

Tracer Study On The Employability Of Doctor Of Philosophy In Psychology Graduates From 2016-2025

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Abstract: Graduate tracer studies play a crucial role in evaluating the effectiveness and relevance of academic programs in relation to employability and professional outcomes. This study examined the outcomes of graduates from the Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology program. A descriptive research design was utilized, involving graduates from multiple cohorts. The study utilized a mixed-methods research design and gathered data from 16 respondents. Frequency counts, percentages, and thematic analysis were used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that all graduates were employed, with most holding permanent positions in academic, government, and psychological service sectors. Graduates generally transitioned to employment within a short period after completing the program. A high degree of alignment between graduates' current work and their field of specialization was observed. Key competencies identified as highly relevant included counseling, research, leadership, and critical thinking skills. Graduates also demonstrated strong professional qualifications, including licensures and research recognitions, reflecting both scholarly engagement and professional credibility. Satisfaction with the program was consistently positive. Qualitative findings indicated minimal employment barriers but highlighted areas for improvement, including curriculum internationalization, enhanced applied training, stronger research mentorship, and expanded specialization. The PhD in Psychology program demonstrates strong outcomes in terms of employability, professional advancement, and graduate satisfaction. Continuous curriculum enhancement, along with increased global engagement and applied learning opportunities, is recommended to sustain program relevance and competitiveness.

Keywords—graduate tracer study; employability; doctoral education; psychology graduates; program effectiveness

1. INTRODUCTION

Graduate tracer studies have become an important mechanism for evaluating the effectiveness, relevance, and long-term outcomes of higher education programs by examining graduates' employment experiences, professional advancement, competency utilization, and overall satisfaction with their academic preparation. Tracer studies provide valuable empirical evidence regarding the transition of graduates from higher education to professional practice and serve as essential tools for curriculum improvement, institutional planning, and quality assurance (Schomburg, 2003). In the Philippine context, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) has consistently emphasized outcomes-based quality assurance and the alignment of academic programs with labor market demands, national development priorities, and global competitiveness through policies supporting outcomes-based education and continuous quality improvement (Commission on Higher Education [CHED], 2014).

At the graduate and doctoral levels, tracer studies become particularly significant as they assess not only employment acquisition but also graduates' contributions to leadership, research, innovation, specialized practice, and institutional development. This aligns with CHED's policies on graduate education, which emphasize advanced scholarship, knowledge generation, professional specialization, and leadership development as expected

outcomes of graduate programs (CHED, 2019). Moreover, in the context of regional integration and internationalization, graduate education institutions are increasingly expected to align with broader regional quality frameworks such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) and the ASEAN University Network Quality Assurance (AUN-QA) framework, which promote comparability of qualifications, learner mobility, academic collaboration, and the development of globally competitive graduates (ASEAN, 2015; ASEAN University Network, 2020). These frameworks underscore the importance of producing graduates who possess not only disciplinary expertise but also research competence, leadership capacity, intercultural adaptability, and a commitment to lifelong learning.

In this context, the present tracer study was conducted to examine the educational, employment, professional, and experiential outcomes of graduates of the Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology program. Specifically, the study sought to assess graduates' demographic and educational profiles, employability outcomes, job-program alignment, professional competencies, licensure and recognitions, program satisfaction, employment challenges, and recommendations for continuous program enhancement. The findings of this study are expected to provide evidence-based insights that may support curriculum review, policy formulation, quality assurance initiatives, and the continued alignment of the doctoral program with CHED standards,

national professional demands, and emerging regional and global expectations in psychology education.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study used a mixed-methods approach to better understand the employability of Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology graduates of Cagayan State University from 2016 to 2025. It provided a comprehensive picture of the graduates by looking into their personal profiles, educational background, employment status, professional eligibility, awards and recognitions, and any further studies they pursued after completing the program. The study also explored how relevant the program has been to their current work. In addition, it gave space for graduates to share their experiences, particularly the challenges they faced in finding employment, as well as their insights and suggestions for improving the program.

2.2 Respondents of the Study

The respondents were graduates of the Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology program of Cagayan State University from 2016 to 2025. Although the study aimed to include all graduates through total enumeration, only 16 participated in the survey.

2.3 Research Instrument

This study utilized an online survey questionnaire administered through Google Forms to facilitate accessible and convenient data collection among respondents across different locations and schedules. The instrument was developed in alignment with the study's objectives and organized into four sections. The first section gathered demographic information, including age, sex, and civil status. The second section focused on the respondents' educational background, such as year of graduation, eligibility, awards and recognitions received, and any further studies pursued after completing the program. The third section collected employment-related data, including current job, employment status, position, type of organization, salary range, and the length of time it took to secure employment after graduation. The fourth section examined the relevance of the PhD in Psychology program to the respondents' current work and included open-ended questions on the challenges they encountered and their recommendations for program improvement.

