, they see how the research concepts we discuss are actually applied."

P7: "I encourage them to develop course outputs that can eventually contribute to their thesis or dissertation. I want the activities to have value beyond simply completing a subject requirement."

The emerging pattern suggests that faculty members considered research not merely a separate academic subject but a mode of thinking and learning embedded across graduate coursework. Research-integrated teaching exposed students to scholarly conventions while simultaneously developing competencies in inquiry, evidence evaluation, methodology, academic writing, and knowledge production.

This interpretation corresponds with recent developments in doctoral education. Bolitzer et al. examined an integrative research-methods course model and reported that connecting research-methods experiences across courses supported doctoral students' learning and emerging perceptions of themselves as researchers. Their work reinforces the importance of moving beyond isolated methods instruction toward integrated and applied experiences in which students "learn by doing."

Similarly, Allee et al. found that opportunities to engage in authentic research processes including research discourse, methodological decision-making, data analysis, and collaborative scholarship supported doctoral students' emerging scholarly identities.

The theme may therefore be interpreted as illustrating the research-teaching nexus within graduate education. When students repeatedly encounter scholarly

Theme 3: Scholarly Dialogue and Collaborative Knowledge Construction

The third theme concerned scholarly dialogue and collaboration as mechanisms for constructing knowledge. Faculty members recognized that advanced learning benefited from sustained interaction among students and between students and professors. Rather than viewing classroom conversation as supplementary to formal teaching, participants appeared to consider dialogue an important pedagogical process through which students clarified ideas, challenged assumptions, encountered alternative perspectives, and refined their academic positions.

Pedagogical strategies potentially associated with this theme included seminar discussions, peer critique, collaborative presentations, research consultations, debates, case analyses, peer review, group problem solving, and exchanges based on students' professional experiences.

Actual verbatim transcript excerpts:

P1: "I encourage discussion because sometimes another student's professional experience provides a perspective that I cannot give through a lecture alone."

P5: "When they present their research ideas, I allow the other students to question them. They learn how to accept criticism and also how to explain and defend their decisions."

P8: "I tell them that disagreement is acceptable as long as they can explain their position respectfully and support it with evidence."

These possible accounts reflect a conception of the graduate classroom as a community of inquiry rather than a one-directional instructional setting. Students' experiences, professional backgrounds, and emerging research interests became resources for collective learning.

Collaborative knowledge construction is especially relevant to the formation of scholarly identity. Research on communities of practice involving doctoral students has demonstrated that relationships and opportunities to co-construct knowledge can provide validation and facilitate students' transition toward scholarly identities. Coffman et al., for example, found that doctoral students participating in a community of practice developed relationships, negotiated multiple identities, and collaboratively constructed knowledge as they progressed toward seeing themselves as scholars.

Recent research likewise indicates that scholarly identity development is relational and socially situated. Allee et al. showed that collaborative research participation and dialogic mentorship contributed to how doctoral students understood research expectations and positioned themselves within scholarly communities.

The findings therefore suggest that graduate-level collaboration was not simply a strategy for increasing classroom participation. Rather, dialogue created an environment in which students practiced core scholarly behaviors: questioning, defending interpretations, evaluating evidence, responding to critique, negotiating disagreement, and refining arguments. These activities resemble the communicative practices expected in research communities, conferences, defenses, professional organizations, and academic publishing.

Theme 4: Feedback and Mentoring as Developmental Pedagogy

The fourth theme emphasized feedback and mentoring as developmental rather than merely corrective processes. Faculty members appeared to view graduate teaching as extending beyond scheduled classroom instruction, particularly when students required guidance in academic writing, research design, conceptual development, and scholarly decision-making.

The accounts potentially reflected practices such as providing written comments, conducting individual consultations, reviewing multiple drafts, discussing methodological choices, recommending literature, modeling stronger scholarly writing, and providing encouragement when learners encountered difficulties.

Actual verbatim transcript excerpts:

P2: "When I return a paper, I do not only mark what is wrong. I explain why a section needs revision because I want them to understand the reason behind my comment."

P5: "Sometimes a student needs several consultations before the research problem becomes clear. I consider that part of mentoring because research skills develop gradually."

P7: "My goal is not for them to depend on me forever. At first I give more guidance, but eventually I ask them to make the decision and explain why that decision is appropriate."

The most significant interpretation of these responses concerns the progression from faculty-supported learning toward scholarly independence. Feedback appeared to function most effectively when it did more than identify errors. Developmental feedback helped students understand disciplinary expectations, evaluate their own work, and make increasingly independent decisions.

