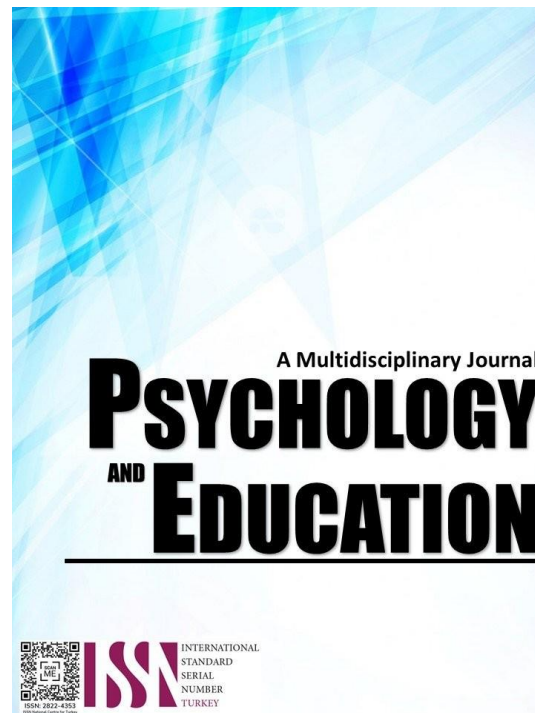


IMPACT OF GRADUATE STUDIES EDUCATION ON CAREER GROWTH OF PROFESSIONALS



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Impact of Graduate Studies Education on Career Growth of Professionals

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Abstract

Career growth is a vital aspect of personal and professional development across all fields of specialization, encompassing upward mobility, additional benefits, and salary enhancements. Achieving career growth demands dedication, hard work, and continuous improvement within one's chosen field. Notably, pursuing graduate studies education can significantly impact an individual's career trajectory. This study explored the motivations driving professionals to pursue graduate studies and assessed the resulting impact on their career growth. A total of 125 graduates was surveyed from a selected private higher education institution over the academic years 2013 – 2019. As a result of the study, professionals are intrinsically motivated for their personal aspiration, professional development and career advancement. It is also found out that graduate studies education significantly contributed to career growth by providing specialized knowledge and skills training, widening professional networks, and strengthening their credentials. Also, the impact on career advancement, earning potential, and career opportunities varies based on the highest degree earned and sector of employment. Findings calls for professionals to pursue graduate studies education to further strengthen their specialized knowledge and skills credentials and professional network for career growth.

Keywords: *graduate studies education; career growth; professionals; motivation; higher education*

Introduction

Career growth is an integral aspect of personal and professional advancement for workers in any field of specialization. It is characterized by moving upward on the organizational chart, receiving additional aids and benefits, and an increase in basic pay or salary. Achieving career growth requires hard work and a commitment to becoming more adept in one's field of specialization. For professionals such as teachers, accountants, and engineers, seeking jobs with better compensation, benefits, and career progression is crucial (San Juan, 2019). These goals come more attainable when professionals invest in continuing their studies in their respective fields. Many professionals view education as a lifelong process that extends beyond earning a bachelor's degree, even after establishing a career. This perspective is supported by institutions offering graduate studies, where professionals can refine their skills, broaden their network, and become more adept at their jobs. Encouraging professionals to continue their studies is essential for acquiring advance learning in their specialized discipline, satisfying various aspects of the 21st century workplace (Bueno, 2017; Buenvinida & Yazon, 2017).

In the Philippines, professionals seek career growth for better compensation and benefits to cope with the increasing costs of living, alongside the challenge of underemployment in some industries. However, both private and public sector professionals face a dilemma between expenses and investments. Continuing their studies helps refine their skills, excel at their jobs, and obtain career growth. Yet a lack of advancement opportunities poses a hindrance with inadequate prospects for upward mobility and evident vertical articulation issues in their careers (Papa, 2020).

According to the latest report by San Buenaventura (2019) on education equality assessment, there was a significant increase in graduates in both Master's and doctorate programs. The number of graduates surged from 31,787 during the academic year 2016 to 2017 to 241,501 by the end of 2018. This increase was notable as professionals sought to distinguish themselves from other job applicants or co-workers, viewing a graduate degree as a requisite for career progression (Dedicatoria, 2017). However, local research spanning from 2016 to 2018 reveals that despite holding a master's or doctorate degree, some teachers and business administration professionals still struggle to advance in their careers due to steep competition and a lack of permanent positions and opportunities (Bentor, 2016; Cruz & Ramirez, 2016; Segismundo & Zacarias, 2017; Cepni et al., 2018). Similarly, this study is aware of professional teachers who face challenges in competing for promotions due to a lack of a master's degree or earned units. Conversely, certain professionals, not confined to the teaching profession have experienced enhanced compensation and benefits after graduating from graduate school, either through promotions to high positions or gaining part-time and sideline opportunities. Given these diverse scenarios this study was conducted to comprehensively describe and analyze the career growth experiences of professionals who hold a graduate degree.