2.4 Analysis of Data

The study employed descriptive statistics, specifically frequency counts and percentages, to systematically organize and summarize the respondents' profiles and employment status. For the qualitative data,

particularly the challenges encountered in finding employment and the suggested improvements to the program, thematic analysis was used to identify and interpret recurring patterns and insights.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Demographic Profile of PhD in Psychology Graduates (N = 16)

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age	30–39 years old	6	37.5
	40–49 years old	4	25
	50–59 years old	5	31.25
	60 years old and above	1	6.25
Sex	Male	6	37.5
	Female	10	62.5
Civil Status	Single	4	25
	Married	12	75
	Others	0	0

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the graduates of the Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology program. In terms of age, the respondents represented a wide range of adult developmental stages, with the largest proportion belonging to the 30–39 years old bracket (37.50%, $n = 6$), followed by those aged 50–59 years old (31.25%, $n = 5$), 40–49 years old (25.00%, $n = 4$), and 60 years old and above (6.25%, $n = 1$). This distribution suggests that doctoral studies in psychology attract professionals across multiple career stages, from mid-career practitioners to senior professionals seeking further academic specialization, leadership development, or scholarly advancement.

In terms of sex, the majority of respondents were female (62.50%, $n = 10$), while 37.50% ($n = 6$) were male. This finding reflects the continued strong participation of women in advanced psychology education and professional practice.

With respect to civil status, the majority of respondents were married (75.00%, $n = 12$), while 25.00% ($n = 4$) identified as single. This profile may suggest that doctoral education in psychology is commonly pursued by individuals who are already professionally established and managing both academic and family responsibilities, reflecting the program's relevance to experienced professionals seeking advanced credentials, research competence, and leadership preparation.

Table 2. Educational Profile of PhD in Psychology Graduates (N = 16)

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Year of Graduation	2016	1	6.25
	2018	1	6.25
	2019	2	12.5
	2021	1	6.25
	2022	1	6.25
	2023	1	6.25
	2024	3	18.75
	2025	6	37.5
Pursued Additional Studies After Graduation	Yes	8	50
	No	8	50

Table 2 presents the educational profile of the graduates of the Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology program. In terms of year of graduation, respondents represented multiple graduating cohorts, reflecting participation from both earlier and more recent doctoral alumni. The largest proportion of respondents came from the 2025 cohort (37.50%, $n = 6$), followed by graduates from 2024 (18.75%, $n = 3$) and 2019 (12.50%, $n = 2$). The remaining cohorts each accounted for 6.25% ($n = 1$) of the respondents. This distribution indicates that the tracer study captured perspectives from graduates across different completion periods, allowing for insights from both recently graduated and relatively earlier doctoral completers.

With respect to postdoctoral academic engagement, the respondents were equally divided, with 50.00% ($n = 8$) reporting that they had pursued additional studies after completing the doctoral program, while the remaining 50.00% ($n = 8$) indicated that they had not pursued further formal studies. This balanced distribution suggests variability in postdoctoral academic trajectories among graduates.

The findings may indicate that while many doctoral graduates continue to engage in lifelong learning through additional certifications, specialized training, postdoctoral education, leadership programs, or professional development initiatives, others may consider the doctoral degree itself as the terminal academic credential necessary for their current professional goals. Given the advanced nature of doctoral education, continued academic engagement may reflect professional specialization, scholarly productivity, research advancement, or preparation for expanded leadership roles in academic, clinical, organizational, or public service settings.

The finding that all doctoral graduates were employed, with nearly all occupying permanent positions, reflects strong employability outcomes commonly associated with advanced academic qualifications. Tracer study literature consistently identifies stable employment, career progression, and professional advancement as important indicators of graduate program effectiveness and labor market responsiveness (Andrin et al., 2022; Schomburg, 2003). At the doctoral level, employment outcomes often extend beyond initial workforce entry and may instead reflect promotion, tenure, expanded institutional responsibilities, and leadership mobility among already established professionals. International studies on doctorate holders similarly show that doctoral qualifications are strongly associated with career stability,

professional specialization, and increased access to leadership and knowledge-intensive positions (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013).

