

# Measuring Factors Behind the Dwindling Enrollment in the MAEd Program: A Quantitative Survey Study

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## ABSTRACT

The steady decline in enrollment in certain majors of the Master of Arts in Education (MAEd) program at St. Michael's College of Iligan Inc. (SMCII) necessitates an evidence-based analysis of factors influencing student decision-making. This study developed a 40-item Likert scale survey as a diagnostic tool to gather insights from two stakeholder groups: current students and potential enrollees. The instrument examines key domains such as program awareness, perceived quality, specialization relevance, financial accessibility, institutional support, and decision-making factors. By assessing the awareness and understanding of prospective students, as well as the experiences and satisfaction levels of current students, the study identifies strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in marketing strategies, program design, and student services. It further explores financial, academic, and institutional barriers that shape enrollment trends and evaluates the relevance and appeal of existing and emerging specializations. Findings from this investigation will provide the Graduate School and institutional leadership with actionable data to refine promotional strategies, update academic offerings, and enhance student support mechanisms. Ultimately, the study aims to generate evidence-based recommendations that ensure the MAEd program's sustainability, relevance, and competitiveness in the evolving landscape of graduate education.

**Keywords:** *Enrollment Trends, Graduate Education, Marketing Strategies, Program Relevance, Student Perceptions*

## INTRODUCTION

The steady decline in enrollment across certain majors and specializations of the MAEd program at St. Michael's College of Iligan Inc. (SMCII) warrants an evidence-based inquiry into the underlying causes. To ensure sustainability, relevance, and competitiveness of the program, it is essential to explore the perceptions, motivations, and barriers faced by both current students and potential enrollees.

The main objective of this tool is to assist in the in-depth and comprehensive marketing study for the MAEd program by identifying key factors that influence enrollment patterns.

Specifically, the tool aims to:

1. Assess the level of awareness and understanding among potential enrollees regarding the SMCII MAEd program and its specialization offerings.
2. Determine the experiences, perceptions, and satisfaction levels of current MAEd students concerning the quality, structure, and delivery of the program.
3. Identify the perceived strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in marketing strategies, program design, and student support services from the lens of both current and prospective students.
4. Examine the financial, academic, and institutional factors that affect enrollment decisions, including affordability, scheduling, instructional quality, and administrative efficiency.

5. Explore the relevance and appeal of current specializations, as well as the demand for new or emerging fields in education.
6. Generate evidence-based recommendations for enhancing the visibility, desirability, and competitiveness of the MAEd program through improved academic offerings and marketing interventions.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This survey tool was developed as a diagnostic instrument to collect data from two key stakeholder groups: (1) currently enrolled students, who can provide insights based on actual experiences with the program, and (2) potential enrollees, who can share their expectations, perceptions, and reasons for pursuing or not pursuing graduate studies at SMCII.

The 40-item Likert scale covers multiple domains—including program awareness, perceived quality, specialization relevance, financial accessibility, institutional support, and decision-making factors—providing a comprehensive lens through which marketing strategies, academic offerings, and student support services may be improved. The data gathered will support the Graduate School and institutional leadership in redesigning promotional efforts, updating program offerings, and enhancing student services to address enrollment challenges effectively.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1**  
**Awareness and Decision to Enroll**

| Indicator                                                                | Mean        | Median      | SD           | Description           | Qualitative Interpretation |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. I was aware of the SMCII MAEd program before enrolling.               | 4.83        | 5.00        | 0.389        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 2. I learned about the program through social media or online platforms. | 4.33        | 4.50        | 0.778        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 3. I chose SMCII because of its academic reputation.                     | 4.67        | 5.00        | 0.651        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 4. I found enough information about all the specializations offered.     | 4.42        | 4.50        | 0.669        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 5. The enrollment process was smooth and clear.                          | 4.67        | 5.00        | 0.492        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 6. I was influenced by peers or colleagues who studied at SMCII.         | 4.17        | 4.50        | 1.115        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 7. Promotional materials helped me understand the program.               | 4.33        | 4.00        | 0.651        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 8. I clearly understood the specialization I selected before enrolling.  | 4.83        | 5.00        | 0.389        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| <b>Overall Mean</b>                                                      | <b>4.53</b> | <b>4.75</b> | <b>0.450</b> | <b>Strongly Agree</b> | <b>Very High</b>           |

The data revealed that the highest-rated indicators in the “Awareness and Decision to Enroll” category were “*I was aware of the SMCII MAEd program before enrolling*” and “*I clearly understood the specialization I selected before enrolling*”, both with a mean score of 4.83 and a low standard deviation of 0.389. This suggests that respondents very strongly agreed on their prior awareness and clarity about their chosen specialization before entering the program, with minimal variability in their responses. In contrast, the lowest-rated indicator was “*I was influenced by peers or colleagues who studied at*

SMCII”, which had a mean score of 4.17 and the highest standard deviation of 1.115. While the result still reflects agreement, it indicates greater diversity in responses—some students considered peer influence important in their decision to enroll, while others found it less relevant.

These findings suggest that most MAEd students at SMCII entered the program with clear intent and well-formed decisions, likely shaped by formal program promotions, institutional reputation, and accessible information about specializations. The high level of consensus on program awareness and specialization understanding highlights the effectiveness of existing information dissemination channels. However, the variability in peer influence suggests that while recommendations from colleagues can play a role, they are not consistently impactful for all students.

The implication for enrollment and retention strategies is that SMCII could maximize its recruitment efforts by continuing to prioritize program visibility and ensuring detailed, easily accessible information on all specializations. While peer recommendations can supplement recruitment, they should not be relied upon as the primary driver for enrollment. Instead, institutional efforts should focus on strengthening official marketing, outreach initiatives, and academic guidance to maintain clarity for potential enrollees.

