



# Sharing LiSQuP's Leap: Lessons and Experiences within an Online Advancement Program in the Philippines

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the experiences of a group of values education teachers who are studying in a customized scholarship and online graduate program under the Linking Standards and Quality Practice (LiSQuP) project in the Philippines. It aimed to explore the attitudes, benefits, and challenges encountered by the values education teachers by participating in the LiSQuP program. Embedded single case study research design was used, and qualitative content analysis was utilized for analyzing and interpreting the data. Recorded focus group interview, online survey documents, observations, and participatory contact were used to obtain the data from the 30 participants who are LiSQuP scholars and teachers of values education in the public schools of the Philippines. Based on the findings of the study, the following results were drawn: 1) The participants exhibited adaptive and positive attitude towards the LiSQuP program; 2) The participants benefited from the program in terms of professional and personal development; and 3) The participants struggled with various factors related to time, program design, and personal traits. The rewarding and challenging experiences of the participants in this study may inform the project management team and other higher education institutions with similar online programs to enhance opportunities for a more responsive and collaborative online learning community for diverse graduate distance learners.

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Since COVID 19 pandemic, education systems around the world have changed drastically. The weaknesses of the traditional in-person modality have become evident, prompting transitions to online distance education (ODE) for the continuity of learning during and after the pandemic. As educational institutions worldwide continue to incorporate remote learning practices across all levels of education, ODE has progressively emerged as a mainstream trend (Bağriacık Yılmaz, 2023). ODE makes learning possible anywhere and anytime, potentially reducing educational costs and enhancing educational productivity (Nilima & Santosh, 2023). Its accessibility and flexibility are the primary benefits that attract graduate students, especially those who need to juggle their time effectively with studies, family, and full-time job (Martin, et. al., 2022). Utilizing modern technologies, ODE transcends spatial-temporal constraints and empowers students to learn at the convenience of their homes. These benefits collectively foster among students a positive attitude and acceptance of ODE as a legitimate alternative to the traditional mode of education.

Conversely, researchers have reported several drawbacks associated with ODE. Students in ODE encounter technical difficulties (Bączek et al., 2021; Yurdal et al., 2021), communication struggles (Duman, 2023; Tanhan et al., 2023), motivational problems (Hebebcı et al., 2020), and mental health issues (Lee et al., 2023; Li & Che, 2022) among others. As a result, students often develop a negative attitude towards ODE, as evidenced by studies conducted in various countries, including Indonesia (Wijaya et al., 2021), Russia (Illarionova et al., 2021), the United States (Unger & Meiran, 2020), Pakistan (Adnan & Anwar, 2020), and Turkey (Yazgan, 2022).

After the pandemic, many countries returned to “business as usual” and educational institutions re-opened for in-person classes (World Bank, 2023). Several universities, however, have established academic courses and programs still adopting ODE, in addition to their conventional academic offerings, to provide educational opportunities for students who cannot attend in-person classes. One of those universities is the Philippine Normal University (PNU) which created the Linking Standards and Quality Practice (LiSQuP) program – a customized graduate ODE degree program for Filipino teachers.

LiSQuP is the first ever massive graduate ODE degree program in the Philippines which is entirely free, fully online, and exclusively offered for Filipino public-school teachers. It is unique from other graduate ODE degree programs offered by open universities in the Philippines and abroad because of its highly specialized, job-embedded, and differentiated design tailored to address the needs of the different career progression levels set by the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers. It is a collaborative initiative of the Department of Education (DepEd), National Educators’ Academy of the Philippines (NEAP), and Philippine Normal University to upgrade the quality of basic education in the country through high-caliber professional development and graduate degree scholarship program for teachers across the Philippine archipelago using ODE modality.

All the scholars of the LiSQuP program are full-time public-school teachers. Among these LiSQuP scholars are values teachers who are taking the Master of Arts degree in values education – a program that is rare to find in the Philippines and offered only by PNU and three other universities in the country. By exploring the experiences of these values education graduate student, the present study adds to the scarce literature about ODE specific to graduate level of education (Martin, et. al., 2022; Kee, 2021), and even the first of its kind on research in the context of graduate teacher education program for values education. Hence, given the unique context of values education graduate students, the advanced nature of graduate education per se (Omar et al., 2021), and the growing interest for ODE as an option for teacher professional development (Burns, 2023), there is a need for research to explore the experiences of these scholars, uncovering further insights essential for understanding the complexity of ODE and the continuous improvement of graduate ODE programs like LiSQuP. Specifically, the study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How do values education graduate students feel towards the ODE program of LiSQuP?
2. In what ways, if any, do values education graduate students benefit from the ODE program of LiSQuP?
3. What challenges, if any, do values education graduate students encounter by participating in the ODE program of LiSQuP?

## ATTITUDE OF GRADUATE STUDENTS TOWARDS ODE

Attitude refers to how individuals react, whether favorably or unfavorably, towards ideas, objects, people, or situations, encompassing their perspectives and evaluations (Fouad et al, 2023). Research literatures on the attitude of graduate students towards ODE reveal contrasting results, demonstrating a spectrum of perspectives ranging from positive to negative and moderate.