Research Questions

This study aimed to determine the impact of graduate studies education on career growth of professionals from Metro Manila College during Academic Years 2013 – 2019. Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of:
 - 1.1 sex;
 - 1.2 age;
 - 1.3 highest degree earned; and
 - 1.4 sector of employment?

2. What motivated the respondents to pursue graduate studies education and to what extent?
3. What is the impact of graduate studies education on the career growth of professionals in terms of:
 - 3.1 skills development;
 - 3.2 job performance;
 - 3.3 career advancement;
 - 3.4 earning potentials; and
 - 3.5 career opportunities?
4. Is there a significant difference on the impact of graduate studies education on career growth of professionals when respondents are grouped based on their profile?

Literature Review

Nature of Career Growth and Development

Career growth is essential to an employee's personal and professional life. It is distinguished when there is an upward mobility in occupational position, addition of benefits, and increase in salary. According to Weng (2018), career growth is in the form of promotion, additional benefits, and increase in salary. But Weng and Zhu (2020) suggested that it is also characterized by progression of career within or across organizations which will lead to a higher position with better compensation. Similarly, Kopchenko et al. (2020) proposed that one of the components of career growth is upward mobility in a structural hierarchy or moving up the career ladder.

However, it is only possible when employees are able to put effort and commit in developing oneself. This development expected from employees are in the areas of skills and behavior towards their work. Weng (2018) explained promotion and additional benefits are awarded to employees when they show commitment in working towards personal and organizational goals. Similarly, Weng and Zhu (2020) elucidated that career growth is established when skills offered by employees greatly contribute on the organization, and one's behavior reflects competence, leadership commitment towards the betterment of the organization. Hitka et al. (2021) also suggested that career growth is anchored with gaining experiences, refining skills, and developing one's potential. It is a continuous development of one's career by means of involvement in professional development, increasing networks, and setting of new goals. As a whole, career growth is achieved when employees started to identify their career needs and try and commit in improving oneself with the aim of having more career opportunities. This process is explained by Shaito (2019) as career development process. In this process, it is important that they can manage and analyze their career properly. By establishing clear career goals, they are able to determine in what aspect of their career they should focus on developing. Some of notable aspects are their attitude towards their workplace and wide-range specialized skills which are needed to perform well on their jobs.

But career growth is more possible if there are clear and company-defined career pathways. These career pathways are career ladder systems which are structured hierarchy of jobs requiring various duties and responsibilities within the organization or workplace. On the said hierarchy of jobs, it is often anchored with benchmarked timing which are well-developed career stage and duration at each position. Career growth is achieved when employees are able to progress or move along these pathways. Career pathways encompasses varied forms of career movement such as horizontal and vertical articulation, career mobility, retirement and termination (Hedge & Rineer, 2017).

These readings assert that career growth is achieved when there is promotion, increase in salary, and additional profits happening in an employee's career. With clear career goals and pathways, employees can attain career growth when they perform competently at their current job position. They can continue working on their career development by means of showing strong will and commitment in refining their skills and gaining more experiences to allow broaden their career opportunities within the organization. In addition, they should demonstrate evidences of strong competence and professionalism if they intend to fill in higher positions. Hence, career growth and career development are distinct but complement each other. Correspondingly, in the conduct of this study, the researcher considered promotion, additional profits and benefits, and increase in salary as manifestation of career growth. These are anchored with their motivation for skills development, better job performance, and career advancement.

Influences in Pursuing Graduate Studies Education

Pursuing graduate education while professionals attend to their duties and responsibilities at work and home is considered a time of substantial change. Challenges and sacrifices will come along the way as they continue their studies in a graduate school given the pressure academically and professionally. But it is rewarding if they have completed all academic requirements of a graduate program as it opens opportunities for career growth and development since a graduate degree appears to be one of the pre-requisites for work promotion of most professions (Zulietta et al., 2020). Hence, the decision-making process of professionals to pursue graduate education relies on knowledge of oneself, trends and issues about one's profession and people whom they interacted (Sturm, 2019).

In order to begin his or her journey in a graduate program, one must take the first step in pursuing graduate education. In the study of Sturm (2019), it was found out that some students pursue graduate studies education because of their uncertainty on their career plans and they might want to change their career. On the other hand, they recognized the importance of a graduate degree to advance on their careers. Also, they are influenced by important people in their life and career like their families, mentors and co-workers. Similarly,

