

A Tracer Study of the Business Graduate Programs of a Catholic University in the Philippines

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Abstract

The success of any degree program being delivered by higher education institutions is measured using the employment performance of its graduates as they navigate the dynamic labor market after completion of their studies. The tool used to gauge this metric is known as a graduate tracer study. Thus, this explanatory sequential mixed methods study may provide the graduate school the baseline employment information, the extent of practice of program competencies and demonstration of graduate attributes of business management major graduates spanning the years 2017-2021 and their level of satisfaction with the graduate programs. The results revealed that outcomes were achieved by the graduates as the graduate degree contributes to their development of competencies and these graduates were extremely satisfied with the delivery and implementation of the programs. They also demonstrated the attributes in their workplace. The results of the study are consistent with the emerging framework of the quality delivery of business graduate programs. It upholds that the satisfaction of the graduates in the delivery, and instruction of the programs, will result in the development of competencies, unlocking of knowledge, skills, and abilities and improve the social and economic status of the graduates.

Keywords: tracer study, business graduate studies, competencies, graduate attributes, career development, explanatory sequential method, Philippines

1. Introduction

Tracer studies or graduate surveys are tools to assess graduates' journey after degree program completion (Schomburg, 2016). Tracer studies determine the relevance of a curriculum and extend projected benefits to graduates to improve the marketability and sustainability of post-graduate studies. In addition, graduate tracer studies can provide pertinent and beneficial information for assessing the outcomes of the education and training of a specific institution of higher education (Woya, 2019). At present, there is an extensive pool of tertiary graduates; however, many lack the appropriate skills and attributes required for successful employment. Many countries with limited resources struggle, reflective of their employment rates (The World Bank, 2017).

Countries like China, India, and Brazil have restructured their tertiary education systems to enhance their reach and efficacy. In Indonesia, the low level of labor productivity, the lack of coordination between the labor market and education, the changing socio-economic system and global political impact on the labor market, and the fast evolution of science and technology have all resulted in elemental changes in terms of qualifications, competencies, and conditions for joining the workforce (Chandra et al., 2013).

In the Philippines, with the evolution of job markets in complexity over time, (HEIs) have recognized that bachelor's degrees are no longer enough to endow graduates with the competitive advantage that enables them to occupy positions in their respective industries, compared to their peers

Given the implementation of Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum No. 15, Series of 2019, which covers government-backed promulgation of policies, standards, and guidelines for graduate programs, it becomes necessary for the local catholic university to evaluate the landscape for graduate studies in light of rapid advancement in education as marked by the 21st century, and exactly how these graduate studies have contributed to graduates' pursuit of their careers within job markets. An investigation of the employment attributes and career backgrounds of the graduates of Visayas State University's graduate degree programs and their feedback on their curricular experiences at the university was conducted (Cagasan et al., 2017).

In a study by Calma (2020), the job status of one university's graduates was determined from 2014 to 2018 for the

Master in Business Administration (MBA) program at Bulacan. Using reviewed research and literature, the study investigates the employability and competencies of MBA graduates. It details the difficulties faced by most employers when choosing candidates for positions that call for MBA degrees (Buenviaje et al., 2016). Further the tracer study conducted by Cervantes et al. (2019) was on the employability of College of Business, Entrepreneurship and Accountancy graduates. Study was conducted to determine whether graduates from the university's master's in business programs similarly experience mismatch, underemployment, and promotion issues (Meñez, 2014). More precisely, it assessed the graduates' employment situations after completing the MBA program at Lyceum University between 2008 and 2012. The study by Quitevis et al. (2019) tracked the general and job statistics of graduates. In addition, it evaluated the delivery and implementation state of graduate school programs, the correlation aspect of chosen variables, and the abilities that graduates acquired while pursuing their Master's degrees that are most valuable in their current positions. While research has been spearheaded by Philippine HEIs conducting graduate tracer studies on multiple occasions, little attention has been given to the local context especially in the catholic university graduate school. Information that can gather from the journeys traversed by graduates of local HEIs is insufficient to contribute to building a local perspective of the circumstances, thus this study.

Hence, this explanatory sequential mixed method aimed to conduct a tracer study of the business Graduate Programs of a Catholic University in the Philippines. Specifically the study aimed to answer the questions on what is the demographic profile of the graduates, the employment characteristics of the graduates, the extent of contribution of graduate education to the acquisition and practice of the program competencies, the graduates' level of satisfaction with the delivery and implementation of the graduate school program in terms of the 4Ps of marketing and the extent of the practice of the university's graduate attributes as demonstrated in the workplace. Likewise, it explained the significant and congruent results of the quantitative phase through a qualitative inquiry.

2. Methodology

Worldview. The study anchored on post-positivism, social constructivism, and pragmatism philosophical underpinnings. Having used the explanatory sequential mixed method, the researcher prefers being pragmatic; both the post-positivist and constructivist worldviews acknowledge that the researcher is the expert and decides what needs to be learned to be objective. At the same time, the researcher acknowledges that the participant is the expert as they help build knowledge, and the researcher brings in personal bias and values (Creswell, 2018).