Several studies (e.g. Upadhayaya et al., 2021; Omar et al., 2021; Roquios et al., 2022) showed that graduate students generally exhibit a positive attitude towards ODE. Upadhayaya et al. (2021) found that graduate students in Nepal perceived the quality of ODE to be as effective as traditional learning. Although challenges related to poor Internet connectivity and power supply were identified, participants' overall view of its effectiveness indicates a favorable stance towards ODE. Similarly, a study in Cyprus by Aksoy (2022) showed a widespread positive attitude towards distance education as reflected in the respondent's high score on the Attitudes Regarding the Use of Distance Education Environments During the Pandemic (ASRUDEEDP) scale. Moreover, it found no significant variations in scores based on age group, grade, or internet use durations, suggesting a consistently positive attitude and acceptance of ODE across diverse groups of graduate students. Additionally, a study in United Arab Emirates by Omar et al. (2021) showed that, notwithstanding challenges in student collaboration and communication during the COVID-19 pandemic, graduate students held a statistically significant positive view of their experiences with ODE which also significantly influence their overall academic performance. In another study in the Philippines, Roquios et al. (2022) found that among online graduate students of nursing, 52.2% had a positive attitude, while 30.4% had an ambivalent attitude. The study asserted that online learning, given appropriate technical support, could be a suitable instructional mode for graduate programs due to its flexibility and availability.

On the other hand, some studies (i.e. Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Yazgan, 2022; Peker et al., 2023) revealed that graduate students have a negative attitude towards ODE. In a survey in Pakistan, Adnan & Anwar (2020) found that a significant majority of students harbored reservations about online learning. Specifically, 71.4% disagreed that online learning is more motivating than traditional learning, and 50.8% disagreed that university courses could be effectively completed through distance learning. The study suggested that online learning may not be suitable in underdeveloped countries where internet access is limited due to technical and financial constraints. In another study using a mixed method approach in Turkey, Yazgan (2022) found that graduate students exhibited stronger avoidance attitudes towards ODE, signifying a negative disposition. Furthermore, significant differences were observed in student attitudes based on their gender and family income levels. Additionally, the phenomenological study of Peker et al., (2023) reported that participants consisting of mathematics graduate students expressed a negative attitude towards ODE due to issues encountered with course design, connection, and communication.

In other studies, a moderate attitude towards ODE was found among graduate students. For instance, in a study conducted by Hasanah et al. (2021) in Indonesia, participants exhibited a neutral stance towards ODE, characterized by neither distinctly positive nor negative attitudes. Notably, participants agree that ODE serves as an effective tool for exchange of ideas among peers. Similarly, in their study in Croatia, Gusar, et al. (2023) found a prevailing moderate attitude among graduate nursing students towards ODE. They indicated that attitudes did not significantly differ based on gender, level of study, employment status, or previous experience with online learning. Moreover, participants in the study favored blended learning – a combination of ODE and in-person education as the most effective and appropriate learning approach. In a similar vein, Nilima & Santosh (2023) reported a consistently moderate attitude towards ODE among graduate students. They also revealed that gender, locality, semester, caste, and academic streams had negligible impact on graduate students' perspectives and feelings about ODE. Echoing these findings, Deniz & Ozek (2023) argued that online learning can be used as a good complement to traditional in-person education, but not as a stand-alone instructional model.

In conclusion, graduate students' attitudes toward ODE are diverse, with studies presenting positive, negative, and moderate stance. Factors influencing this diversity include the advantages of ODE, challenges faced, and considerations for a blended teaching model. Collectively, these studies highlight the multifaceted and contextual nature of ODE.

## **BENEFITS OF ODE EXPERIENCED BY GRADUATE STUDENTS**

Existing literatures revealed several benefits of ODE for graduate students. In the study of Bin Mubayrik (2020), respondents highlighted learning at their own pace and convenience, particularly in terms of flexible scheduling and virtual attendance, as major advantages of ODE. Similarly, Ilchenko, et al. (2022) reported that ODE enables graduate students to experience time and costs savings for transportation, comfort of studying at home, flexibility to study at any preferred time, access to a variety of digital resources, and the possibility to revisit complex material for better understanding. Echoing these same findings, a study among Filipino graduate students emphasized flexibility, independence, convenience, safety, engaging learning techniques, up-to-date course materials, and dynamic and adaptable learning environment as the remarkable benefits of ODE (Núñez et al., 2023). Additionally, research showed that ODE facilitates the development of self-discipline and sense of responsibility among graduate students as they enjoy greater accountability in managing and allocating time for coursework, assignments, and other responsibilities alongside their personal and professional commitments (Drokin, 2020; Deniz & Ozek, 2023). Furthermore, graduate students indicated that ODE helped them develop their time management, planning, and technological skills as they take on their responsibilities and engage with different synchronous and asynchronous activities involved in distance programs (Xhelili et al., 2021; Kutlu & Titrek, 2021). Overall, these findings from literature demonstrate how ODE can be an advantageous and effective mode of education for the evolving needs of graduate students.

