

Determinants of the University's Graduate School Public Image in the Philippines

Tarhata S. Guiamalon*¹, Arbaya H. Boquia¹, Esmael A. Lawan¹, Marilyn G. Billones¹,
Joanie T. Haramain¹, Pembain H. Solaiman¹

Cotabato State University, Rosary Heights, Cotabato City

Email ID: tarhata_guiamalon@ccspsc.edu.ph

***Corresponding Author**

Tarhata S. Guiamalon

Cotabato State University, Rosary Heights, Cotabato City

Email ID: tarhata_guiamalon@ccspsc.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

In the Philippine context, graduate education contributes significantly to national development and enhances institutional credibility by cultivating school leaders. The present study examined graduates' perceptions of the appropriateness and utility of the Ph.D. in Educational Administration (Ph.D.-Ed. Ad) and the MAED in Administration and Supervision (MAED-AS) programs at Cotabato State University, as well as the relationship between these perceptions and the public image of the Graduate School. Utilizing a descriptive-correlational approach, data were collected from 54 graduates through surveys and focus group discussions. Results indicated that both programs were perceived as appropriate and useful for developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes, with grand means of 3.87 (PhD) and 4.34 (MAED) for appropriateness, and 4.01 (PhD) and 4.36 (MAED) for usefulness. The public image was rated as "highly achieved" (PhD = 4.52; MAED = 4.53). Correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive association ($r = 0.45\text{--}0.50$, $p < 0.01$) between curriculum relevance and public image. This study extends tracer frameworks by clarifying the relationship between curriculum relevance and institutional image, and provides insights for accreditation and policy reform in the Philippines and broader Asian contexts.

Keywords: Graduate education, curriculum relevance, public image, educational administration, tracer study, employability, Philippine higher education.

INTRODUCTION

The development of competent administrators and professionals necessitates advanced study in areas such as public administration, peace development, business administration, education, social work, agriculture, information technology, and related fields. Graduate education is integral to fostering national development, enhancing institutional reputation, and promoting individual career advancement (Candelaria et al., 2025). According to Mayyasi (2020), globalization amplifies the demand for such advanced study. Gines (2014) situates graduate education within the Philippine Qualifications Framework, while Ramanick (2015) emphasizes the need to align curricula with professional objectives. Collectively, these studies underscore the importance of systematically evaluating Cotabato State University's graduate programs. The introduction of graduate education programs has been a key reform in the Philippines, reflecting governmental efforts to strengthen workforce competencies in response to globalization. Graduate education contributes to poverty reduction and socioeconomic development (Daguplo et al., 2019) and cultivates a workforce that embodies the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values required by contemporary society (Guiamalon et al., 2024).

Cotabato State University (CSU) aims to be a world-class educational institution for sustainable, inclusive, and transformative peace and development in the Southern Philippines. Its mission includes producing professionals in science and technology, advocating peace and development, advancing research and extension, generating resources, and providing leadership across specializations. Accordingly, the University offers a wide range of graduate programs, including the PhD in Educational Administration (Ph.D.-Ed.Ad) and the MAED in Administration and Supervision (MAED-AS). These programs support CSU's mandate and follow the Commission on Higher Education's (CHED) competency-based curriculum guidelines (CHED Memo No. 36, s. 1998; CHED Memo No. 15, s. 2018). The University may design its own competency-based curriculum for graduate degree programs.

Evaluating program effectiveness is key to institutional improvement (Guiamalon et al., 2024). Menez (2014) and Ramanick et al. (2015) emphasize that tracer studies help determine program quality and alignment with professional needs. The current study examines graduates' views on CSU's Graduate School public image and whether the PhD and MAED programs are seen as appropriate and useful for developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The research addresses these questions:

1. To what extent do graduates perceive the Ph.D.-Ed.Ad. and MAED-AS programs as appropriate and useful in developing their knowledge, skills, and attitudes?
2. How do graduates assess the public image of the Graduate School in relation to its delivery and management of the Ph.D.-Ed.Ad. and MAED-AS programs?
3. Is there a significant relationship between graduates' perceptions of the appropriateness and usefulness of the Ph.D.-Ed.Ad. and MAED-AS programs and their perception of the Graduate School's public image?

The study hypothesizes that the relevance of graduate programs in developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes is not significantly associated with the Graduate School's public image. Testing this hypothesis provides evidence regarding the potential impact of curriculum relevance on institutional reputation and offers insights into graduate program effectiveness.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Graduate education is key for national development, school reputation, and career growth (Guiamalon et al., 2024). Recent work shows that curriculum relevance and organizational accountability affect employability and public image (Ortiz, 2025).