The researcher acquired the subjective meanings of the graduates' experiences-meanings oriented toward graduate school. Because these meanings are different and multiple, the researcher looked for the complexity of perspectives rather than categorizing them into a few categories or ideas. Throughout the investigation, the researcher acknowledges, owns, and explicitly deals with personal subjectivity (Boyland, 2019)

Research design. The researcher used the explanatory sequential mixed method. It entailed a two-part data collecting process. The researcher gathered quantitative data in the first phase, evaluated the results, and planned the second qualitative phase based on the findings. The quantitative findings usually guide the types of people that will be purposefully chosen for the qualitative phase and the questions that will be asked of them (Creswell, 2018).

Participants and sampling technique. In the quantitative phase convenience sampling was used to identify graduates who participated in the survey. The 56 graduates were recognized in the quantitative phase as respondents. In qualitative phase, purposive sampling was used to identify ten discussion partners from the quantitative phase respondents. The following inclusion criteria were utilized to choose conversation partners: such as with highest scores in contribution of graduate school education to the acquisition and practice of the program competencies, level of satisfaction with the delivery and implementation of the graduate school program and the extent of the practice of the university's graduate attributes. Representatives consisting of one from PhD and one from master's from different batches or year level were the identified participants.

Research instrument. In the quantitative phase, a survey questionnaire created by a researcher and an adapted questionnaire for attributes were employed. The validity and reliability of the researcher made questionnaire was examined by ten experts who conducted a Content-Validity Ratio (CVR) on the survey. These professionals were picked for their contributions to and knowledge of various aspects of business management. The CVI was 0.95, or the Content-Validity Index. For the reliability, Cronbach's alpha was employed to determine the instrument's reliability and obtained the following: for ratings and recommendations 0.895 (PhD) and 0.805 (Masters); for 4Ps 0.920 (PhD) and .884 (Masters); graduate attributes 0.946 (PhD) and 0.918 (Masters) reliability index which indicated that the instrument was reliable.

For the adapted survey questionnaire for attributes, the CVI overall mean result was 0.86, which means the

research instrument was valid and Cronbach's alpha was employed to determine the instrument's reliability and obtained a reliability index of 0.7 and above, which indicated that the instrument was reliable. In addition, a semi-structured interview guide was used during the interview for the qualitative phase.

Data collection. In the quantitative phase, the researcher sought permission from the President of the Catholic University. The researcher then identified the study's target respondent population upon the university president's approval. The researcher requested the list of graduates from 2017-2021 from the Registrar's Office. The researcher then prepared a web-based survey form and a printed form questionnaire the respondents chose. After the data were gathered, there was a series of tabulation and analysis, employing the statistical tools appropriate for the research questions.

In the qualitative phase, before the interview, the researcher thanked the participants for the discussion and introduced herself. The rationale, purpose, and processes were made clear to the participants. The researcher ensured that the participants were comfortable and not nervous. The researcher informed the participants of the following: that the interview would take approximately an hour or less online; that the interview would be recorded and transcribed; and that if the participants agreed that the interview would be recorded, there would be a series of interviews to attain the rigors of qualitative research.

Data analysis. For the quantitative phase, the descriptive analysis employed frequency count, percentage distribution, mean, and standard deviation for quantitative data analysis to analyze the tracer study data. Descriptive analysis was used in the data analysis because it aided in accurately describing, displaying, or summarizing data points so that patterns may appear that satisfy all of the data's requirements. Frequency and percentage statistics were used in the demographic profile and employment characteristics while the mean and standard deviation were used for the extent of contribution of graduate education, level of satisfaction and the extent of practice of the university's graduate attributes.

The quantitative phase's results served as the foundation for crafting the semi structured interview questions. An organized interview was held. Transcripts of digital recordings were made and thematically analyzed using Lichtman's three C's as a guide (2013). The researcher generated initial codes based on the significant statements and phrases that constitute categories and themes that surfaced. The researcher simultaneously identified and coded the text segments and themes from the participants' experiences. This generated different codes until the researcher developed many codes; redundant ones were taken as either one or renamed or modified.

Data Trustworthiness. The truthfulness, consistency, applicability, and neutrality of the qualitative data were maintained by applying the criteria for trustworthiness proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Where the semi-structured interview transcripts were delivered and validated, member checking was done to guarantee credibility by the dialogue partners. An audit trail was used to determine confirmability by an experienced auditor who examined the theme analysis to confirm the researchers' method and findings were addressed by deleting theme that was supported by few statements and added more statements that supported the themes.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Quantitative Results

3.1.1 Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 shows that many of the respondents have a degree of Masters in Business Administration, with 35.7% in the year 2018. This holds with the CHED's statistical data for an increasing post-graduate studies level of enrollment in 2018 offered by over 2,000 higher educational institutions in the country (Ofreneo, 2015).