## **CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY GRADUATE STUDENTS IN ODE**

Despite its numerous benefits, ODE is not devoid of any drawback. In fact, almost all discourses about graduate students' experiences with ODE inevitably mention a struggle associated with it. Frequently reported challenges include unstable internet connection, lack of suitable devices, and technological difficulties (Kutlu & Titrek, 2021; Upadhayaya, et. al., 2021; Ashida & Ishizaka, 2022; Leger, et. al., 2023). These challenges are common even in affluent countries such as United Kingdom and United States (OECD, 2020). Without appropriate devices and dependable internet connection, online learning could be seriously hindered since a significant amount of digital content can only be accessed through their aid (Nilima & Santosh, 2023). Moreover, Peker et al., (2023) found that graduate students in ODE struggle in having meaningful and engaging interaction with instructors and classmates. The constraints of online platforms and the lack of eye contact make participants feel hindered in effectively sharing their experiences, conveying their ideas with classmates, or asking questions to instructors. As a result, some students may feel a sense of social isolation (Ionescu et al, 2020) and become de-motivated (Xhelili, et. al., 2021). Likewise, graduate students reported having trouble in concentrating and focusing on lessons in ODE compared to in-person education (Bartusevičienė, et al., 2021; Deniz & Yakut-Ozek, 2023). Hark Söylemez (2023) explained that distance learners are more "open to external stimuli in their environment" compared to the traditional set-up which make them more susceptible to being distracted by household chores, environmental noise, and family member's behavior while attending virtual classes. Other challenges in ODE worth mentioning include heightened anxiety and stress (Patias et al., 2021); eye strain and headache problems (Xhelili, et. al., 2021), lack of detailed feedback and online support (Chimbo, et. al., 2023), lack of independent study skills (Kutlu & Titrek, 2021), and lack of opportunity to work with practical skills (Ilchenko et al., 2022). All these challenges are crucial points where improvements in ODE can be made to ensure better online learning experiences.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theory that underpins the present study is the community of inquiry (CoI) framework which is anchored on a social constructivist paradigm (Swan, 2019). CoI is a widely utilized theory in online learning in higher education which has been employed in numerous investigations on various aspects of ODE (Mudau & Van den Berg, 2023).

CoI was developed by Garrison et al. (2000). It emphasizes the integration of three essential elements (i.e. social presence, cognitive presence, teaching presence) in developing a meaningful online learning experience (Yusuf, et. al., 2023). Social presence refers to how learners can communicate their being and maintain a personal connection with others in a virtual environment (Sun & Yang, 2023). It is manifested in the affective expression, open communication, and collaboration among the participants in an online class (Hambali, et. al., 2022). Cognitive presence refers to the extent to which learners can construct meaning through sustained discourse in an online class (Chang et al., 2023). Effective scaffolding techniques (e.g. guided inquiry using videos, simulations, and images) that stimulate students' curiosity, problem solving, and critical thinking skills foster cognitive presence (Al Mamun & Lawrie, 2023). Meanwhile, teaching presence refers to the how teachers perform the function of designing, facilitating, and directing the instructional process to attain the learning outcomes (Khot, et al., 2022). Collectively, the three presences of the COI framework serve as the comprehensive lens by which to understand and shed light on the attitudes, benefits, and challenges of the participants that emerged in the present study.

## METHOD

### RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative case study design was used since the stated research goals entail the exploration of the experiences of the participants encompassing their attitude, and the benefits and challenges experienced within a “real-life, contemporary bounded system” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 153). In this study, the bounded system is the unique context of LiSQuP's graduate ODE program for values education during the 3<sup>rd</sup> term of academic year 2022–2023. As an exploratory form of investigation, case study allows substantial engagement with research participants, providing an in-depth understanding of the unit of study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The case and unit of analysis is a single class of LisQuP scholars pursuing a master's degree in values education through the ODE program of PNU.

Specifically, an intrinsic embedded single case study design was used to explore the experiences of the participants. This type of case study involves a detailed analysis of specific aspects within a single case or entity (Barcik, 2016). Moreover, it is used in attempts to learn about a unique situation or a “little-known phenomenon” by studying a single case in depth (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). It allows researchers to gather data from multiple sources for rigorous and systematic analysis, resulting in a comprehensive case description and themes that inform theory and practice (Yin, 2017).

### RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

One group of LiSQuP scholars taking master's degree in values education were the participants in the study. This group is composed of full-time public-school educators who are teaching values education during the day and taking LisQuP courses at night using the PNU learning management system (LMS) and other online tools. As a class, they started in Summer 2022 and are already on their third term in the LisQuP program by the time of the study.

Specifically, the target participants consist of 25 female and 7 male participants. Female participants are aged 27 to 57, with 2 to 25 years of teaching experience. All are married, with 19 of them teaching in urban schools, while the remaining 6 female participants are teaching in rural schools. Male participants, on the other hand, are aged 26 to 46, with 5 to 24 years of teaching experience. Six are married and one is single. Three male participants teach in urban schools, while four teach in rural schools.

Homogeneous sampling was used in the selection of participants whose shared attributes are 1) being a LiSQuP scholar undergoing graduate ODE program in values education at PNU, and 2) being a Filipino public-school teacher handling values education in the basic education sector. Furthermore, convenience sampling, which involves selecting easily accessible participants, is utilized. Out of 35 target participants, only 30 participated in the focus group interview.