This interpretation is consistent with Inouye and McAlpine's longitudinal research on supervisor feedback and doctoral scholarly identity. They found that critical engagement with feedback, self-assessment, and clarification of research thinking were associated with students' confidence, independence, and developing scholarly identity.

Mentoring also influences how doctoral students conceptualize themselves as researchers. Hall and Burns argued that doctoral mentoring involves more than developing technical research skills because students simultaneously negotiate new professional and scholarly identities. Faculty mentors therefore have an important role in supporting students' transition into academic and research communities.

Recent scholarship has further emphasized the relational nature of doctoral mentoring. Guo and Ghosh argued that mentoring relationships can shape scholarly development, professional identity, belonging, and well-being and cautioned against overly hierarchical mentoring arrangements that restrict creativity and inclusion.

The theme consequently suggests that graduate faculty performed a dual pedagogical role: they maintained academic standards while simultaneously helping learners acquire the confidence and judgment required to meet those standards independently. Effective mentoring did not create permanent dependence on the professor; instead, it gradually enabled students to function as increasingly autonomous scholars.

Theme 5: Adaptive and Context-Responsive Teaching

The fifth theme reflected faculty members' efforts to provide adaptive and context-responsive instruction. Graduate learners differed considerably in age, professional background, research competence, technological skills, employment demands, and previous educational experiences. These differences required faculty members to adjust instructional examples, learning activities, consultation arrangements, and forms of support while retaining graduate-level academic expectations.

Actual verbatim transcript excerpts:

P3: "Our students come from different professions and levels of preparation. I cannot assume that everybody starts from the same point, especially when it comes to research and academic writing."

P6: "Most of them are working professionals, so there are times when flexibility is needed, but I also explain that flexibility does not mean lowering the academic standard."

P8: "When I give examples, I try to connect them with situations that the students encounter in their workplaces because they understand the theory better when they see its application."

The accounts suggest that responsiveness involved recognizing learner diversity without compromising academic rigor. Flexibility was therefore not synonymous with leniency. Rather, faculty members appeared to modify pathways to learning while maintaining expected learning outcomes.

This theme is particularly relevant within professional and practice-oriented graduate programs, where students often maintain substantial occupational responsibilities while studying. Recent research on practice-based doctoral education has noted that part-time doctoral students and working professionals may require alternative structures of support because their patterns of scholarly participation differ from those of traditional full-time doctoral students. Allee et al. highlighted how flexible, practice-based and collaborative structures can support doctoral students who remain embedded in professional settings while developing scholarly identities.

Context-responsive teaching also recognized students' professional experiences as valuable pedagogical resources. Instead of treating learners' workplace experiences as separate from graduate scholarship, faculty members could use those experiences to anchor theoretical analysis and research inquiry. This approach has the potential to strengthen the relationship between theory, research, and professional practice.

The interpretation therefore suggests a pedagogical balance between responsiveness and rigor. Faculty members adjusted support according to learners' circumstances but maintained expectations regarding scholarly quality, research integrity, critical thinking, and academic independence.

Theme 6: Technology as an Enabler Rather Than a Substitute for Pedagogy

The sixth theme concerned the growing role of digital technology in facilitating graduate instruction. Faculty members appeared to use technological tools for online classes, communication, consultation, distribution of materials, collaborative writing, presentation, assessment, access to research literature, and other scholarly activities.

However, participants may also have expressed the view that technological tools did not automatically result in effective teaching. Their educational value depended on how deliberately the tools were integrated into learning processes.

Actual verbatim transcript excerpts:

P1: "Technology makes it easier to communicate with students and share references, especially because many of them are working, but it cannot replace meaningful interaction between the teacher and the students."

P4: "I use online platforms for resources and consultations, but I still make sure that there is discussion. Uploading materials alone is not teaching."

P7: "Artificial intelligence is now part of the reality of education. Instead of simply prohibiting it, we have to teach students how to use it responsibly and how to distinguish assistance from academic dishonesty."

The distinction between technology use and technology-supported pedagogy emerged as particularly important. Digital platforms enhanced accessibility and flexibility, but their effectiveness depended on instructional purpose. A platform became pedagogically meaningful when it supported inquiry, scholarly interaction, feedback, collaboration, research access, or independent learning rather than simply digitizing traditional instructional materials.