Further, it shows an improvement in the position after pursuing graduate studies. A majority were promoted from rank and file to supervisors and executive managers. On the other hand, the reasons for pursuing further studies are professional growth and promotion or ranking. Most graduates have already established themselves as regular or permanent employees. This means that most graduate school alumni or graduates are already secure in their current positions (Quitevis et al., 2019). The employment position of the graduates before graduate studies was mostly rank and file, but after graduate studies, they were promoted to supervisors and executive managers.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the respondents

Variable	f	%
Age*		
Younger (42 years and below)	32	57.1
Older (43 years and above)	24	42.9
Sex		
Male	18	32.1
Female	38	67.9
Educational Background		
Accountancy	11	19.6
Marketing Management	11	19.6
Marketing	2	3.6
Financial Management	2	3.6
Hotel and Tourism Management	7	12.5
Others	23	41.1
College/University for their undergraduate degree		
Catholic School under study	21	37.5
From Other School	35	62.5
Degree from Graduate School		
MBA	25	44.6
MBA-HTM	5	8.9
MBA-HA	15	26.8
PhD Business Management	11	19.6
Year graduated from RBGS		
2017	18	32.1
2018	20	35.7
2019	9	16.1
2020	5	8.9
2021	4	7.1
Employment Position before Graduate Studies		
Executive/Manager	5	8.9
Supervisor/Department Head	16	28.6
Government Official	2	3.6
Rank and File	18	32.1
Others	12	21.4
Not Employed	3	5.4
Employment Position after Graduate Studies		
Executive/Manager	9	16.1
Supervisor/Department Head	21	37.5
Government Official	2	3.6
Managing Proprietor	1	1.8
Rank and File	10	17.9
Others	10	17.9
Not Employed	3	5.4
Reasons for pursuing further studies*		
Promotion and ranking	23	41.1
Professional growth	48	85.7
Salary increase	13	23.2
Prestige	7	12.5
Others	7	12.5
<i>Total</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Note. *Average age=42.1 years old; *multiple response

3.1.2 Employment Characteristics

Table 2 shows an improvement in the monthly income after pursuing graduate studies. As shown in the statistic result, before graduate studies, there were three graduates whose income was below Php 10,000 and 13 graduates whose monthly income was 71,000 and above. After graduate studies, there were no graduates whose income is below 10,000, and there were additional five graduates whose income improved to 71,000 and above. According to Mihail and Elefterie (2006), MBA programs positively impact job performance, compensation, employability, and skills. According to Harvard's Business Review, it is no secret that those with graduate degrees earn significantly more money than those without. While the average gain in earnings is 25%, attending the best MBA programs can enhance your compensation by 60-150 percent (Premuzic, 2020). True enough, the results of the study showed that most of the graduates' salaries increased after pursuing their graduate studies.

Table 2. Employment characteristics of the graduates

Variable	f	%
Monthly income range Before Graduate Studies		
below 10,000	3	5.4
10,000-20,999	14	25.0
21,000-30,999	13	23.2
31,000-40,999	6	10.7
41,000-50,999	2	3.6
51,000-60,999	2	3.6
61,000-70,999	3	5.4
71,000 and above	13	23.2
Monthly income range After Graduate Studies		
below 10,000	0	
10,000-20,999	5	8.9
21,000-30,999	16	28.6
31,000-40,999	6	10.7
41,000-50,999	6	10.7
51,000-60,999	3	5.4
61,000-70,999	2	3.6
71,000 and above	18	32.1

3.1.3 Extent of Contribution of Graduate Education to the Acquisition and Practice of the Program Competencies

Table 3A shows the extent of the contribution of graduate education to the acquisition and practice of the program competencies as evaluated by the graduates is very great extent when taken as a whole ($M=3.46$, $SD=0.50$) in terms of the Philippine qualification's framework number seven for Masters in Business Administration.

Among the variables, the address business decision with significance and relevance ranked first ($M=3.58$, $SD=0.58$). This denotes the very great extent contribution of graduate education in addressing business decisions with significance and relevance. In the same manner that schooling is a vital investment in human capital development, advanced graduate programs are likely to boost individuals' knowledge and abilities to be competent at work (Timiyo & Sriram, 2021).

Table 3A. Extent of contribution of graduate education to the acquisition and practice of the program competencies of MBA graduates

Variable	M	SD	Int
Address business decisions with significance and relevance	3.58	0.58	VGE
Perform business tasks with collaboration, competency, and efficiency.	3.51	0.55	VGE
Pursue creative, systematic, and scientific processes in developmental studies aligned to field of specialization in business.	3.47	0.59	VGE
Pursue independent studies in developmental studies aligned to the field of specialization in business	3.29	0.63	VGE
<i>Whole</i>	<i>3.46</i>	<i>0.50</i>	<i>VGE</i>

Note. VGE=Very Great Extent

Table 3B shows the extent of the contribution of graduate education to the acquisition and practice of the program competencies as evaluated by the graduates is very great extent when taken as a whole ($M=3.46$, $SD=0.50$ in terms of the Philippine qualifications framework number eight for Doctors in Philosophy. The PQF helped the graduates in their business decision-making under the higher-order thinking skills (HOTS).