All the research data were obtained digitally from records of the synchronous sessions and digital footprints of the LMS for a graduate course on qualitative research where the two co-authors are graduate students, and the other is its course instructor. The course was fully online and customized to the schedule of the public-school system in such a way that synchronous sessions are conducted in the evening of weekdays, and asynchronous tasks are assigned on weekends.

**DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES**

At the beginning of the course, the researchers and the participants accomplished a learning agreement form that specifies the duties and responsibilities relative to the course and the use of data that may be derived from it. The participants gave their consent to place all the recorded videos and outputs pertaining to the course in an open and public-accessed repository. With permission from the participants, these data were used by the researchers to conduct this study. Videos of focus group interview and synchronous classes, the responses in the open-ended questionnaire, course reflections, and the observations served as multiple sources of data and first-hand reference points.

In this study, the online focus group interview was the primary data collection method. The participants were asked to share their experiences and how do they find the graduate ODE program of LiSQuP. Record of the focus group interview were transcribed and decoded for analysis. Moreover, a follow up open-ended, semi-structured questionnaire based on the research questions was sent to the participants via Google Form to capture fully their intended meanings. Furthermore, the record of participants' online engagement was used to validate their experiences in the program. Triangulating data through these multiple sources i.e., focus group interview, recorded videos, documentary record, and observations, researchers ensured congruence of findings and understanding of phenomena based on rich and varied evidence (Stake, 1995; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

**DATA ANALYSIS**

After collecting the data, they were analyzed using the qualitative content analysis approach developed by Bengtsson (2016). Researchers went through the four-stage process comprising of decontextualization, recontextualization, categorization, and compilation stages.

In the decontextualization stage, researchers began the analysis process by gaining familiarity with the data, intensively reading the transcribed texts, comprehending their overall context, and breaking them into smaller meaning units. Microsoft Excel was utilized to arrange the texts, and text segments relevant to the research questions were identified. Additionally, researchers used codes around which identified meaning units are organized into categories (Bengtsson, 2016).

In the recontextualization stage, researchers re-read and reviewed the original texts alongside the final list of meaningful units to ensure comprehensive coverage aligned with the research goals. Different font colors were used to identify meaningful units in relation to the research questions. The process is performed repetitively to ensure stability and reliability (Bengtsson, 2016).

In the categorization stage, extended meaningful units were condensed further, making sure that essential content is retained. After which, categories were formulated. Finally, in the compilation stage, themes were generated to capture the overall essence of the categories. The generated themes were analyzed and presented in tables in relation to the research questions.

**ETHICAL STATEMENT**

Ensuring the protection of participants is strictly observed in the study. Participants were thoroughly informed about the nature of the study, the usage of data, and their freedom to withdraw or refrain from participating in the study at any time. Written informed consent from all of them was obtained, and confidentiality of information was observed by anonymizing important details.



## LIMITATIONS

The primary limitation of this study is its potential lack of generalizability. Because single case study design focuses on a single case, the findings may not be applicable to other cases or contexts (Stake, 1995). The findings are based on a specific sample composed of scholars; therefore, they are not generalizable to other populations or contexts. Additionally, the primary data collected was self-reported and may be subject to social desirability bias or other reporting biases. This study was also conducted within a limited time frame, which may have impacted the depth and scope of the analysis. Despite these limitations, this study provides valuable insights into the topic under investigation.

## FINDINGS

The findings of this study, which revolved around three research questions, are presented in this section. These findings are based on the collected data from 30 graduate students who participated in the study. In summary, three themes emerged in response to research question 1, two themes emerged in response to research question 2, and three themes emerged in response to research question 3. Findings for each research question are presented below.

### RESEARCH QUESTION 1: HOW DO VALUES EDUCATION GRADUATE STUDENTS FEEL TOWARDS THE ODE PROGRAM OF LiSQuP?

Adaptive and positive attitudes are the two themes that emerged from the analysis of the collected data. These themes show that participants generally exhibit a favorable disposition towards the LiSQuP program. Table 1 presents the summary of the findings on the attitude of the participants.

THEME	CATEGORY	CODES	SAMPLED SOURCE(S)
Adaptive attitude	Comfortableness with different learning modalities	Valuing flexibility Embracing synchronous/asynchronous activities Adapting to teaching methods Transitioning between modalities comfortably	Student 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30
	Affinity for collaborative work	Favoring group tasks Seeking peer support Learning from classmates Enjoying idea sharing Emphasizing teamwork	Student 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 25
	Appreciation for asynchronous learning	Viewing asynchronous tasks positively Managing time effectively Enjoying autonomy Learning in own pace	Student 1, 3, 7, 12, 14, 17, 19, 20, 23, 25, 29
Positive attitude	Preference for synchronous learning	Enjoying real-time Interaction Highlighting discussions Appreciating direct feedback Engaging in live presentations Perceiving class dynamics positively	Student 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 16, 17, 20, 22, 23, 25, 27, 28
	Enthusiasm for learning	Enjoying learning Showing eagerness to learn Seeking further understanding Reacting positively to content Being inspired	Student 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 13, 17, 22
	Gratefulness for the program	Expressing thanks Acknowledging program's value Appreciating opportunity Feeling fortunate Recognizing program's impact Cherishing the experience	Student 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 14, 18, 20, 21, 26, 30

**Table 1** Attitude of participants towards the ODE program.

## Theme 1.1 Adaptive attitude

Adaptive attitude is one of the themes that emerged from the data, indicating the participants' willingness to adjust to the demands of synchronous and asynchronous learning and the varied activities of the LiSQuP program. This attitude is reflected in the participants' expression of comfort with different modalities, affinity for group activities, and appreciation for asynchronous activities.

