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# Feasibility of Offering MS Nursing Program at Visayas State University

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** All academic institutions try to make sure that their programmes are good and that their graduates are qualified enough to compete in local and international markets. A feasibility study examines the viability of a project to check its success rate and make sure that the program meets the needs of its stakeholders. **Objective:** The objective of the study is to assess the practicality of offering a master's degree program for nurses in the region and to evaluate the potential of the proposed program to respond to the needs of those pursuing graduate studies. **Methods:** A quantitative research design that was supplemented by qualitative responses was employed. The data was gathered using a convenience sampling technique, and the primary focus was on registered nurses in the healthcare industry. Descriptive statistics were utilised in the data processing and analysis of the results. **Results:** The intention to open a graduate program which is in accordance with the needs of working professionals. The results revealed that VSU meets the demand for nurses across regions, and this will potentially help nurse researchers develop, carry out, and support educational initiatives for graduate schools. **Conclusion:** The study shows that a significant number of nurses are interested in enrolling in a graduate program and they express their determination to achieve this goal and VSU is able to meet the needs of the participants.

*Keywords: Feasibility; Graduate School; Master of Science in Nursing; Nursing; Preference*

## INTRODUCTION

When the Visayas State University College of Nursing (VSU-CN) was founded in 2007, it had already achieved a number of significant milestones in the development of the nation's nursing profession. Many recognitions have been issued by the government and private agencies in recognition of the success of producing highly skilled and research-prepared nurses who are competitive in the international healthcare arena. Additionally, in 2018, the Accrediting Agency for Chartered Colleges and Universities (AACCUP) awarded Level II accreditation to the BS Nursing program.

Offering a graduate-level education program is a good practice of curricular upscaling for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that have satisfactorily achieved certification from accrediting bodies. To ensure that the program offering is relevant and responsive to the needs of its future stakeholders, it is essential to provide evidence-based data to anchor the strategies and implementation.

The only location in the area where graduate nursing programs are available is Tacloban City, where a private HEI offers a master's degree in nursing administration. As there aren't many options for advanced education in the province, the VSU College of Nursing decided to estimate the number of people interested in nursing graduate studies. This study aimed to determine the viability of VSU offering a master's degree program in the region.

### Graduate Education Program in Nursing

The VSU Graduate School thrives on providing excellence in graduate education for regional growth and rural development. It provides graduate and post-graduate degree programs for professional advancement and development.

VSUCN is eager to offer a master's degree program in order to compete with the quest for global excellence.

An advanced degree creates doors for higher opportunities in knowledge expansion, such as instructing employment and improving client care abilities. It will assist the nurse in developing as a leader, who will then boost the organization by coaching other healthcare professionals (Oldland *et al.*, 2022; Macdiarmid *et al.*, 2021; Krishnamoorthy, Muthuveloo & Ping, 2020; Vazquez-Calatayud, Errasti-Ibarrondo & Choperena, 2021). However, earning an advanced degree was complicated by management, educational, and personal constraints (Alavi, Nabizadeh Gharghozar & Ajorpaz,, 2022; Casey *et al.*, 2018). Negative effects on nurses' motivation and knowledge development result from their propensity to disregard learning activities (Alavi, Nabizadeh Gharghozar & Ajorpaz, 2022).

Oldland *et al.*, (2022), Cho-Baker, Kell & Fishtein, (2022), and Kinsella, Fry & Zecchin, (2018) identified themes in nurses' learning goals and reasons for postgraduate programs, namely: knowledge and skill acquisition, personal outcomes, personal professional behaviors, and interpersonal professional behaviors. A variety of additional factors in the decision-making process are also suggested, particularly in relation to student support.

According to Cho Baker *et al.* (2022), the graduate programs' small numbers of classes, cohort arrangements, administrative emphasis, and practical experience were essential elements. Geographical location, program characteristics, faculty and/or coordinator characteristics, academic concerns, work-related concerns, considerations for spouses, financial aid, and the learning environment were also found to be significant factors and have the greatest influence on student decisions (Pjesky, Spaulding & Wood, (2019).

This feasibility study will investigate if it is possible for the area to have a graduate school programme for nurses. A graduate school programme that is realistic and made to meet the needs of professionals must also take into account the needs of the community and the demands of the industry.

## Rationale and Objectives

The goal of the study is to find out if it is possible for the school to offer a graduate programme for nurses in the province and maybe even from other parts of the country or the world. Also, research will be done to see if the programme could help nurses get an MSN degree and further higher education according to their needs.

