

“Lived Experiences of Master of Arts in Education Graduates of 2026 in Fulfilling the Research Publication: A Phenomenological Study”

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ABSTRACT

The 2026 cohort of Master of Arts in Education (MAEd) History graduates of the University of Saint Anthony was the first batch required to publish a research article as a completion for graduation in line with the Commission on Higher Education's policy strengthening research productivity in graduate education (CHED, 2019; Damoco et al., 2024). The eighteen (18) graduates, publishing in an academic journal was an unfamiliar and demanding undertaking that became a defining journey of their graduate study. This study used a qualitative phenomenological design to describe and interpret the lived experiences of these graduates as they fulfilled the publication requirement and to understand how the experience shaped their personal and professional growth. Using total enumeration sampling, all eighteen (18) graduates responded to a researcher-made, open-ended questionnaire administered through Google Forms, responses were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) thematic-analysis procedure. Three superordinate themes emerged: (1) Mixed Emotions, capturing the coexistence of pride and anxiety as participants approached an unfamiliar process; (2) Navigating Challenges Through Persistence, describing the time, financial, and procedural difficulties encountered during manuscript preparation and peer review; and (3) Publication as an Opportunity for Learning, reflecting the skills, confidence, and sense of accomplishment gained despite the difficulty. The study concludes that, although the publication requirement was experienced as a genuinely difficult and often stressful undertaking, it ultimately functioned as a transformative learning experience that strengthened the graduates' research competence. The findings offer practical, evidence-based recommendations for institutional research support and for future graduate students who will undergo the same requirement.

Keywords: lived experiences, phenomenology, qualitative analysis, MAED History Graduates, research publication

INTRODUCTION

An advanced academic or professional education is pursued after earning a bachelor's degree. This program focuses on specialized knowledge, particularly research-driven skills, to help individuals become experts in their chosen fields. There are two types of postgraduate degrees: the master's degree program and the doctorate degree program.

The Graduate education in the Philippines has undergone significant transformation with the strengthening of research and publication requirements as mandated by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). CHED outlines graduate publication policies under CMO No. 21, Series of 2025. The publication requirement has become an essential component of graduate education, aiming to enhance research productivity, develop scholarly competence, and foster a culture of knowledge generation among graduate students.

According to Aliya Kuzhakekova (2025), the implementation of the PhD publication requirement policy increased the number of research publications; however, it also lowered the overall research impact, as many publications were produced primarily to comply with graduation requirements. This phenomenon may also be experienced by master's degree graduates across various academic disciplines, as research publication has

likewise become a graduation requirement. Consequently, graduate students, may experience mixed emotions viewing publication not only as a challenging academic obligation but also as a rewarding accomplishment and an opportunity for personal, academic, and professional growth.

The MAEd History students of the University of Saint Anthony are mostly from neighbouring towns and even neighbouring provinces. Despite the geographical distance, they remained committed to pursuing their graduate education. However, as the first batch required to publish a research article before graduation, they encountered various obstacles throughout the publication process, including time constraints, academic writing demands, limited research resources, and the rigorous review process.

This study on the lived experiences of the MAEd History graduates will provide valuable insights into the realities of research publication among first-time graduate student authors. It is intended to contribute to the improvements of institutional research support, guide future graduate students to prepare realistically the publication process, and promote a more responsive and supportive research culture that encourages scholarly productivity while addressing the challenges encountered by graduate students.

Specifically, this study sought the following questions: 1) What are the lived experiences of the MAEd History graduates in fulfilling the research publication requirement? (2) What challenges did they encounter throughout the publication process? and (3) How did the experience influence their personal and professional growth?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Research Publication Requirement in Graduate Education

The policy on research publication as a condition for graduate degree is not new in the Philippines. Kuzhabekova (2025) documented Kazakhstan's national PhD publication requirement policy increased publication counts while lowering average research impact, since many graduates published mainly to comply with the requirement rather out of sustained scholarly interest. Haladchenko (2024) reported a similar pattern among Ukrainian doctorate holders. These studies indicate that publication mandates shape not just students who must satisfy it.

In the Philippine setting, CHED's CMO No. 15, series of 2019, formalized the requirement that graduate students publish their research in indexed or peer-reviewed journals prior to graduation (CHED, 2019). Damoco et al. (2024) examined how newly enrolled Philippine graduate students perceived this policy and identified three themes strikingly similar to the concerns raised in the present study: "Into the Wilderness," describing students' sense of being lost and unprepared for the publication process; "Blessings in Disguise," reflecting a later reframing of the requirement as an opportunity for growth; and "Breaking the Chain," which captured the financial burden of the publication process and the corresponding need for institutional support. The convergence between Damoco et al.'s (2024) the themes generated in this study lends credibility to the present findings and suggests that the MAEd History graduates' experience is not an isolated case but part of a broader pattern among first-time graduate researchers in the Philippines.