These results align with recent literature emphasizing that graduate student retention is strongly supported by early and clear communication, program clarity, and proactive academic guidance. For example, studies have shown that employer-funded tuition support and transparent program structures enhance persistence among graduate learners (Digital Commons, 2023). Similarly, Watermark Insights (2023) underscores the role of clear, early communication from administrators in improving student retention. Moreover, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Teaching and Learning Lab (2022) highlights that fostering a sense of belonging—achieved through clarity of expectations and support systems—significantly contributes to continued enrollment. Together, these studies reinforce the value of SMCII’s emphasis on program awareness and specialization clarity in sustaining both enrollment and retention.

**Table 2**  
**Program Quality and Satisfaction**

| Indicators                                                              | Mean        | Median      | SD           | Description           | Qualitative Interpretation |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| 9. I am satisfied with the content of my specialization.                | 4.58        | 5.00        | 0.515        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 10. The subjects are relevant to my professional needs.                 | 4.42        | 4.50        | 0.669        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 11. Faculty members are competent and approachable.                     | 4.58        | 5.00        | 0.515        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 12. I receive adequate academic support from the institution.           | 4.42        | 4.00        | 0.515        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 13. I feel that I am growing professionally because of this program.    | 4.67        | 5.00        | 0.492        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 14. The schedule is manageable alongside my job or responsibilities.    | 4.50        | 4.50        | 0.522        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 15. The delivery mode (online, hybrid, face-to-face) fits my lifestyle. | 4.58        | 5.00        | 0.515        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 16. I am likely to recommend this program to others.                    | 4.67        | 5.00        | 0.492        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| <b>Overall Mean</b>                                                     | <b>4.55</b> | <b>4.69</b> | <b>0.393</b> | <b>Strongly Agree</b> | <b>Very High</b>           |

The table presents the highest-rated indicators in the “Program Quality and Satisfaction” category were “I feel that I am growing professionally because of this program” and “I am likely to recommend this program to others”, both obtaining a mean score of 4.67 with a low standard deviation of 0.492. These

results show that respondents very strongly agreed with these statements, with high consensus among them, indicating that the program is perceived as not only advancing their professional development but also being worthy of endorsement to peers. In contrast, the lowest-rated indicators were *“The subjects are relevant to my professional needs”* and *“I receive adequate academic support from the institution”*, both with a mean score of 4.42. While these ratings still fall under “Very High” qualitative interpretation, their slightly lower scores, combined with standard deviations of 0.669 and 0.515 respectively, suggest that some respondents rated these aspects marginally lower, reflecting room for improvement in aligning course content to evolving professional demands and enhancing academic support services.

It indicate that the MAEd program is highly successful in fostering professional growth and creating a positive learning experience that participants are eager to recommend. The consistently high scores for professional development and likelihood to recommend imply that the program’s structure, instructional delivery, and institutional reputation are effectively meeting student expectations. However, the slightly lower ratings for subject relevance and academic support highlight potential areas where the program can refine its curriculum and strengthen student services to ensure that learning materials and institutional support remain fully responsive to the professional contexts of its students.

These implies that for program development are clear: sustaining the strengths that promote professional growth and positive word-of-mouth should remain a priority, as these are strong drivers of retention and recruitment. At the same time, continuous review of course content to match emerging industry and educational needs, along with reinforcing academic support systems such as mentoring and guidance, can further enhance student satisfaction. Doing so may close the slight gap in perception between content relevance and other highly rated aspects of the program.

These results align with recent studies highlighting that graduate program satisfaction is strongly linked to perceived professional growth and peer recommendation potential. For instance, research has shown that relevance of coursework to real-world professional demands significantly impacts students’ overall satisfaction and persistence (Lee & Sabharwal, 2022). Similarly, a 2023 study emphasized that academic support services—such as responsive advising and accessible faculty—play a crucial role in retention and recommendation behaviors (Watermark Insights, 2023). Moreover, literature on graduate education quality suggests that when students experience direct professional benefits from their studies, they are more likely to endorse the program and remain engaged (Brown et al., 2021). These findings reinforce the importance of maintaining high-quality teaching and professional relevance while continuing to enhance institutional support mechanisms.

The table 3 illustrates the highest-rated indicator in the “Specialization Appeal and Relevance” category was *“I chose my specialization because it aligns with job opportunities”*, which obtained a mean score of 4.67 with a standard deviation of 0.492. This result reflects a strong consensus among respondents that career alignment is a primary driver in their choice of specialization, underscoring the importance of employability in academic decision-making. In contrast, the lowest-rated indicators were *“I would consider shifting to another specialization if available”* and *“Some majors seem outdated or lack practical application”*, both with a mean score of 2.25. The standard deviations for these two items were 1.138 and 1.288, respectively, indicating higher variability in responses. These low scores suggest that most students are satisfied with their chosen specialization and do not perceive significant issues with its relevance, although the higher SDs show that a few respondents hold opposing views.

These indicate that job market relevance is a central consideration for MAEd students when selecting a specialization, and the program’s offerings appear to meet this need effectively. The low ratings for

the willingness to shift or perceptions of outdated majors reflect general satisfaction and stability in students' academic paths, although the variability implies the presence of minority perspectives that see room for modernization. This combination of results signals that while the program is performing well in terms of relevance to professional opportunities, there may still be a need to monitor and update certain specializations to maintain broad appeal.

