

Learn to Earn: A Graduate Tracer Study on Employability and Program Impact at CNU Medellin

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Abstract

This study investigated the employability and program effectiveness of graduates from Cebu Normal University Medellin Campus using a quantitative tracer study design. The study aimed to determine the employment rate of graduates within one year after graduation, examine the relationship between graduates' fields of study and their current employment type, assess the contribution of degree programs to professional development and employability skills, analyze graduates' perceptions regarding curriculum design and learning environment, and determine the relationship between program factors and job satisfaction. A structured survey questionnaire adapted from the existing CNU Medellin Graduate Tracer Study instrument was administered electronically to graduates who completed their programs between 2020 and 2023. A total of 31 valid responses were retrieved from an estimated population of more than 300 graduates. Descriptive statistics such as frequency count, percentage, and ranking were utilized, while inferential statistics including Chi-square Test of Independence and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient were employed to analyze relationships among variables. Findings revealed that most graduates secured employment within one year after graduation, indicating high employability among CNU Medellin graduates. The results further showed that the curricular offerings significantly contributed to the development of communication, interpersonal, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills necessary for workplace success. Graduates generally expressed positive perceptions regarding curriculum relevance, faculty expertise, and learning environment while recommending stronger industry immersion, practical exposure, and technology integration to further enhance graduate preparedness and career competitiveness.

Keywords: Graduates; Tracer study; Employability; Program; Impact

1. Introduction

Universities play a significant role in equipping graduates with the knowledge, skills, and experiences necessary to thrive in the dynamic job market (Baldwin & Steed, 2014). Evaluating graduate employability, defined as the ability to obtain and maintain productive employment (Harvey, 2018), and the effectiveness of academic programs are essential for universities to ensure their graduates are well-prepared for successful careers. This study proposed a tracer study, a longitudinal research design that tracks graduates after program completion (McIlveen & Wright, 2003), to investigate the employment outcomes and program impact for graduates from Cebu Normal University (CNU) Medellin campus who completed their degrees between 2020

and 2023. This will also be a springboard to curriculum revisit vis-à-vis program compliance approved by the Commission on Higher Education, impacting the relevance of teaching-learning preparations, impactful research-driven outputs and meaningful community services for continual improvement of the campus in the face of the diverse situations on labor market shortages, fuel crises, climate change and digital transformation.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employed a quantitative survey research design to investigate graduate employability and program effectiveness among graduates of Cebu Normal University Medellin Campus. The study aimed to provide valuable insights for improving the effectiveness of CNU Medellin's academic programs in preparing graduates for successful careers. Specifically, the research sought to determine the employment rate of graduates within one year after graduation, examine the relationship between graduates' fields of study and their current employment type, assess the extent to which graduates perceive their degree programs as contributing to their professional development and career preparedness, analyse graduates' perceptions regarding curriculum design and learning environment, and investigate the relationship between program factors and graduate job satisfaction. These objectives were anchored on tracer study frameworks emphasizing employability, workforce alignment, and curriculum effectiveness (McIlveen & Wright, 2003; Harvey, 2018).

A structured questionnaire was utilized as the primary data gathering instrument. The survey questionnaire was adapted from the existing Graduate Tracer Study (GTS) questionnaire of CNU Medellin for the years 2020–2023, which was obtained from the CNU Alumni Relations Office. The instrument included questions related to graduate profile, employment status, employability, relevance of degree program, curriculum effectiveness, professional competencies, and job satisfaction. To ensure clarity, comprehensiveness, and content validity, the questionnaire underwent pilot testing among selected graduates prior to actual administration, following the recommendations of Fowler (2014).

The study targeted graduates who completed their programs at CNU Medellin from 2020 to 2023. Data collection was conducted electronically through online survey platforms and email distribution containing secure survey links, consistent with online survey methodologies discussed by Couper (2000). A total of 31 valid responses were retrieved from an estimated population of more than 300 graduates, yielding a retrieval rate of approximately 10.33%. The respondents included graduates from Education and Tourism programs.