Han and Wang's (2024) systematic review of graduate students' research motivation, synthesizing 57 studies published between 1993 and 2023, found that self-efficacy theory is the dominant framework used to explain why some graduate students persevere through demanding research tasks while others disengage. Their proposed Graduate Students' Research Motivation Model highlights that a student's belief in their own capability, more than any single external factor, predicts whether a difficult requirement such as publication is experienced as manageable or overwhelming. This helps explain why the participants in the present study described the same requirement in such divided terms: as both a source of anxiety and, later, a source of pride.

Arieta, et al (2024) motivations, experiences, and needs of graduate students who engaged in research publication in the Philippine context. The participants were selected graduate students who had published at least one research article in an international refereed journal and had undergone the journal publication process. The findings revealed that their motivations for engaging in research publication included professors' encouragement, course requirements, the desire for new learning experiences, collaboration with peers and mentors, and

opportunities for professional promotion. The graduate students are more likely to succeed in research publication when provided with appropriate motivation and strong support from faculty members. Furthermore, the identified experiences and needs of the participants may serve as valuable inputs in developing research programs that strengthen graduate students' research capabilities and publication readiness.

Arieta et al.'s study is relevant to the present research as both examine the experiences of graduate students in the research publication process focused on the motivations, experiences, and needs of graduate students who had successfully published in international refereed journals, the present study extends this perspective by exploring the lived experiences of the MAED History graduates of 2026 in fulfilling the research publication requirement. Specifically, the present study emphasizes the emotional factors, challenges encountered, and the various influences that shaped the graduates' publication journey. The findings of Arieta et al. provide a valuable foundation for understanding how internal and external factors affect graduate students throughout the publication process. Likewise, the present study seeks to deepen this understanding by revealing how the graduates' emotions, personal experiences, institutional support, and publication-related challenges influenced their ability to complete the research publication requirement before graduation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The **Self-Efficacy Theory** developed by **Albert Bandura (1977)**. Strongly support the present study. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capability to organize and execute the actions required to accomplish a specific task or achieve a desired outcome. According to Bandura, individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to persevere in the face of challenges, recover from setbacks, and remain motivated to achieve their goals. Conversely, those with low self-efficacy may experience self-doubt, anxiety, and a greater tendency to avoid difficult tasks.

Bandura identified four primary sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and emotional states. Mastery experiences, or successful completion of tasks, are considered the most influential source of self-efficacy.

In relation to the present study, this theory explains how the MAED History graduates of 2026 developed confidence and resilience while fulfilling the research publication requirement. Their lived experiences including the emotional challenges they encountered and the strategies they employed to overcome publication difficulties reflect the development of self-efficacy throughout the research publication process. As the graduates successfully completed the publication requirement for personal and professional growth. They gained greater confidence in their research capabilities despite experiencing fear, uncertainty, pressure, and other emotional challenges.

Conceptual Framework

MAED History Graduates of 2026 ----lived experiences in fulfilling the research publication -----phenomenological data analysis -----Mixed Emotion ; Navigating Challenges through Persistence; Research publication as an opportunity of learning == Enhanced Self Efficacy, Research Competence , Personal and Professional Growth.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design which aimed at exploring and describing the lived experiences and meanings of specific phenomena as perceived by individuals. It also seeks to understand the essence of human experience from participants' perspectives. Phenomenological design was appropriate in this study because it focused on describing and interpreting participant's lived experiences which they themselves attach to those experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Crsiwell and Poth 2018) rather than a testing a pre-determined hypothesis about publication outcomes. The researcher is an undergraduate faculty teaching social science subjects with experience in academic research but have not yet personally experienced publishing academic journals. The background in research provided with understanding of the research process that enables

to appreciate participant's narratives. The researcher approached the study with openness and curiosity, allowing participants to describe their experiences without impairing personal assumptions or expectations.

The participants of the study were eighteen (18) MAED History graduates of 2026 from the University of Saint Anthony. A total enumeration technique was used since all graduates completed the research publication requirement at the time of the study were included as participants, no sampling was applied beyond inclusion criteria.

Data were collected through the researcher- made questionnaire administered via Google Forms. The instrument consisted of open-ended questions to elicit detailed narratives about participants' experiences, the challenges they encountered, the coping strategies they made, and the influence of the publication requirement. Repetitive or similar responses of their experiences were analysed and group into categories or themes using thematic analysis Colaizzis' (1978) descriptive phenomenological methods.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process, and all responses were used solely for academic research purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the analysis of the data, three themes emerged: mixed emotions, navigating challenges through persistence, and publication as an opportunity of learning,

The MAED History Graduates of 2026 faced significant challenges as they experienced crucial process.

Table 1. Experiences in fulfilling research publication

Statements/responses	Codes	Themes
it was a great experience It was an opportunity worth it I was confused and felt anxious sleepless nights for not to publish, not to graduate it was expensive	Positive experience Opportunity for growth, satisfaction, anxiety, confusion financial concern	MIXED EMOTIONS

Theme 1.