Specifically, this study aims to:

a) Determine the respondent's profile and interest in pursuing a Master of Science in Nursing (MSN);

b) Assess the perceptions of the participants in the proposed MSN program and determine the anticipated career effects of pursuing a degree in nursing.

c) Determine the preferences of the participants in the proposed MSN, particularly on structure, specialization, estimated fees, and the target year of enrollment;

d) Determine the participant's perceived benefits of the proposed nursing program offering.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design. Qualitative responses based on the needs of prospective students and market demands supported the descriptive findings of the quantitative design.

### Sampling Technique

A convenience sampling technique which is a non-probability scheme, was used in the data collection. Primarily, the study was targeted at nurses with plans to take further graduate studies that may specialize as capacity builders, data analysts, and decision-makers in their respective organizations.

### Data Collection

Prior to the collection of data, a letter of approval to conduct the study was obtained from the College of Nursing Dean through the research coordinator and the Vice President for Research, Extension, and Innovation, respectively. The researchers used Google Forms as the survey instrument. The survey link was forwarded to the nurses' emails and social media messenger applications to obtain the needed data.

Access to the data will be confidential and controlled by the primary researchers. The research upholds the provisions of RA 10175, or the Data Privacy Act of 2012, alongside its IRR.

### Research Instrument

A feasibility study tool is a modified-adapted tool that was provided by the Office of the Graduate School of the Visayas State University. The said tool was utilized to identify the viability of graduate program offerings in nursing.

The tool is divided into the following sections: an introductory statement with consent; the respondent's demographic profile; the graduate school relevance offering; the respondent's interest in pursuing graduate school program studies; the factors influencing that interest; the time constraints for pursuing graduate school programs; and comments, suggestions, and other matters that may be pertinent to the operation of the aforementioned graduate study program.

### Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were utilized in the data processing and analysis of the results. Frequency counts and the percentage were used to present the results of the conducted survey. The use of chart presentation was generated because it was deemed appropriate for data presentation. The qualitative data was analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis.

### Ethical Consideration

This study underwent technical and ethical review from the Visayas State University – College of Nursing Research Review Committee and was granted clearance to proceed with the code: RES-CON-F2021-01 issued on June 28, 2021.

### RESULTS

#### Respondent's Profile

Nearly two-thirds (63.7%) of the 116 respondents were young adults (ages 20 to 30), and nearly three-quarters (70%) of the respondents were female (Table 1). The majority (87%) of the respondents had a job at the time of the research. Ninety-two (79.3%) were full-time employees, with seventy-six (65.5%) working in a hospital or in the clinical sector. More than one-third (35.5%) of the seventy (60.3%) employees worked in a private healthcare facility in the province of Leyte, and a significant share were BSN graduates.

*Table 1: Respondent's Profile (N=116)*

| Categories | f | % |
|---|---|---|
| **Age** | | |
| 20-30 | 74 | 63.7 |
| 31-40 | 36 | 31.03 |
| 40 and up | 6 | 5.17 |
| **Gender** | | |
| Female | 81 | 70 |
| Male | 29 | 25 |
| LGBT | 5 | 4 |
| Prefer not to say | 1 | 1 |

| Current Employment | | |
|---|---|---|
| Hospital/Clinical Nurse | 74 | 63.79 |
| School Nurse | 4 | 3.44 |
| Teaching | 4 | 3.44 |
| Public Health (DOH, LGUs) | 13 | 11.20 |
| Birthing Units | 1 | 0.86 |
| Uniformed Personnel | 3 | 2.58 |
| Company Nurse | 1 | 0.86 |
| Unemployed | 5 | 4.31 |
| Self-employed | 2 | 2.58 |
| Others | 7 | 6.03 |
| **Employment Status** | | |
| Full-time | 92 | 79.3 |
| Part-time | 6 | 5 |
| Self-employed | 6 | 5 |
| Job Order/Contractual | 12 | 10.7 |
| **Place of Institutional Affiliation** | | |
| Leyte | 70 | 60.34 |
| Outside Leyte | 22 | 18.96 |
| Unspecified | 24 | 20.68 |
| **Type of Institutional Affiliation** | | |
| Public Health Facility | 31 | 26.7 |
| Private Health Facility | 41 | 35.5 |
| National Government Agency | 13 | 12.2 |
| Local Government Agency | 12 | 101 |
| State Universities/ Colleges | 3 | 3 |
| Private Universities/ Colleges | 3 | 3 |
| Non-Government Organization | 3 | 3 |
| Not Applicable | 8 | 7 |
| **Highest Educational Attainment** | | |
| BS Nursing graduate | 91 | 78.4 |
| With Units in Master's | 16 | 13.7 |
| MS graduate | 7 | 6 |
| With units in a Doctorate Program | 1 | 0.8 |
| Doctorate program graduate | 1 | 0.8 |