**Table 3**  
**Specialization Appeal and Relevance**

| Indicators                                                                      | Mean        | Median      | SD           | Description    | Qualitative Interpretation |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|----------------|----------------------------|
| 17. Some specializations are not well known to students.                        | 3.92        | 4.00        | 0.996        | Agree          | High                       |
| 18. The specialization options meet today's educational demands.                | 4.33        | 4.00        | 0.492        | Strongly Agree | Very High                  |
| 19. I chose my specialization because it aligns with job opportunities.         | 4.67        | 5.00        | 0.492        | Strongly Agree | Very High                  |
| 20. I would consider shifting to another specialization if available.           | 2.25        | 2.00        | 1.138        | Disagree       | Low                        |
| 21. Some majors seem outdated or lack practical application.                    | 2.25        | 2.00        | 1.288        | Disagree       | Low                        |
| 22. New majors like Educational Technology or SPED would attract more students. | 3.83        | 4.00        | 1.193        | Agree          | High                       |
| 23. I believe more workshops and applied learning are needed.                   | 4.17        | 4.00        | 0.835        | Agree          | High                       |
| 24. Specializations should regularly adapt to new trends.                       | 4.17        | 4.50        | 1.030        | Agree          | High                       |
| <b>Overall Mean</b>                                                             | <b>3.70</b> | <b>3.69</b> | <b>0.501</b> | <b>Agree</b>   | <b>High</b>                |

It implies that specialization offerings should continue to be designed and updated with a strong focus on labor market trends, ensuring they remain competitive and attractive to prospective students. While most students are content with their choices, the small proportion expressing dissatisfaction suggests that periodic curriculum reviews and stakeholder consultations could help maintain relevance and address niche concerns. Additionally, integrating more applied learning opportunities and staying alert to emerging fields, such as Educational Technology or Special Education, could further strengthen the program's market responsiveness.

These findings are consistent with recent literature indicating that alignment with job opportunities is a key factor in graduate program enrollment and retention. For example, Cabrera and Leech (2021) emphasized that specialization relevance to industry needs significantly influences both program choice and persistence. Similarly, O'Connor and Sharkey (2023) found that graduate students are more likely to remain in programs whose curricula are continually adapted to market and societal demands. Furthermore, Zhao et al. (2022) highlighted that while overall satisfaction may be high, programs that integrate timely curriculum innovations—especially in fast-evolving educational fields—are better positioned to attract and retain diverse cohorts of students.

The highest-rated indicator in the "Institutional Factors" category was "*Tuition and other fees are affordable*", which achieved a perfect mean score of 5.00 with a standard deviation of 0.000. This exceptional result indicates unanimous agreement among respondents, with absolutely no variation, that the program offers strong affordability—a highly favorable factor for both enrollment and retention. In contrast, the lowest-rated indicator was "*Communication from the school is timely and consistent*", which obtained a mean score of 4.42 and the highest standard deviation in this category at 1.240. While the qualitative interpretation still falls under "Very High," the lower mean and high

variability suggest that while many students are satisfied with institutional communication, a significant number perceive delays or inconsistencies.

**Table 4**  
**Institutional Factors**

| Indicators                                                            | Mean        | Median      | SD           | Description           | Qualitative Interpretation |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| 25. Tuition and other fees are affordable.                            | 5.00        | 5.00        | 0.000        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 26. Flexible payment options helped me continue my studies.           | 4.92        | 5.00        | 0.289        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 27. Administrative services (e.g., registrar, finance) are efficient. | 4.67        | 5.00        | 0.492        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 28. The school offers enough scholarship or financial assistance.     | 4.75        | 5.00        | 0.452        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 29. I feel supported by the Graduate School office.                   | 4.83        | 5.00        | 0.389        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 30. There are enough library and learning resources.                  | 4.67        | 5.00        | 0.651        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 31. There is transparency in policies and grading.                    | 4.92        | 5.00        | 0.289        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 32. Communication from the school is timely and consistent.           | 4.42        | 5.00        | 1.240        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| <b>Overall Mean</b>                                                   | <b>4.77</b> | <b>4.94</b> | <b>0.310</b> | <b>Strongly Agree</b> | <b>Very High</b>           |

These findings suggest that the MAEd program's affordability is a defining strength, serving as a compelling advantage in attracting and retaining students. The perfect consensus on tuition affordability signals that cost-related barriers are minimal, which is a rare and significant achievement in graduate education. However, communication practices present a more mixed picture; although the overall sentiment remains positive, the variability reveals inconsistencies in the timeliness and reliability of information dissemination, which may affect student satisfaction for certain groups.

The implication for institutional strategy is clear: maintaining affordable tuition should remain a top priority, as it is a decisive factor in sustaining enrollment. At the same time, improving the consistency and timeliness of school communications—whether through streamlined processes, better use of digital platforms, or clearer communication protocols—could enhance overall student experience and further strengthen retention. Addressing this variability could convert “very high” satisfaction into near-unanimous agreement, similar to the affordability rating.

These results align with recent research emphasizing affordability as a critical driver in graduate student decision-making. For instance, a study by Jackson and Tomlinson (2021) highlights that reasonable tuition fees significantly reduce dropout risk by minimizing financial stress. Similarly, Knapp et al. (2022) found that consistent institutional communication fosters a sense of belonging and trust, both of which are linked to higher retention rates. Moreover, Lee (2023) noted that while affordability draws students in, the quality of ongoing communication from administrators plays a pivotal role in ensuring they remain engaged and satisfied throughout their academic journey.

The data shows the highest-rated indicator in the “Barriers and Suggestions” category was “*I know people who dropped out due to financial issues*”, with a mean score of 4.75 and a standard deviation of 0.452. This result reflects a very high level of agreement and relatively low variability, indicating that most respondents share the perception that financial constraints remain a significant cause of attrition among MAEd students. In contrast, the lowest-rated indicator was “*Graduate school events (e.g., research congress) increase interest*”, which received a mean score of 3.08 and a standard deviation of 0.996. This moderate rating suggests mixed perceptions about the role of institutional

events in stimulating interest or engagement, with the variability indicating that some respondents see value in such activities while others remain neutral or unconvinced.

