

Employability and Curriculum Relevance of Master of Arts in Guidance and Counseling Graduates: A Graduate Tracer Study 345

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Abstract

This graduate tracer study examined the employability, employment characteristics, and curriculum relevance of graduates of the Master of Arts in Guidance and Counseling (MAGC) program from Academic Years 2022–2025. The study utilized a descriptive-survey research design through an online questionnaire. Results revealed that the majority of the graduates were currently employed, with most holding regular or permanent positions. Findings further showed that graduates were able to secure employment within a relatively short period after graduation, indicating favorable employability outcomes. Graduates also perceived the MAGC curriculum as highly relevant to their current work assignments and professional responsibilities. The most useful competencies that emerged were communication, human relations, critical thinking, and problem-solving. The findings suggest that the MAGC program effectively equips graduates with competencies aligned with labor market demands and professional counseling practice. The study recommends continuous curriculum enhancement, strengthened field exposure, and sustained linkages with industry and professional organizations to maintain program relevance and graduate competitiveness.

Keywords: graduate tracer study; employability; curriculum relevance; guidance and counseling

INTRODUCTION

Graduate tracer studies have become significant mechanisms for assessing the quality, effectiveness, and relevance of higher education programs. These studies provide institutions with empirical evidence on graduate employability, career progression, job satisfaction, and the alignment between acquired competencies and labor-market demands. Through tracer studies, higher education institutions can evaluate whether their curricula adequately prepare graduates for professional practice and societal needs. In the Philippine context, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) strongly encourages the conduct of graduate tracer studies as part of quality assurance, accreditation, and continuous curriculum improvement initiatives.

Higher education institutions are increasingly expected to produce graduates equipped with competencies responsive to the rapidly changing demands of the workforce. Employability has become one of the most important indicators of educational quality because it reflects the institution's ability to prepare graduates for gainful employment and professional success. According to Schomburg (2003), tracer studies serve as

important tools in examining the relationship between higher education and employment outcomes, particularly in determining whether academic programs are responsive to industry and societal expectations. Similarly, Teichler (2011) emphasized that graduate employability is closely associated with the relevance of curriculum design, practical training, and competency development provided by educational institutions.

In the field of guidance and counseling, the need for competent counseling professionals continues to grow as concerns related to mental health, career development, psychosocial adjustment, and student well-being increase. Counselors are expected to possess strong communication skills, critical thinking abilities, ethical competence, and counseling intervention skills necessary for various professional settings such as schools, clinical institutions, industries, and community organizations. Consequently, graduate counseling education programs must ensure that students acquire the competencies required for professional practice and employment.

The Master of Arts in Guidance and Counseling (MAGC) program aims to prepare competent counseling professionals equipped with theoretical knowledge, practical counseling skills, research competence, and ethical standards necessary for educational, clinical, industrial, and community settings. Through academic coursework, practicum experiences, and professional training, the program seeks to develop graduates who can respond to the diverse psychosocial and mental health needs of individuals and communities.

Several studies have highlighted the importance of curriculum relevance and competency development in ensuring graduate employability. Yorke (2006) stated that employability involves not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the development of transferable skills such as communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and adaptability. Moreover, Harvey (2001) emphasized that higher education institutions must continuously review their curricula to maintain alignment with workplace expectations and professional standards. Studies on graduate tracer research in the Philippines also revealed that practical experiences, internship exposure, and industry linkages significantly contribute to graduates' employability and career advancement.

Despite the increasing recognition of graduate tracer studies, limited research has focused specifically on graduates of guidance and counseling programs, particularly at the graduate education level. This gap highlights the need to examine the employment outcomes and curriculum relevance of counseling graduates to determine whether graduate programs effectively prepare students for professional counseling practice.