The predominance of graduates in faculty, academic leadership, and psychological service roles is likewise consistent with the traditional career trajectories of doctoral graduates, who are often expected to contribute to teaching, research, institutional leadership, and specialized professional practice. Higher education and employability literature suggests that doctoral graduates possess not only advanced disciplinary knowledge but also research competence, leadership capacity, scholarly identity, and professional credibility that enable them to assume positions of influence within academic and professional institutions (Gardner, 2008; Tinto, 2012; Tomlinson, 2017; Yorke, 2006). Previous studies on doctoral career development likewise indicate that doctoral education functions as a mechanism for developing independent scholarship, institutional leadership, and long-term professional advancement across academic and applied settings (Nerad & Cerny, 1999; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018).

Table 3. Employment Profile of PhD in Psychology Graduates (N = 16)

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Currently Employed	Yes	16	100
	No	0	0
Employment Status	Permanent	15	93.75
	Contractual	1	6.25
	Probationary	0	0
	Part-time	0	0
	Self-employed	0	0
Current Position / Job Title	Faculty and Teaching Positions*	8	50
	Guidance and Psychological Services**	4	25
	Academic Leadership / Administration***	3	18.75
	Specialized Behavioral / Clinical Services****	1	6.25

Note. * Includes Instructor III, Teaching, Assistant Professor, Assistant Professor II, Assistant Professor III, Assistant Professor IV, Associate Professor V, and Faculty/Associate Professor I.

** Includes Guidance Counselor, Psychologist II, Police Captain/Psychologist, and related psychology service roles.

*** Includes Registrar III, Vice President for Administration, and similar administrative positions.

**** Includes Applied Behavior Analysis Registered Behavior Technician.

Table 3 presents the employment profile of graduates of the Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology program. The findings reveal that all respondents (100.00%, $n = 16$) reported being currently employed, indicating full employment among the doctoral graduates who participated in the tracer study. This suggests highly favorable employability outcomes and reflects the strong market relevance of doctoral-level competencies in psychology across academic, administrative, and specialized professional settings.

In terms of employment status, the overwhelming majority of respondents (93.75%, $n = 15$) reported holding permanent positions, while only 6.25% ($n = 1$) reported contractual employment. No respondents reported probationary, part-time, or self-employed arrangements. The predominance of permanent appointments suggests not only

successful workforce participation but also long-term professional integration, organizational trust, and recognition of the advanced expertise associated with doctoral-level preparation.

With respect to current position or job title, half of the respondents (50.00%, $n = 8$) occupied faculty and teaching-related roles, making this the most represented occupational category. This was followed by graduates working in guidance and psychological services (25.00%, $n = 4$), academic leadership and administrative positions (18.75%, $n = 3$), and specialized behavioral or clinical services (6.25%, $n = 1$). This distribution suggests that the PhD in Psychology program primarily prepares graduates for leadership in higher education, specialized psychological practice, and institutional administration, consistent with the expected outcomes of doctoral education.

The finding that all doctoral graduates were employed, with nearly all occupying permanent positions, reflects strong employability outcomes commonly associated with advanced academic qualifications. Tracer study literature consistently identifies stable employment, career progression, and professional advancement as important indicators of graduate program effectiveness and labor market responsiveness (Andrin et al., 2022; Schomburg, 2003). At the doctoral level, employment outcomes often extend beyond initial workforce entry and may instead reflect promotion, tenure, expanded institutional responsibilities, and leadership mobility among professionals who are already established in their respective fields. International studies on doctorate holders likewise show that doctoral qualifications are associated with greater career stability, occupational specialization, and access to leadership and knowledge-intensive positions (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013).

The predominance of graduates in faculty, academic leadership, and psychological service roles is likewise consistent with the traditional career trajectories of doctoral graduates, who are often expected to contribute to teaching, research, institutional leadership, and specialized professional practice. Higher education and employability literature suggests that doctoral graduates possess not only advanced disciplinary knowledge but also research competence, scholarly independence, leadership capacity, and professional credibility that enable them to assume positions of influence within academic and professional institutions (Gardner, 2008; Tinto, 2012; Tomlinson, 2017; Yorke, 2006). Previous studies on doctoral career development further indicate that doctoral education functions as a mechanism for developing independent scholarship, institutional leadership, and long-term professional advancement across both academic and applied professional settings (Nerad & Cerny, 1999; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018).