**Interest in Pursuing Graduate Degree Program in Nursing**

One-fourth (25.9%) of the respondents considered enrolling in graduate programs but were still undecided (Figure 1). Alternately, nearly one-fifth (19.8%) of the respondents revealed that they were very likely to apply and actively looking for options. A considerable number, nearly one-fifth (19%)—consider this intellectual advancement but have not yet looked for a graduate school to enroll in.
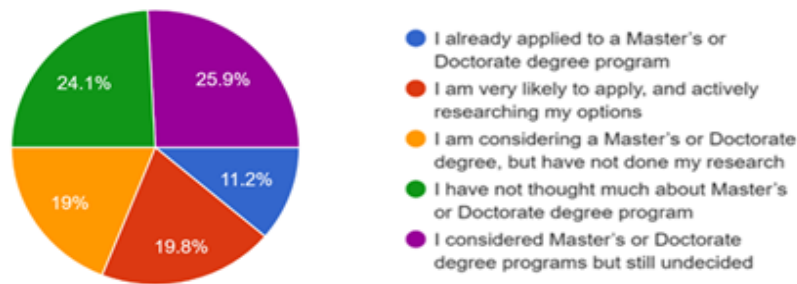
*Figure 1: Level of Interest in Pursuing Graduate Degree Program in Nursing*

**Perception of the Proposed Master's Degree Program**

The majority of respondents (98.3%) believe that the intention to open a graduate programme is relevant to the needs of professionals (Table 2). There were 113 (97.4%) respondents who identified themselves as potential enrollees, and 111 (95.7%) indicated that opening this program is timely given the needs of professional nurses.

*Table 2: Perception of the Participants in the Proposed Master's Degree Program*

| Perception | f* | % |
|---|---|---|
| Relevance | 114 | 98.3 |
| Potential enrollees | 113 | 97.4 |
| Timeliness | 111 | 95.7 |

*Multiple response*

**Motivations in Pursuing a Graduate Degree Program**

More than half of the total respondent (56.9%) said that a career is a very important reason to get a graduate degree in nursing (Table 3). On the other hand, nurses were driven by their desire to learn (46.6%), their need for money (46.6%), and their desire to help others (46.6%). Moreover, nearly half (44.8%) revealed that the desire to expand their opportunities is also a motivation for professional advancement.

*Table 3: Motivations in Pursuing Master's Degree Program*

| Motivations | M | f* | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Enjoyment of learning | Very Important | 54 | 46.6 |
| Career considerations | Very Important | 66 | 56.9 |
| Financial considerations | Very Important | 54 | 46.6 |
| Desire to help others | Very Important | 54 | 46.6 |
| Desire to expand network | Very Important | 52 | 44.8% |

*Multiple response*

**Perceived Effect on Career After Earning Graduate School Degree**

Majority (84.5%) believed that obtaining a master's degree would better their professional situation (Table 4). Alternately, 28 (24.1%) respondents said that they also expected a job shift as a result of completing nursing graduate school.

*Table 4: The Anticipated Effect on Career after Earning Master's Degree*

| | f* | % |
|---|---|---|
| To start a career | 9 | 7.8 |
| Advancement in current career | 98 | 84.5 |
| Career change | 28 | 24.1 |
| To create a company | 1 | 0.9% |
| Continued learning | 1 | 0.9% |

## School Preferences for Graduate Program

A total of 40 (37.9%) respondents were "Very interested" in enrolling in the graduate program at VSU (Table 5). Alternately, respondents also prefer to enroll in a private non-faith-based university (43.1%), other state universities (38.8%), and private faith-based universities (29.3%) for their master's degree.

### Table 5: School Preference for Master's Degree Enrollment

| Schools | M | f* | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Visayas State University (VSU) | Very Interested | 44 | 37.9 |
| Private Faith-based University | Somewhat Interested | 34 | 29.3 |
| Private Non-faith-based University | Somewhat Interested | 50 | 43.1 |
| Other State Universities | Somewhat Interested | 45 | 38.8 |

*Multiple response

The respondents were "very interested" in enrolling at Visayas State University, while enrolling at a private faith-based university, a private non-faith-based university, and other state universities were categorized as "somewhat interested" in their school preferences.