This study sought to determine the employability and curriculum relevance of graduates of the Master of Arts in Guidance and Counseling (MAGC) program from Academic Years 2022–2025. Specifically, it examined graduates' employment status, employment characteristics, job levels, time to first employment, and perceived usefulness of competencies acquired during graduate studies. The study's findings may serve as a basis for curriculum review, policy formulation, quality assurance initiatives, and continuous program improvement to produce globally competitive counseling professionals.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to determine the employment outcomes, nature of employment, time to first employment, salary range, and curriculum relevance among MAGC graduates from batches 2022–2025. Specifically, it sought to:

1. Determine the employment status of MAGC graduates;
2. Identify the employment characteristics and job levels of graduates;
3. Determine the time it took graduates to secure their first job after graduation;
4. Assess the relevance of the MAGC curriculum to graduates' present employment; and
5. Identify competencies that graduates found useful in their current occupations.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive-survey research design to gather information regarding the employability and curriculum relevance of MAGC graduates. Descriptive research is appropriate because it systematically describes the characteristics, employment outcomes, and perceptions of graduates.

Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study consisted of graduates of the Master of Arts in Guidance and Counseling program from Academic Years 2022–2025 who voluntarily participated in the online survey. The respondents represented various employment sectors, including educational institutions, government agencies, private organizations, and counseling-related professions.

Research Instrument

The study utilized an adapted CHED Graduate Tracer Study questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The instrument gathered information regarding demographic profile, employment status, employment characteristics, salary range, time to first employment, and curriculum relevance.

Data Gathering Procedure

Permission to conduct the study was secured from the concerned academic office. The online survey link was distributed to graduates through electronic communication platforms and alumni networks. Respondents were informed of the study's purpose and assured of confidentiality and voluntary participation.

Statistical Treatment of Data

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentages. These statistical tools were used to summarize and interpret the graduates' responses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 Employment Status of Graduates

Employment Status	Frequency	Percentage
Employed	19	95%
Unemployed	1	5%
Total	20	100%

Table 1 presents the employment status of the graduates of the Master of Arts in Guidance and Counseling (MAGC) program. The findings revealed that 19 or 95% of the respondents were employed, while only 1 or 5% was unemployed at the time of the study. The high employment rate indicates favorable employability outcomes among the graduates and suggests that the MAGC program effectively equips students with competencies relevant to the labor market and counseling profession.

The findings support the study of Schomburg (2003), which emphasized that graduate employability reflects the responsiveness of higher education institutions to industry and societal needs. Similarly, Yorke (2006) explained that employability is closely associated with the acquisition of both academic knowledge and transferable skills such as communication, critical thinking, and interpersonal competence. The high employability rate of MAGC graduates may also be attributed to the increasing demand for counseling and mental health professionals in educational institutions, government agencies, and private organizations.

Table 2 Present Employment Classification of Graduates

Employment Classification	Frequency	Percentage
Regular/Permanent	14	70%
Contractual	4	20%
Temporary	1	5%
Self-employed	1	5%
Total	20	100%

Table 2 shows the present employment classification of the respondents. The majority of the graduates, comprising 14 or 70%, occupied regular or permanent positions in their respective organizations. Meanwhile, 20% were employed on a contractual basis, while 5% held temporary positions and another 5% were self-employed.

The findings indicate employment stability among the graduates and suggest that employers recognize the competence and qualifications of MAGC graduates. Permanent employment often reflects organizational trust and professional preparedness. According to Harvey (2001), higher education institutions play a significant role in preparing graduates for sustainable employment through competency-based and outcome-based education. The findings further imply that the counseling-related skills acquired during graduate studies contribute to long-term employability and career advancement.

Table 3 First Job Position Level of Graduates

Position Level	Frequency	Percentage
Rank and File	11	55%
Supervisory	6	30%
Managerial	3	15%
Total	20	100%

Table 3 presents the first job position level of the graduates. The results revealed that 55% of the respondents initially occupied rank-and-file positions, while 30% held supervisory positions and 15% occupied managerial positions.

