Academic Challenges and Perceived Career Growth of Master in Agribusiness Management Graduates of Central Mindanao University

Teddy E. Colipano

Department of Agribusiness Management, College of Agriculture, Central Mindanao University, Musuan, Maramag, Bukidnon, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Graduate education enhances capabilities and opens opportunities for career development. However, pursuing graduate studies entails academic challenges, and there is limited localized evidence on the perceived career growth of individuals after earning a graduate degree. This study described the academic challenges and perceived career growth of the Master in Agribusiness Management (MAM) graduates at Central Mindanao University (CMU). Specifically, it examined the challenges experienced during graduate studies and the perceived improvements in their professional careers. This study used a descriptive research design. The study used total enumeration to identify 20 graduates from 2004 to 2021; however, only nine responded, for a 45% response rate. Data were collected through an expert-validated questionnaire administered using Google Forms and analyzed using descriptive statistics, particularly the mean. Results revealed that respondents encountered only slight academic challenges (m=1.98), particularly regarding the proximity of their workstation to the school, work-study balance, and demands of academic requirements. On the other hand, respondents perceived to have improvements on their career (m=4.46). These graduates were sent to seminars and conferences to represent their organization; they became more self-confident in performing their jobs; and got opportunities for promotion. Thus, the graduates of the MAM program had manageable academic challenges and perceived to have career growth. The study recommends strengthening flexible learning arrangements, sustaining curriculum relevance, and institutionalizing regular graduate tracer studies to support continuous program improvement.

Keywords: Academic challenges, Career growth, Master in Agribusiness Management, Tracer study

INTRODUCTION

Graduate education is more than a trend today. It plays an important role in advancing knowledge and honing professionals' skills in any field. It brings a positive impact not only on the individual level but also on society as a whole (Williamson-Lott, 2026). This is a response to industry demands, wherein institutions look for individuals who have advanced intellectual capabilities, are adaptive to the changes of time, collaborative, and can create value amidst an AI-driven world. Skills in communication, research, critical thinking, problem-solving, ethics, and responsible AI use are some of the specific competencies that are deemed required for employment and promotion nowadays (Misra, 2026). To address these demands, in the Philippines, there are around 1,977 higher education institutions that offer 876 graduate programs with an average of 214,487 students enrolled in master's programs during school year 2023-2024 (Candelaria, Dio, & Delosa, 2025).

Despite the quest of graduate students to advance their professional growth, challenges in graduate school are inevitable. Some of these challenges include financial limitations, time management, and stress in juggling work and academic demands (Agbayani & Paglinawan, 2025). Added to these challenges is pressure from self, peers, and family (Bagcat, et al., 2026). These challenges may hinder graduate students from gaining the benefits of obtaining a graduate degree, such as securing better opportunities, promotion, higher position, and increased earnings (Cruz, 2024).

The Master in Agribusiness Management (MAM) program of Central Mindanao University has been offered for more than 20 years. The program's objective is to produce well-rounded professionals in the field of agribusiness. However, there is no evidence on the development of the careers of its graduates after earning the degree. Thus, this study was conducted to determine the academic challenges of the graduates of the program and their perceived career growth as a basis for improvement of its curricular services.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

This study includes only graduates of the Master of Agribusiness Management (MAM) program of Central Mindanao University and does not cover graduates from other programs. The responses of the respondents were based on their perception and personal opinion, which might be subject to some level of bias. The small sample size also does not warrant conclusions about the population of the MAM graduates, but instead, conclusions are limited only to the respondents of the study. The study is also descriptive in nature and does not include causal analysis on the variables included in the study. The study also did not gather qualitative data to validate the quantitative data of the study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was anchored in Malcolm's (1980) Andragogy Theory and Becker's (1964) Human Capital Theory. The Andragogy Theory states that adults learn differently from children and adult learners possess distinct characteristics, motivation, and learning needs. In this study, it was assumed that graduate students have different learning needs and different challenges. On the other hand, the Human Capital Theory states that education, training, and other forms of investment in human capabilities enhance an individual's knowledge, skills, competencies, and productivity. The theory views education as an investment in human capital that can generate both individual and societal economic benefits. In this study, it is assumed that individuals who undergo graduate education have perceived career contribution.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a descriptive research design. The participants of the study were the Master's in Agribusiness Management graduates of Central Mindanao University from 2004 up to 2021, a total of 20 graduates. This study used total enumeration. However, the study got a response rate of 45%. The study developed a research questionnaire, which was validated by experts. The respondents were reached online, and informed consent was sought from them. An online method of data gathering was used through Google Forms. The respondents filled out the questions online. In data analysis, descriptive numerical measures were used, specifically the mean. Ethical standards were also followed in the conduct of the study. Anonymity of the respondents and confidentiality of their responses were strictly observed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Academic Challenges

Table 1 shows the academic challenges of Master in Agribusiness Management (MAM) graduates of Central Mindanao University. These challenges encompass various aspects, which include personal, institutional, and curricular.