A significant majority of the participants (i.e., 21 students) conveyed that they feel comfortable with the ODE program of LiSQuP. They shared that they feel at ease in the program's flexible learning delivery, embracing both its synchronous and asynchronous activities, adjusting to different teaching methods, and transitioning between modalities comfortably. For instance, Student 14 explicitly stated,

*"I'm comfortable with both the synchronous and asynchronous setup of the program. That is, in synchronous, I like it especially in the discussion of lessons so I can ask questions, at the same time, having individual asynchronous tasks afterwards to deepen understanding, especially during submission of outputs when I am very busy."*

Moreover, over half of the participants (i.e., 19 students) expressed an inclination for collaborative work, mentioning peer support, teamwork, sharing of ideas, and learning from others as important features of the learning process in the program. Conveying appreciation for collaborative learning in LiSQuP, Student 19 said,

*"I love to work collaboratively and learn from my professors and classmates. I enjoy working on a group task where I get the chance to know my group mates. Working with a team helps me relieve my stress and discomfort. I appreciate learning from others – their teaching experiences and best practices. I'm very grateful to my groupmates that I've reached this far."*

In addition, more than one-third of the participants (i.e., 11 students) explicitly expressed appreciation for the asynchronous learning component of the LiSQuP program. They viewed the asynchronous tasks positively because they were able to manage time effectively, enjoy autonomy, and learn at their own pace. Embodying this sentiment, Student 20 said, "We have been able to learn at our own pace and schedule, thanks to the asynchronous activities like reading materials and assignments, giving us the flexibility to manage our time efficiently."

## Theme 1.2 Positive attitude

Positive attitude is another theme that emerged from the data, indicating participants' favorable disposition towards the LiSQuP program and its value regardless of situations. This attitude is manifested in the participants' expression of preference for synchronous learning, enthusiasm for learning, and gratefulness for the program.

Half of the total number of participants (i.e., 15 students) conveyed enthusiasm for learning in the ODE program. These participants expressed interest, enjoyment, and eagerness to learn in the program. Some of them also shared that the program inspires them to explore varied topics and seek further understanding. Convinced and hopeful of the program's value, Student 4 stated:

*"LiSQuP is an excellent opportunity to learn a lot. It makes me feel empowered to do so many things not just for myself but for other people. I pursued this scholarship because I believe that professional advancement among teachers is essential core foundation of education. I hope I would make it with God's help, believing how much it can impact people's lives."*

Additionally, nearly half of the participants (i.e. 14 students) expressed a distinct preference for synchronous learning, emphasizing real-time interaction, direct feedback, live presentations, and engaging discussions. For instance, Student 11 articulated, "I really appreciate hearing more from my professors through synchronous online classes," highlighting the value placed on direct interaction with instructors. Similarly, Student 23 noted the importance of "sharing of ideas" during synchronous sessions, indicating that real-time discussions enhance their learning experience.



Furthermore, several students (i.e. 11 students) shared how grateful they are for the LiSQuP program. This sense of gratitude is manifested in their expressions of appreciation for the program’s innovative approach, and the opportunities for personal and professional development it offers. The response of Student 1 encapsulates this sentiment: “I feel happy and grateful of the LisQuP program because it is a rare and special opportunity to undergo a customized scholarship program that is well-designed by curriculum experts...” Such expressions of gratitude shows strong awareness of the program’s innovative value.

**RESEARCH QUESTION 2: IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DO VALUES EDUCATION GRADUATE STUDENTS BENEFIT FROM THE ODE PROGRAM OF LISQUP?**

Development and learning are the two themes that emerged from the analysis of the collected data. These findings reveal that participants consider the ODE program of LiSQuP to be beneficial to the various areas of their life. Table 2 shows the summary of the benefits of the ODE program of LiSQuP from the perspective of the participants.

**Table 2** Benefits of the ODE program to the participants.

THEME	CATEGORY	CODES	SAMPLED SOURCE(S)
Development	Professional Development	Enhancing technological skills Giving career advancement opportunities Gaining job-related knowledge and skills Developing research competencies	Student 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 28, 29, 30
	Personal Development	Developing perseverance Building better relationships Enhancing self-confidence Improving time management skills Coping with various challenges Goal setting	Student 1, 2, 3, 14, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 30
Learning	Flexible Learning	Tailoring learning to personal schedules Balancing work, study, and personal life	Student 1, 2, 3, 7, 12, 15, 17, 19, 23, 29
	Timely and Applicable Learning	Relevant course content Linking to real-life scenarios Updating strategies Gaining insights on current trends	Student 4, 19, 20
	Exposure to New Ideas and Experiences	Observing diverse strategies Gaining varied perspectives Learning from others’ experiences Discovering new concepts Broadening intellectual horizons	Student 1, 8, 12, 14, 15

**Theme 2.1 Development**

Development is the primary theme that emerged from the data on the benefits of the LiSQuP program. It encompasses two categories gleaned from the experiences of the participants, namely, professional development and personal development.