These findings suggest that while many graduates began in entry-level positions, several were able to assume leadership and supervisory roles, indicating career progression and professional growth. Graduate education provides opportunities for promotion and enhanced qualifications that may lead to leadership positions. Teichler (2011) emphasized that graduate education contributes significantly to career mobility and professional advancement by developing specialized competencies and workplace readiness.

Table 4 Length of Time in Securing First Employment

Length of Time	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 1 month	8	40%
1–6 months	9	45%
7–11 months	2	10%
1 year and above	1	5%
Total	20	100%

Table 4 shows the length of time it took graduates to secure their first employment after graduation. The results revealed that most graduates obtained employment within 1 to 6 months after graduation, while several secured employment within 1 month.

The findings indicate positive labor market demand for graduates of the MAGC program. The ability of graduates to obtain employment within a relatively short period suggests that the competencies acquired during graduate studies are aligned with workplace needs. According to Yorke (2006), employability is enhanced when graduates possess practical competencies, communication skills, and adaptability. Internship experiences, practicum exposure, and counseling-related training may have contributed to the graduates' employability and professional readiness.

Table 5 Initial Gross Monthly Salary of Graduates

Salary Range	Frequency	Percentage
₱5,000–₱10,000	6	30%
₱10,001–₱15,000	8	40%
₱15,001–₱20,000	6	30%
Total	20	100%

Table 5 presents the initial gross monthly salary of graduates in their first employment after graduation. The findings showed that the largest percentage of graduates, comprising 40%, received salaries ranging from ₱10,001–₱15,000, while 30% received salaries ranging from ₱5,000–₱10,000 and another 30% earned ₱15,001–₱20,000.

The salary distribution suggests that graduates were able to obtain professional employment opportunities that provide financial stability and career growth. Salary outcomes are often influenced by employment sector, job position, years of experience, and organizational classification. Teichler (2011) noted that higher educational attainment contributes to improved career opportunities and earning potential among graduates.

Table 6 Relevance of the MAGC Curriculum to Present Employment

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	18	90%
No	2	10%
Total	20	100%

Table 6 reveals that the majority of the respondents perceived the MAGC curriculum as relevant to their current employment. Specifically, 18 or 90% of the graduates affirmed that the curriculum was relevant to their work assignments and professional responsibilities.

The findings suggest strong alignment between the curriculum and workplace expectations. Graduates identified communication skills, human relations skills, counseling techniques, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills as among the most useful competencies acquired during graduate studies. This finding supports the study of Harvey (2001), which emphasized that curriculum relevance and practical training are essential factors influencing graduate employability and workplace performance.

Furthermore, the results indicate that the MAGC curriculum effectively integrates theoretical knowledge and practical counseling competencies necessary for professional practice. Outcome-based and competency-based approaches in graduate education contribute significantly to preparing graduates for the demands of counseling-related professions.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that graduates of the Master of Arts in Guidance and Counseling program showed positive employability outcomes. Most graduates were employed in stable positions and perceived the curriculum as relevant to their professional responsibilities. The competencies acquired during graduate studies, particularly communication skills, counseling skills, critical thinking, and human relations skills, were considered highly beneficial in the workplace.

The findings suggest that the MAGC program effectively prepares graduates for employment and professional practice in counseling-related fields. Graduate competitiveness and professional success are facilitated by the alignment of curriculum content with workplace demands.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations are proposed. The institution should strengthen experiential learning opportunities by expanding internships, practicum placements, and field exposure to better prepare students for real-world practice. It is also recommended to enhance career guidance, job placement services, and professional networking programs to increase graduates' employability and career readiness. In addition, administrative processes should be enhanced to ensure more efficient and responsive support for student needs and academic services. The thesis requirements should likewise be reviewed and updated to align with current academic standards and professional expectations. Finally, continuous curriculum evaluation and revision are encouraged to ensure that academic programs remain relevant and responsive to evolving labor demand and industry trends.

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