

# Lived Experiences in Dissertation, Thesis, and Capstone Research Advising of Graduate Students in Selected Higher Education Institutions in Calabarzon and Mimaropa, Philippines

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to examine the lived experiences of graduate students who are currently involved in their dissertation, thesis, and capstone research advising among select Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the CALABARZON and MIMAROPA Regions in the Philippines. Phenomenological research design was used to explore advising relationships influenced participation of students with institutional research frameworks, emotional health, and academic advancement. The instrument used is an in depth, semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted with 9 chosen graduate students selected through purposive sampling. Their experiences with academic direction, autonomy, communication, feedback, and institutional support during the research process were explored.

The themes that have emerged from the thematic analysis are academic assistance and advisor guidance, autonomy and supervised independence, communication and feedback methods, and institutional structures and research resources. The results revealed the significance of prompt and helpful feedback as well as culturally sensitive mentorship and open communication between advisors and students in promoting long term research advancement and completion. The said themes were especially noticeable in regional HEIs with high faculty workloads, little funding for research, and the complex administrative needs.

To conclude, the study found out that the institutional procedures for responsive and encouraging supervision are just as important to the effective graduate research advising in CALABARZON as well as MIMAROPA as individual faculty competency. This study offers context-sensitive perspectives to support the faculty development programs, institutional policymaking, and the improvement of graduate research supervision practices in Philippine higher education with emphasis on the narratives of the graduate students across dissertations, theses, and capstone projects.

**Keywords:** graduate research advising; dissertation; thesis; capstone; lived experiences; phenomenology; Philippine higher education; Calabarzon; Mimaropa

## INTRODUCTION

Dissertations, theses, and capstone projects constitute the culminating academic requirements of graduate education, serving as key indicators of scholarly competence, research independence, and professional readiness. Beyond demonstrating methodological rigor, graduate research is increasingly shaped by ethical accountability, institutional expectations, and supervisory relationships. Antes and Maggi (2021) said that to make a difference and maintain public confidence in science, researchers do their work ethically.

Using rigorous, repeatable research procedures, publishing findings in a reliable manner, and properly crediting the researchers who contributed are all crucial duties of researchers. In addition to academic expectations, institutional mandates, faculty workload distribution, accreditation requirements, and varying degrees of research infrastructure particularly in regional institutions in CALABARZON and MIMAROPA all have an impact on graduate research conduct in the Philippine higher education system. Hence, a graduate research is now both an institutional process and an academic undertaking that requires constant student support and effective oversight.

A key component of an effectively completing graduate research is the relationship between the advisor-advisee. Graduate advisers guide students through challenging administrative and intellectual demands by serving as mentors, disciplinary specialists, and institutional procedure mediators. Advising strategies have a huge impact on motivation, confidence, and perseverance of graduate students in regional HEIs, where faculty members often juggle teaching, administrative, and research responsibilities. Previous research has shown that time to degree completion, emotional health, and research productivity are all strongly correlated with the quality of advising relationships (Li et al., 2025; McCain, Roksa, & Breen, 2024).

However, it is noticeable that only fewer studies have looked at graduate advising experiences spanning dissertations, master's theses, and applied capstone projects, especially in the Philippine context, despite a large body of worldwide research on doctoral supervision. The current research in the country has frequently focused on policy-oriented evaluations or satisfaction surveys with only little findings into how students interact with advising procedures in the face of institutional limits, hierarchical academic cultures, and resource constraints typical of regional HEIs. Because of this, graduate students' perspectives particularly those from non-metropolitan institutions remain underrepresented in the literature.

Thus, in order to close this gap, the current study used a phenomenological research design to investigate the dissertation, thesis, and capstone research advising experiences of graduate students in certain HEIs in CALABARZON and MIMAROPA. The current study looked at how the academic supervision, autonomy, communication, feedback practices, as well as the institutional structures interacted to influence research paths of the graduate students by focusing on their lived experiences. The results are expected to contribute contextually grounded findings that may help to improve the graduate research supervision in Philippine higher education system and guide responsive advising practices.