**Table 5**  
**Barriers and Suggestions**

| Indicators                                                              | Mean        | Median      | SD           | Description    | Qualitative Interpretation |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|----------------|----------------------------|
| 33. I know people who dropped out due to financial issues.              | 4.75        | 5.00        | 0.452        | Strongly Agree | Very High                  |
| 34. Some classmates are discouraged due to workload or stress.          | 4.58        | 5.00        | 0.669        | Strongly Agree | Very High                  |
| 35. Lack of awareness of the program affects enrolment.                 | 4.00        | 4.00        | 0.953        | Agree          | High                       |
| 36. Stronger marketing could help attract more students.                | 4.42        | 5.00        | 0.793        | Strongly Agree | Very High                  |
| 37. Graduate school events (e.g., research congress) increase interest. | 3.08        | 3.00        | 0.996        | Neutral        | Moderate                   |
| 38. More alumni success stories should be highlighted.                  | 3.58        | 4.00        | 1.379        | Agree          | High                       |
| 39. Offering flexible class schedules would increase retention.         | 4.67        | 5.00        | 0.492        | Strongly Agree | Very High                  |
| 40. I suggest conducting surveys regularly to gather feedback.          | 4.33        | 4.50        | 0.778        | Strongly Agree | Very High                  |
| <b>Overall Mean</b>                                                     | <b>4.18</b> | <b>4.19</b> | <b>0.457</b> | <b>Agree</b>   | <b>High</b>                |

These data suggest that while the program is perceived as affordable overall (as seen in the institutional factors), external or personal financial pressures still present a considerable barrier to retention for some students. The consistently high score for financial issues as a dropout factor highlights the importance of sustaining and possibly expanding scholarship and financial assistance initiatives. Meanwhile, the lower rating for graduate school events indicates that such activities may not yet be positioned or perceived as strong drivers of enrollment or retention, perhaps due to limited awareness, irregular scheduling, or a lack of direct connection to students' immediate academic or professional goals.

The implication for program improvement is twofold: first, continue and enhance financial aid efforts, possibly exploring new sponsorship or partnership models to support students at risk of dropping out due to economic hardship; and second, reimagine graduate school events to make them more appealing, relevant, and accessible. This might involve integrating them into coursework, featuring high-profile guest speakers, or linking them explicitly to professional development outcomes to increase perceived value.

These insights are consistent with recent research emphasizing that financial challenges remain a primary driver of student attrition, even in affordable programs. For example, Asplund et al. (2021) found that financial strain—whether from tuition, opportunity cost, or personal expenses—significantly influences dropout rates in graduate education. Similarly, Zainuddin et al. (2022) noted that while extracurricular academic events can boost engagement, their impact depends heavily on alignment with student needs and career trajectories. Finally, findings from Torres and Waters (2023) underscore that institutions that connect co-curricular activities to tangible professional benefits see higher participation and stronger retention outcomes, reinforcing the need for strategic planning in graduate event design.

## PART 2: FOR POTENTIAL ENROLLEES

**Table 6**  
**Awareness and Interest**

| Indicators                                                                     | Mean        | Median      | SD           | Description           | Qualitative Interpretation |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| 41. I am aware that SMCII offers a Master of Arts in Education (MAEd) program. | 4.33        | 5.00        | 1.231        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 42. I know about the different specializations offered under the MAEd.         | 4.42        | 4.50        | 0.669        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 43. I have visited the SMCII website or social media for program information.  | 4.00        | 4.50        | 1.348        | Agree                 | High                       |
| 44. I have seen advertisements or announcements about the MAEd program.        | 4.67        | 5.00        | 0.651        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 45. I am interested in pursuing graduate studies at SMCII.                     | 4.75        | 5.00        | 0.452        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 46. I would like more detailed information before making a decision.           | 4.92        | 5.00        | 0.289        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 47. I heard positive feedback about the program from colleagues or friends.    | 4.75        | 5.00        | 0.622        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 48. I consider location and accessibility in choosing a graduate school.       | 4.75        | 5.00        | 0.622        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| <b>Overall Mean</b>                                                            | <b>4.57</b> | <b>4.69</b> | <b>0.444</b> | <b>Strongly Agree</b> | <b>Very High</b>           |

The highest-rated indicator in the “Awareness and Interest” category for potential enrollees was “*I would like more detailed information before making a decision*”, with a mean score of 4.92 and a low standard deviation of 0.289. This shows an overwhelming and consistent desire among potential students for comprehensive program details prior to enrollment, indicating that while interest is high, the decision to commit relies heavily on the clarity and completeness of information provided. In contrast, the lowest-rated indicator was “*I have visited the SMCII website or social media for program information*”, which received a mean score of 4.00 and the highest standard deviation in this category at 1.348. While this still reflects agreement, the lower mean and high variability suggest that not all prospective students actively seek information through SMCII’s online channels, with some relying on alternative sources or having yet to engage in research.

These findings suggest that while potential enrollees are generally aware of and interested in the MAEd program, there is a significant opportunity to bridge the gap between awareness and active information-seeking. The strong consensus on the need for more detailed program information underscores the importance of transparent, easily accessible, and comprehensive marketing materials. Meanwhile, the lower engagement with the official website and social media points to a need for more targeted and appealing digital outreach strategies to capture and sustain the attention of prospective students.

The implication for recruitment strategy is that SMCII should enhance both the visibility and depth of its program-related content across various platforms. This could involve not only optimizing the website and social media pages but also diversifying communication channels—such as hosting webinars, sending direct informational packets, or engaging in partnerships with schools and professional organizations—to meet the different ways potential enrollees prefer to receive information. By ensuring that interested individuals have easy access to all necessary program details, the institution can more effectively convert interest into actual enrollment.

These results are supported by recent research highlighting the role of comprehensive, targeted information in influencing graduate program choice. For instance, Stewart and Dwyer (2021) found that prospective students are more likely to commit when institutions provide detailed, program-



specific information that addresses academic content, costs, and career outcomes. Similarly, studies by Kaur and Sidhu (2022) emphasize that the quality and accessibility of online information directly affect prospective students' perceptions and enrollment decisions. Moreover, Chen et al. (2023) note that while social media presence is important, engagement is maximized when content is interactive, visually appealing, and directly relevant to the audience's decision-making needs.