Zugelder et al. (2018) recognized that Master of Arts in Education (MAEd) students were influenced to pursue an advanced degree to engage themselves in learning which will meet the demands of their current job. But in the study of Lin and Wang (2015), students who plan to return to graduate school are more motivated internally as they seek for professional advancement and cognitive interest than being influenced by their respective families. Furthermore, it was highlighted that there is no significant difference on extrinsic factors, related to family, between learners in terms of sex since it is seen that male and female adult learners pursued graduate studies to portray as good role model for their children. Correspondingly, according to Greene et al. (2020), professionals are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated. Professionals teachers considered graduate education by factors related to time and length of the program, professional options and career advancement. They pursued graduate education since it is online learning and the course can be completed in one year. Also, they believed that it can carry them well into any avenue of education where they can eventually be a curriculum specialist or more options after they graduated. It was also stated that they are highly influenced to pursue graduate studies to acquire newest teaching strategies which can be a great help in making them a better educator. Moreover, personal or professional advancement and preparation for doctoral work are contributing factors on the persistency of graduate schools' students (Gordon, 2016). Also, in the study of Cruz and Ramirez (2016), students who are currently enrolled in graduate programs revealed that the factors that motivated them in pursuing their graduate degrees are obtaining and upgrading qualifications, increasing self-esteem, enjoying learning new things, and fostering intellectual stimulation. They also revealed that least factors influenced them are friends and scholarship grants. Furthermore, both male and female respondents have the same motivational level in pursuing graduate studies education. In addition, different age brackets have different motivations in pursuing graduate studies education. Lastly, the study found out that respondents enrolled in different programs have the same motivational level in pursuing graduate studies education.

Gender seems to be a significant variable when it comes to determining patterns in graduate school enrollment. According to Ethington and Smart in Zhang and Harris (2019), women consider the content-based knowledge and skills needed in their jobs. These influenced women than men to pursue further studies in graduate school. Also, women's decision making towards graduate education, compared to men, are being more affected by salary (Perma in Zhang & Harris, 2019). On the other hand, on the study of English and Umbach (2016), it revealed that there is no significant influence of gender on aspirations, applications or enrollment of graduates in pursuing graduate studies but race, undergraduate degree and grade point average are significant influences. But the study of Lin and Wang (2015) revealed no significant difference of family togetherness between male and female adult learners. This means that they have the same interests in molding themselves to be a good role model for their children by pursuing graduate studies education.

Also, many adults show their desires and aspirations to continue their studies by attending graduate school. These adults are nontraditional students which are common in graduate schools since they believed that acquiring advanced knowledge and skills is essential so that they can meet the demands of the changing economy and evolving workplace. This reason is what influenced both young and older adults in pursuing graduate education. Thus, graduate education is for all lifelong learners any age group (Kuther, 2019).

In the Philippines, there is a dramatic increase on enrollees in the graduate schools. This scenario happened because professionals seek for career advancement as underemployment and increase of food and poverty threshold seemingly a problem in every households (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2019). Professionals were influenced by the fact that they need to have better compensation on their jobs to provide for their families. Though they want to finish their studies for more financial prospects, professionals struggle in coping with personal primary issues including school fees, and school-related activities that consume mostly of their time (Almeda, 2014).

The study of Segismundo and Zacarias (2017) presented that personal and professional growth are contributing factors in enrolling in a graduate school. Also, on the perspective of MAEd and Master of Business Administration (MBA) graduates, the program highly contributed on their personal and professional growth. Similarly, in the study of Menez (2014), MBA graduates initially pursued graduate studies education for professional development over promotion. But an interview with the graduates reveals that earning a degree in graduate school is definitely a personal accomplishment than a definite avenue for possible higher position on the workplace. In addition, in the study of Arceño (2018), graduate degree holders related to education and management pursued graduate education because of personal growth and possible increase of salary. Also, Almeda (2014) highlighted that Master's degree graduates pursue their degrees for personal development and career advancement. Their motivation increased as they appreciated and respected their competent instructors that gave them valuable ideas, knowledge and experiences which will make them understand better the nature of their work. Similarly, Encio et al. (2018) stated that professionals pursued graduate studies education to enhance their knowledge and skills which can be a great help for them to efficiently and effectively perform their duties and responsibilities in their workplace. They also believed that educational background along with their experiences are vital in preparation for a promotion at their jobs. Also, according to Esguerra et al. (2020), bachelor's degree holders pursued graduate studies to compete with the steep competition in their field of specialization. Furthermore, they will also secure their job status. And lastly, their driving force in pursuing graduate studies hinges on self-realization.

In brief, considering to take up graduate studies education is a big step for professionals in moving forward on their respective careers. This decision reflects their desire to improve oneself by showing their commitment and determination in investing their time, effort, and resources. This will fulfill their yearning for improvement of oneself in terms of skills, outlook, and attitude towards their careers. Hence, their self-realization, desire for career development and advancement, promotion for a better compensation and benefits, are some reasons in taking up graduate studies education. In addition, on their stay in the graduate school, they become more motivated as

they interact with their instructors which gave them valuable expertise and experiences which contributes on their personal and professional growth.