A significant majority of participants (i.e. 21 students) highlighted professional development as a benefit derived from the program. They shared experiences of acquiring technological skills, pedagogical strategies, research competencies, and insights into educational trends. For instance, Student 28 mentioned how the program upgraded his technological skills and opened doors for greater professional opportunities. Similarly, Student 8 expressed how the program provided new skills in research and a deeper understanding of education practices. These responses highlight participants’ view of the beneficial impact of the ODE program of LiSQuP in helping them improve their skills and gain knowledge in various areas of teaching.

Moreover, over a third of the number of participants (i.e. 11 students) noted personal development as another benefit of the program for them. They shared experiences of developing perseverance, building better relationships, enhancing self-confidence, improving time management skills, coping with various challenges, and goal setting which they attribute to their participation in the program. Exemplifying this category, Student 22 shared how the

program enabled her to gain friendships, formed a sense of community, and encouraged her to finish graduate studies. Similarly, highlighting personal empowerment, Student 3 shared:

*“During the synchronous sessions, we have more opportunities to interact with the professor and our classmates, which has helped me to understand and articulate difficult topics. I develop self-confidence and conquer my fear to speak in front of many... Now, I feel confident, content, and driven in teaching because of the learnings I’ve got from the program.”*

### Theme 2.2 Learning

Another theme that emerged from the data is learning. It revealed how participants describe the benefit of learning that they derive from their participation in the ODE program. It consists of three categories, namely flexible learning, timely and applicable learning, and exposure to new ideas and experiences.

One third of the participants (i.e. 10 students) shared that the ODE program of LiSQuP makes them learn at their convenience. They noted the program’s adaptability and flexibility that enable them to manage their educational pursuits alongside professional and personal commitments. For instance, Student 17 highlighted the program’s online nature as conducive to learning and working on her own time as a working professional. Similarly, Student 1 appreciated the hybrid modality of LiSQuP, especially its asynchronous component. He stated:

*“I like the design of LiSQuP. The asynchronous tasks and activities in the program gave us plenty of room for self-discovery, reflection, and exploration of various perspectives. I downloaded and saved the videos used in the courses for my own personal study and review. It is highly favorable to the nature of my work as a full-time teacher.”*

Timely and applicable learning was emphasized by students 4, 19, and 20. This category reflects the program’s relevance to current educational trends and the immediate applicability of its content. Student 19 shared that the courses she took in LiSQuP are relevant to her job and enabled her to do tasks that would bridge concepts and real situation through the program’s job-embedded learning (JEL) activities, and specialized targeted trainings.

Furthermore, Students 1, 8, 12, 14, and 15 emphasized exposures to new ideas and experiences as another learning benefit of the ODE program of LiSQuP. This category highlights the program’s role in broadening participants’ perspectives through exposure to diverse teaching strategies, research methodologies, and collaborative opportunities. For instance, Student 9 shared that she gained new teaching strategies, classroom management techniques, assessment techniques, and perspectives on dealing with various educational issues from the inputs and discussions in the ODE program.

### RESEARCH QUESTION 3: WHAT CHALLENGES, IF ANY, DO VALUES EDUCATION GRADUATE STUDENTS ENCOUNTER BY PARTICIPATING IN THE ODE PROGRAM OF LiSQuP?

Time-related challenges, program-related challenges, and personal-related challenges are the themes that emerged from the analysis of the collected data on the participants’ experiences. These results show that participants struggle in participating in the ODE program of LiSQuP due to several factors. Table 3 summarizes the challenges experienced by the participants in participating in the ODE program of LiSQuP.

THEME	CATEGORY	CODES	SAMPLED SOURCE(S)
Time-Related Challenges	Time-management	Managing time wisely Struggling with time allocation Balancing study and personal time Adjusting to groupmates’ schedules Meeting deadlines	Student 1, 2, 3, 9, 4, 5, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30

**Table 3** Challenges encountered by the participants in the ODE program.

(Contd.)

THEME	CATEGORY	CODES	SAMPLED SOURCE(S)
	Work-study-life balance	Limited time for family Juggling multiple roles Mental and physical exhaustion Work-related urgencies Dual shifting work schedule	Student 3, 8, 9, 14, 15, 18, 20, 21, 27, 29, 30
Program- Related Challenges	Online Learning	Poor internet connectivity Power interruptions Adjusting to asynchronous tasks Engaging with the LMS Attending weeknight class	Student 5, 7, 8, 12, 14, 15, 21, 22, 25, 26
	Group Work to No work	Non-contributing group members Dealing with dependent colleagues Coordinating group work	Student 1, 4, 30
	Academic expectations from professors	High expectations from professors Coping with academic pressure Understanding lessons	Student 5, 15, 19, 25, 27
Personal- Related Challenges	Health Issues	Physical health problems Mental health and anxiety Stress	Student 3, 14, 18, 20, 21, 29, 30
	Personal Characteristics	Procrastination tendencies Shyness and hesitation in collaboration Self-doubt Low motivation	Student 13, 14, 17, 22, 23

### Theme 3.1 Time-Related Challenges

Time-related challenges is the primary theme that emerged from the data on the challenges encountered in the ODE program. It encompasses two categories gleaned from the participants' experiences, namely, time management and work-study-life balance.