**Table 7**  
**Perceptions of Program Value**

| Indicators                                                                    | Mean        | Median      | SD           | Description    | Qualitative Interpretation |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|----------------|----------------------------|
| 49. I believe that an MAEd degree can boost my career.                        | 3.50        | 3.00        | 1.446        | Agree          | High                       |
| 50. A master's degree is necessary in today's competitive job market.         | 4.42        | 4.50        | 0.669        | Strongly Agree | Very High                  |
| 51. I believe SMCII provides a high-quality education.                        | 4.50        | 5.00        | 0.674        | Strongly Agree | Very High                  |
| 52. The specialization options are appealing to me.                           | 4.42        | 5.00        | 0.900        | Strongly Agree | Very High                  |
| 53. I prefer a school that offers updated and relevant programs.              | 3.58        | 4.00        | 1.564        | Agree          | High                       |
| 54. I think public schools recognize degrees from SMCII.                      | 4.17        | 4.50        | 0.937        | Agree          | High                       |
| 55. The school's accreditation and reputation influence my decision.          | 4.42        | 5.00        | 0.793        | Strongly Agree | Very High                  |
| 56. I would be more interested if the program offered more industry linkages. | 4.58        | 5.00        | 0.669        | Strongly Agree | Very High                  |
| <b>Overall Mean</b>                                                           | <b>4.20</b> | <b>3.94</b> | <b>0.690</b> | <b>Agree</b>   | <b>High</b>                |

The table shows the highest-rated indicator in the "Perceptions of Program Value" category for potential enrollees was *"I would be more interested if the program offered more industry linkages"*, with a mean score of 4.58 and a standard deviation of 0.669. This indicates strong agreement that practical connections with industry and professional networks would enhance the appeal of the MAEd program, with relatively low variability showing consistent sentiment across respondents. In contrast, the lowest-rated indicator was *"I believe that an MAEd degree can boost my career"*, which had a mean score of 3.50 and a standard deviation of 1.446. Although still interpreted as "High," this comparatively lower rating and high variability reveal mixed perceptions about the degree's direct career impact, suggesting that while some potential enrollees see strong professional benefits, others are less convinced or unsure.

These findings highlight two critical points for recruitment strategy. First, there is a strong market demand for graduate programs that integrate academic learning with industry engagement, such as partnerships, internships, and collaborative projects. This suggests that increasing industry linkages could significantly strengthen SMCII's competitive positioning and enrollment appeal. Second, the mixed views on career benefits point to a possible gap in communicating the tangible outcomes of earning an MAEd degree. Some prospective students may need clearer evidence—such as alumni success stories, career advancement data, or employer testimonials—to connect the degree with real-world career growth.

It implies that SMCII should strategically emphasize both the career relevance of its MAEd program and its potential for professional advancement. This can be achieved by integrating industry collaborations into the curriculum and explicitly marketing these partnerships as part of the program's value proposition. At the same time, the institution should develop targeted messaging and materials

that clearly demonstrate how past graduates have leveraged the degree to achieve career milestones, thus addressing skepticism among less convinced prospects.

These results align with recent literature showing that graduate program appeal is closely linked to perceived employability and industry relevance. For example, Tran and Vu (2021) found that industry partnerships significantly enhance graduate program attractiveness by improving real-world applicability. Similarly, De Clercq et al. (2022) noted that prospective students' enrollment intentions are strongly influenced by evidence of career outcomes and professional advancement opportunities. Moreover, Kim and Maloney (2023) emphasized that graduate institutions that actively communicate success stories and labor market alignment tend to achieve higher enrollment conversion rates, underscoring the importance of both practical linkages and targeted career impact messaging.

**Table 8**  
**Specialization Relevance and Expectations**

| Indicators                                                                      | Mean        | Median      | SD           | Description           | Qualitative Interpretation |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| 57. The available specializations match current educational trends.             | 4.25        | 4.00        | 0.754        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 58. I prefer programs aligned with DepEd priority areas.                        | 4.25        | 4.00        | 0.754        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 59. I am looking for specialization in areas like SPED, Tech, or Curriculum.    | 4.25        | 4.00        | 0.866        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 60. I expect the specialization to have practical application in the classroom. | 3.92        | 4.00        | 0.793        | Agree                 | High                       |
| 61. I think some majors are not clearly explained in ads.                       | 4.33        | 4.00        | 0.651        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 62. If new specializations were offered, I would be more likely to apply.       | 4.50        | 5.00        | 0.674        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 63. I want to learn skills that are useful in educational leadership.           | 4.58        | 5.00        | 0.669        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 64. I would like to see the syllabus or curriculum before applying.             | 4.33        | 4.50        | 0.778        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| <b>Overall Mean</b>                                                             | <b>4.30</b> | <b>4.50</b> | <b>0.590</b> | <b>Strongly Agree</b> | <b>Very High</b>           |

For Specialization Relevance and Expectations, the highest mean was recorded for the indicator “*I want to learn skills that are useful in educational leadership*” ( $M = 4.58$ ,  $SD = 0.669$ ), interpreted as Strongly Agree with a Very High qualitative interpretation. This suggests that MAEd students place significant importance on acquiring leadership skills, aligning with the findings of Abduh (2022), who emphasized that graduate students prioritize competencies that enhance both instructional and managerial capacities. Conversely, the lowest mean was found in the statement “*I expect the specialization to have practical application in the classroom*” ( $M = 3.92$ ,  $SD = 0.793$ ), interpreted as Agree with a High qualitative interpretation. While still positive, this indicates a relatively lesser—though still notable—emphasis on direct classroom applicability compared to broader skill development. The overall mean of 4.30 ( $SD = 0.590$ ) reflects Strongly Agree and Very High qualitative interpretation, indicating that the respondents generally perceive the offered specializations as relevant, aligned with educational trends, and capable of meeting their professional expectations, echoing the conclusions of Bautista et al. (2021) on the role of specialization in sustaining graduate program enrollment and retention.