Trends in Career Growth of Professionals

In the Philippines, teachers need patience, dedication and hard work if they want to be promoted for self-satisfaction and better compensation as they are required to perform excellently in their jobs, undergo seminars and trainings, and achieve worthy accomplishments. More specifically, in the public sector, teachers are promoted in compliance with Department of Education (DepEd) Order No. 66 series 2007 by being evaluated on their job performance, experiences which are relevant to the duties and functions of the position to be filled, outstanding accomplishments, and academic requirements. Also, teachers should be able take examination like psychosocial attributes and personality traits.

But despite of these clear key components to be promoted, teachers are struggling for their career growth in different ways. Some teachers retired as Teacher I although they have served for more than twenty (20) years. This is because of documentary requirements which are meticulous and time consuming to prepare (Llego, 2019). Moreover, a number of permanent teachers who are classified as Teacher III are stuck with their positions because Department of Education (DepEd) can only fund limited number of master teacher positions. In addition, there is a lack of career progression as the ranking of permanent positions is lacking and inadequate where there is a four-salary grade gap between Teacher III and Master Teacher I which lawmakers desire to fill the gap by creating new ranks which are Teacher IV, Teacher V, Teacher VI and Teacher VII with salary grades fourteen (14) to seventeen (17), respectively (Salaverria, 2019). With the lack of advancement opportunities and growth, some teachers consider applying for a non-teaching position or jobs which can cover their expenses in response to a high cost of living in the country (ABS-CBN News, 2018).

In spite of the struggle to progress in teaching career, some teachers use their education background as a springboard for promotion as seemingly evident in year 2017 to 2018 in which the number of enrollees in higher education bloated from 31,787 to 241,501 in master's and doctorate programs collectively (San Buenaventura, 2019). In line with the aforementioned scenario, promotions are evidently experienced by graduates of master's and doctorate programs across the country. Tracer study of Belecina and Ocampo (2017) presented that graduates of Master of Arts in Education with Specialization in Mathematics Education and Doctor of Philosophy in Mathematics Education experience promotion roughly within a year by means of application or policy of the school. Moreover, one graduate received professional awards while two from the respondents had published a book as their professional achievement. Similarly, in research by Quitevis et al. (2019), MSE and MAEd graduates benefited from their degrees as they occupied higher positions like Head Teacher I, Master Teacher I, and Principal I. Also, in the study of Bueno (2017), there are 83 master teachers, 36 head teachers, and 7 principals among 126 MAEd graduates. On the other hand, Buenvenida and Yazon (2017) recognized 34 out of 85 graduates of MAEd stills holds a position as Teacher I. Also, Cagasan et al. (2017) presents data showing that almost thirty percent (30%) of graduates did not experience promotion in their jobs. But almost 28% of them hold administrative positions like department heads, principals and college deans. Moreover, 1 out of 73 master's degree holder is self-employed. Furthermore, 1 out of 73 master's program graduates is working in the private sector while 69 of them are in the public sector. Additionally, some of these graduates received awards in relation to their job performance like best research paper in local and international, outstanding faculty award, and best faculty and research presenter. Not to mention, in the result of the study of Segismundo and Zacarias (2017), despite having a master's degree and a permanent position in their jobs, 8 out of 45 respondents' salary are below 20,000 PHP which is less than the salary of Teacher I in the public sector with a minimum requirement of a bachelor's degree in education and license for teachers. In addition, there were 2 MAEd graduates who are employed in abroad. Additionally, 19 out of 44 are working in the public sector while the other 25 graduates are in the private section. In addition, a number of graduates both MAEd hold managerial positions. Moreover, 26 out of 45 or 58% of MBA graduate remains on their current job or did not look for a new job. In the study of Cruz and Ramirez (2016), teaching graduate degree holders revealed that they benefited on graduate schools works as they enhanced their career opportunities and experienced professional advancement.

For science and mathematics teachers, career opportunities like scholarship grants or tuition-fee grants is available as part of the commitment of DepEd to deliver quality education. They are encouraged to apply for a graduate scholarship program supported by DepEd and Department of Science and Technology-Science Education Institute (DOST-SEI). These scholarship grants are offered to science and mathematics teachers with less than seven years of teaching experience where they will be awarded with tuition grant worth PhP 20, 000 and thesis grant worth PhP 60, 000. This program will make graduate education available and accessible for hardworking and qualified science and mathematics teachers who faces financial problems in pursuing graduate studies education (DepEd, 2021).