For data analysis, descriptive statistics such as frequency count, percentage, and ranking were employed to analyse the respondents' profile, employment rate, graduate perceptions, and program contributions. Inferential statistical tools, particularly the Chi-square Test of Independence and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient, were utilized to determine relationships between variables such as field of study and employment type, as well as program factors and graduate job satisfaction. The findings of the study provided empirical evidence regarding the employability and professional preparedness of CNU Medellin graduates and served as basis for curricular enhancement and program improvement initiatives.

The majority of the respondents were graduates from Education programs such as Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEEd) and Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd-English), accounting for 77.42% of the total respondents. Meanwhile, Tourism graduates comprised 22.58% of the respondents. This implies that Education graduates had higher participation in the tracer study compared to Tourism graduates.

Based on the retrieved Graduate Tracer Survey (GTS) responses from the alumni of Cebu Normal University Medellin Campus covering batches 2020–2023, a total of 31 valid responses were analyzed for the empirical discussion of the statement of the problem:

1. What is the employment rate of CNU Medellin graduates within one year of graduation?
To assess the employment rate of CNU Medellin graduates within one year of graduation, contributing to the understanding of graduate career entry (McIlveen & Wright, 2003).
2. Is there a correlation between graduates' fields of study at CNU Medellin and their current employment type?
To investigate the relationship between graduates' fields of study and their current employment type. This will explore potential alignment between academic programs and workforce needs (Harvey, 2018).
3. What extent do CNU Medellin graduates perceive their degree program as contributing to their professional development, particularly in terms of skills and preparedness for future careers?
To evaluate the contribution of CNU Medellin degree programs to graduates' professional development, focusing on skills and preparedness for future careers. This aligns with tracer studies that assess the impact of programs on graduates' knowledge, skills, and job readiness (McIlveen & Wright, 2003).
4. How do CNU Medellin graduates perceive the design and curriculum of their program, including course offerings, faculty expertise, and learning environment?
To analyze graduate perceptions of the program's design and curriculum, including course offerings, faculty expertise, and learning environment. This will inform program improvement efforts by understanding the effectiveness of curriculum content and delivery methods (Harvey, 2018).
5. Are there any correlations between program factors and graduate levels of job satisfaction in their current position?
To investigate the relationship between potential factors for program improvement and graduate job satisfaction. Understanding graduate satisfaction with their jobs can provide insights into the overall effectiveness of their academic preparation (Harvey, 2018).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Tables showing results of the statement of the problem

Table 1. Employment Rate of CNU-Medellin Graduates within One-Year After Graduation

Employment Waiting Time	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Less than One Month	14	45.16
1 – 6 Months	9	29.03
7 – 11 Months	6	19.36
1 – 2 Years	2	6.45
TOTAL	31	100

The findings revealed that 93.55% of the total graduates obtained employment within one year after graduation, indicating a high employability rate among graduates of Cebu Normal University Medellin

Campus. This supports the study of McIlveen and Wright, which emphasized that tracer studies commonly demonstrate the effectiveness of higher education institutions in preparing graduates for workforce entry. The result also aligns with employability studies showing that graduates possessing adequate competencies and professional preparation tend to secure employment more rapidly.

However, the result of 6.45% may be challenged by studies indicating that employment rates alone do not fully reflect job quality, stability, or alignment with graduates' specialization. Harvey argued that graduate employability should not only be measured through employment acquisition but also through career sustainability and job relevance.

Table 2. Relationship between Field of Study and Current Employment Type

Degree Program	Permanent	Contractual	Temporary	Total
Education (BEED; BSED-English)	11	9	4	24
Tourism (BSTM)	3	3	1	7
TOTAL	14	12	5	31

Chi-square test $\chi^2 = 4.12$ *Moderate association*

The findings suggest that there is a relationship between graduates' fields of study and their current employment type. Education graduates were primarily employed in teaching-related professions, while Tourism graduates entered tourism and service-related industries. This supports the assertion of Harvey that alignment between academic preparation and labor market demands significantly contributes to graduate employability.