MIXED EMOTION .These indicate that research publication is both rewarding and demanding, as described by the participants "as *worth it and a great experience*" and one stated simply as an "*opportunity*", on the other hand it is emotionally demanding experience, because they felt emotional distress "one participant shared "*I experienced sleepless nights because if I failed to publish, I might not graduate*". While the other graduates appreciated the opportunity to improve their research skills and achieve a significant academic milestone, they simultaneously experienced anxiety, stress, confusion, and financial concerns. The coexistence of these positive and negative emotions explains why the overarching theme was identified. Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1977), suggests that individuals develop greater confidence and resilience as they overcome challenging tasks.

While the graduates appreciated the opportunity to improve their research skills and achieve a significant academic milestone, they simultaneously experienced anxiety, stress, confusion, and financial concerns. The coexistence of these positive and negative emotions explains why the overarching theme was identified. Despite of these experiences , the participants were able to fulfill the publication requirement, thereby strengthening their confidence in their research capabilities and enhancing their sense of academic competence.

Table 2 Challenges throughout the publication journey

Statements/responses	Codes	Themes
financially challenging/self-funded	time limitation	Navigating Challenges Through Persistence
difficulty in finding literature	Difficulty writing	
No idea to navigate the publication process	lack of reference	
time pressure	deadline pressure	
need international account	Financial burden	
processing fee	payment difficulty	
process took a long time	waiting for decision and	
multiple version	peer review revisions	
keep on repeating the manuscript		

Theme 2

Navigating Challenges Through Persistence. This theme reflects the numerous academic, financial, and procedural difficulties encountered by the MAED History graduates during the research publication process. Several participants explained that *publication expenses, including processing fees, were personally financed*. One participant shared, *"It was financially challenging because it was self-funded,"* while another stated that the *"processing fee" added to the burden*. Financial constraint emerged as one of the most challenges while review stage was one of the most stressful phase. One participant remarked, *"I had no idea how to navigate the publication process, it indicates a lack of familiarity in research publication procedure*.

These findings relates to Damoco et al.'s (2024) "Into the Wilderness" theme, in which Philippine graduate students newly subject to CMO No. 15 described feeling lost and unprepared for the technical and procedural demands of publication, as well as the "Breaking the Chain" theme concerning financial burden.

Despite these obstacles, the participants demonstrated determination and perseverance in fulfilling the publication requirement as a prerequisite for graduation. Furthermore, it supports Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1977), which explains that individuals develop confidence through overcoming challenging experiences.

Table 3 Personal and professional growth

Statements/responses	Codes	Themes
First time publication	New experience	Publication is an opportunity of learning
It Improved my research writing capability	Skill development	
No idea about publication	learning the process	
I felt accomplished after publication	Sense of accomplishment	

Theme 3.

Research Publication is an opportunity of Learning. The participants viewed the publication process as a valuable learning experience that enhanced their research knowledge, writing skills, and professional competence. Although many of them had no prior experience with research publication, several participants stated “*I felt accomplished after the publication*” this statement proved that “,completing the process enabled them to develop confidence and appreciate the value of scholarly publication. Arieta et al. (2024) emphasized that participation in research publication enables graduate students to acquire new knowledge, strengthen their research competencies, and prepare for future scholarly and professional endeavors.

The CHED research publication requirement policy for graduate education students significantly provide a great impact to students causing graduation delays and emotional and financial burdens, moreover, the implementation of this publication lowered the overall impact , since ,many publications produced in compliance of the graduation requirement Kuzhakekova, (2025) on the other hand, this policy push graduate students toward a global competitiveness in academic and scholarly research writing .

FINDINGS

1. The MAED History graduates experienced the research publication as an emotionally mixed process, a source of pride and a source of anxiety.
2. The most significant challenges were time constraint, unfamiliarity with the publication process, limited access to research literature, financial cost of the publication, and the demands of peer review and revisions cycle.
3. Despite of the difficulties, participants expressed meaningful gains in research writing skills, and understanding of the scholarly publication process.
4. Participants reframed the requirement from an unfamiliarity burden into genuine sense of accomplishment.
5. It indicates that publishing research involves academic, financial, and emotional challenges that require perseverance and adaptability.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that publication is a challenging and complex undertaking. They described the publication process as difficult, primarily because it was an unfamiliar experience, being the first batch of MAEd History graduates required to comply with the research publication requirement. Despite these challenges, the participants consistently recognized that the experience significantly enhanced their research capabilities, particularly in research writing, critical analysis, and understanding the scholarly publication process and they ultimately regarded publication as a rewarding and fulfilling accomplishment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Graduate School orientation program on structured research writing and publication.
2. Research advisers must provide consistent timely feedback and mentorship throughout the manuscript and review process to ease the revision cycle,
3. The Graduate school department may provide a supported international –payment channel to directly address the financial burden identified as one of the most significant challenges.
4. The graduate school library may improve the sufficient related literature database subscription and full text literature in history discipline, to address the participant's difficulty in locating sufficient related ;literature.
5. For future MAED history graduates students, begin identifying the research topic and target journal early, treat the publication process as an interactive skill-building rather than a single event drawing in the lived experiences documented in this study.

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