The results reveal that among the financial and structural considerations, the highest mean rating was for the expectation of efficient and supportive administrative staff ( $M = 4.25$ ,  $SD = 0.754$ ), interpreted as *Very High*. This is followed by three indicators with equal mean scores: the preference for a program that allows studying while working ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 0.835$ ), preference for modern facilities ( $M =$

4.17, SD = 0.835), and desire for institutions that communicate updates regularly (M = 4.17, SD = 0.835), all with a *High* qualitative interpretation. The lowest-rated items, each with a mean of 3.83 (SD = 0.835), were the preference for schools offering flexible payment options and the need for scholarship or financial aid to enroll, both of which were still interpreted as *High*. The overall mean score was 4.05 (SD = 0.616), suggesting that respondents generally *Agree* that financial and structural aspects significantly influence their decision.

**Table 9**  
**Financial and Structural Considerations**

| Indicators                                                          | Mean        | Median      | SD           | Description    | Qualitative Interpretation |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|----------------|----------------------------|
| 65. Tuition cost is a big factor in my decision.                    | 4.00        | 4.00        | 0.739        | Agree          | High                       |
| 66. I would prefer a school that offers flexible payment options.   | 3.83        | 4.00        | 0.835        | Agree          | High                       |
| 67. I would need scholarship or financial aid to enroll.            | 3.83        | 4.00        | 0.835        | Agree          | High                       |
| 68. I prefer schools with weekend or online classes.                | 4.00        | 4.00        | 1.206        | Agree          | High                       |
| 69. I would choose a program that allows me to study while working. | 4.17        | 4.00        | 0.835        | Agree          | High                       |
| 70. I expect efficient and supportive administrative staff.         | 4.25        | 4.00        | 0.754        | Strongly Agree | Very High                  |
| 71. I prefer a graduate school with modern facilities.              | 4.17        | 4.00        | 0.835        | Agree          | High                       |
| 72. I want an institution that communicates updates regularly.      | 4.17        | 4.00        | 0.835        | Agree          | High                       |
| <b>Overall Mean</b>                                                 | <b>4.05</b> | <b>4.00</b> | <b>0.616</b> | Agree          | High                       |

The prominence of administrative efficiency indicates that respondents value smooth and supportive processes in their academic journey as much as, or even more than, financial aspects. Meanwhile, the strong preference for work-study-compatible programs, modern facilities, and timely communication reflects the need for practicality, accessibility, and technological readiness in graduate education. The lowest-rated yet still high-scoring indicators—flexible payment options and financial aid—imply that while financial considerations matter, they are not the sole determinants compared to operational and structural qualities of the institution. The relatively low standard deviations, except for the preference for weekend or online classes (SD = 1.206), indicate a high level of agreement among respondents, with slight variability in certain lifestyle-related preferences.

These findings suggest that prospective students place strong emphasis on administrative competence, flexible learning modalities, and institutional modernity as part of their decision-making. While tuition and payment flexibility are important, respondents appear to prioritize institutional support systems and infrastructure over purely financial incentives. The variability in responses for weekend or online classes indicates differing schedules and lifestyle needs, possibly due to variations in work commitments or personal circumstances. This aligns with the evolving expectations of graduate learners, who seek not only affordability but also convenience, adaptability, and efficiency in service delivery.

This outcome resonates with recent literature emphasizing that institutional support services and infrastructural readiness are critical in student satisfaction and retention (Baker et al., 2021; Flores & Gonzalez, 2022). In a post-pandemic academic landscape, structural flexibility and efficient communication have become decisive factors in school choice, often equaling or surpassing purely financial considerations. Moreover, the balance between affordability and quality service delivery

reflects the modern learner's pragmatic approach—valuing an institution not only for cost-effectiveness but for the ease, support, and adaptability it offers throughout the learning experience.

**Table 10**  
**Enrolment Decision-Making and Recommendations**

| Indicators                                                                     | Mean        | Median      | SD           | Description           | Qualitative Interpretation |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| 73. I am still undecided on where to pursue graduate studies.                  | 4.83        | 5.00        | 0.389        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 74. I would choose SMCII if it offered more promotional webinars.              | 4.83        | 5.00        | 0.389        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 75. An orientation or info session would help me decide.                       | 4.75        | 5.00        | 0.452        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 76. I would benefit from testimonials of alumni and current students.          | 4.58        | 5.00        | 0.669        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 77. I think the lack of promotion contributes to lower enrolment.              | 4.75        | 5.00        | 0.452        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 78. A more active online presence could increase awareness.                    | 4.75        | 5.00        | 0.452        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 79. I suggest SMCII partners with schools or divisions to reach more teachers. | 4.67        | 5.00        | 0.492        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| 80. I would like to receive personalized guidance in choosing a major.         | 4.75        | 5.00        | 0.452        | Strongly Agree        | Very High                  |
| <b>Overall Mean</b>                                                            | <b>4.74</b> | <b>5.00</b> | <b>0.397</b> | <b>Strongly Agree</b> | <b>Very High</b>           |

The results reveal that the highest mean score ( $M = 4.83$ ,  $SD = 0.389$ ) was shared by two indicators: “*I am still undecided on where to pursue graduate studies*” and “*I would choose SMCII if it offered more promotional webinars.*” Both statements, rated *Strongly Agree* with a *Very High* qualitative interpretation, highlight that many potential enrollees are still in a decision-making phase and that targeted promotional activities could directly influence their final choice of institution. The lowest mean ( $M = 4.58$ ,  $SD = 0.669$ ) was recorded for “*I would benefit from testimonials of alumni and current students*”, which, although still rated *Strongly Agree*, suggests that while testimonials are appreciated, they may be perceived as less influential compared to interactive promotional efforts like webinars and orientations. The overall mean for this domain ( $M = 4.74$ ,  $SD = 0.397$ ) falls within the *Strongly Agree* category, indicating a generally high agreement among respondents that strategic interventions can significantly improve enrolment decisions.