## Selecting a Graduate School in Nursing

A convenient timetable was listed as the top consideration of 83 (71.6%) respondents (Table 6). The cost and class availability were very important to 79 (68.1%) and 72 (62.1%) respondents, respectively.

### Table 6: Factors Influencing the Selection of Graduate School

| Factors | M | f* | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Academic reputation of the school | Very Important | 63 | 54.3 |
| Academic reputation of the program | Very Important | 64 | 55.2 |
| Faith-based university | Somewhat Important | 31 | 26.7 |
| Convenient schedule | Very Important | 83 | 71.6 |
| Cost | Very Important | 79 | 68.1 |
| Student Support Services | Very Important | 69 | 59.5 |
| Approachability of the faculty | Very Important | 59 | 50.9 |
| Small class size | Important | 41 | 35.5 |
| Class availability | Very Important | 72 | 62.1 |
| Cohort system | Important | 44 | 37.9 |
| Accelerated program completion | Important | 49 | 42.2 |

*Multiple response

## Preferred Program Structure

Fifty-eight (50%) respondents said that a semester arrangement was their preferred structure (Table 7). While 46 (39.7%) respondents chose largely or only weekend programs, 47 (41.4%) preferred an accelerated style or a schedule of one class for 5-7 weeks.

Alternatively, 45 (38.8%) respondents preferred a 50:50 (face-to-face and online) hybrid format; 45 (37.1%) respondents reported having a fully online implementation; and 38 (32.8%) respondents preferred a 75:25 (face-to-face and online) hybrid format and mostly all-day classes. This reveals that nurses favoured an expedited semester arrangement with most or all weekend classes.

*Table 7: Preferred Program Structure*

| Program Structure | M | f* | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fully face-to-face | Somewhat desirable | 34 | 31 |
| Fully Online | Desirable | 43 | 37.1 |
| Hybrid Format (50:50 :face-to-face and Online) | Desirable | 45 | 38.8 |
| Hybrid Format (75:25 :face-to-face and Online) | Somewhat desirable | 38 | 32.8 |
| Hybrid Format (25:75 :face-to-face and Online) | Somewhat desirable | 33 | 28.4% |
| Semester Format | Desirable | 58 | 50% |
| Accelerated Format (5-7 weeks at one class at a time) | Desirable | 47 | 41.4 |
| Mostly or all night classes | Minimally desirable | 34 | 29.3 |
| Mostly or all-day classes | Somewhat desirable | 38 | 32.8 |
| Mostly or all-weekend classes | Very desirable | 46 | 39.7 |

*Multiple response*

## Preferred Specialization in the Master of Science in Nursing (MSN)

A variety of responses were shown in their preferred MSN specialization (Table 8). The following were the respondents' top-choice specializations: Medical-Surgical Nursing (34.2%), Clinical Supervision and Leadership (31.6%), Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing (15.4%), and Family Health Nursing (14.5%) were among the preferred specializations.

*Table 8: Preferred MSN Program Specializations*

| MS Nursing Program Specialization | f | % |
|---|---|---|
| MSN major in Medical-Surgical Nursing | 40 | 34.2 |
| MSN major in Clinical Supervision and Leadership | 37 | 31.6 |
| MSN major in Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing | 18 | 15.4 |
| MSN major in Family Health Nursing | 17 | 14.5 |
| MSN major in Public Health | 2 | 1.8 |
| MSN major in Nursing Administration | 1 | 0.9 |
| MSN major in Maternal and Child Nursing | 1 | 0.9 |

## Reasons for the Preferred Specialization in the MS Program

The highest percentage of the respondents (19.8%) said that their aim of improving the skills relevant to their job and improving their career were the reasons for selecting their specialization (Table 9).

Alternatively, to expand or broaden their knowledge (19%), based on interest (18.1%), to improve the quality of nursing service (17.2%), to improve one's leadership skills (7.8%), great schools (4.3%), and enhance one's competency (3.4%).