Tracer studies check employability, but few assess direct effects on institutional image. This study links employability to perceptions of institutions. Castulo et al. (2025) note quality gaps, and Candelaria et al. (2024) highlight the role of accreditation in building trust. International research (Stevenson, 2016; Song et al., 2008) connects graduate education quality to earnings, yet underemployment remains in ASEAN (Reyes et al., 2025). These findings show that curriculum relevance impacts both employability and institutional trustworthiness.

Tracer studies reveal graduate employability (Sarsale et al., 2024). Maghamil (2025) found that advanced education supports career growth, reinforcing the curriculum's relevance. Dela Cruz (2022) found similar results, showing that tracer data can improve curricula. However, despite strong curricula, underemployment persists among Laguna University graduates (Reyes, Bautista, and Tan, 2025), underscoring the need for updates and alignment with the job market.

International research highlights comparisons of graduate education with global standards. Stevenson (2016) and Song et al. (2008) find that quality impacts earnings, while ASEAN studies link employability to competitiveness (Reyes et al., 2025). Institutional image extends beyond the local sphere. Key themes: curriculum relevance drives employability and image; policy and accreditation influence perception; tracer studies are essential for evaluation and should be long-term and comparative (Guzman, 2025). This study shows that curriculum appropriateness and usefulness strongly predict the CSU Graduate School's public image, informing debates on educational quality (Toquero & Ulanday, 2021).

3. METHODOLOGY

Design

This study used a descriptive-correlational design, which was appropriate for investigating the relationship between the perceived appropriateness and usefulness of graduate education programs and the public image of the Graduate School. The design enabled both descriptive analysis of program effectiveness and correlational testing to determine the strength and direction of associations between variables.

Population and Sampling

The study population comprised 273 graduates of Cotabato State University's Graduate School from academic years 2020–2021 to 2023–2024, including 89 Ph.D. graduates in Educational Administration and 184 MAED graduates in Administration and Supervision. Ethical safeguards were rigorously observed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, in accordance with CSU's research ethics standards. These measures enhance the study's methodological rigor and transparency.

Instruments

Two structured survey questionnaires were created: one for PhD graduates and one for MAED graduates. Each survey focused on how well the curriculum helped develop graduates' knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The instruments underwent content validation by 4 faculty experts and were pilot-tested with 10 graduate students who were not included in the final sample. Reliability testing using the split-half method produced a coefficient of 0.89, confirming strong internal consistency.

Data Collection Procedures

The research team obtained the list of alumni and their contact information from the University Registrar. Alumni were invited to participate through email and social media, and informed consent was secured prior to participation. Surveys were administered using Google Forms, and a focus group discussion with 15 alumni was conducted to supplement and elaborate on the survey findings.

Data Analysis

Data were entered into a master sheet and analyzed using descriptive statistics, particularly the mean, to assess views on curriculum appropriateness, usefulness, and public image. Pearson correlation was used to see the relationship between curriculum relevance and public image. Ratings were classified using set interpretation scales (e.g., 4.50–5.00 = Highly Appropriate/Useful; 3.50–4.49 = Appropriate/Useful).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Relevance of PhD in Educational Administration Courses

PhD Graduates assessed their courses as both appropriate (grand mean = 3.87) and useful (grand mean = 4.01). The highest ratings were assigned to Advanced Research Methods and Designs (M = 4.27) and Theory Building in Applied Disciplines (M = 4.22). These findings indicate strong alignment between advanced research training and workplace competencies. Focus group discussions corroborated these results, with participants reporting that research and policy analysis courses enhanced their capacity to design projects and lead institutional reforms. One respondent stated: “The program strengthened my confidence in administrative leadership.”

PhD graduates emphasized advanced research and policy analysis, whereas MAED graduates valued applied management and instructional supervision. These distinctions enhance the interpretation of program relevance, demonstrating that PhD programs foster theoretical and research depth, while MAED programs emphasize practical supervisory competencies (Pentang et al., 2023).