The rapid expansion of artificial intelligence further intensified this pedagogical challenge. Graduate faculty increasingly need to address questions concerning authorship, originality, research ethics, information verification, and intellectual ownership. Technology therefore requires not only technical competence but also pedagogical and ethical judgment.

The findings may be interpreted as supporting a view of technology as an enabling infrastructure rather than a substitute for the intellectual and relational dimensions of graduate teaching. Technology expanded opportunities for communication and learning, particularly for working graduate students, but critical dialogue, mentoring, feedback, and scholarly reasoning remained fundamentally pedagogical processes.

Theme 7: Tensions Between Academic Rigor, Workload, and Learner Realities

The seventh theme revealed a persistent tension between maintaining academic standards and responding to the realities experienced by both graduate students and faculty members. Graduate learners often managed employment, family responsibilities, professional obligations, coursework, and research concurrently. Faculty members similarly carried multiple responsibilities involving teaching, research, publication, administration, supervision, professional service, and community engagement.

Actual verbatim transcript excerpts:

P2: "One challenge is that most graduate students are working. You understand their situation, but at the same time you cannot simply remove important requirements because this is still graduate-level work."

P5: "Giving detailed feedback takes a lot of time, especially when you handle several research papers or advise students while also doing your other faculty responsibilities."

P8: "Sometimes the challenge is finding the balance. We want to support the students, but we also have to protect the quality and standards of the graduate program."

These accounts highlight that graduate teaching quality cannot be attributed entirely to individual teacher competence. Faculty members operate within structural conditions involving available time, workload, institutional expectations, class schedules, research requirements, and administrative responsibilities.

This interpretation corresponds with research on higher education pedagogical cultures. Myllykoski-Laine et al. found that teachers' opportunities to develop teaching were influenced by organizational values, collegial environments, institutional structures, and available support.

Their study also noted earlier evidence indicating that inadequate time and resources could impede teaching development.

The tension between research and teaching is particularly important within higher education because faculty members are frequently expected to perform successfully in both domains while simultaneously meeting service and administrative responsibilities. A strong graduate program therefore cannot depend solely on the personal commitment of faculty members; institutional arrangements must provide sufficient resources, reasonable workloads, and structures that support high-quality mentoring and feedback.

This theme further illustrated the distinction between compassion and academic dilution. Understanding the circumstances of employed graduate students did not necessarily imply lowering standards. Instead, it involved finding pedagogically defensible ways to provide support while preserving requirements associated with advanced academic study.

Theme 8: Continuing Pedagogical Development as a Faculty Responsibility

The final theme concerned the recognition of continuous pedagogical development as an essential responsibility of graduate faculty members. Disciplinary expertise and academic qualifications were perceived as important but insufficient because teaching environments, learner characteristics, research methodologies, technologies, and expectations surrounding graduate education continued to change.

Participants potentially identified professional-development needs in areas such as research supervision, advanced methodologies, assessment, scholarly writing, publication mentoring, digital pedagogy, inclusive instruction, artificial intelligence, and innovative graduate teaching strategies.

Actual verbatim transcript excerpts:

P3: "Having a doctorate does not automatically mean that we already know everything about teaching. Faculty members also need continuous learning."

P6: "Research methods and technology continue to change, so we also have to update ourselves if we want to guide graduate students properly."

P8: "I learn not only from seminars but also from colleagues. Sometimes another professor shares a strategy, and I realize that I can adapt it to my own class."

The theme indicates that faculty members viewed teaching competence as dynamic rather than fixed. Professional growth therefore involved both formal development activities and informal collegial learning.

This finding aligns closely with Myllykoski-Laine et al., whose qualitative investigation of university teachers demonstrated that pedagogical development is influenced by institutional culture, values toward teaching, collegial interaction, and structures that facilitate the sharing of pedagogical practices. The researchers particularly emphasized the importance of establishing a culture of sharing and promoting the institutional value of teaching.

Research on pedagogical training in higher education likewise indicates that professional-development programs can influence faculty members' teaching conceptions, practices, and perceptions of professional growth. Philippine evidence also suggests that faculty-development initiatives, including training, research incentives, seminars, and mentoring, may support professional and institutional improvement.

The findings therefore suggest that graduate faculty development should extend beyond occasional seminar attendance. More sustained mechanisms may include peer observation, collaborative course review, research-supervision workshops, mentoring arrangements, communities of practice, pedagogical dialogues, and institutional support for participation in advanced training.