*Table 9: Reasons for Selecting the Preferred MS Program Specialization*

| Reasons for Selecting the Preferred MS Program Specialization | f | % |
|---|---|---|
| To improve my skills relevant to my job | 23 | 19.8 |
| To improve my career | 23 | 19.8 |
| To expand/broaden my knowledge | 22 | 19 |
| I find it interesting | 21 | 18.1 |
| It will improve the quality of nursing service | 20 | 17.2 |
| To improve my leadership skills | 9 | 7.8 |
| Great schools | 5 | 4.3 |
| It is my competency | 4 | 3.4 |
| Accessible | 1 | 0.9 |
| It is challenging | 2 | 1.7 |
| To earn another degree | 2 | 1.7 |
| It is applicable to any fields in nursing | 2 | 1.7 |

**Target Academic Year for Enrollment**

Half (50.7%) of respondents recommended that MSN be operational for the first semester of the academic year 2022-2023 (Figure 2). This suggests that nurses were eager to enroll in VSU's MSN program.
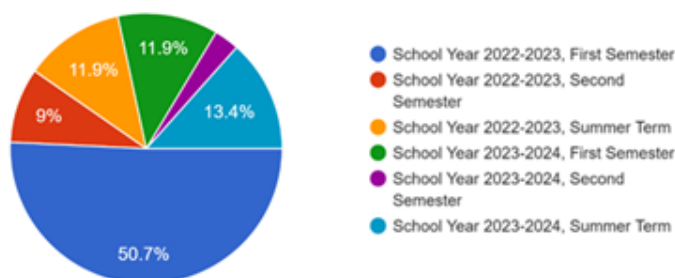


*Figure 2: Target Academic Year for Enrollment*

**Preferred Estimated School Fees**

More than half of the respondents (59.5%) preferred PHP 4,000.00 to PHP 5,000.00 as the program's school fees (Figure 3).
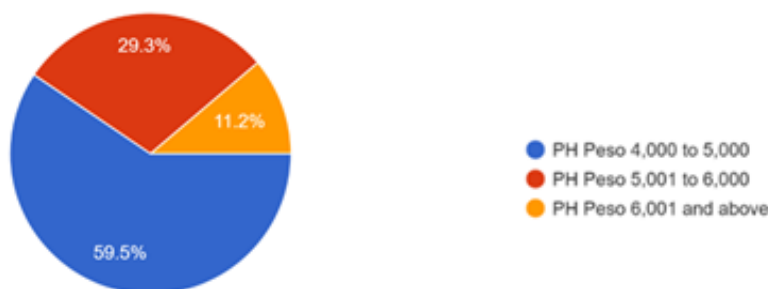


*Figure 3: Preferred Estimated Fees for the Program*

**Benefits of the MSN Program**

Three themes arose from the responses and their categories (Table 10). The themes are beneficial to oneself (76.2%), beneficial to the nation (18.1%), and beneficial to the linked institution (5.4%).

*Table 10: Perceived Benefit of the MS Program*

| Themes | Category | Meaning units | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Beneficial to Self | For knowledge development | 24 | 21.8 |
| | For Promotion | 21 | 19 |
| | Both Personal and professional growth | 19 | 17.27 |
| | To improve practice | 12 | 10.9 |
| | Convenience | 5 | 4.5 |
| | Advocacy | 3 | 2.7 |
| Beneficial to Country | Improve competencies of Filipino nurses | 16 | 14.5 |
| | Improve public health | 4 | 3.6 |
| Beneficial to the Institution | Improved outputs | 6 | 5.4 |

## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to determine the viability of VSU in offering an MSN program and to evaluate the potential of the proposed program to respond to the needs of those pursuing graduate studies.

The findings showed that most of the respondents were female, young adults, and working as full-time staff nurses in a private hospital in the province of Leyte. The findings suggested nurses' motivation (Kinsella, Fry & Zecchin, 2018) but they are unsure because of things like working abroad, the nature of their jobs, and work schedules (Mbombi & Mothiba, 2020). Nonetheless, some nurses haven't given graduate school much thought.

The plan to create a graduate program is pertinent to working professionals' needs. The debut of this program, according to the study, is timely in light of demands and needs. This suggests that nurses are preparing for VSU's intention to open a graduate program. In actuality, the province of Leyte lacks a public graduate institution that offers graduate nursing degrees.