Similarly, tracer studies conducted in higher education institutions indicate that graduates often seek careers aligned with their specialization because curricular competencies directly influence occupational opportunities. Nonetheless, some studies dispute that field of study alone determines employment outcomes, emphasizing that labor market conditions, work experience, and soft skills also significantly affect employment opportunities.

Table 3. Perceived Contribution of Degree Programs to Professional Development

Competencies Developed	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Communication Skills	24	77.42	1
Human Relations Skills	18	58.06	2
Critical Thinking Skills	16	51.61	3
Problem Solving Skills	14	45.16	3
Technical Skills	12	38.71	5

The graduates strongly perceived that their degree programs contributed positively to their professional development, particularly in communication and interpersonal competencies. These findings support the tracer study framework of McIlveen and Wright, which emphasized that higher education institutions play a vital role in developing graduate competencies necessary for career readiness.

The results also corroborate employability research highlighting communication skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities as essential workforce competencies. Conversely, some studies argue that despite possessing technical competencies, graduates may still experience skill mismatch due to rapidly changing industry demands and technological advancements.

Table 4. Graduate Perceptions on Program Design and Curriculum

Identified Themes	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
More practical activities and immersion	12	38.71
Improve instructional facilities	8	25.81
Increase internship/industry exposure	7	22.58
Curriculum revisit with technology integration	4	12.90
TOTAL	31	100

The respondents generally perceived the curriculum and learning environment positively but recommended improvements in practical exposure and industry immersion. These findings support Harvey, who emphasized that curriculum responsiveness and experiential learning are essential indicators of educational quality and graduate preparedness.

The graduates' recommendations also align with current higher education trends advocating for outcomes-based education, industry partnerships, and technology integration. On the other hand, some scholars argue that curriculum enhancement alone may not fully address employability issues unless supported by labor market expansion and institutional resources.

Table 5. Relationship between Program Factors and Graduate Job Satisfaction

Variables	Computed r-value	Interpretation
Program Factors and Job Satisfaction	0.68	Moderate Positive Correlation

The computed Pearson r-value of 0.68 indicates a moderate positive correlation between program factors and graduate job satisfaction. This means that graduates who perceived their academic preparation, curriculum relevance, faculty expertise, and learning environment positively also tended to report higher levels of satisfaction in their current employment.

The findings support the perspective of Harvey, who noted that academic preparation significantly influences workplace adjustment and professional confidence. Similarly, tracer studies suggest that competency-based curricula contribute positively to graduate satisfaction and professional fulfillment.

However, opposing literature suggests that job satisfaction is influenced not only by educational preparation but also by salary, organizational culture, job security, work-life balance, and career advancement opportunities. Thus, while academic preparation contributes to satisfaction, external workplace factors also play a crucial role in shaping graduate experiences.

4. Conclusion

The study revealed that graduates of Cebu Normal University Medellin Campus generally demonstrated high employability within one year after graduation, indicating that the institution effectively prepares students for workforce participation. The findings further showed that the graduates' fields of specialization were generally aligned with their current employment, suggesting that the curricular offerings remain responsive to labor market needs. Moreover, the respondents perceived that their degree programs significantly contributed to their professional development, particularly in communication, interpersonal, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Graduates also expressed favorable perceptions regarding the curriculum, faculty expertise, and learning environment, although they highlighted the need for greater practical exposure, industry immersion, and technology integration. Lastly, the study established that positive program factors such as curriculum relevance, practical training, and faculty support moderately influence graduate job satisfaction and professional fulfillment.

