

Employment Trends Among Graduate School Graduates: A Study of the 2020–2022 Cohorts

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Abstract: *The current study specifically aims to determine the profile of graduates and their employment information. Likewise, it also examines the relatedness and relevance of the program offered as a basis for further improving graduate school services. A descriptive research design utilizing a researcher-made instrument was employed. The study covered 157 graduates from AY 2019–2020, 2020–2021, and 2021–2022. Findings revealed that the majority of the respondents were female, married, master's graduates from the academic year 2020–2021, and regular permanent employees. Moreover, the university offers programs that are responsive to the needs of the respondents. Respondents recognize the value of their programs in relation to their jobs. Lastly, the programs completed by the graduates have significantly contributed to their personal and professional development.*

Keywords: Graduate School Graduates, Employment, Cohorts, Central Philippines State University

1. Introduction

Graduate education is crucial to the development of manpower that can provide leadership geared toward a country's progress. It molds the human resources needed to accelerate at least two main driving engines of growth—education and research. High-skilled professionals are in increased demand as a result of global technology and innovation making higher education's significance and universities' expanding role clear. As a result, HEIs need to improve their capabilities, particularly in terms of initiating, maintaining, and proving reforms aimed at sustainable growth (Sulkowski et al., 2020).

Central Philippines State University offers various graduate programs that aim to generate a pool of human resources who are globally competitive graduates and highly trained professionals and experts in their chosen field of specialization. Like other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines, these programs are continuously subjected to monitoring and evaluation by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to maintain quality academic services. One of the requirements for higher education institutions is the graduate profile.

Likewise, the Philippine Qualifications Framework mandates agencies such as the Department of Education (DepEd), CHED, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), and Philippine Regulation Commission (PRC) to review, assess, and suggest learning standards for basic education, the development of technical skills, and higher

education (Dela Cruz, 2022). Every HEI should set up a system to ensure that all graduates have a stable socioeconomic situation through feedback and by identifying graduate profiles.

Tracing the employability of advanced higher education graduates is very important in identifying their profile characteristics. In advanced higher education, employability is more than just "having a job." It encompasses a combination of accomplishments, including specialized skills, knowledge, and personal attributes, that enhance graduates' ability to secure employment and thrive in their chosen professions. Individuals gain from this, but it also has a favorable impact on the labor force, society, and national economy (Abelha, Fernandes, Mesquita, Seabra, & Olivera, 2020).

Furthermore, postgraduate students' employability includes aspects unique to their field of study. This involves identifying and enhancing the skills, qualities, and knowledge that enable them to succeed in the workforce. Additionally, it examines changes in their employment status, job roles, career advancements, salaries, and any honors or distinctions received during their postgraduate studies. Moreover, it explores the relevance of graduate programs and their effectiveness in developing students' holistic skills.

Tracer studies are important for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) as they provide insights into the effectiveness of academic programs and their alignment with labor market demands. Tracking graduates can serve as a basis for enhancing the curriculum, improving instructional practices, and modifying teaching strategies.

The Theory of Education-to-Work prepares students for the labor market, which is the basis of a tracer study (Schomburg, 2016). It explores the alignment of the curriculum with industry demands. Additionally, it plays an important role in achieving accreditation status and serves as a basis for curriculum enhancement.

Several studies have affirmed the importance of tracer studies. According to Dela Cruz (2020), they serve as a source for gathering information about graduates. They also contribute to existing tools for evaluating the quality of the programs offered (Tutor et al., 2021). Saunders-Smits and De Graaf (2012) further stated that a tracer study is one of the indicators of a university's curriculum effectiveness. Likewise, Woya (2019) hypothesized that tracer studies are highly effective for assessing graduate programs and their relevance to the labor market.

A tracer study is not just about gathering information; it also solicits feedback from stakeholders. The studies of Deblois (2021) and Cruz (2022) focus on the relatedness and relevance of graduate programs to graduates' jobs. Deblois (2021) emphasized the alignment of students' knowledge and skills with the demands of their current jobs. It is evident from Deblois's (2021) claims that the university prepares students for the workforce. Additionally, Dela Cruz (2022) highlights that providing strong program offerings is the basis for producing competitive graduates.