In other professions related to business administration, a master's degree seems to be a great addition to one's credentials. It was utilized by these professionals as they experienced promotion in their respective field of work. In the study of Segismundo and Zacarias (2017), 32 out of 37 MBA graduates are working in a higher position like college instructors and professors, administrators in their respective institutions, supervisor and corporate executives or managers. In addition, these MBA graduates are earning at least PhP 21,000 despite seven (7) of them are distinguished as contractual employees. But almost 82% have not pursued further studies after their master's degree. Furthermore, 15 are working in the public sector while 20 are in the private sector. Also, it is worth notetaking that all the respondents are neither self-employed nor own a business as sideline. In addition, 21 out of 37 or 57% of MBA graduate

remains in their current job or did not look for a new job. Likewise, there are 7 college professors, 8 supervisors, and 5 managers, out of 61 MBA graduates in the study of Bueno (2017). In addition, graduates believed that their academic-acquired skills and competencies are highly relevant on their respective jobs. On the other hand, in the study of Encio et al. (2018), almost 40% of respondents remain in the same job level position even after earning their master's degree in business administration. In addition, out of 64 graduates, 33 holds a professional, technical or supervisory job level positions while 18 graduates are categorized as managerial or executive job level positions. Also, majority of the graduates experienced an estimated percentage of more than 10% increase on their monthly salary. Correspondingly, the result of the tracer study of Menez (2014), even 23 out of 24 MBA graduates hold a regular position on their jobs, it is alarming that despite having a graduate degree, there are still MBA graduates which categorized as rank or clerical job level position. In addition, all of them neither work in other companies as part-time nor put up their own business.

But despite the work promotion they have experienced, there are seemingly practices which are considered as problem since it adversely affects the implementation in some instances. In the study of Bantor (2016) about job promotion practices and its associated problems, despite having a set of good practices in job promotion such as awareness of employees on the policies and procedures regarding promotions, people who are directly involved in the promotion process recognized that there is a serious problem in promotion relating to favoritism. Also, it is somewhat evident that they are concerned with nepotism and promotion which are not based on merit system. On the other hand, teachers' career advancement in the public sector is caught up by slow or inactive handing out of promotion in DepEd. Along with the aforementioned scenario, teacher's problem in promotion amplifies as there are a lot of requirements to fulfill and limited vacant higher positions. This encountered problems in promotion kept public school teachers at Teacher I position for at least 15 years. Furthermore, some of them retired as Teacher I. As for the records of DepEd in 2017, 52% of public teachers are entry-level teachers while 7.3% are master teachers (Roxas, 2018). On the contrary, Philippine National Police (PNP) promotion program allows qualified and deserving police officers to be promoted into their next level rank through merit and fitness. Police officers fill up vacant positions to enable upward mobility of their career to strengthen the organizational structure of PNP. According to Caliwan (2021), 1,834 police officers designated in Metro Manila experienced promotion. Also, in an article in ABS-CBN News (2021), 2,151 police commissioned officers and 23,386 police non-commissioned officers who passed the qualification standards were promoted. Similarly, 32,334 regular promotion and 1,156 projected meritorious promotion were granted in second level ranks. These mass promotions aimed to make the police organization efficient and effective (National Police Commission, 2021).

Alongside with problems encountered related to promotion practices, professionals who pursue graduate studies education for career growth also experience challenges and barriers when it comes to finances, perception towards professional advancement, and finding a right balance between work, family, and studies. This affirms the study of Gordon (2016) that graduate students identified job responsibilities and family obligations hinder their studies. Also, they faced problems related to time management to finish their academic requirements on time. In addition, they encountered financial problems as they do not have access to scholarships, graduate assistance, or tuition benefits from their employers. On the other hand, master's degree holders expressed their problems related to social pressure. They were pressured by the views of society and their family which greatly affected their motivation (Cepni et al., 2018). But in the study of Cruz and Ramirez (2016), graduate students find it difficult to balance their time as an employee and as a student. They find it difficult to manage their time in working and studying as they have too many school requirements and additional work. Also, according to Gino et al. (2015), more negative outcomes occur when promotion comes along the way of female participants compared to men. For female participants, goal conflicts, stress, anxiety, sacrifice and burden of responsibility will prevail as they seek for career growth. Hence, they would be less likely to seek for promotion compared to men. On the other hand, their level of perception towards positive outcomes on promotion are statistically equivalent. Despite their perception towards promotion, it is notable that there is no significant difference between gender and current position they hold in the organization.

Despite the difficulties and challenges professionals encountered, they show excellence and satisfaction on their job performances. In the study of Hashmi et al. (2019), respondents revealed that they improved in carrying out their work efficiently, conveying their message accurately using their written communication skills, and working closely and diligently to keep their job-related knowledge and skills up-to-date which are key factors in working. Also, they always show resilience as they are able to recover quickly from tough situations, and able to deal skillfully and prompted with challenging circumstances. Furthermore, they show willingness to take extra responsibilities. This study also discovered that the difference in respondents' job performance was not statistically significant based on sex, age and workplace. However, there exist a small margin in the construct of context and adaptive performance when grouped according to sex where male respondents have a better adaptive performance than females. Also, it is evident that the quality of task performance of respondents increases from age group 25 – 30 years till 36 – 40 years then it decreases up to age above 50 years. Furthermore, the peak of context and adaptive performance of the respondents is at the age group of 41 – 45 years and it decreases up to age above 50 years.