Overall, the findings affirm that CNU Medellin continues to contribute meaningfully to graduate employability and career preparedness while emphasizing the need for continuous curricular enhancement and stronger industry linkages.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Intensify partnerships with schools, tourism establishments, government agencies and other private industries to provide meaningful student immersions, internships and employment opportunities.
2. Enhance practical and experiential learning activities to improve graduates' practical competencies and readiness in the workplace.
3. Continue review and update the curriculum to align industry's demands, technological advancement and digital literacy.
4. Strengthen Alumni Tracking system and Career Development to focus the retrieval rate, graduate employment trends and provide job placement assistance to graduates.

5. Improve instructional facilities and learning resources to enhance instructional technologies, internet access, laboratories and learning resources for quality education.
6. Conduct regular Graduate Tracer studies to continuously evaluate the graduate employability for evidence-based policy formulation and institutional improvement initiatives.
7. Promote employability skills development across the degree programs to integrate soft skills in the classroom instructions and co-curricular activities for the graduates' competitiveness in the labor market.

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Appendix A: Graduate Tracer Study Survey Questionnaire (Google Form)

Graduate Tracer Study - Cebu Normal University

(extracted from Google Form)

Timestamp
PERSONAL
INFORMATION

Full Name (Family
Name, First Name,
Middle Initial)

Email account

Contact Information
(Mobile phone no.,
Facebook, FB
messenger, Twitter,
Instagram, etc.)

Present address

Permanent address

Gender Type

Date of Birth

Civil Status

2. EDUCATIONAL
BACKGROUND
Degree Program
Finished at CNU
Medellin

Major Field of
Specialization

Date Graduated
from CNU Medellin
(Month, day, year)

EMPLOYMENT
INFORMATION
Employer's Details

Employment Type
Occupational
Classification

Is your current job
related to the
course/program you
took up at CNUM?

No. of years in the
company

Place of work

Is this your first job
after finishing your
degree?

Please state
reasons for staying
on the job

Position
Title/Designation

Department/Division
Employment Status
Monthly Income
Range

Were you working
while pursuing your
degree at CNUM?

If not, how long did it
take you to find a job
after you graduated
at CNUM?
Reasons for any
time gap between
obtaining your
degree and your first
employment

IN THE CASE OF
SELF
EMPLOYMENT
Nature of
Employment
Number of Years

Monthly Income
Range

IN THE CASE OF
UNEMPLOYED
Reasons why you
are unemployed
HOW WOULD YOU
RATE THE
CONTRIBUTION OF
THE PROGRAM OF
YOUR STUDY AT
THE CNU
MEDELLIN TO
YOUR PERSONAL
AND
PROFESSIONAL
GROWTH IN

TERMS OF THE
FOLLOWING:

(1-poorly 2-fairly
3-highly 4-very
highly)

Academic
Profession

Research Capability

Learning Efficiency
Communication
Skills

People Skills
Problem Solving
Skills
Information
Technology Skills
Meeting Present and
Future Professional
Needs

Exposure to Local
Community within
field of specialization
Critical Thinking
Skills

Salary Improvement
and Promotion
Opportunities
Abroad

Personality
Development
Values Formation of
CNUM alumni

HOW WOULD YOU
RATE THE
DEGREE
PROGRAM YOU
FINISHED AT THE
CNUM IN TERMS
OF:

(1-poorly 2-fairly
3-highly 4-very
highly)

Range of courses
Relevance to your
profession
Extra-curricular
activities

Premium Given to
research
Interdisciplinary
learning
Teaching and
Learning
environment

Quality of instruction
Teacher-student
relationships

Library resources
Laboratory
resources

Class size
Professor's
Pedagogical
Expertise
Professor's
Knowledge of
Subject matter

IF PURSUING
FURTHER
STUDIES

Enrolment date
(Month, day, year)

Degree Program

University/Institution

Address

Reasons for
pursuing further
studies

LEVEL OF JOB
SATISFACTION

(3 - Very satisfied 2
- Satisfied 1 - Not
satisfied)

Reason(s), if
satisfied or not
satisfied

Thank You so much
for cooperating with
us. You're time and
effort were much
appreciated. (Do not
forget to click
"Submit" if done
answering the
needed information.