Table 4. Employment Characteristics of PhD in Psychology Graduates (N = 16)

Nature of Organization	Government	11	68.75
	Private	0	0
	NGO	0	0
	Academic Institution	3	18.75
	Clinical Setting	2	12.5
Monthly Salary Range	Below P20,000	0	0
	P20,000–P40,000	3	18.75
	P40,001–P60,000	8	50
	P60,001 and above	5	31.25
Time to Obtain First Job After Graduation	Less than 3 months	13	81.25
	3–6 months	1	6.25
	7–12 months	1	6.25
	More than 1 year	1	6.25

Note. Employment-related data represent the respondents' professional status at the time of survey administration and do not necessarily reflect their employment conditions immediately after graduation, except for the item pertaining to time to first employment.

Table 4 further presents the employment acquisition profile of graduates of the Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology program. In terms of time to obtain first employment after graduation, the vast majority of respondents (81.25%, $n = 13$) reported securing their first job within less than three months after completing their doctoral degree. Meanwhile, 6.25% ($n = 1$) obtained employment within three to six months, another 6.25% ($n = 1$) within seven to twelve months, and 6.25% ($n = 1$) reported obtaining employment after more than one year.

These findings suggest an exceptionally strong employability profile among doctoral graduates, with the overwhelming majority transitioning into employment within a relatively short period. The short job-search duration may reflect the strong labor market value of doctoral-level competencies in psychology, including advanced expertise in research, instruction, leadership, consultation, assessment, and specialized professional practice. Furthermore, given that many doctoral students are already professionally engaged while completing their studies, the rapid employment acquisition observed may also reflect career advancement, promotion, tenure, or transition into higher-level professional roles rather than initial workforce entry.

The finding that the majority of doctoral graduates secured employment within less than three months suggests a highly favorable workforce transition and strong labor market responsiveness of the competencies developed through doctoral education. Tracer study literature identifies the length of time required to obtain first employment as an important indicator of graduate employability and academic program relevance (Millington, 2017; Schomburg, 2003). The predominance of rapid employment acquisition observed in the present study may indicate that doctoral-level preparation in psychology equips graduates with specialized competencies that are immediately valued across academic, clinical, administrative, and public service sectors.

Moreover, doctoral employability often differs from undergraduate or master's employability, as many doctoral

candidates are already professionally established prior to degree completion. In such cases, employment outcomes may reflect professional advancement, tenure, promotion, leadership appointments, or expanded institutional responsibilities rather than first-time labor market entry (Andrin et al., 2022; Tomlinson, 2017). The present findings therefore suggest that the PhD in Psychology program not only supports employability but may also facilitate career progression, leadership mobility, and sustained professional advancement among experienced practitioners.

Table 5. Perceived Relevance of Graduate Training to Current Employment Among PhD in Psychology Graduates (N = 16)

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Present Job Related to Psychology	Highly Related	13	81.25
	Moderately Related	2	12.5
	Slightly Related	1	6.25
	Not Related	0	0
Competencies Gained from Graduate Studies Useful in Current Job*	Counseling Skills	15	93.75
	Research Skills	13	81.25
	Leadership Skills	11	68.75
	Critical Thinking	11	68.75
	Teaching Skills	10	62.5
	Assessment Skills	10	62.5
	Problem Solving Skills	10	62.5
	Communication Skills	8	50

Note. Employment-related data represent the respondents' professional status at the time of survey administration and do not necessarily reflect their employment conditions immediately after graduation, except for the item pertaining to time to first employment.

Table 5 presents the doctoral graduates' perceptions regarding the relevance of competencies acquired through the Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology program to their current professional roles. The findings show that counseling skills emerged as the most frequently identified competency (93.75%, $n = 15$), followed by research skills (81.25%, $n = 13$). Other competencies commonly identified as useful included leadership skills and critical thinking (both 68.75%, $n = 11$), as well as teaching skills, assessment skills, and problem-solving skills (all 62.50%, $n = 10$). Meanwhile, communication skills were identified by 50.00% ($n = 8$) of the respondents.

These findings suggest that doctoral graduates perceive the competencies developed through the PhD in Psychology program as highly relevant to advanced professional practice. The prominence of counseling and research competencies reflects the dual scholarly-practitioner orientation of doctoral psychology training, while the substantial endorsement of leadership, teaching, and critical thinking competencies suggests that graduates occupy roles requiring not only technical expertise but also institutional leadership, decision-making, supervision, and knowledge generation.

The prominence of counseling and research competencies among doctoral graduates highlights the applied and scholarly nature of doctoral psychology education.

Competency-based models in psychology emphasize that advanced training should develop expertise in intervention, assessment, research generation, supervision, and evidence-based practice, enabling graduates to function effectively across academic, clinical, organizational, and leadership settings (American Psychological Association, 2013; Fouad et al., 2009). The high perceived utility of counseling and research skills in the present study suggests that doctoral preparation remains closely aligned with the professional demands encountered by graduates in real-world practice.