Similarly, it was claimed by Lee and Lee (2018) that women have the same capabilities as men but they do not receive the same of level of support or permission to take leadership positions in the company or organization. In addition, they received less support and opportunities to progress on their career within the organization. But there are seemingly differences when it comes to earning potentials of professionals. According to Turner et al. (2017), male and female have significant margin in their earnings mainly for professional occupations. It was revealed that male hourly earnings increase more sharply than female. The earnings of female professional and skilled workers in the age bracket 18 to 24 years are higher than male but in the age bracket 25 to 29 years, earnings of female and

male professionals and skilled workers do not vary. In addition, female professionals' earning peak is around the age of 50 to 54 years while age of 55 to 59 years for male professionals. Furthermore, workers in the public sector earn 18% more on the average hourly pay than works in the private sector. Similarly, in the study of Molato (2015), female professionals are receiving higher pay than male professionals. Also, female professionals employed in the public sector earns 34.6% compare to their counterparts in the private sector. In the same manner, male professionals employed in the government received higher wage premium over those in the private sector with a 13.2% margin. On the other hand, professionals like accountants and lawyers are paid higher in the private sector than in the public sector. Also, jobs in the private sector have more potential for salary growth. But jobs in the public sector offer more benefits not limited to pensions and health insurance while in the private sector, employees are offered bonuses and remote working opportunities (Woodruff, 2020).

These literature and studies assert that professionals aim for career growth. They strengthened their credentials by enrolling in graduate school alongside with numerous trainings and seminars. They make sure to find all means in gaining and refining skills which can be used to show their competence and worth in workplace. But despite of their exhausted efforts to gain promotion, they experienced challenges like lack of opportunities for career mobility, lack of support by the employers for career development, and unfavorable career promotion practices. On the other hand, it is evident that these professionals have used their involvements in graduate school and the graduate degree itself to qualify for higher position and compensation. Thus, graduate studies education is a key factor in career growth of professionals.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive design with survey method. Descriptive research design is a handy tool that researchers use to learn a lot about a group of subjects. It helps paint a detailed and accurate picture of what the group of subjects is like by carefully gathering information through well-constructed questionnaire. This kind of research design gives researchers a better understanding of a specific topic, providing useful insights that can be helpful for the current and future studies (Sirisilla, 2023). Thus, it contributes in answering the research questions with depth and breath.

Participants

A total of 125 graduates from the Graduate Studies program at Metro Manila College participated in the study, representing various programs, using purposive sampling. These participants are graduates from 2013 to 2019. The distribution of participants included 55 came from Master of Arts in Education (MAEd), 22 from Master of Arts in Teaching, 15 from Master of Business Administration, 13 from Master of Science in Criminal Justice (MsCrim), and Doctor of Philosophy in Development Education (PhD). In addition, the occupation of these participants is in line with their graduate degree.

Instruments

The instrument used in this study is a descriptive researcher-made survey questionnaire. It contains the following parts: (1) demographic profile of the respondents, (2) motivation that influenced the respondents to pursue graduate studies education and its extent, and (3) indicators to describe the impact of graduate studies education on career growth of the respondents in terms of skills development, job performance, career advancement, earning potentials and career opportunities.

Procedure

The names of graduates from 2013 to 2019 were obtained from the Metro Manila College Alumni Office. Subsequently, these graduates were traced through their Facebook accounts with the assistance of friends and colleagues. The researcher administered the entire questionnaire through Google Forms.

Ethical Considerations

In this study, all participants were given questionnaire in Google Form which starts with an informed consent clearly explaining the purpose of the study and obtain informed consent from them before collecting any data. They were aware of what they are agreeing to and how their information will be used. Furthermore, it emphasized the confidentiality of participants information. The researcher assured the participants that their responses and personal details will be kept confidential. And lastly, the researcher ensured that participation in the study is entirely voluntary. Participants were not obligated or pressure to take part in the study, and they were free to withdraw at any point without facing any negative consequences.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings according to the study's research questions. To compare the mean and find out the significance between variables, statistical tools such as frequency, percentage, ranking, weighted mean, Kruskal-Wallis H test, and Mann-Whitney U test. Additionally, a scale of 1 to 4 was employed, with 1 representing the lowest and 4 representing the highest.

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

This table indicates that are 56 males and 69 females. Hence, there are more female respondents than male. In addition, majority of the respondents are MAEd graduates. And lastly, a little more than 82% are working in the public sector.