Table 1. Appropriateness and Usefulness of PhD in Educational Administration Courses

Item	Mean	Appropriateness		Usefulness
Advanced Research Methods and Designs	4.27	Appropriate	4.27	Useful
Theories, Concepts, and Principles in Administrative System	3.68	Appropriate	4.00	Useful
Philosophy of Education	3.94	Appropriate	4.00	Useful
Public Ethics and Public Service	3.95	Appropriate	4.04	Useful
Theory Building in Applied Disciplines	3.86	Appropriate	4.22	Useful
Policy Analysis Applied to Education	3.68	Appropriate	4.00	Useful
Administrative Leadership and Supervisory Development	4.00	Appropriate	3.90	Useful
Financial Management, Budgeting, and Control	3.68	Appropriate	3.72	Useful
Educational Planning (Special Problems)	3.72	Appropriate	4.04	Useful
Curriculum Development (Special Problems)	4.00	Appropriate	3.90	Useful
Administration and Supervision of Instruction	3.95	Appropriate	3.95	Useful
Organizational Growth and Management	3.68	Appropriate	4.09	Useful
Grand Mean	3.87	Appropriate	4.01	Useful

Scale: 4.50–5.00 = Highly Appropriate/Useful; 3.50–4.49 = Appropriate/Useful; 2.50–3.49 = Moderately Appropriate/Useful; 1.50–2.49 = Less Appropriate/Useful; 1.00–1.49 = Least Appropriate/Useful.

4.2 Relevance of MAED in Administration and Supervision Courses

MAED graduates rated their curriculum highly, with grand means of 4.34 for appropriateness and 4.36 for usefulness. Courses such as Curriculum Development (M = 4.62, SD = 0.29) and Research Methods and Design (M = 4.50, SD = 0.33) received the highest evaluations, classified as “very appropriate” and “very useful.” Focus group discussions indicated that graduates valued the integration of philosophical and ethical foundations with practical management skills, noting that these competencies enhanced instructional supervision and fiscal management practices.

The MAED program scored higher than the PhD program on both appropriateness and usefulness, indicating it better aligns with the supervisory skills needed in professional practice. This advantage highlights the program’s focus on applied learning and management skills that match workplace needs (Ladera et al., 2025). Purcell (2020) examines the relationship between higher education, skill development, and graduate employment outcomes. It contends that despite the fact that the increase in educational attainment is generally linked with better work prospects and income, there is a significant mismatch that occurs between the skills acquired from higher education and the skills employers are looking for, resulting in graduates being underemployed and overqualified.

Table 2. Appropriateness and Usefulness of MAED in Administration and Supervision Courses

Item	Mean	Appropriateness		Usefulness
Research Methods and Design	4.50	Very Appropriate	4.50	Very Useful
Theories and Practices in Educational Management	4.50	Very Appropriate	4.50	Very Useful
Curriculum Development	4.50	Very Appropriate	4.62	Very Useful
Philosophical & Ethical Foundations of Education	4.37	Appropriate	4.50	Very Useful
School Administration and Supervision	4.25	Appropriate	4.25	Useful
Educational Laws and Policies	4.12	Appropriate	4.12	Useful
Human Behavior in Organization	4.37	Appropriate	4.00	Useful
Fiscal Management in Education	4.12	Appropriate	4.37	Useful
Statistics with Data Analysis	4.37	Appropriate	4.37	Useful
Grand Mean	4.34	Appropriate	4.36	Useful

Scale: 4.50–5.00 = Highly Appropriate/Useful; 3.50–4.49 = Appropriate/Useful; 2.50–3.49 = Moderately Appropriate/Useful; 1.50–2.49 = Less Appropriate/Useful; 1.00–1.49 = Least Appropriate/Useful.

4.3 Public Image of the Graduate School

Both PhD and MAED graduates rated the Graduate School's public image as "highly achieved," with mean scores of 4.52 and 4.53. The strongest indicators were graduates' strong analytical thinking and problem-solving skills (PhD M = 4.56; MAED M = 4.58). Focus group discussions showed that trust in the institution was strengthened by meeting accreditation standards, adopting digital initiatives, and building partnerships with other organizations. One participant said: "The Graduate School's reputation is built not only on its curriculum but also on its ability to interact with communities and sustain linkages."

Table 3. Graduates' Perceptions of Public Image Aligned with Graduate School Goals

Item	Phd Mean	Interpretation	MAEd Mean	Interpretation
Enhance quality of instruction through advanced studies, trainings, accreditation, and compliance	4.51	Highly Achieved	4.56	Highly Achieved
Produce graduates with critical thinking, problem-solving, and leadership skills	4.56	Highly Achieved	4.58	Highly Achieved
Produce experts with competence in knowledge production, sharing, and application	4.49	Evident	4.54	Highly Achieved
Collaborate in partnerships and linkages for sustainable extension services	4.56	Highly Achieved	4.48	Evident
Strengthen digital advancement and transformation for efficient service delivery	4.46	Evident	4.50	Highly Achieved
Grand Mean	4.52	Highly Achieved	4.53	Highly Achieved

Scale: 4.50–5.00 = Highly Achieved; 3.50–4.49 = Achieved; 2.50–3.49 = Moderately Achieved; 1.50–2.49 = Less Achieved; 1.00–1.49 = Least Achieved.