Among the variables, the demonstration of a sense of business decisions with significance and relevance ranked first ($M=3.64$, $SD=0.50$). This signifies the very great extent of contribution of graduate education in demonstrating a sense of business decisions with significance and relevance. Employers expect having pursued further studies to mean having developed the skills in business decision-making. Having ranked as number one implies that graduate studies helped them achieve this goal to make business decisions and relevance in the workplace.

Any graduate education of uncertain assertion that the graduate school represents the pinnacle of the overall educational system, a graduate program necessitates a significant amount of effort in gaining specialized abilities in order to achieve degrees (Meñez, 2014).

Table 3B. Extent of contribution of graduate education to the acquisition and practice of the program competencies of PhD in business management graduates

Variable	M	SD	Int
Demonstrate a sense of business ethics in terms of accountability and responsibility	3.64	0.50	VGE
Address complex business decisions with significance and relevance	3.45	0.69	VGE
Pursue creative, systematic, and scientific processes in developmental studies aligned to the field of specialization in business	3.36	0.67	VGE
Communicate confidently and with proficiency in the business discipline	3.36	0.67	VGE
Extensive utilization of accountancy, business, and market research.	3.27	0.65	VGE
Whole	3.44	0.56	VGE

Note. VGE=Very Great Extent

3.1.4 Level of Satisfaction

Table 4 shows that the overall assessment of the level of satisfaction as evaluated by the graduates based on the 4Ps of the marketing mix is extremely satisfied when taken as a whole ($M=3.33$, $SD=0.50$). The results indicate that the stakeholders are extremely satisfied with the graduate school's product, process, people, and physical facilities.

Among the 4Ps of the marketing mix, the faculty qualification and administrative support under people ranked first (with an average $M=3.43$, $SD=0.53$). This signifies the extreme satisfaction of the graduates with the faculty qualification and administrative support. The importance of the faculty in the teaching and learning process cannot be overstated. This demonstrates that graduate school instructors can adequately teach the necessary skills and abilities (Quitevis, 2019). The graduates are extremely satisfied with the people; these include the administrative support. This is seconded by the study of Mahajan and Golahit (2017) that customer satisfaction is greatly influenced by the services offered by academic and administrative support personnel.

Table 4. Graduates' level of satisfaction with the delivery and implementation of the graduate school program

Variable	M	SD	Interpretation
Product			
Curriculum	3.43	0.57	Extremely Satisfied
Values Formation	3.41	0.63	Extremely Satisfied
Research Training	3.32	0.69	Extremely Satisfied
Average Mean	3.39	0.56	Extremely Satisfied
Process			
Vision, Mission, Goals	3.54	0.54	Extremely Satisfied
Thesis/Dissertation	3.39	0.62	Extremely Satisfied
Student Services	3.34	0.79	Extremely Satisfied
Delivery Instruction	3.29	0.76	Extremely Satisfied
Learning Management System	3.29	0.59	Extremely Satisfied
Average Mean	3.37	0.52	Extremely Satisfied
People			
Faculty Qualification	3.50	0.60	Extremely Satisfied
Administrative Support	3.36	0.55	Extremely Satisfied
Average Mean	3.43	0.53	Extremely Satisfied
Physical Facilities			
Library	3.38	0.68	Extremely Satisfied
Classroom	3.11	0.82	Very Satisfied
Internet Connectivity	2.91	0.88	Very Satisfied
Average Mean	3.13	0.67	Very Satisfied
Overall Mean	3.33	0.50	Extremely Satisfied

Note. Mean range: 1.00-1.75=Unsatisfied, 1.76-2.50=Slightly Satisfied, 2.51-3.25=Very Satisfied, 3.26-4.00=Extremely Satisfied

3.1.5 Extent of Practice of Graduate Attributes

Table 5 shows the extent of the practice of the University's graduate attributes, as demonstrated in the workplace when taken as a whole, is very great extent ($M=3.66$, $SD 0.32$). The result, in general, revealed that Recoletos de Bacolod Graduate School graduates practiced/demonstrated frequently the graduate attributes in their workplace. Graduate traits indicate students' desired features after completing their degrees at a higher education institution. All three categories must reflect the student's character, competently uphold those attributes to employers, and be able to put such characteristics into effect (Brosola, 2007).

It could be deduced from the impressive findings that the very great extent of practice of the university's graduate attributes as demonstrated in the workplace revealed that the graduate school has commendably developed and increased the attribute of morally healthy by transforming these graduates into people with high moral integrity who can help construct a just, peaceful, and humane society (Madrigal, 2015).