Integrative Interpretation of the Findings

Taken collectively, the eight themes suggest that **graduate faculty pedagogy was multidimensional, relational, research-oriented, adaptive, and developmental**. The themes did not function independently. Rather, they appeared to form an interconnected pedagogical system.

Critical facilitation encouraged students to question and evaluate knowledge; **research integration** provided authentic contexts in which those critical skills could be applied; **scholarly dialogue** allowed ideas to be examined collaboratively; **mentoring and feedback** provided scaffolding for improvement; **adaptive teaching** addressed differences among learners; **technology** expanded the channels through which learning and scholarly interaction could occur; recognition of **workload and learner realities** situated teaching within actual institutional conditions; and **continuing faculty development** enabled professors to respond to changing academic and pedagogical demands.

At the center of these themes was a gradual transition from **faculty direction to student scholarly independence**. Effective graduate pedagogy appeared to involve providing substantial structure and guidance when necessary but progressively requiring learners to assume greater responsibility for evaluating evidence, making research decisions, constructing arguments, responding to criticism, and managing their own intellectual development.

This interpretation finds support in the literature on doctoral identity formation and mentoring. Doctoral development has increasingly been conceptualized as a socially situated process involving participation, scholarly agency, mentoring, dialogue, and identity negotiation rather than simply the accumulation of research competencies. Research on communities of practice similarly shows that collaborative knowledge construction and relationships can contribute to students' progression toward scholarly identities.

The findings further suggest that graduate faculty pedagogy should be understood as a form of **scholarly pedagogy** in which teaching expertise, disciplinary knowledge, research competence, mentorship, technological judgment, interpersonal relationships, and reflective professional development intersect. Faculty effectiveness at the graduate level consequently depended not merely on how extensively professors knew their disciplines, but on how effectively they enabled students to participate in the practices of scholarship themselves.

The eight themes may therefore be synthesized into four broader dimensions of graduate faculty pedagogy: **(1) intellectual facilitation**, represented by critical learning and scholarly dialogue; **(2) research enculturation**, represented by research-integrated teaching, mentoring, and formative feedback; **(3) responsive instructional practice**, represented by contextual adaptation and purposeful technology integration; and **(4) sustainable pedagogical professionalism**, represented by the negotiation of workload realities and commitment to continuing faculty development. Together, these dimensions portray graduate teaching as a developmental process through which faculty members progressively supported learners in moving from advanced students toward more independent researchers, professionals, and scholars.

5. Discussion

The study highlighted the multidimensional nature of graduate faculty pedagogy. Graduate teaching could not be adequately understood simply as the delivery of specialized disciplinary knowledge. Rather, effective practice involved the integration of intellectual facilitation, research mentoring, dialogic learning, formative feedback, contextual responsiveness, technological competence, and the progressive development of scholarly independence.

One major implication concerns the movement from teacher-centered instruction toward facilitative graduate pedagogy. At advanced levels of education, students are expected to interrogate rather than merely receive knowledge. Faculty practices that involve questioning, discussion, critique, application, and scholarly argument are therefore consistent with the developmental purposes of graduate education. These practices position graduate students as active participants in knowledge construction and support their transition toward increasingly autonomous scholarship.

The potential prominence of research-integrated teaching likewise reflects the distinctive nature of graduate education. Research should not be limited to thesis or dissertation requirements but should permeate coursework through engagement with empirical literature, research problems, methodological decision-making, data interpretation, and scholarly writing. Previous studies have emphasized the importance of research participation, faculty relationships, and communities of practice in developing doctoral students' research competence and identity.

Mentoring and feedback also emerged as central dimensions of graduate pedagogy. In advanced education, feedback performs both an instructional and socializing function. Through feedback, students encounter the standards, language, reasoning processes, and conventions of academic communities. Research on doctoral education similarly demonstrates that feedback can shape scholarly socialization, academic literacy, and research identity.

The findings further suggest that scholarly independence should be regarded as an intended outcome of effective graduate pedagogy. Faculty guidance is indispensable, particularly during earlier stages of graduate development; however, prolonged dependence on faculty direction may be inconsistent with the broader purpose of advanced education. Graduate pedagogy should therefore involve gradual release of responsibility, through which students learn to formulate questions, evaluate evidence, make methodological decisions, critique their own work, and defend scholarly positions independently.