The shared highest mean of 4.83 suggests two critical needs: first, the existence of a large pool of potential enrollees who are not yet fully committed to a graduate program, and second, the potential of well-structured, informative promotional webinars to convert indecision into commitment. Webinars provide a platform for direct engagement, Q&A sessions, and showcasing program strengths, which aligns with findings from Flores and Ceniza (2022), who observed that interactive online sessions significantly improved enrolment conversion rates in higher education. The lowest mean of 4.58 for alumni and student testimonials, while still high, may indicate that such narratives serve more as supplementary reinforcement rather than as primary decision-making triggers.

The results imply that SMCII could benefit from adopting a more proactive, multi-channel enrolment strategy that emphasizes live promotional events, orientations, and partnerships with feeder institutions. Given that the respondents expressed strong agreement across all indicators, the data suggests that these initiatives would not only help undecided students but also strengthen institutional presence in the competitive graduate education market. Personalized guidance in choosing a major ( $M$

= 4.75) and fostering an active online presence ( $M = 4.75$ ) also emerged as equally strong needs, highlighting that decision-making is both informational and relational in nature.

Recent studies support these findings. Gonzales et al. (2023) emphasized that personalized enrolment advising combined with targeted digital marketing campaigns significantly increases program awareness and student confidence in their choice of school. Similarly, Li and Kim (2021) reported that interactive online engagements, including webinars and virtual orientations, resulted in higher application and retention rates compared to static promotional materials. This aligns closely with the present results, underscoring that SMCII's adoption of a more dynamic outreach model could bridge the gap between awareness and actual enrolment, ultimately boosting retention by securing students who feel informed, welcomed, and guided from the outset.

**Table 11**  
**Summary of the Indicators**

| Indicators                                       | Mean | Median | SD    | Description    | Qualitative Interpretation |
|--------------------------------------------------|------|--------|-------|----------------|----------------------------|
| A. Awareness and Decision to Enroll              | 4.53 | 4.75   | 0.450 | Strongly Agree | Very High                  |
| B. Program Quality and Satisfaction              | 4.55 | 4.69   | 0.393 | Strongly Agree | Very High                  |
| C. Specialization Appeal and Relevance           | 3.70 | 3.69   | 0.501 | Agree          | High                       |
| D. Institutional Factors                         | 4.77 | 4.94   | 0.310 | Strongly Agree | Very High                  |
| E. Barriers and Suggestions                      | 4.18 | 4.19   | 0.457 | Agree          | High                       |
| F. Awareness and Interest                        | 4.57 | 4.69   | 0.444 | Strongly Agree | Very High                  |
| G. Perceptions of Program Value                  | 4.20 | 3.94   | 0.690 | Agree          | High                       |
| H. Specialization Relevance and Expectations     | 4.30 | 4.50   | 0.590 | Strongly Agree | Very High                  |
| I. Financial and Structural Considerations       | 4.05 | 4.00   | 0.616 | Agree          | High                       |
| J. Enrolment Decision-Making and Recommendations | 4.74 | 5.00   | 0.397 | Strongly Agree | Very High                  |

The data reveal that Institutional Factors recorded the highest mean score of 4.77 ( $SD = 0.310$ ), interpreted as *Very High*, indicating that respondents place strong emphasis on the reputation, facilities, policies, and support systems of the institution in their decision to enroll. This aligns with recent literature, such as that of Chen et al. (2021), which emphasizes that institutional credibility and infrastructure significantly influence graduate student retention and enrollment decisions. On the other hand, Specialization Appeal and Relevance obtained the lowest mean score of 3.70 ( $SD = 0.501$ ), rated *High*, suggesting that while students generally agree on the importance of specialization alignment with career goals, it may not be the foremost deciding factor compared to institutional strengths. This finding is consistent with the study of Ramirez and Tuazon (2022), which found that while specialization relevance remains important, students often prioritize institutional prestige, program quality, and accessibility. Overall, the results suggest that enrollment and retention strategies for MAEd programs should leverage institutional strengths while improving efforts to highlight and communicate the value and uniqueness of the program's specializations.

***Interview Question 1: Can you describe the factors that most influenced your decision to stop or consider stopping your enrollment in the MAEd program at SMCII?***

The participants shared that the decision to discontinue or consider stopping their enrollment in the MAEd program at SMCII was mainly driven by financial limitations due to family needs, health-related financial burden, increased work demands, financial reprioritization, and basic needs over

education. All these pointed to a central theme: family-centered priorities shaped by financial and work constraints.

**Table 12**  
**Factors Influencing MAEd Discontinuation**

| Common Responses                                                                                                                                                    | Axial Codes                               | Theme                                                                |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>I have two kids in school, and their tuition alone takes most of my salary. As much as I want to finish my MAEd, my children's education has to come first.</i>  | Financial limitations due to family needs | Family-centered priorities shaped by financial and work constraints. |
| <i>My father got sick, and I had to shoulder a big part of the medical expenses. I couldn't keep up with the tuition anymore while helping with hospital bills.</i> | Health-related financial burden           |                                                                      |
| <i>My workload at school doubled this year, and I couldn't balance lesson planning, family time, and my graduate studies.</i>                                       | Increased work demands                    |                                                                      |
| <i>When my husband lost his job, I became the sole provider. We had to let go of some expenses, and sadly, my MAEd was one of them.</i>                             | Financial reprioritization                |                                                                      |
| <i>I often had to choose between paying my tuition or buying groceries for the family. Family always comes first.</i>                                               | Basic needs over education                |                                                                      |

These responses painted a clear picture of how life circumstances often outweighed academic goals. Many of the participants still carried the desire to finish their graduate degree, but family responsibilities and financial pressures left them with little choice. The stories revealed that when personal, professional, and academic roles collided, graduate studies often became the sacrifice. Workload demands, especially when paired with financial struggles, created a situation where time, energy, and resources simply could not stretch far enough. This meant that graduate education was never just an individual journey—it was deeply tied to the realities of home, work, and community life. The decision to pause or leave the program was not a sign of a lack of commitment, but a reflection of priorities rooted in love and responsibility. When faced with situations like paying for children's tuition, covering medical bills, or simply ensuring there was food on the table, participants consistently placed their families' needs first.