Table 5. Extent of the practice of the university's graduate attributes in the workplace

Graduate Attributes	M	SD	Interpretation
Morally healthy	3.78	0.34	Very great extent
Spiritually sound	3.73	0.39	Very great extent
Socially concerned	3.72	0.36	Very great extent
Intellectually inspired	3.67	0.46	Very great extent
Culturally conscious	3.66	0.42	Very great extent
Technically proficient	3.67	0.40	Very great extent
Physically healthy	3.59	0.44	Very great extent
Scholarly leaders of science	3.45	0.55	Very great extent
As a whole	3.66	0.32	Very great extent

3.2 Qualitative Results

The study utilizing an explanatory-sequential design also gathered qualitative data to deeply understand and validate the quantitative results. The qualitative phase of the study involved interviews of ten (10) participants: two for each year from 2017-2021, one each for an MBA, and one for a PhD. Four (4) central themes and seven (7) sub-themes were derived from the interviews.

Theme 1: Graduate education's contribution to the development of competencies

A graduate education's contribution to the development of competencies is unique because it builds on the basic knowledge and skills developed during the undergraduate course and its application and further honing during the employment phase. In graduate education, knowledge is further enhanced, strengthened, and applied in the work environment of the graduates.

“My masters in hospital administration. Personally, and professionally, the positive impact on different competencies works related or personal related. So, in terms of the graduate degree as far as work related competency in particular. It has affected the leadership aspect, being a government employee such as more on managerial and supervisory function the graduate studies. It had provided an avenue to enrich as a whole the basic knowledge or skills as well as attitude.” (Jose, personal communication, May 20, 2022)

Unlocking the knowledge, skills, and abilities. A pre-requisite for graduate education is work exposure in chosen fields and industries of specialization. The experience gained and perspective attained through this work exposure are critical in graduate education. As cited by Linda:

“The graduate degree was able to develop my competencies by additional knowledge and skills in terms of decision making, business planning and collaboration with my colleagues at work that I was able to apply in my current job.” (Linda, personal communication, May 14, 2022)

Many theories explicitly connect the importance of education as a means of investment in human capital formation that could result in economic development and productivity growth (Janer et al., 2015).

Theme 2: The graduates' experience in the delivery of quality education

The graduates' experience determines the level of satisfaction felt, directly proportional to the quality perceived in the education delivery obtained. Accordingly, as long as what is underwent by the graduates is recognized as positive, the greater the satisfaction. Consequently, the higher the quality is perceived during instruction.

Relevance of the curriculum to the needs of the stakeholders is always of great importance to review and ensure the quality of its implementation (Aquino et al., 2015). The MBA curriculum must address the capability of the students to venture with innovative ideas in business that would assist the organization in sustaining its progress. Magdalena states that:

“Curriculum and administration. Is a great accomplishment that is coupled with a struggle, and you know are help me get through with it. In terms of curriculum, it is well rounded as it covers all business disciplines useful in my field of work as to the administration, it ensures quality education is afforded to graduate students.” (Magdalena, personal communication, May 23, 2022)

Competent teachers. Observation and research show that competent graduate school professors have exposure in both the academe and industries in their fields of expertise. Such teachers can give examples of knowledge and skill applicability to their students and directions on extra-curricular, work-related endeavors to further hone their knowledge and skills. They can ably guide the students in the resolution of actual work issues. Monica states that:

“The teachers were experienced and skilled. There were a lot of activities given on top of the educational requirement, which were good for social development. I am extremely satisfied. There are a lot of reasons, but the main thing that stood out the most was the teacher-subject pairing. I would say that because of the competencies of the teachers in their handled subjects, the delivery and implementation of the course were more in-depth. They really get to share with you both the theory and the actual scenario at work, making you understand and pass the course altogether.” (Monica, personal communication, May 14, 2022)

Support system. Graduate education is challenging given the scenario that students have to balance the pursuit of this education and the demands of their career and their personal/family lives. The support system that adequately covers these concerns is an inclusive group that should include the university's administration – for concerns on curricula, facilities, and fees; faculty, especially the professors that directly teach the students; and

the students who almost always form an inner circle of support among themselves. They stated that:

“The formula in order to survive in order to learn more is having constant discipline and regular open dialogue and communication with our professors. The Dean and of course the academics staff, the support staff.” (Jose, personal communication, May 20, 2022)

“My experience in RBGS is really great since I have met different people that became my new friends and also competent professors that helped me achieve what I am today. Also, I have learned a lot of things that contribute to my professional growth.” (Elena, personal communication, May 22, 2022)

Theme 3: Helping graduates navigate in the practice of their profession through graduate attributes

The graduate attributes serve as a guide to students and graduates in their pursuit of professional development. These attributes determine how the university has successfully equipped them for professional skills deemed necessary in the workplace and their capacity to refine and hone such skills, even long after their studies. Magdalena affirms that:

“As the Faculty of Higher Learning Institution, these graduate attributes served as my guiding principle in the practice of my profession. I performed my duties and responsibilities effectively and efficiently. The advanced knowledge I gained are imported to my students. As a business professional and a teacher, I was able to develop the courage to continually do things that will help me learn and grow more. Whenever confronted with matters or issues, I decide objectively, and judgments are made without impartiality. Above all, I always make sure that I live a life that glorifies God.” (Magdalena, personal communication, May 23, 2022)

Practicing the values. As a Roman Catholic university, values education is integral to the curricula. In the work environment, the consistent practice of these values is severely tested with all the work-related issues and co-workers who do not share and practice Christian beliefs. During graduate education, these values are revisited, re-internalized, and reinforced, considering the work environment that makes the practice of these values challenging. They mentioned that:

“I was able to live out graduate attributes in the practice of my profession through supervising my staff and setting as an example to them. As well as sharing my knowledge and wisdom I have gained in order to have a complete staff work in the workplace.” (Elena, personal communication, May 22, 2022)

“I think above all the graduate attributes, the school’s embrace of Marian Devotion and Christ-centeredness were the things I live out the most. I work in sales; I have targets and expectations. It was easy to be tempted to say something untrue just to make a sale, but in my several years of experience, not once did I ever feel the need to lie or misrepresent. I do think highly of integrity because it was taught in school due to the love for Jesus.” (Monica, personal communication, May 14, 2022)

Employers are also involved in articulating a university’s own set of graduates’ attributes. The graduate’s characteristics give universities a clear picture of what competencies, attitudes, and skills are needed in the workplace, thus enabling their graduates to be employable. Universities need to involve employers to identify these attributes since, after graduation, the fate of the graduates to be employed lies in their hands and decides to hire them (Aquino et al., 2015). Virgie has to say:

“It has helped me to become the best person that I am. There are struggles but because of my faith coupled with prayers especially in my doctorate degree with the grace of God I overcame the struggle. It was manifested in my PhD degree I almost quit prior to my final defense and my graduation, I lost my husband but because all of my adviser, because of Dean Madrigal I was able to graduate.” (Virgie, personal communication, May 23, 2022)

Theme 4: Graduate studies contributed to graduates’ professional development

Employability of the graduates is one factor that determines the effectiveness of the delivery of services of an academic institution and its effort to provide quality in all its endeavors (Loquias, 2015). Educational institutions are expected to prepare students for employment or practice of the profession (Laguador, 2016). MBA graduates have so many job opportunities to be considered in the labor market, wherein the structure of every organization is grounded in business concepts and management principles.

Increase salary. In industries today, graduate education is a prime consideration in the salary upgrading of employees. For an employee who pursues graduate education, the message they are extending to the employer is:

I am career-oriented; I am a self-initiator for my training and development; I am freeing you from the burden of training me. On the part of the employer, these are savings on training initiated by the employee and critical inputs for the employee's salary upgrading. They positively affirmed that:

"My PhD degree contributed a lot in terms of income and position. I was able to spread my wings and get promoted and at the same time developed my skills." (May, personal communication, May 19, 2022)

"My income and position indeed improved when I took my further studies." (Rose, personal communication, May 19, 2022)

"My income and position significantly improved when I took the graduate studies." (Virgie, personal communication, May 23, 2022)

"Yes, it really did contribute to my career advancement since I was promoted from Accountant I to Accountant III." (Elena, personal communication, May 22, 2022)

Although career options continue to be broader than in many other fields and the acquired skills are marketable in just about any industry, new MBAs are entering a tight, competitive job market. The refined luster that MBAs once imparted often guaranteed a six-figure salary and signing bonus. However, the job scene is rough these days (Berdan, 2012).

Promotion. Employees slated for promotion are those with the right qualification, experience, and competence. Graduate studies are objective proof of an employee's qualification and competence, given that not anyone can just pursue graduate studies with the program's stringent qualification criteria. This promotion barometer is used in the private sector and academe and in the different government branches. They said:

"My PhD degree contributed a lot in terms of income and position. I was able to spread my wings and get promoted and at the same time developed my skills." (May, personal communication, May 19, 2022)

"My motivation was for personal growth and for my career. Especially during the time when I was in the Bureau of Internal Revenue as it really matters if you have Masters." (Linda, personal communication, May 14, 2022)

"Yes indeed because of the degrees earned I was able to advance in my career as a faculty and designated chairperson of the masters in graduate school." (Lucy, personal communication, May 20, 2022)

Many theories explicitly connect the importance of education as a means of investment in human capital formation that could result in economic development and productivity growth (Janer et al., 2015).