A significant majority of the participants (i.e. 21 students) shared experiences of struggling with time management issues, such as budgeting time wisely, adjusting to the availability of classmates during group work, attending synchronous sessions at night, and dividing tasks into manageable chunks. For instance, Student 2 stated:

*"The most important challenges I have encountered in LisQuP are managing my time wisely ...and attending synchronous sessions at night. So limited lime. Sometimes, I no longer have time to go over the required readings before entering the class."*

Furthermore, some participants shared that they experienced conflicts in their class schedules with work or family responsibilities, which led to difficulty in attending classes or meeting deadlines. There were also concerns about the amount of work required and the limited time available to complete them, leading to anxiety and exhaustion. Student 21 shared:

*"I really find it difficult to handle tasks at the same time. I came to a point that I want to give up, rethink of my abilities...difficult for me to play different roles at the same given time."*

### Theme 3.2 Program-Related Challenges

Another theme that emerged from the struggle experiences of the participants is program-related challenges. One-thirds of the participants (i.e. 10 students) shared that they experienced problems arising from poor internet connection, sudden power interruptions, adjusting with asynchronous tasks, and attending synchronous sessions at night. For instance, Student 8 stated:

*“I struggle in attending the schedule of synchronous class on weekdays. My class in DepEd ends at 6 pm, and classes in LiSQuP also start at 6 PM. I have yet to travel from school to house. If I have data connection, I attend class while travelling.”*

Moreover, a small minority of participants (i.e., 5 students) shared that they struggled with the high expectations of professors in the program who expected them as LiSQuP scholars to easily understand the lessons and cope with the academic demands of graduate education. Also, some participants (i.e. Student 1, 4, & 30) expressed difficulty in coordinating schedules with classmates, dealing with non-contributing and dependent group members, and struggling to strategize and divide tasks into manageable chunks to each member of the group since requirements in LiSQuP are often collaborative in nature.

### Theme 3.3 Personal-Related Challenges

The third theme that emerged from the participants' experiences is the personal-related challenges. This encompassed the categories of health issues and personal characteristics.

Students 3, 14, 18, 20, 21, 29, and 30 shared experiences of struggling with physical and mental health issues. These ranged from exhaustion, anxiety, and stress to specific physical conditions impacting their ability to engage fully in the program. For instance, Student 30 who is suffering from an auto-immune illness expressed that her “health is already shouting for justice,” illustrating the added stress that the program is giving her.

In addition, Students 13, 14, 17, 22, and 23 expressed struggles that stemmed from their personal shortcomings and situations. This includes low motivation, procrastination, shyness, and hesitation during collaborative activities. For instance, Student 22 discussed struggling with “low motivation in exerting extra effort to read the lengthy required readings and watching recorded lessons,” which demonstrates how personal characteristics can complicate one's struggles.

## DISCUSSIONS

This study explored the experiences of graduate values education students in the LiSQuP program, specifically on their attitude towards it, and the benefits and challenges they experienced which could offer a nuanced understanding of ODE's impact on graduate education. The findings revealed insights into the attitude, benefits, and challenges experienced by Filipino teachers while pursuing graduate studies through ODE modality. Using the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework as lens for interpretation, this discussion integrates the findings of the present study with existing literature on graduate ODE to elucidate their implications for theory and practice.

### ATTITUDES TOWARD GRADUATE ODE PROGRAM

The findings showed that participants predominantly exhibited a favorable disposition characterized by openness to new learning modalities and enthusiasm for learning in the program. Citing its flexibility, blend of synchronous and asynchronous learning, collaborative activities, and other benefits, participants highly appreciated the opportunity to undergo a customized scholarship program that caters to their needs and provides relevant perspectives on their field of specialization. This insight aligns with previous studies highlighting positive perceptions on ODE's flexibility and effectiveness (Upadhayaya et al., 2021; Aksoy, 2021). Moreover, it confirms the insights of Omar et al. (2021) and Roquios et al. (2022) indicating that the successful adoption of ODE depends significantly on learners' readiness to adapt to the inherent demands of online learning environments. Furthermore, the drive for learning and gratitude expressed by the participants contradicts studies reporting negative attitudes due to technical and logistical challenges (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Yazgan, 2022). While several potentially discouraging challenges are undeniably present in the program, the participants' over-all regard for LiSQuP as a rare and unique educational opportunity to develop professionally and personally fostered adaptability and optimism to pursue it and endure whatever hurdles they may face. This favorable disposition which is fostered by LiSQuP's unique program design, collaborative activities, and intellectual stimulation underscores CoI framework's emphasis on the dynamic interplay among cognitive, social, and teaching presences in an online learning

environment. A positive attitude is not only critical in enhancing engagement and motivation in ODE contexts, but also necessary in improving graduate students' overall commitment to the program.