Likewise, the substantial endorsement of leadership, critical thinking, teaching, and problem-solving competencies reflects the expanded professional expectations associated with doctoral-level roles. Graduate employability literature suggests that advanced degrees contribute not only to technical specialization but also to the development of higher-order cognitive abilities, professional judgment, leadership capacity, and the ability to influence organizational and academic systems (Tomlinson, 2017; Yorke, 2006). In doctoral education specifically, these competencies are essential for graduates who assume roles involving faculty instruction, institutional administration, policy development, supervision, and professional consultation.

Table 6. Professional Awards, Recognitions, Licensure, and Eligibility of PhD in Psychology Graduates (N = 16)

A. Awards and Recognitions

Category	Illustrative Recognitions Reported
Academic Excellence	Outstanding Dissertation; Outstanding Dissertation/Dean's List; Dean's List
Research Recognition	2024 CHED Call for Research – Best in Research (Region II); Best Research Paper – ISEME Malaysia
Institutional Service Recognition	Loyalty Award; Outstanding Non-Teaching Personnel

B. Professional Licensure and Eligibility

Licensure / Eligibility	Frequency (f)
Licensed Professional Teacher (LPT)	8
Registered Guidance Counselor (RGC)	7
Registered Psychometrician (RPm)	8
Registered Psychologist (RPsy)	7

Note. Frequencies are based on multiple responses; totals exceed the number of respondents.

Table 6 presents the professional awards, recognitions, licensure, and eligibility of graduates of the Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology program. The findings indicate that doctoral graduates possess diverse professional credentials and recognitions that reflect both academic excellence and professional advancement. Several graduates reported receiving academic distinctions such as Outstanding Dissertation and Dean's List, while others received institutional and research-based recognitions, including Outstanding Non-Teaching Personnel, Loyalty Award, and notable external recognitions such as the 2024 CHED Call for Research – Best in Research (Region II) and Best Research Paper at ISEME Malaysia. These recognitions suggest active scholarly engagement, institutional contribution, and research productivity among graduates.

In terms of professional licensure and eligibility, the most frequently reported credentials included Licensed Professional Teacher (LPT), Registered Psychometrician (RPM), Registered Guidance Counselor (RGC), and Registered Psychologist (RPsy). Some graduates also reported civil service eligibility and specialized certifications such as Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) and international school psychology credentials. The presence of multiple professional licenses and specialized certifications suggests that doctoral graduates possess multidisciplinary qualifications that support professional mobility, leadership opportunities, and specialized practice across educational, clinical, counseling, governmental, and behavioral settings.

The presence of multiple professional licenses, academic distinctions, and research recognitions among doctoral graduates suggests that the Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology program supports not only employability but also professional credentialing, scholarly productivity, and leadership development. Graduate employability literature emphasizes that advanced academic qualifications often interact with professional licensure, certifications, and recognized scholarly outputs to enhance graduates' professional capital and career competitiveness (Tomlinson, 2017; Yorke, 2006).

Moreover, the presence of research awards and academic distinctions reflects the scholarly orientation expected of doctoral education. Doctoral training is designed not only to produce practitioners but also independent researchers, knowledge generators, and institutional leaders capable of contributing to disciplinary advancement and evidence-based practice (Tinto, 2012; Schomburg, 2003). The attainment of multiple professional licenses may likewise reflect continued commitment to lifelong learning, interdisciplinary competence, and adherence to professional standards within psychology and allied professions (American Psychological Association, 2013; Fouad et al., 2009).

Taken together, these findings suggest that graduates of the PhD in Psychology program demonstrate strong professional legitimacy, scholarly engagement, and multidisciplinary competence, further supporting the program's effectiveness in preparing highly qualified professionals for advanced academic, clinical, administrative, and research-oriented roles (Schomburg, 2003; Tomlinson, 2017).

Table 7. Level of Satisfaction with the Quality of Education Received Among PhD in Psychology Graduates (N = 16)

Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Very Satisfied	14	87.5
Satisfied	2	12.5
Neutral	0	0
Dissatisfied	0	0
Very Dissatisfied	0	0

Table 7 presents the graduates' level of satisfaction regarding the quality of education received from the Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology program. The findings reveal that the overwhelming majority of respondents (87.50%, n = 14) reported being very satisfied, while the remaining 12.50% (n = 2) indicated that they were satisfied with the quality of education they received. Notably, none of the respondents selected neutral, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied responses.