## METHODS

This study used a qualitative phenomenological research design. Phenomenological research design was used to explore the lived experiences of the graduate students involved in dissertation, thesis, and capstone research advising at particular Philippine Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the CALABARZON and MIMAROPA Regions. According to Englander and Morley (2023), the ability of a phenomenological research design is to record the interpretations that participants made of their experiences in certain academic and institutional contexts led to its selection.

Purposive sampling was used in selecting the nine (9) graduate students. The participants were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) current or recent enrollment in a graduate program; (2) active participation in dissertation, thesis, or capstone research for at least one academic year; and (3) affiliation with a public or private HEI in CALABARZON or MIMAROPA. As discussed by Dahal et al. 2024), this sample size was thought to be suitable for phenomenological research since it supported thematic saturation and for in-depth investigation.

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews designed to elicit rich narratives while allowing flexibility for emergent themes. The interview guide focused on advisor-advisee relationships, research guidance, autonomy, feedback practices, communication patterns, and institutional support systems. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or online, lasted approximately 45–60 minutes, and were audio recorded with informed consent. All recordings were transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity and integrity of participants' accounts (Lim, 2025).

Thematic analysis was employed following an iterative and systematic process. Transcripts were read multiple times to achieve immersion, after which significant statements were identified and coded. Initial codes were refined through constant comparison and clustered into broader thematic categories that captured shared meanings across participants' experiences. Reflexive memoing was used throughout analysis to document analytic decisions and researcher assumptions.

Trustworthiness was strengthened through peer debriefing, which facilitated critical examination of emerging interpretations, and member checking, wherein participants reviewed and affirmed the accuracy of thematic representations. An audit trail was maintained to enhance dependability and confirmability (Bearman et al.,

2024). Ethical clearance was obtained from the appropriate institutional authority, and all participants were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The four (4) main themes that emerged from the analysis of interview data that described the lived experiences of the graduate students in dissertation, thesis, and capstone research advising at particular HEIs in CALABARZON and MIMAROPA Regions in the Philippines are the following: (1) academic support and guidance; (2) autonomy and independence; (3) communication and feedback; and (4) institutional systems and resources. The selected nine (9) participants made it possible to preserve thematic consistency. Their responses were used for more flexibility between programs, study forms, and institutional environments.

The above-mentioned themes illustrate the interrelated elements influencing graduate research supervision in regional higher education institutions in the Philippines. This is where institutional policies, faculty workload, research resource availability, and individual advisor methods all have an impact on advising practices.

### Guidance and Academic Support

The participants of the study have consistently stated about the importance of personalized and accessible guidance in building research confidence and competence.

#### One participant remarked:

*“Ang aking tagapayo ay palaging nandiyan upang tulungan ako sa proseso ng pananaliksik at upang tumugon sa aking mga katanungan. Kahit na nagkamali ako, nabuhayan ako ng loob. (My advisor was always there..*

*hmmm to help me of course in the research process and to respond to my inquiries. Even when I made mistakes, I felt encouraged).”*

Another participant among the nine graduate students noted:

*“Hindi po talaga ako palaging sigurado kung patungo ako sa tama bang direksyon, ngunit ang pagkakaroon ng malinaw na mga tagubilin mula sa aking tagapayo ay nakatulong sa akin na manatiling motivated (I wasn't really always sure if I was headed in the right direction or... but having clear instructions from my advisor helped me stay motivated).”*

This is in accordance with the discussion of Li et al. (2025); McCain et al. (2024) that through demonstration of structured supervision, consistency across dissertations, theses, and capstone projects are promoted and the reports both confirm and expand upon previous findings.

### Autonomy and Independence

The participants of the graduate students have stressed the necessity of a well-rounded strategy that encouraged independence while guaranteeing sufficient oversight.