Pursuing a graduate degree in nursing requires careful thought about future career. This suggests that nurses' motivation may take the form of professional development (Hariyati & Safril, 2018; Mbombi & Mothiba, 2020) and a stable and long-lasting career path, opening up prospective new frontiers or opportunities outside their prior employment or life experiences (Macdiarmid *et al.*, 2021). When classifying their level of motivation, the respondents agreed on all points. All respondents regarded the desire to serve others, the love of learning, financial concerns, career considerations, and the desire to broaden their network as being highly important in their motives for seeking a graduate degree in nursing (Oldland *et al.*, 2022; Macdiarmid *et al.*, 2021; Krishnamoorthy, Muthuveloo & Ping, 2020).

The results of the predicted impact on career following a master's degree are comparable to those of Vazquez-Calatayud *et al.*, (2021), Yeong Woo, Yu Lee & San Tam, (2017), Mbombi & Mothiba, 2020, and Oldland (2022), who discovered that pursuing professional progress will be beneficial to their careers. This suggests that this is a means of advancing one's existing career, providing quality nursing care, generating clinical outcomes, and potentially strengthening the healthcare workforce. However, the findings of considering a desire for a career change and leaving current situation are also influencers (Price *et al.*, 2018; Vazquez-Calatayud, Errasti-Ibarrondo & Choperena, 2021).

The respondents expressed strong interest in enrolling at VSU and moderate interest in private, non-religious HEIs. Convenient scheduling (Cho-Baker, Kell & Fishtein, 2022), cost (Mbombi & Mothiba, 2020), and class availability were factors taken into account wan choosing and HEI (Vazquez-Calatayud *et al.*, 2021).

The findings are consistent with those of Baker, Kell, and Fishtein (2022) on the influence of graduate student decisions. The academic reputation of the school and of the program, the convenience of the schedule, the cost, student support services (Mohammed, 2021), faculty attitude (Mallek & El-Hosany, 2020), and class availability were all essential.

Respondents chose a semester-accelerated schedule and primarily or exclusively weekend classes (Macdiarmid *et*

*al.*, 2021). Additionally, respondents chose a blended learning program to address their learning styles, numerous roles, and busy schedules (Chmiel, Shaha & Schneider, 2017; Mangold *et al.*, 2018; Mbombi & Mothiba, 2020; Martin *et al.*, 2022; Daňo; 2017; Wu *et al.*, 2020).

The majority of respondents' employment in clinical settings shows that they were interested in medical-surgical nursing as a specialization. According to the study, developing one's abilities and furthering one's career were the two top considerations while selecting a program emphasis. Similar to these, Tiliander *et al.*, (2022), Ocapan & Locsin (2019), Efendi, Chen & Kurniati, (2018), Casey *et al.*, (2018), and Choo (2015) identified these factors: situational assessment, organizational context, a seismic shift, additional roles, intellectual complexities, and career that affect nurses' decisions when choosing a nursing specialty.

This study suggests that respondents want to progress in their careers and enhance their knowledge, nursing skills, and leadership abilities (Tiliander *et al.*, 2022; Ocapan & Locsin, 2019; Kinsella, Fry & Zecchin, 2018; Casey *et al.*, 2018) by enrolling in an MSN. Additionally, nurses prefer a lower cost than other HEIs and are anticipating the start of the MSN program at VSU (Mbombi & Mothiba, 2020).

Lastly, according to the content analysis, nurses are investing in professional-related intellectual assets for knowledge development and advancement, boosting the competencies of Filipino nurses, and increasing outputs and productivity (Yeong Woo, Yu Lee & San Tam, 2017; Macdiarmid *et al.*, 2021; Oldland *et al.*, 2022; Cho-Baker, Kell & Fishtein, 2022).

**Nursing Implication**

The results of this study could help nurse researchers come up with, carry out, and support educational programmes for graduate nursing schools. Also, these will help nurse educators, administrators, and clinicians understand the process and promotion of graduate-level nursing education in a systematic way. Lastly, the survey data should be included in the plan for developing and evaluating graduate nursing HEIs, since these are important for accreditation and approval requirements.

**CONCLUSION**

Based on the study's findings, it can be said that VSU satisfies the need for nursing professionals in the region. This is demonstrated by the significant number of nurses who are eager to enroll in a graduate program at VSU and who are demonstrating their determination to achieve this goal.

**Recommendations**

Even though the study's results showed that respondents were very interested in VSU's proposed graduate nursing degree program, they also made a number of suggestions for improvements to the programme that could be carried out to make it run better. The administrators and curriculum designers at the VSU Graduate School are asked to think about these ideas and use them as a crucial point to create programmes that will make the graduate courses at the university more responsive to the needs of their stakeholders.

**Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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