4.4 Relationship between Curriculum Relevance and Public Image

Pearson correlation analysis showed a moderate positive link between curriculum appropriateness/usefulness and public image ($r = 0.45$ – 0.50 , $p < 0.01$). This means graduates who see their programs as more relevant also view the institution's public image more positively. The effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.52$) shows a medium impact, confirming that curriculum quality is an important factor in institutional reputation. Focus group discussions supported these results, as graduates often connected their career growth to the Graduate School's credibility.

Table 4. Curriculum Appropriateness/Usefulness and Public Image of the Graduate School

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables	r	p-value	interpretation	
PhD in Educational Administration (Appropriateness & Usefulness of courses in developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes)	Public Image of Graduate School	0.45	0.008	Moderate	Curriculum relevance moderately predicts institutional image
MAED in Administration and Supervision (Appropriateness & Usefulness of courses in developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes)	Public Image of Graduate School	0.50	0.005	Moderate	Curriculum relevance moderately predicts institutional image

Correlation coefficients (r) were interpreted using Cohen's guidelines: 0.10–0.29 means small, 0.30–0.49 means moderate, and 0.50–0.69 means strong. Significance was set at $p < 0.05$. Both correlations were statistically significant, confirming that curriculum relevance is an important predictor of institutional reputation.

5. DISCUSSIONS

This study shows that the appropriateness and usefulness of graduate programs have a strong effect on the public image of Cotabato State University's Graduate School (Cruz, 2022). Both the PhD and MAED programs were rated positively, but the MAED program scored higher in both areas. This suggests that practical supervisory and administrative training is more valued by stakeholders, while the PhD program's main strength is in advanced research and policy analysis. Together, these programs show CSU's broad approach to preparing graduates for both leadership roles and academic research.

The moderate correlation ($r = 0.45\text{--}0.50$, $p < 0.01$) between curriculum relevance and public image underscores that institutional trustworthiness depends not only on program offerings but also on their perceived alignment with labor market needs. This finding supports Castulo et al. (2025), who emphasized that quality gaps undermine institutional image, and Candelaria et al. (2024), who highlighted accreditation compliance as a driver of public trust. For CSU, strong ratings indicate that curricular design and delivery are meeting expectations, yet continuous enrichment remains necessary to sustain competitiveness.

The policy implications are clear: CHED and DepEd should update accreditation standards to emphasize curriculum relevance as a marker of institutional trustworthiness (Guzman, 2025). CSU should continue to add applied learning, digital skills, and global competencies to improve graduate employability. Comparing programs to ASEAN and international standards is important, as regional competitiveness affects how graduate education is viewed. This aligns with findings by Stevenson (2016) and Song et al. (2008), who linked education quality to earnings, and by Reyes et al. (2025), who found underemployment despite strong curricula.

Theoretically, this study adds to institutional image theory by showing that curriculum relevance affects public perception. It also expands tracer study frameworks by measuring the link between program usefulness and institutional reputation, going beyond employability outcomes to examine institutional credibility (Sarsale et al., 2024). However, the study is limited because it only covers one institution and relies on self-reported data. Future research should use long-term tracer studies, compare multiple universities, and include cross-country benchmarking to place Philippine graduate education in a wider international context.

6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the perceived relevance of graduate programs is closely linked to institutional trust. Both the PhD and MAED programs at Cotabato State University were valued by graduates, with the MAED program particularly noted for its alignment with supervisory and administrative competencies. The moderate correlation between curriculum relevance and public image indicates that institutional reputation depends not only on prestige but also on the extent to which programs address the evolving needs of professionals and communities. For CSU, maintaining this trust requires ongoing curriculum enhancement, integration of applied learning and digital competencies, and benchmarking against ASEAN and global standards. Policymakers and accrediting bodies are encouraged to recognize curriculum relevance as fundamental to institutional credibility. By establishing a connection between program usefulness and public image, this study broadens the scope of tracer research to include institutional perception and trust within the educational landscape. Future studies may consider a comprehensive evaluation of the Graduate School's service delivery.

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