Table 1. *Demographic Profile of the Respondents*

Profile Variables	Male		Female		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Age						
25 – 34	30	53.6	40	58.0	70	56.0
35 – 44	17	30.4	15	21.7	32	25.6
44 and above	9	16.1	14	20.3	23	18.4
Highest Degree Earned						
MAEd	18	32.1	37	53.6	55	44.0
MBA	9	16.1	6	8.7	15	12.0
MAT	8	14.3	14	20.3	22	17.6
MsCrim	8	14.3	5	7.3	13	10.4
PhD	13	23.2	7	10.1	20	16.0
Sector of Employment						
Public	42	75.0	61	88.4	103	82.4
Private	14	25.0	8	11.6	22	17.6

Respondents' Motivation to Pursue Graduate Studies Education

Table 2. *Intrinsic Motivation to Pursue Graduate Studies Education*

Variables	WM	VI	Rank
a. Personal aspiration	3.74	VHE	2
b. Self-fulfillment	3.67	VHE	4
c. Future career plans	3.62	VHE	5
d. Pride	2.85	HE	6
e. Professional development	3.80	VHE	1
f. Career advancement	3.70	VHE	3
Overall Weighted Mean	3.56	VHE	

In this table, the respondents were intrinsically motivated to a very high extent. This suggests that they have set their goals on enrolling in graduate school on their hopes for personal and professional growth. Hence, they see graduate school as an avenue in fulfilling their aspirations and further advance in their career.

Table 3. *Extrinsic Motivation to Pursue Graduate Studies Education*

Variables	WM	VI	Rank
a. Influence of co-workers/ peers	3.11	HE	2
b. Influence of family members/ relatives	2.94	HE	4
c. Company privilege (i.e. scholarship grants)	2.49	LE	6
d. Expected merits given by the current work/ company (i.e. monetary reward based on acquired grades)	2.83	HE	5
e. Requirement for job retention	3.06	HE	3
f. Mandatory requirement based on a job's qualification standards	3.13	HE	1
Overall Weighted Mean	2.93	HE	

This table shows that respondents are extrinsically motivated to a high extent. This reveals that they enrolled in graduate school to meet their job's requirements for retention and qualification. Additionally, the influence of co-workers and peers contributes to their motivation to pursue graduate studies education. Thus, they recognized a graduate degree is effective platform not only in strengthening their skills set but also enhancing their credential.

Impact of Graduate Studies Education on Respondents' Career Growth

Table 4. *Impact of Graduate Studies Education on Respondents' Skills Development*

Indicators	WM	VI	Rank
a. Demonstrated the appropriate level of proficiency in the principles and practice of one's field of work	3.50	VHE	4
b. Established a right mindset for continuous improvement including understanding and application of technology	3.51	VHE	2.5
c. Adjusted plan by applying critical thinking and problem-solving to address various demands in a work environment	3.46	VHE	5.5

d. Demonstrated effective use of oral and written communications	3.51	VHE	2.5
e. Worked effectively and cooperatively with others to achieve common goals	3.65	VHE	1
f. Discovered solutions to existing problems based on scientifically proven method or approach on process inquiry	3.46	VHE	5.5
Overall Weighted Mean	3.52	VHE	

This table reveals that graduate studies education influenced the respondents' skills development to a very high extent. This suggests that the most acquired skills in their graduate school were human relation skills, communication skills, and technology-related skills. Therefore, graduate school contributed on both hard and soft skills of the respondents.

Table 5. *Impact of Graduate Studies Education on Respondents' Job Performance*

Indicators	WM	VI	Rank
a. Performed job/ assigned tasks efficiently	3.71	VHE	1
b. Performed job/ assigned tasks effectively	3.64	VHE	3
c. Made sound and rational decisions	3.54	VHE	4
d. Widen span of control (i.e. the ability to handle or manage more people)	3.22	HE	6
e. Understood the nature of my job better	3.68	VHE	2
f. Satisfied the key results areas or key performance indicators of my job	3.53	VHE	5
Overall Weighted Mean	3.55	VHE	

In this table, it shows that the respondents' job performance was impacted on by graduate studies education to a very high extent. This reveals that graduate studies education provided specialized knowledge and skills training so that the respondents can understand the nature of their respective jobs better. As a result, respondents found themselves becoming more efficient and effective on their jobs.

Table 6. *Impact of Graduate Studies Education on Respondents' Career Advancement*

Indicators	WM	VI	Rank
a. Promoted while taking my Graduate Studies education (or after earning some units)	2.80	HE	2
b. Promoted after finishing my Graduate Studies education	3.39	VHE	1
c. Promoted to a supervisory position (i.e. unit of department head)	2.55	HE	3
d. Promoted to a managerial position (i.e. a position that handles supervisors/ heads)	2.28	LE	4
e. Promoted to an executive position (i.e. a position that handles managers)	2.26	LE	5
f. Achieved career autonomy by putting up own business	2.18	LE	6
Overall Weighted Mean	2.58	HE	

This table shows that the graduate studies education shaped the respondents' career advancement to a high extent. These findings reveal that earning units or graduate degree will lead to a promotion in terms of classification or a higher position.

Table 7. *Impact of Graduate Studies Education on Respondents' Earning Potentials*

Indicators	WM	VI	Rank
a. Received salary increase while taking my Graduate Studies education (or after earning some units)	2.70	HE	2
b. Received salary increase after taking my Graduate Studies education	3.25	HE	1
c. Received extra income from part-time jobs	2.66	HE	3.5
d. Received fees for professional/ consultancy rendered to others	2.58	HE	5
e. Received Honoria for speakerships or other related engagements	2.66	HE	3.5
Overall Weighted Mean	2.72	HE	

In this table, it suggests that the respondents' earning potential was influenced by graduate studies education to a high extent. The findings show that earning units or a graduate degree will lead to increase of income. Their salary increases as they received promotions. Also, they can easily look for part-time jobs and even asked to be a resource speaker and the likes because of the credibility being anchored in a graduate degree holder.