These findings suggest an exceptionally positive evaluation of the doctoral program, with all respondents expressing favorable perceptions of their educational experience. The predominance of "very satisfied" responses may indicate that graduates perceive the program as having effectively delivered advanced academic preparation, rigorous scholarly training, meaningful faculty mentorship, research competence development, and professional experiences aligned with their career advancement and leadership goals.

The consistently high satisfaction ratings observed among doctoral graduates suggest that the Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology program is perceived as academically relevant, professionally meaningful, and responsive to the developmental needs of advanced learners. In graduate education, learner satisfaction is often regarded as an important indicator of program quality, reflecting graduates' perceptions of curriculum relevance, faculty expertise, research mentorship, academic support, and alignment between educational experiences and professional goals (Andrin et al., 2022; Tinto, 2012).

The predominance of "very satisfied" responses may also reflect the unique expectations associated with doctoral education, where learners seek not only advanced content knowledge but also opportunities for independent scholarship, research productivity, professional identity formation, and leadership development. Previous tracer studies and higher education literature suggest that graduate satisfaction tends to increase when academic experiences translate into meaningful professional advancement, stronger research competence, expanded leadership opportunities, and enhanced professional credibility (Gentova et al., 2023; Schomburg, 2003).

Moreover, doctoral education is inherently mentorship-driven, with faculty guidance, scholarly collaboration, and intellectual engagement playing central roles in student success and persistence. Tinto (2012) emphasized that meaningful academic engagement, supportive faculty relationships, and strong scholarly communities significantly influence graduate satisfaction and long-term academic outcomes. The uniformly positive satisfaction ratings observed in the present study may therefore reflect not only graduates' experiences during their doctoral training but also retrospective appreciation of the program's contribution to their professional growth, scholarly productivity, and career advancement (Tinto, 2012; Tomlinson, 2017).

Thematic Analysis of Graduates' Open-Ended Responses



Theme 1: Employment Challenges

Analysis of the graduates' responses regarding challenges encountered in finding employment generated **three major themes: (1) Minimal or No Employment Barriers, (2) Experience-Related Entry Constraints, and (3) Geographic and Field-Specific Employment Limitations.**

Subtheme 1: Minimal or No Employment Barriers

The overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that they encountered little to no difficulty in securing employment. Several respondents explicitly stated:

"NA"
"None"
"None so far."

These responses suggest that most doctoral graduates experienced a relatively smooth workforce transition and minimal employment barriers. Given that many doctoral candidates are already professionally established while completing their studies, employment outcomes may reflect career continuity, promotion, or expanded professional responsibilities rather than first-time workforce entry.

Subtheme 2: Experience-Related Entry Constraints

A small number of respondents identified professional experience as a challenge during employment acquisition:

"Lack of work experience."

This response suggests that even among highly educated graduates, practical experience may remain an important consideration in certain employment contexts, particularly when transitioning into specialized roles or new professional sectors.

Subtheme 3: Geographic and Field-Specific Employment Limitations

Some respondents highlighted challenges related to the availability of psychology-related positions within specific geographic areas or professional sectors:

"Finding a job relevant to my degree in my hometown."

"There are few positions available related to my field."

These responses suggest that employment challenges may not necessarily stem from a lack of qualifications but from labor market constraints, geographic limitations, or the availability of specialized positions aligned with doctoral-level training.

Overall, the qualitative findings suggest that most PhD in Psychology graduates experienced minimal difficulty in securing employment, with only a few respondents identifying challenges related to prior work experience, geographic accessibility, and the limited availability of positions aligned with their specialization. These findings are consistent with the quantitative results showing 100% employment, predominantly permanent appointments, and rapid workforce transition, suggesting strong employability outcomes among doctoral graduates.

The predominance of responses indicating minimal employment barriers suggests highly favorable employability conditions among doctoral graduates. Previous tracer studies have shown that advanced graduate qualifications often support career continuity, promotion, leadership mobility, and expanded professional responsibilities, particularly among individuals who are already professionally established before degree completion (Andrin et al., 2022; Schomburg, 2003). This may help explain why most respondents reported little to no difficulty in securing employment.

At the same time, the emergence of challenges related to work experience and field-specific job availability highlights that employability extends beyond academic qualifications alone. Employability literature suggests that workforce outcomes are influenced not only by educational attainment but also by prior professional experience, occupational demand, geographic labor market conditions, and access to specialized employment opportunities (Tomlinson, 2017; Yorke, 2006). For highly specialized disciplines such as psychology, employment opportunities may vary depending on regional demand, institutional availability, and the presence of organizations requiring doctoral-level expertise.