Findings from the study will serve as the basis for monitoring the quality of programs offered in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and for providing incentives to institutions. Likewise, through this study, colleges and universities can update the current status of their curricular offerings, focusing specifically on the effectiveness and relevance of their programs in meeting the demands of society.

2. Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to determine the profile of graduates and their employment information. Likewise, it also examined the relatedness and relevance of the programs offered.

3. Theoretical Framework

Weber's (2002) Human Capital Theory served as the foundation for this study. This theory acknowledges the positive correlation between economic growth and investments in human development. Investment in work-related values, skills, and competencies is crucial. The theory considers skills to be commodities and is based on the assumption that individuals invest in their education, making them more marketable. According to Weber (2002), there is compelling empirical support for the idea that unemployment rates are inversely correlated with educational attainment; hence, increasing educational attainment will likely lead to lower unemployment rates. Additionally, Weber claimed that because labor markets are not entirely flexible, education plays a significant role in the frequency and duration of unemployment. As a result, there may be less demand for unskilled labor and, consequently, lower unemployment. Therefore, higher education is a human investment essential for the advancement of the labor market.

Education is believed to have become an increasingly important component of the workforce. Enrolling in graduate programs increases individuals' productive capacity through advanced education and skills training. Upgrading knowledge, developing skills, and enhancing training levels through graduate studies are necessary to maintain a good standard of living.

4. Methodology

The present study utilized a descriptive research design using a survey instrument. The respondents of the study were graduates of the different programs from SY 2019–2020, 2020–2021, and 2021–2022. A total enumeration was used in determining the respondents; however, only 157 responded out of 237 graduates. The response rate was only 66%.

The researcher-made questionnaire was used and was subjected to validity testing by the experts. A validity rating of 3.90 was established. The items in the questionnaire were also analyzed to test their reliability. Using Cronbach alpha, it reported acceptable reliability results of 0.87. The survey was given through Google Forms.

The respondents were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary since they had the option to not be directly involved in its execution. Additionally, they were informed that any information acquired from them would be kept private and utilized solely for the investigation.

The data gathered were statistically treated using a frequency count, percentage distribution, and weighted mean.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Profile Characteristics

Table 1: Respondents' Profile Characteristics

Profile	F	%
Sex		
Male	52	33.0
Female	105	67.0
Civil Status		
Single	58	37.0
Married	99	63.0
Program Graduated from		
Doctorate	38	25.0
Master's	119	75.0
Number of Graduates		
2019- 2020	6	4.0
2020- 2021	101	64.0
2021- 2022	50	32.0
TOTAL	157	100.0

The majority of the respondents were female, comprising 67.1% of the total population. This data suggests that females continue to dominate graduate school programs. It also implies that females tend to be more persevering than males and more mature in prioritizing responsibilities. More than half of the population were married, comprising 63%. Married students are more motivated to complete their advanced studies despite the challenge of balancing work, commitments, financial resources, and parenting. The remaining 37% of the respondents were single.

Moreover, the study was primarily represented by samples enrolled in master's programs, while only 25% of the graduates came from doctorate programs.

Lastly, the majority of the respondents were graduates of AY 2021–2022, while the lowest number of graduates was in AY 2019–2020. Respondents found it difficult to complete their thesis or dissertation since this period coincided with the height of the pandemic. Lockdowns and border restrictions were implemented; thus, they were unable to enroll in their programs.

5.2 Employment Data

	Frequency	Percentage
Agency		
• Department of Education (DepEd)	86	54.78
• Government Agency	13	8.28
• Private Academic Institutions	16	10.19
• Higher Education Institutions	32	20.38
• Private Agency	10	6.37
Employment Status		
• Permanent	123	78.34
• Contractual	34	21.66
Total	157	100.0

The majority of the sample respondents (54.78%) are affiliated with the Department of Education (DepEd), indicating that most of the workforce in this dataset is involved in the basic education sector. The Department of Education employs a significant share of the workforce, aligning with national statistics that show public education as one of the largest employment sectors. According to studies, government spending on basic education has led to a steady increase in the number of available teaching and administrative positions (UNESCO, 2022).