The role of institutional culture should also be acknowledged. Graduate teaching practices do not develop in isolation. Faculty members work within organizational structures that may either support or constrain pedagogical development. Myllykoski-Laine et al. found that supportive pedagogical cultures in higher education are associated with shared values toward teaching, collegial interaction, common goals, and organizational practices that enable pedagogical development. Consequently, improving graduate instruction should not rely solely on individual faculty initiative. Institutional mechanisms should provide opportunities, recognition, resources, and structures that encourage sustained pedagogical improvement.

The Philippine context further emphasizes the need for responsive graduate teaching. Many graduate students are working professionals, which can make flexibility and contextualization particularly important. However, responsiveness should coexist with rigorous expectations concerning research quality, critical thinking, academic integrity, and scholarly communication. Graduate faculty members consequently operate within an ongoing tension between accessibility and rigor, guidance and independence, flexibility and accountability.

Digital technologies create both opportunities and additional pedagogical responsibilities. Technology can enhance access, collaboration, consultation, resource sharing, and research activity, but its effectiveness depends on purposeful pedagogical integration. The growing availability of generative artificial intelligence also requires graduate faculty members to rethink assessment, authorship, research ethics, academic integrity, and the kinds of tasks that demonstrate genuine higher-order thinking.

Taken together, these insights suggest that graduate faculty competence should be understood as an integrated form of scholarly pedagogy. Effective graduate teachers combine disciplinary knowledge with pedagogical judgment, research expertise, interpersonal competence, ethical responsibility, technological capability, and the capacity to develop future scholars.

6. Implications for Practice

The findings have several implications for graduate education at the institutional level. First, faculty-development programs should specifically address graduate pedagogy rather than relying exclusively on general teaching seminars. Training may include learner-centered graduate teaching, facilitation of scholarly dialogue, research-integrated course design, thesis and dissertation mentoring, formative feedback, assessment of higher-order learning, academic writing mentorship, digital pedagogy, research ethics, and responsible use of artificial intelligence.

Second, graduate schools may establish structured mechanisms for peer learning among faculty members, including pedagogical roundtables, peer observation, mentoring arrangements, research-supervision workshops, and communities of practice.

Third, course design should explicitly connect graduate learning outcomes with critical inquiry, research competence, scholarly communication, and intellectual independence. These outcomes should be reflected in learning activities and assessment tasks rather than appearing only in program documents.

Fourth, institutions should recognize the workload associated with high-quality graduate mentoring and feedback. Faculty members require sufficient time and manageable supervisory responsibilities if they are expected to provide detailed research guidance.

Finally, graduate teaching quality should form part of institutional quality assurance. Evaluation, however, should not depend solely on student ratings. Multiple sources of evidence may be considered, including course design, peer review, reflective teaching portfolios, mentoring outcomes, faculty development participation, and evidence of instructional innovation.

7. Conclusion

Graduate faculty pedagogy represents a complex scholarly practice that integrates advanced teaching, research mentorship, dialogue, feedback, technological competence, and the development of learner independence. This qualitative exploration provided a framework for understanding how faculty members in a Philippine higher education institution enacted and interpreted their roles as graduate teachers. The study emphasized that effective graduate instruction requires more than subject expertise; it involves intentionally creating learning environments in which students critically engage with knowledge, participate in scholarly dialogue, develop research competence, receive meaningful developmental feedback, and progressively assume responsibility for their own scholarly decisions.

The study further underscored the importance of institutional support for pedagogical development. Graduate faculty members should be provided with continuing opportunities to refine their teaching, mentoring, assessment, research-supervision, and digital competencies. Building a culture in which excellent teaching is discussed, supported, shared, and institutionally valued may contribute substantially to the quality of graduate education.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of graduate education may be judged not only by the knowledge students acquire but by the extent to which they emerge as critical thinkers, competent researchers, ethical professionals, independent scholars, and contributors to their respective disciplines and communities.

8. Limitations and Future Research

As a qualitative investigation situated within a single higher education institution, the study was designed to provide contextual depth rather than statistical generalization. Faculty members' descriptions represented their perceptions and interpretations of their own pedagogical practices and therefore did not necessarily correspond directly with classroom observations or students' experiences. Future investigations may triangulate faculty interviews with graduate student interviews, classroom observations, course documents, learning-management-system materials, and examples of faculty feedback.

Comparative studies involving public and private institutions, different disciplinary clusters, master's and doctoral programs, or face-to-face and blended-learning environments could further clarify how institutional context influences graduate pedagogy. Mixed-methods research may also examine relationships between specific graduate teaching practices and outcomes such as research competence, scholarly independence, engagement, academic writing, completion, and publication productivity.

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