Moreover, geographic limitations identified by some respondents suggest that labor market accessibility remains an important consideration even for highly credentialed professionals. Research on graduate employability has emphasized that employment outcomes are often shaped by the interaction between graduate competencies and regional labor market structures, which may influence the availability of positions aligned with

graduates' specialization and career aspirations (Millington, 2017; Schomburg, 2003).

Theme 2: Suggested Program Improvements

Analysis of the graduates' responses regarding suggested program improvements generated five major themes: (1) Curriculum Enhancement and Internationalization, (2) Strengthening Applied and Specialized Training, (3) Research Mentorship and Academic Support, (4) Expansion of Professional Specialization, and (5) Program Satisfaction and Maintenance.

Subtheme 1: Curriculum Enhancement and Internationalization

Several graduates emphasized the need for curriculum enhancement, global alignment, and international academic exposure:

"Improve the curriculum."
"Continuous curriculum review."
"I'm hoping you can align the curriculum internationally."
"Exchange student program for graduate school."
"Exposure of students and faculty in international arena through faculty and student-exchange program."
"International seminars for teachers."

These responses suggest that doctoral graduates recognize the importance of ensuring that the curriculum remains globally relevant, responsive to emerging international standards, and competitive within an increasingly interconnected academic and professional environment.

Subtheme 2: Strengthening Applied and Specialized Training

A recurring recommendation involved increasing practical exposure in specialized areas of psychology:

"More exposure in assessment and forensic psychology."
"Psychological Laboratory and more exposure to Psychometric Tests."
"Clinical Training."
"Enhanced practicum and research."

These responses indicate a strong desire for more experiential learning opportunities that support advanced competency development in assessment, intervention, clinical practice, and specialized applied domains.

Subtheme 3: Research Mentorship and Academic Support

Some graduates highlighted the need for stronger advising and research support:

"I would like to suggest enhancing the advising support system in the research program, as some students experience challenges in receiving sufficient guidance during their research work."

This response suggests that effective faculty mentorship and structured scholarly guidance remain important components of doctoral student success and research productivity

Subtheme 4: Expansion of Professional Specialization

Several graduates recommended expanding specialization options and aligning doctoral preparation with licensure and emerging professional domains:

"Subjects in doctoral degree should also be aligned with the board examination for Psychologist."
"To expand major fields of specialization (i.e., Clinical, Educational, Counseling)."
"Add more content on contemporary human resource management and development."

These responses suggest the need for broader curricular pathways that support diverse career trajectories, licensure preparation, and interdisciplinary practice.

Subtheme 5: Program Satisfaction and Maintenance

A few graduates expressed satisfaction with the current program:

"NA."
"None."

These responses suggest that some graduates perceive the program as already effective in meeting their academic and professional needs.

Overall, the qualitative findings suggest that while PhD in Psychology graduates generally view the program positively, they also identified opportunities for enhancement in curriculum modernization, internationalization, specialized applied training, research mentorship, and expanded areas of specialization. The recurring emphasis on international exposure, psychological laboratories, clinical training, and stronger research support suggests that doctoral graduates value learning experiences that not only meet local professional requirements but also align with global standards, emerging professional competencies, and increasingly internationalized academic environments (Andrin et al., 2022; Schomburg, 2003; Teichler, 2015).

The graduates' recommendations for curriculum enhancement and internationalization reflect the evolving expectations of doctoral education in a globalized academic

environment. Contemporary higher education literature emphasizes that doctoral programs must continuously adapt to international standards, interdisciplinary developments, research collaboration, and emerging professional demands to remain globally competitive and academically relevant (Altbach et al., 2009; Tinto, 2012; Tomlinson, 2017). Similarly, internationalization scholars have noted that faculty mobility, student exchange, international seminars, and cross-border academic collaboration contribute significantly to graduate competence, global awareness, and scholarly competitiveness (De Wit, 2011; Knight, 2013). The calls for curriculum review, international seminars, and faculty-student exchange programs, therefore, suggest that graduates value global exposure as part of scholarly development, professional networking, and academic competitiveness.

The recurring emphasis on psychological laboratories, psychometric exposure, clinical training, and practicum enhancement likewise underscores the importance of experiential learning in advanced psychology education. Competency-based training models in psychology emphasize that doctoral preparation should integrate supervised practice, advanced assessment training, intervention competence, and evidence-based application across authentic professional settings (American Psychological Association, 2013; Fouad et al., 2009). Likewise, experiential learning theory suggests that meaningful professional competence develops through the integration of concrete experience, reflective practice, conceptual understanding, and active experimentation (Kolb, 2015). These recommendations suggest that graduates continue to value applied learning opportunities that bridge doctoral scholarship with specialized professional practice.