Alignment of the degree program with job requirement. Pursuing graduate studies is also an opportunity to align the competencies required for certain assignments or positions. An example is a professor tasked to handle an Accountancy Department whose graduate degree is not aligned with a business course. The professor can pursue a master's in business administration to align his competency with the requirement of his position. They mentioned that:

"I pursued MBA because it is the minimum requirement by CHED in order to teach accounting in the tertiary level." (Maria, personal communication, May 18, 2022)

"Ma'am I have already my PhD in Technology advancement, but I was not vertically aligned. Because of this, I got a scholarship and because of the expectations of CHAMSI, and with that right now the I was again assigned as the branch here all post the MBA and consequently because of the PhD in business management that I have earned." (Lucy, personal communication, May 20, 2022)

Lubis (2012) revealed that business graduates of LPU are in their respective lines of business-related jobs. They are technically capable of handling jobs assigned to them; their skills acquired from the school help them be productive in their present positions as they are mostly frontline employees. They were treated with respect, which gave them a sense of accomplishment.

3.3 Mixed Method Results

Based on the quantitative and qualitative findings, the following in meta-inferences were drawn:

The business graduate program develops the business competencies of the graduates. Graduate students' knowledge is improved, expanded, and applied in the workplace during their graduate studies. The primary driver of employability is the quality of graduates that a university produces, usually recognized in terms of

skills and abilities to perform a task competently. Universities must ensure that graduates' acquired skills and competencies align with society's labor market demands, which call for qualified workers (Rojas & Rojas, 2016). Numerous ideas explicitly link the value of education as an investment in the development of human capital that may lead to economic growth and productivity growth (Janer et al., 2015).

The business graduate program gained positive feedback from the graduates. The experience of the graduates impacts their degree of satisfaction, which is closely correlated to the perceived quality of the education they received. Therefore, the greater the satisfaction and, as a result, the higher the perceived quality in the course of teaching, so long as what is undergone by the graduates are considered positive. To review and assure the quality of its execution, it is always crucial to consider how relevant the curriculum is to the demands of the stakeholders (Aquino et al., 2015). The skill of the lecturer and the curriculum's structure or substance is rated as highest in the level of satisfaction. The curriculum and learning process is at the highest level, while the lack of a balance between theory and practice is a factor that alumni rate the curriculum and learning process at the lowest level (Abidin, 2015).

The business graduate program formed values essential to the practice of the graduates' profession. Graduates who are pursuing professional growth use the graduate qualities as a guide. These values determine how the university has successfully equipped students for professional abilities deemed important in the workplace and their potential to refine and hone such skills, even long after completing their education. Employers are also involved in articulating a university's own set of graduates' attributes. A study by Madrigal and Doromal (2014) showed that the participants grew into graduates with significant qualities. The findings demonstrated that there is a substantial process implementation in the creation of graduate attributes between students.

The business graduate program contributed to the career advancement of the graduates. Graduate education is becoming a major factor in industries when it comes to career advancement. The message a graduate student sends to an employer is the need for training and development and reward system thereafter. Employees who meet the necessary qualifications in terms of education, experience, and training are eligible for promotions. Graduate studies objectively affirm an employee's qualification and skill because only those who meet the program's high eligibility conditions are allowed to enroll in graduate programs. Along with business and academics, the various arms of government use this promotion barometer. The significance of education as an investment in human capital development that may result in economic growth and productivity growth is explicitly linked in several theories (Janer et al., 2015)

Table 6. Joint display of the quantitative and qualitative results

Quantitative Results	Qualitative Themes	Meta-inferences
Very great extent of contribution of graduate degree as to competencies	Theme 1. Graduate education's contribution to the development of competencies 1.1 Unlocking the knowledge, skills, and abilities	A. The business graduate program develops the business competencies of the graduates.
Extremely satisfied with the delivery and implementation of graduate programs	Theme 2. The graduates' experience in the delivery of quality education 2.1 Competent teachers 2.2 Support System 2.3 Library Facility	B. The business graduate program gained positive feedback from the graduates.
Very great extent practice of graduate attributes in the workplace	Theme 3. Helping graduates navigate in the practice of their profession through graduate attributes. 3.1. Practicing the values	C. The business graduate program formed values essential to the practice of the graduates' profession.
Graduate degree contributed to career advancement (rank and income)	Theme 4. Graduate studies contributed to graduates' professional development. 4.1 Increase salary 4.2 Promotion 4.3 Alignment of the degree program with job requirements	D. The business graduate program contributed to the career advancement of the graduates.

3.4 Emerging Framework

In the study of Genovate and Madrigal (2021), graduate studies are pursued by students all around the world for lifelong learning, career advancement, and professional growth. Universities encountered difficulties with increased expectations and industry competition on elements impacting satisfaction to improve graduate school service quality because these were seen as investments.