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) account for 20.38% of the workforce, suggesting a significant presence of faculty and staff from universities and colleges. Only 10.19% of the workforce is employed in private academic institutions, reflecting the role of private schools in education employment. Additionally, a smaller but notable portion of the sample population is affiliated with government agencies, comprising 8.28%, while only 6.37% of the workforce comes from private agencies.

The lower percentage of employees in private agencies may indicate a preference for public sector employment due to greater benefits and job stability. Research suggests that jobs in the public sector, particularly in education, offer more attractive long-term career opportunities (OECD, 2021).

Job security in the academic industry is reflected in the high percentage of permanent employees. According to labor economics literature, employment in the public sector often provides more job security than in the private sector (Bach, 2016). However, the 21.66% contractual employment rate also suggests a reliance on temporary workers, which is common in higher education due to financial constraints and fluctuating student enrollments (Altbach, 2019).

Hiring and Promotion

	Frequency	Percentage
Hired as a result of completion of a graduate degree		
• Yes	91	57.96
• No	66	42.04
Promoted as a result of completion of a graduate degree		
• Yes	86	54.78
• No	71	45.22
Level of Promotion		
• Middle Level	84	53.50
• Top Level	73	46.50
Total	157	100.0

A total of 57.96% of respondents were hired due to the completion of a graduate degree. Graduate education plays a crucial role in employment and professional advancement. Earning a master's or doctorate degree, along with the skills acquired throughout the program, likely contributed to securing a new or permanent job.

According to Becker's Human Capital Theory (1993), higher educational attainment enhances an individual's productivity and makes them more appealing to employers. Additionally, research indicates that employers favor applicants with postgraduate degrees for leadership and specialized positions (Santiago & Benavides, 2020). Compared to graduates with only a

bachelor’s degree, those with a master’s degree and additional professional training provide a greater economic advantage (Posselt & Grodsky, 2017).

The majority of respondents indicated that they were promoted as a result of completing a graduate degree at CPSU. Many were promoted from Teacher I to Teacher II, while others transitioned from teaching to administrative positions. This underscores the significance of earning a graduate degree for career advancement and promotion. It also demonstrates how advanced education is valued and recognized for fostering professional growth in the education sector.

On the other hand, some respondents were not promoted after completing their degree. It is interesting to note that while a graduate degree is often a prerequisite for job promotion in many professions, fulfilling all academic requirements of a graduate program still creates opportunities for professional growth and development (Zulieta et al., 2020).

Notably, the majority of promoted respondents advanced to middle-level positions. Yang and Chan (2020) emphasize that pursuing higher credentials (i.e., a master’s or even a doctoral degree) is inevitable, as individuals must maintain their market value through continued academic and professional development.

Respondent’s Feedback

Relatedness and relevance of graduate program to job

	Frequency	Percentage
Relatedness of graduate program to job		
• Yes	118	75.16
• No	39	24.84
Relevance of graduate program to job		
• Relevant	123	78.34
• Not relevant	34	21.66
Total	157	100.0

Respondents indicated that their degree programs at CPSU were related to their jobs. This implies that the institution is effectively aligning industry demands with its curriculum offerings. Ensuring that graduates acquire relevant competencies that enhance their employability and professional efficacy is essential.

The university actively strengthens its academic framework through a well-designed curriculum aligned with workforce demands. Through continuous initiatives such as regular curriculum reviews involving stakeholders and faculty upskilling programs, CPSU demonstrates its commitment to providing quality education to its students.

Furthermore, the university’s adoption of competency-based education has provided graduate school students with essential knowledge and skills. This approach enhances practical experience, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities, underscoring both the academic and practical value of education.

Even though the findings are promising, continuous evaluation is necessary. To improve its programs, the university should solicit feedback from employers, alumni, and other stakeholders.

This finding is supported by Deblois (2021), who states that the knowledge and skills students acquire in school align with the demands of their current jobs. This demonstrates that when the university enhances students' skills and abilities, it better prepares them for the workforce. Additionally, Dela Cruz (2022) highlights that strong curricular offerings are the foundation for producing competitive graduates.

Likewise, respondents confirmed that CPSU degree programs were relevant to their jobs. This implies that the university offers strong academic programs that effectively prepare students for their professional careers. Furthermore, it suggests that CPSU has designed its curriculum to meet workforce demands.