The identified need for stronger research advising and mentorship is likewise consistent with doctoral education literature, which recognizes faculty mentorship as a critical determinant of research productivity, academic persistence, scholarly identity formation, and timely degree completion (Gardner, 2008; Golde, 2005; Tinto, 2012). Research further suggests that effective doctoral supervision contributes significantly to students' research self-efficacy, academic integration, dissertation completion, and long-term scholarly productivity (Lovitts, 2001; Pyhältö et al., 2015). Effective mentoring structures may therefore be particularly important in doctoral programs where independent research and dissertation completion represent core academic milestones.

Finally, graduates' recommendations regarding specialization expansion, licensure alignment, and inclusion of emerging fields such as human resource development suggest the growing need for curricular flexibility and responsiveness to diverse career pathways. Graduate employability literature suggests that advanced academic programs increasingly need to balance disciplinary depth with professional adaptability, interdisciplinary competence, and alignment with evolving workforce requirements (Schomburg, 2003; Tomlinson, 2017; Yorke, 2006). Studies on doctoral career development likewise indicate that modern doctoral graduates increasingly pursue diverse academic, clinical, organizational, and leadership roles, necessitating

curricula that support specialization, professional mobility, and transferable expertise across multiple sectors (Nerad & Cerny, 1999; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013).

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The findings of this tracer study suggest that the Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology program demonstrates strong outcomes in terms of graduate employability, professional advancement, competency relevance, and overall program satisfaction. All respondents were currently employed, with most holding permanent positions and occupying roles in academe, leadership, government service, and specialized psychological practice, indicating strong alignment between doctoral training and advanced professional responsibilities.

Graduates likewise reported that their current work is highly related to psychology and identified counseling, research, leadership, teaching, critical thinking, and assessment as among the most valuable competencies gained from the program. The presence of multiple professional licenses, certifications, academic distinctions, and research recognitions further reflects the graduates' professional credibility, scholarly engagement, and multidisciplinary competence.

Moreover, graduates expressed very high satisfaction with the quality of education received while also providing valuable recommendations for program enhancement, particularly in curriculum modernization, internationalization, stronger research mentorship, expanded clinical and assessment training, improved laboratory resources, and broader specialization options aligned with emerging professional demands.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this tracer study and the recommendations provided by the alumni, the following recommendations are proposed to further strengthen the Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology program:

1. The program may institutionalize a regular curriculum review mechanism to ensure alignment with current professional standards, licensure competencies, emerging psychological practice, and international benchmarks such as CHED outcomes-based education frameworks, ASEAN quality assurance standards, and global developments in psychology. Particular attention may be given to integrating contemporary and interdisciplinary content relevant to evolving professional demands.
2. Given graduates' recommendations for global exposure, the Graduate School may expand opportunities for faculty and student exchange programs, international research

collaboration, academic mobility, international seminars, and cross-border scholarly partnerships. These initiatives may enhance global competence, academic networking, research visibility, and alignment with international best practices.

3. The program may strengthen experiential learning by expanding advanced training in psychological assessment, psychometrics, forensic psychology, clinical intervention, and supervised practicum experiences. The establishment or enhancement of a doctoral-level psychological laboratory equipped with updated assessment tools and simulation resources may further support competency-based professional preparation.

4. In response to graduates' feedback regarding research support, the program may institutionalize a structured doctoral mentoring framework that includes regular adviser consultations, dissertation monitoring, research colloquia, writing workshops, and peer-review mechanisms. Strengthening faculty advising may support timely completion, research productivity, and scholarly development.

5. The Graduate School may consider offering or strengthening specialized tracks in areas such as clinical psychology, counseling psychology, educational psychology, organizational psychology, forensic psychology, and human resource development, allowing doctoral students to pursue career pathways aligned with their professional interests and labor market opportunities.

6. The program may review the alignment of selected courses with competencies relevant to professional licensure, ethical practice, supervision, advanced assessment, consultation, and emerging practice areas in psychology, while maintaining the scholarly and research-oriented nature of doctoral education.

7. To broaden professional exposure, the program may expand partnerships with hospitals, mental health institutions, schools, government agencies, industries, and research organizations for practicum, consultancy, collaborative research, and professional immersion opportunities.

8. The institution may establish a more formal doctoral alumni engagement and tracking system to monitor graduates' career progression, professional achievements, competency needs, and emerging industry trends. Regular tracer studies and alumni consultations may provide evidence-based inputs for continuous curriculum enhancement and policy development.

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