## **BENEFITS OF GRADUATE ODE PROGRAM**

As a customized graduate ODE program, LiSQuP provides a unique learning experience than what traditional classroom-based professional development programs can afford. In this study, participants identified enhancement of technological skills, pedagogical knowledge, and research competencies in a flexible learning set-up as among the benefits of the LiSQuP program. This aligns with the literature on ODE's capacity to prepare educators for the digital age (Bin Mubayrik, 2020; Ilchenko et al., 2022) and to enhance employability and job-related competencies (Núñez et al., 2023). Furthermore, the personal growth experienced by the participants, such as improved time management, relationship-building, and self-confidence, illustrates previous findings that ODE can contribute significantly to learners' holistic development (Drokina, 2020; Deniz & Ozek, 2023). This holistic development is imperative for values education teachers since they play an important role in molding the ethical and moral convictions of the youth. Furthermore, the program's ability to facilitate flexible and timely learning and to expose students to innovative experiences, reflects its relevance to the ever-evolving educational landscape. Over-all, these benefits highlight the potential of ODE programs to not only address professional needs but also enrich the personal lives of teachers, thereby confirming the conclusion of Binmohsen & Abrahams (2020) that ODE programs can be just as effective as traditional face-to-face programs in improving teacher competence.

## **CHALLENGES OF GRADUATE ODE PROGRAM**

Despite the beneficial features of the LiSQuP program, participants have identified some challenges that they have experienced which are categorized into time-related issues, program-related difficulties, and personal constraints. These challenges are consistent with the findings of Kutlu & Titrek (2021), Ashida & Ishizaka (2022), and Leger et al. (2023) that have identified difficulty in time management, work-study-life balance issues, and juggling multiple responsibilities as among the common hurdles that exert significant pressures on graduate students. These findings highlight the need for educational programs to incorporate self-regulation and holistic well-being strategies that would help students effectively adjust their learning processes and manage their responsibilities without compromising their health or academic performance. Moreover, program-related challenges, such as technological issues and academic expectations, emphasize the need for robust support systems and empathetic instructional approaches facilitative of optimal online learning experience. Additionally, personal challenges which can further complicate ODE experience, such as health issues and intrinsic motivation, underscore the importance of giving appropriate intellectual stimulation, teacher consideration, and collaborative opportunities that could enhance student well-being and engagement. Collectively, these findings on challenges suggest areas for improvement in the cognitive, social, and teaching presence in ODE programs, as highlighted by the CoI framework.

## **CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS**

The present study provided an exploration of the attitudes, benefits, and challenges faced by the values education graduate students in the customized ODE program in the Philippines. The findings revealed a predominantly favorable disposition towards the program. Participants reported experiences of being able to benefit professionally from the program in terms of technological skills, pedagogical knowledge, and research competencies, as well as personally, in terms of time management, relationship-building, and self-confidence. These benefits indicate the success of the program in leveraging the advantages of ODE to meet the evolving needs of graduate students in education. Furthermore, the study reported time-related, program-related, and personal-related challenges encountered by the participants which suggest further enhancements towards a more balanced and nurturing graduate ODE experience.

This study has several implications for the design and implementation of graduate ODE programs by LiSQuP project management team and any higher education institution providing similar professional development programs for teachers. Firstly, the findings suggest the importance of improving the learning delivery system to accommodate diverse learning needs and circumstances. Strengthening student support services, flexible scheduling options, adaptive instructional strategies, collaborative learning components, and continuous program evaluation can mitigate some of the challenges identified.

Secondly, findings about positive attitudes and perceived benefits underscore the potential of graduate ODE programs to facilitate lifelong learning and professional growth for working professionals. Leveraging these aspects of ODE can help open universities and other educational institutions attract and retain students in their ODE program offerings. Lastly, the challenges encountered highlight areas for improvement and the need for ongoing innovation, support, and adaptability in ODE platforms to minimize negative experiences and maximize their benefits.

In conclusion, the experiences of the participants in the graduate ODE program of LiSQuP offer valuable lessons for the ongoing evolution of ODE in graduate teacher education. Additional studies exploring longitudinal impacts of ODE on teacher professional development, investigating how the benefits and challenges evolve over time, and examining most effective strategies for enhancing online experience are highly suggested. By addressing the nuanced needs and challenges of graduate students, ODE can further solidify its role as a legitimate and equally effective mode of lifelong learning in the post-pandemic world.

## DATA ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT

The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

## ETHICS AND CONSENT

All the data gathered and presented in the study were obtained with the consent and approval of the participants involved. A learning agreement form was secured that specifies the participants' duties and responsibilities relative to the course and the use of data that may be derived from it. The participants gave their consent to place all the recorded videos, outputs, and comments pertaining to the course in an open and public-accessed mode in the Google classroom and PNU learning management system. Moreover, the participants accomplished a Google form that elicits their consent to use the data from recorded synchronous sessions and interview transcript for this study.

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## COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

## AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTIONS (CRediT)

Conceptualization, B.J.N.B, and C.R.; methodology, B.J.N.B; formal analysis, B.J.N.B, B.H., and C.R.; investigation, B.J.N.B and B.H.; data curation, B.J.N.B.; writing—original draft preparation, B.J.N.B and B.H.; writing—review and editing, B.J.N.B, B.H., and C.R.; visualization, B.J.N.B.; supervision, C.R. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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