Added to that, heavier workloads left them exhausted, making it even harder to devote the focus and energy required for academic success. Reyes and Mendoza (2023) found that working graduate students often left their studies when financial obligations to their families became too great, especially when they were the main source of income. Likewise, Tan and Villanueva (2024) observed that unexpected family crises and heavier professional workloads frequently disrupted graduate students' academic journeys, as maintaining family well-being took priority over continuing education.

***Interview Question 2: "What specific reasons led you to decide not to enroll or to discontinue your studies at SMCII, and what changes might encourage you to reconsider?"***

Participants shared that their decision to pause or discontinue their MAEd studies at SMCII stemmed from several key factors: difficulty balancing career and studies, loss of income and financial instability, financial redirection to medical needs, shift in priorities to childcare, and career opportunity abroad. These axial codes reflected the central theme of life, work, and financial realities influencing decisions to stop or delay enrollment, alongside suggestions for flexibility and support. Many also suggested potential program adjustments—such as weekend or evening classes, installment payment

plans, scholarships for working students, part-time study options, online classes, and re-entry programs—that could make returning to graduate school more feasible.

**Table 13**  
**Factors Influencing MAEd Discontinuation and Suggested Program Improvements**

| Common Responses                                                                                                                                                                        | Axial Codes                              | Theme                                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Balancing my job and graduate studies became too overwhelming, especially when my workload doubled. If the program offered more weekend or evening classes, I could manage both.</i> | Difficulty balancing career and studies  |                                                                                                                                           |
| <i>I was laid off from my job, and with no stable income, I couldn't pay for tuition. If there were installment plans or more scholarships for working students, I'd return.</i>        | Loss of income and financial instability | Life, work, and financial realities influencing decisions to stop or delay enrollment, alongside suggestions for flexibility and support. |
| <i>My father got sick, and I became the primary provider for my family. If there were part-time study options, I could balance caregiving and my degree.</i>                            | Financial redirection to medical needs   |                                                                                                                                           |
| <i>I got pregnant during my second semester, and I had to focus on my health and baby. If there were online classes or a re-entry program for new mothers, I'd go back.</i>             | Shift in priorities to childcare         |                                                                                                                                           |
| <i>I had to stop because my contract work abroad started earlier than expected. If there were online modules for overseas students, I would keep studying.</i>                          | Career opportunity abroad                |                                                                                                                                           |

These responses revealed that students' academic journeys were deeply intertwined with life transitions and unforeseen events. While the desire to continue studying remained strong, the lack of flexible options made it difficult for them to adapt when major personal or financial changes occurred. The fact that many participants were able to clearly suggest solutions indicated that their withdrawal was not an act of giving up but rather a pause until conditions became more accommodating. These narratives showed that the challenge was not merely academic performance—it was about fitting graduate studies into the complex realities of adulthood.

The findings suggested that SMCII's MAEd program could benefit from more flexible structures that acknowledge the competing demands of working adult learners. This was not about lowering academic standards but about adjusting delivery modes and support systems to keep education accessible during life's disruptions. For example, online modules could help overseas workers continue their learning, while installment plans and scholarships could ease the financial pressure. Re-entry programs for new parents could also address a major gap in student retention. Ultimately, these stories reflected a clear truth: students often leave not because they have lost the will to learn, but because life circumstances demand immediate attention.

Recent research confirmed these patterns. Mendoza and Mendoza (2023) found that working graduate students often struggled to manage both employment and academic demands, especially when financial stability was compromised. Quecanao, Rincón, and Barragán (2024) reported that program flexibility—through online learning, part-time options, and flexible scheduling—significantly improved retention among postgraduate students facing family or work responsibilities. Similarly, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED, 2023) highlighted that rising tuition costs and lack of targeted financial aid contributed to attrition, but adaptive delivery modes and support programs encouraged students to return and complete their studies.

## CONCLUSION

The research on the Master of Arts in Education (MAEd) program at SMCII has revealed critical insights into the factors influencing student enrollment, retention, and discontinuation. The findings indicate that financial challenges, such as family obligations, job loss, and increased work demands, are the most significant reasons for students' decisions to stop or delay their graduate studies. These external pressures highlight the complex intersection of life, work, and academic responsibilities that many adult learners face.

Additionally, the study underscores the need for more flexible academic structures that align with the realities of adult learners. The suggestions from participants, including weekend/evening classes, installment payment plans, online learning options, and re-entry programs for new parents, reflect the growing demand for more adaptive, accessible graduate education. By addressing these needs, SMCII could not only increase retention rates but also enhance the overall student experience, helping learners to balance academic goals with personal and professional challenges.

The institutional factors, such as affordability and academic support, were also positively rated, reinforcing the importance of maintaining low tuition costs and efficient administrative services. However, improvements in communication consistency and support for working professionals could further improve the overall student experience and contribute to higher retention rates.

The results emphasize the importance of aligning graduate education with the evolving needs of students. As demonstrated by recent research, providing clear, flexible, and comprehensive support for students facing external challenges can significantly enhance both student satisfaction and enrollment outcomes.

## Recommendations

1. Integrate flexible learning options like online modules and part-time study programs.
2. Offer financial support systems such as scholarships, installment payment plans, and targeted financial aid.
3. Improve student communication regarding program updates and academic support.
4. Consider introducing re-entry programs for students who need to pause their studies for family or financial reasons.

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