Table 1. Academic Challenges of MAM Graduates

INDICATORS		Weighted Mean	Qualitative Description
1	The location of the school is very far from my residence.	3.11	Minor Problem
2	The subject requirements are time-demanding and time-consuming.	2.22	Slight Problem
3	I cannot balance my work and academic life. I have problems with time management.	2.11	Slight Problem

4	The subjects are highly technical and difficult to understand.	2.11	Slight Problem
5	Poor school facilities.	2.00	Slight Problem
6	Admission to the program has a long and difficult process.	1.89	Slight Problem
7	The topics/subjects taught are not relevant to my job.	1.67	Slight Problem
8	The topics/subjects taught are very generic and basic, which left me unchallenged.	1.67	Slight Problem
10	The school fees are high, and I don't have enough finances to support my studies.	1.56	Slight Problem
	Overall Mean	1.98	Slight Problem

Legend:

4.51- 5.00	-	Extreme Problem	Encountered 76%-100% of the time
3.51- 4.50	-	Major Problem	Encountered 51%-75% of the time
2.51- 3.50	-	Minor Problem	Encountered 26%-50% of the time
1.51- 2.50	-	Slight Problem	Encountered 1%-25% of the time
1.00- 1.50	-	Not a Problem	Not Encountered

Results show that the MAM graduates did not encounter serious problems while taking up their graduate studies. However, there are some slight to minor problems that they sometimes encounter along the way. One of these is the distance of their home or workstation from the school. They travel several hours to get to school. This problem leads to physical stress and tiredness among them. Second, they find the subjects to be time-demanding and time-consuming. They also find that the subjects are highly technical and difficult to understand. This is due to the heightened training under the MAM program. On their personal life, they also faced issues on difficulty in managing their time at work and in their studies. In terms of school facilities, they observed old facilities on campus, such as classroom ventilation and structures. Thus, even though there were few issues, these were low and not so pressing.

Perceived Career Growth

Table 2 shows the perceived career growth of Master in Agribusiness Management (MAM) graduates. These are the things that happened in their career after earning their respective master's degrees.

Table 2. Perceived Career Growth of MAM Graduates

INDICATORS		Weighted Mean	Qualitative Description
After taking the Master of Science in Agribusiness Management..			
1	I was sent to seminars and conferences to represent the organization.	4.67	There is an improvement by more than 50%
2	I feel satisfied with my performance at work.	4.67	There is an improvement by more than 50%
3	I am more effective in troubleshooting problems and finding solutions in the organization.	4.56	There is an improvement by more than 50%
4	I am more efficient in using resources in achieving an organizational goal.	4.56	There is an improvement by more than 50%
5	I was promoted and tasked to handle/supervise people in our organization.	4.56	There is an improvement by more than 50%
6	My work tenure status from job order/casual/COS was changed to permanent/regular status.	4.44	There is an improvement by less than 50%
7	I already have work-life balance.	4.44	There is an improvement by less than 50%
8	I am given with more challenging tasks to accomplish	4.33	There is an improvement

	and handle.		by less than 50%
9	My salary has increased	4.33	There is an improvement by less than 50%
10	I am more productive in my work compared before.	4.11	There is an improvement by less than 50%
	Overall Mean	4.46	There is an improvement by less than 50%

Legend:

4.51- 5.00	-	There is an improvement by more than 50%
3.51- 4.50	-	There is an improvement by less than 50%
2.51- 3.50	-	Nothing has changed
1.51- 2.50	-	There is a decline by less than 50%
1.00- 1.50	-	There is a decline by more than 50%

Results show that MAM graduates attained professional growth as they completed their graduate degree. First, it allows them to have tenure security. Their degree also provided them with the opportunity to be promoted in their organization and increase their salary. Some of them were frequently sent to seminars and conferences to represent the organization. MAM graduates felt that they were more efficient in using resources in achieving an organizational goal. They also believed that they were more effective in troubleshooting problems and finding solutions in the organization. This led them to feel satisfied with their performance at work as they attained work-life balance. Thus, MAM graduates believed that they were able to grow professionally.

CONCLUSION

The study examined the academic challenges encountered by Master in Agribusiness Management (MAM) graduate respondents of Central Mindanao University and their perceived career growth after completing the program. Based on the findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

The Master in Agribusiness Management graduates in Central Mindanao who participated in the study have not encountered serious academic challenges during the time when they were taking the program. There were no major problems that MAM graduates-respondents encountered while taking the MAM program. Minimal issues were observed regarding the proximity of the school to their workstation, demands of academic courses, and old school facilities. Thus, geographical accessibility of the school and competing responsibilities of working student professionals are relevant considerations in graduate education. However, these factors are considered to be manageable. The Master in Agribusiness Management program graduate respondents perceived to have positive career growth after earning the degree. The program was able to serve as a means to enhance their agribusiness management competencies, assume greater organizational responsibilities, and become more confident in performing their respective functions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions, the following are the recommendations:

The Master in Agribusiness Management program may consider adopting flexible learning modalities or blended learning arrangements. This can be done through the use of modules or online platforms, subject to the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the university's policies and requirements. This action can make the program more accessible to graduate students, especially those who are located in other provinces and far-flung areas. This can ease travel-related difficulties, and it can also attract enrolment from those who wish to take the program.

With the positive career development of MAM graduates, it is thereby recommended to sustain and enhance the course offering of the program, ensuring that it is aligned to the developments and changing demands of

the industry. Stakeholder consultation should be done prior to any curriculum revision to match program competencies to actual workplace demands.

To consistently monitor career progression, industry involvement, and achievements of the graduates of the MAM program, a tracer study should be regularly conducted. This way of collecting feedback from graduates will be used for curriculum improvement. Strengthening the program's network with its alumni through collaboration and partnership in different academic endeavors is also recommended.

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