Table 8. *Impact of Graduate Studies Education on Respondents' Career Opportunities*

Indicators	WM	VI	Rank
a. Got a part-time job	2.70	HE	3
b. Increased professional networks	3.44	VHE	1
c. Transferred to a better company/ institution	2.34	LE	5
d. Got job/ work that pays more	2.69	HE	4
e. Given a chance to travel abroad relative to the performance of job/ work	2.16	LE	6
f. Received awards relative to the performance of my job	2.84	HE	2
Overall Weighted Mean	2.70	HE	

This table shows that graduate studies education impacted the respondents' career opportunities to a high extent. From the results, it can be inferred that respondents meet new people who are professionals with various backgrounds. These professionals are their classmates, mentors and professors in graduate school. They can be a great deal when it comes to introducing them on other job opportunities. Also, they can be a big help on achieving greater heights in their respective fields.

Table 9. *Test of Difference on the Impact of Graduate Studies Education on Respondents' Profile*

Variables	Sex		Age		Highest Degree Earned		Sector of Employment	
	U-value	P-value	H-value	P-value	H-value	P-value	U-value	P-value
Skills Development	1,588	0.09	8.84	0.07	6.67	0.16	1,129	0.98
Job Performance	1,707	0.27	2.33	0.68	12.15	0.02*	1,046	0.58
Career Advancement	1,799	0.51	1.55	0.82	17.45	0.002**	745.5	0.01*
Earning Potentials	1,828	0.61	2.18	0.70	17.10	0.002**	758	0.02*
Career Opportunities	1,723	0.30	6.57	0.16	16.58	0.002**	686	0.004**

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the impact of graduate studies education on career growth of the respondents when grouped according to their sex.

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the impact of graduate studies education on career growth of the respondents when grouped according to their age.

Ho3: There is no significant difference in the impact of graduate studies education on career growth of the respondents when grouped according to their highest degree earned.

Ho4: There is no significant difference in the impact of graduate studies education on career growth of the respondents when grouped according to their sector of employment.

In this table, it revealed that the calculated u-value and p-value of the impact of graduate studies education on career growth of the respondents when grouped according to sex and age was not statistically significant. Hence, hypotheses 1 and 2 were retained. On the other hand, when grouped according to highest degree earned and sector of employment were statistically significant in the impact of graduate studies education on career advancement, earning potentials, and career opportunities. Professionals, whether male or female, young or old, benefited from their graduate degree in gaining advanced and specialized knowledge and skills, display.

Conclusion

As concluded in the study, professionals are intrinsically motivated to a very high extent due to their strong desire and aspiration for professional development and career advancement. Additionally, they are extrinsically motivated to a high extent, influenced by their co-workers and peers to pursue graduate education for job retention and qualification standards.

Graduate studies contribute significantly to the skills development of professionals. They establish excellence and trustworthiness by displaying a willingness to work in a team, exhibiting effective use of oral and written communication, and demonstrating an appropriate level of proficiency in their work. Furthermore, professionals gain a better understanding of the nature of their jobs, leading to efficient and effective task performance, as graduate education caters to advanced and specialized knowledge and skills. Professionals also experience promotions to supervisory positions, salary increases, and extra income from part-time jobs and honoraria related to other engagements after graduating. Graduate studies education paves the way for opportunities to increase their professional network, secure part-time jobs, and receive awards related to their jobs.

The impact of graduate studies education on the career growth of professionals does not depend on their sex and age. Both male and female professionals, young or old, benefit from their graduate degrees by gaining advanced and specialized knowledge and skills, displaying excellence in their jobs, securing promotions, and ensuring career advancement. However, professionals with doctoral degrees gain more opportunities to increase their earnings and strengthen their credibility and expertise in the field. Additionally, professional working in the public sector experience better opportunities for recognition and promotion due to clear career pathways for progression in their profession.

Graduate school students are recommended to take advantage of their time in the program to strengthen both their personal and professional networks. They can volunteer as resource speakers and consultants, seizing opportunities that require their knowledge and expertise. Attending classes is essential, as students learn not only from the lessons but also from the experiences of their classmates. Faculty members can recommend students for opportunities such as resource speakers, consultants, or part-time jobs related to their field. They can also provide mentoring and coaching, sharing their first-hand professional experiences and success stories of graduates. School administrators may invest in the career growth of employees by offering incentives based on performance and sponsoring relevant local and international training, seminars, and further studies. Prospective graduate students and professionals should consider enrolling in graduate school to strengthen their knowledge, skills, and credentials for career growth.

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