The paper proposes an emerging framework of stakeholders' satisfaction based on the delivery of business graduate programs. Because the graduate education's contribution to the development of competencies, unlocking knowledge, skills, and abilities opened the doors of opportunities for the graduates. According to the findings, the graduate business program established competency frameworks that target not only general graduate qualities but also values and attributes that the graduates may live out in the practice of their profession, enhancing their social, academic, and economic status because of the quality delivery of business graduate programs. If the stakeholders are satisfied, it may contribute to the increase in enrollment, market share, active alumni involvement, partnership, linkages, and quality management system. All of these will enhance the quality and sustainability of the delivery of the graduate business programs.

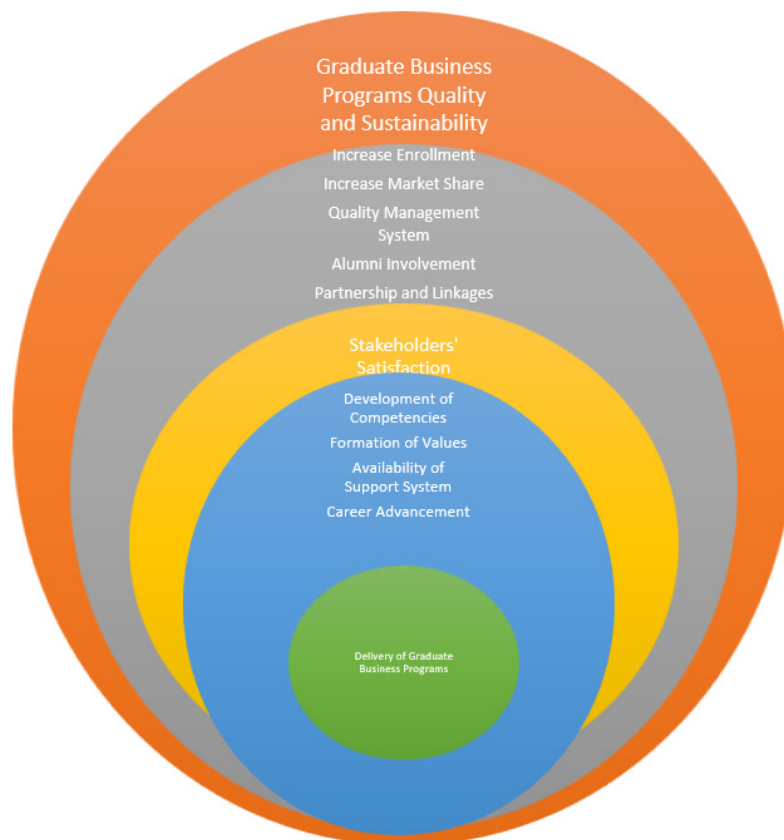


Figure 1. Stakeholders' satisfaction resulting to graduate business program's quality and sustainability

4. Conclusion

The results of the present study are consistent with the emerging framework of the quality delivery of business graduate programs. The quantitative and qualitative of the graduate tracer study are consistent. It upholds that the satisfaction of the graduates, notwithstanding the results of the findings, needs improvement with regards to facility, the delivery, and instruction of the graduate programs, resulting in the development of competencies and unlocking knowledge, skills, and abilities. The graduate attributes have helped the graduates navigate in the practice of their profession. As a result of all these, the graduate business programs improve the social and economic status of the graduates.

Moreover, the results of the study validated that, indeed, the tracer study could assist the graduate school in complying with the accreditation and quality assurance measure requirements for a quality management system. It also helped evaluate the landscape for graduate business studies in light of rapid advancement in education as marked by the 21st century and exactly how these graduate studies have contributed to graduates' pursuit of their careers within job markets.

5. Translational Research

The tracer study may provide the graduate school with the baseline employment information of business management major graduates spanning 2017-2021, necessary for quality assurance. Further, the strategic plan designed to aid the Recoletos de Bacolod Graduate school may improve the business programs in the graduate education curriculum responsive to the Philippine Qualifications framework VII and VIII, and marketability of the program. In addition, it may address continuous improvement in terms of the delivery of instruction, physical facilities like classrooms, library resources, internet connectivity, and administration and governance.

6. Limitations of the Study

The present study recognizes several limitations. First, in terms of the respondents, not all of the graduates from 2017-2021 have responded because their contact details no longer exist. Most of the respondents are in the medical profession, and due to the pandemic, visitations were restricted in the medical clinics, though the researcher exhausted all the means to contact them. Second, in terms of the generalizability of results. The study results will only apply to the Master's in Business Administration and Doctor of Philosophy major in business management. Lastly, the rigors in statistics are also seen as one of the limitations. The application of more complex statistical procedures may shed light on some of the current study's statistical inconsistencies.

7. Directions for Future Research

Future researchers may utilize the data from this study to expand the extent of this topic's coverage and develop new research strategies and approaches to fill in the gaps. Future researchers will be able to solve the study's limitations and offer considerably more nuanced and data-driven outcomes. This study can be replicated by other programs in the graduate school that can result in the emergence of a new theory.

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