As one of the graduate students further explained:

*“Pinahahalagahan ko po na binigyan po ako ng aking tagapayo ng kalayaang pumili kung paano magpatuloy habang nag-aalok din ng patnubay kapag kailangan ko ito (I really appreciated that my advisor gave me the freedom to choose how to proceed while also offering guidance when I needed it).”*

Another participant stated during the interview:

*“Kapag masyadong hands-off ang pangangasiwa, nakaramdam ako ng pagkawala. Kapag ito ay masyadong nagkokontrol, naramdam ko po kung minsan ang paghihigpit (When the supervision was too hands-off, sometimes, I felt lost. When it was too controlling, I can say that felt restricted).”*

According to the findings of Wu and Kim (2025), the results have showed how autonomy-supportive advising differs among various graduate research formats and are consistent.

## Communication and Feedback

The research experiences of the graduate students were also found to be influenced by timely and clear communication. The participants praised rapid and detailed feedback as inspiring and beneficial although the ambiguous or delayed responses caused worry and delays.

According to the study of Lim (2025) and Bearman et al. (2024), open feedback procedures is important and there is a need to establish a connection between communication quality and both academic achievement and psychological health.

## Institutional Systems and Resources

The research trajectories of the graduate students were greatly influenced by institutional support systems. Progress was aided by the availability of workshops and research instruments, but administrative hold-ups and scarce resources continued to be obstacles.

As explained by Dahal et al. (2024), it is fundamental to have good and consistent relationship between institutional structures and individual advising practices.

Likewise, the findings revealed further how advisor behaviors, student expectations, and institutional environments interact dynamically.

The current study contribute to the new body of knowledge for graduate research supervision enhancement and beyond policy-level talks. It also stresses graduate student voices across a variety of research formats.

## CONCLUSION

This phenomenological study focused on nine (9) graduate students who were active in dissertation, thesis, and capstone research advising at certain HEIs in the Philippines' CALABARZON and MIMAROPA Regions. Four themes have emerged from the students' research experiences: academic support and supervision, autonomy and independence, communication and feedback, and institutional structures and resources.

The results further revealed that the behaviors of the advisers, institution of the graduate student, and institutional structures all influence effective graduate research supervision. The establishment of research competence, motivation, and emotional well-being required timely, constructive feedback, balanced autonomy, and personalized mentoring. Simultaneously, the research development of the graduate students was either assisted or hindered by institutional efficiency, access to research resources, and streamlined administrative procedures.

The study increases the validity and applicability of its conclusions by taking into account a wider variety of student experiences. It gives emphasis on the need for integrated supervision frameworks that link faculty development, explicit advising rules, and responsive institutional support. Also, it adds context-specific perspectives and information to the scant literature on graduate research advising in the Philippines.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the current study, a number of recommendations are made to improve graduate research advising in certain HEIs in Mimaropa And Calabarzon.

It is recommended that research advising rules that specify advisor and advisee duties, feedback criteria, ethical obligations, and anticipated deadlines can be established at the institutional level by HEIs. Simplifying administrative procedures for defenses and research approvals may help cut down on delays that impede

advancement of the graduate students. Ability of the graduate students to conduct research may also be improved by bolstering research support organizations like research centers.

Graduate advisers may also profit from continual professional development at the faculty level that focuses on mentoring techniques, constructive criticism, and supervision of dissertations, theses, and capstones. Academic rigor and responsiveness to a range of student demands may be balanced with the use of structured but adaptable supervision techniques.

Early instruction on research expectations, advising procedures, and institutional support systems may enable students to interact with advisors more effectively and successfully manage research obligations.

Future research could further broaden this investigation by using longitudinal and mixed-methods approaches, larger sample sizes, or views of the advisers. Regional comparisons could provide further light on how institutional settings affect graduate research advising in the Philippines.

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