Contribution of the Degree they finished at CPSU Graduate School

Mean Rating on the contribution of graduate degree to personal and professional growth

	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. Teaching Skills	4.45	.704	High contribution
2. Research Skills	4.39	.685	High contribution
3. Learning Efficiency	4.46	.656	High contribution
4. Communication Skills	4.34	.711	High contribution
5. Human Relation Skills	4.49	.682	High contribution
6. Problem Solving Skills	4.39	.697	High contribution
7. ICT Skills	4.28	.728	High contribution
8. Critical Thinking Skills	4.41	.677	High contribution
9. Salary Improvement and Promotion	4.30	.839	High contribution
10. Personality Development	4.54	.681	Very high contribution
11. Entrepreneurial/Managerial Skills	4.35	.746	High contribution

The table provides compelling evidence of the significant impact of the graduate studies program on students' professional development. The data indicate that students who enroll in graduate programs acquire critical competencies and skills essential for success in both their academic and professional careers.

CPSU offers various opportunities to enhance students' personal and professional growth, as reflected in the consistently high results. The findings further suggest that the program completed by graduates has made a substantial contribution to their current jobs and overall professional development. Additionally, earning the degree has strengthened participants' knowledge and skills, particularly in teaching and managerial functions, equipping them for future roles.

However, it is notable that research and ICT skills received only "high" ratings rather than "very high." This suggests that while these skills contribute to graduates' current jobs, their impact is comparatively lower. To address this, it is essential to explore opportunities for further enhancement by revisiting the curriculum, conducting training workshops, and integrating relevant content into coursework.

These findings align with the research of Oduor (2018) and Wanzala & Nyamai (2018), which indicate that technology integration remains a crucial professional skills gap significantly affecting educators' ability to provide high-quality services. This is further supported by Ojala et al. (2021), who emphasize that completing a degree program improves students' job-specific skills and enhances their professional competencies. By acquiring deeper knowledge and fully developing their competencies, students can further strengthen their professional skills. Ojala et al. (2021) also stress that completing a post-baccalaureate degree enhances students' overall capabilities.

Effectiveness of the Graduate School Curricular Programs

Extent of effectiveness of graduate degree to personal and professional growth

		Mean	SD	Interpretation
1.	Relevance of the program to professional requirement	4.29	.817	Highly effective
2.	Professors	4.19	.853	Highly effective
3.	Teaching/Learning Environment	4.24	.843	Highly effective
4.	Teacher-Student Relationship	4.24	.843	Highly effective
5.	Quality of Program Delivery	4.27	.830	Highly effective
6.	Range of courses offered	4.27	.830	Highly effective
7.	Library, laboratory, and other facilities	3.92	.988	Highly effective
8.	Work placement/attachment	4.14	.917	Highly effective
9.	Number of optional subjects	4.14	.871	Highly effective
10.	Extracurricular subjects	3.96	.936	Highly effective

Observe that all indicators showed high effectiveness. This finding suggests that the university provides high-quality graduate programs. It also indicates that the programs offered are not only well-designed and compliant with the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) but also meet the demands of professional and industry standards. The high effectiveness results further demonstrate that students progressively enhance their skills, increasing their efficiency in their respective fields of specialization.

This, therefore, implies that the university offers programs that are adaptable to workforce demands. The high effectiveness results also suggest that the university cultivates an environment that fosters skills development and continuous improvement.

6. Conclusions

The majority of the respondents were married and held master's degrees from the 2020–2021 class. After earning their degrees, several were promoted to middle-level roles, and most were employed in regular, permanent positions. Their degree programs and job responsibilities are highly aligned, emphasizing the relevance and applicability of their education to their professional development. Graduates also noted that their ability to learn efficiently, develop their personalities, and interact with others had a significant influence on their job performance.

Overall, the institution has successfully provided opportunities for both professional and personal growth, offering courses that deliver excellent results and are responsive to industry demands.

Recommendations

It is recommended that graduate school programs enhance students' ICT and research skills through capability training workshops. A yearly update on graduates' employability status, along with the inclusion of additional variables such as graduates' perceptions of the adequacy of university facilities, may be conducted for monitoring and validation of the study results.

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