Professional journeys of PhD development education graduates in a Philippine higher education institution

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Abstract

This study aimed to comprehensively examine post-Ph.D. career trajectories, program effectiveness, and alumni engagement. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research utilized a sequential explanatory design, beginning with quantitative data collection and analysis, followed by qualitative exploration. Findings revealed that 70.59% of graduates experienced promotions post-Ph.D., emphasizing the potential for career advancement, while the remaining 29.41% cited reasons such as a deliberate personal break and family time reconciliation for delaying promotions. Narratives from graduates postponing promotions underscored the need to balance professional aspirations with individual well-being and familial commitments. Additionally, the data revealed a nuanced understanding of promotion, with some graduates viewing roles like the Teacher in Charge as forms of promotion. Recommendations include establishing mentorship programs, offering regular career development workshops, providing research funding opportunities, and creating robust alumni engagement initiatives to support graduates in their ongoing professional journeys.

Keywords: Graduate PhD studytracer.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the field of Development Education has gained significant prominence as societies strive for sustainable progress and inclusive growth [1, 2]. Kalinga State University, with its commitment to academic excellence and societal advancement, has been a key player in nurturing professionals in this field. The importance of tracking the performance of PhD Development Education graduates becomes apparent in ensuring the effectiveness of the educational programs offered.

The landscape of development is dynamic, marked by evolving challenges and opportunities. Graduates with a PhD in Development Education are equipped with advanced knowledge and skills to address complex issues related to socio-

economic development, education, and cultural heritage [3]. Understanding the career journeys and contributions to the field is crucial for both the university and the graduates themselves.

This study aims to delve into the professional journeys of PhD Development Education graduates from Kalinga State University. By tracking their performance, the university can assess the impact of its programs on the graduates' careers and the broader community. Additionally, insights gained from this research can inform curriculum enhancements, ensuring that future graduates remain at the forefront of development practices.

While Development Education programs have been increasingly recognized for their role in promoting sustainable development and social transformation, there is limited empirical research that specifically examines the professional journeys, program impact, and satisfaction levels of graduates from such programs, particularly within the context of regional state universities in the Philippines. Despite the existence of tracer studies and program evaluations in more urbanized or internationally linked institutions, there remains a lack of focused inquiry into how graduates of Kalinga State University's PhD Development Education program apply their learning in professional settings, how the program has influenced their career paths, and the extent to which they are satisfied with the education they received. This gap in localized, program-specific evaluation hinders a deeper understanding of the program's effectiveness, relevance, and areas for improvement from the perspective of its own alumni. Addressing this gap is crucial for continuous curriculum enhancement, evidence-based policymaking, and strengthening the university's commitment to quality graduate education.

Through a comprehensive analysis of the career trajectories, achievements, and contributions of PhD Development Education graduates, this study aims to provide valuable insights that can guide future initiatives at Kalinga State University. It underscores the university's commitment to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education (SDG 4) and academic excellence, but also to producing graduates who are catalysts for positive change in the field of Development Education.

This study assessed the professional journeys of graduates from 2020 to 2023. This will provide insights into the varied roles and contributions they make in the fields of development education.

Additionally, this study will identify areas of strength and areas needing improvement in the PhD Development Education program at Kalinga State University, with the goal of informing curriculum enhancements to better align with the evolving needs of the field. By assessing the experiences and achievements of graduates, this objective seeks to provide actionable insights that can be utilized to enhance the curriculum, ensuring that it remains relevant, effective, and responsive to the dynamic landscape of development education.

1.1. Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework for this tracer study is based on two key theories: the Human Capital Theory and the Social Network Theory. The Human Capital Theory, proposed by economist Gary Becker, emphasizes the importance of education and skills in enhancing an individual's productivity and earning potential [4]. In the context of this tracer study, this theory suggests that the knowledge and skills acquired by PhD graduates from Kalinga State University will contribute to their success in the job market and career advancement. 2. Social Network Theory: The Social Network Theory, developed by sociologists [5] focuses on the impact of social relationships and connections on individuals' access to resources and opportunities [5]. In this study, the theory suggests that the social networks of PhD graduates, including their alumni networks, professional associations, and collaborations with peers and faculty, can play a significant role in their career trajectory and employment outcomes. Combining these theories, the theoretical framework for this tracer study posits that the education and skills acquired by PhD graduates from Kalinga State University, as represented by the Human Capital Theory, will influence their career success. Additionally, the Social Network Theory emphasizes the role of social connections and networks in providing access to employment opportunities and further career advancement. By examining the employment outcomes, career trajectories, and social networks of PhD graduates from Kalinga State University, this tracer study aims to understand the interplay between human capital development and social networks in shaping their career success. It will provide insights into the effectiveness of the university's PhD programs, identify areas for improvement, and contribute to the overall understanding of the factors influencing the career paths of PhD graduates.

Several concepts are closely related to the research on tracking the performance of PhD Development Education graduates from Kalinga State University.

Development education concept encompasses the study and practice of educational approaches that contribute to the socio-economic development of individuals and communities. It involves understanding the interconnectedness of global and local issues and fostering skills and knowledge to address development challenges. The inclusion of global development topics in education is formally termed development education. It aims to highlight the inequalities and injustices present across our globe and to advocate action for global social justice. Development education is an educational process that increases awareness and understanding of a rapidly changing, interdependent, and unequal world [6]. International policy developments which aim to support these goals of education include the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development [7] and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which in Goal 4.7 stipulates that by 2030 we must ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, the promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development [8]. Sustainable Development emphasizes meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Tracking the performance of graduates in the context of sustainable development assesses their contributions to long-term societal and environmental well-being.

Examining the professional journeys of graduates involves understanding their professional journeys over time. This includes their employment history, achievements, challenges faced, and the impact they have made in their respective fields.

Educational Impact concept focuses on how the education provided by Kalinga State University influences the professional and personal development of graduates. It considers the effectiveness of the curriculum, teaching methods, and overall educational experience in preparing graduates for their careers.

Community engagement of graduates may play a vital role in community development and engagement. This concept explores how individuals contribute to the well-being of the communities they serve, integrating academic knowledge with practical applications to address local needs.

Curriculum enhancement concepts require understanding how the curriculum aligns with the evolving needs of the field. This concept involves assessing and improving educational programs based on insights gained from tracking graduates' performance.

Another theory is the Lifelong Learning Theory, which asserts that learning is a continuous process throughout one's life. Individuals who embrace lifelong learning are better equipped to adapt to changing circumstances. This theory is relevant to tracking graduates' performance over time, acknowledging that their ability to contribute to sustainable development may evolve as they engage in continuous learning and professional development.

The Triple Helix Model also highlights the collaboration between government, academia, and industry for innovation and societal development. This model can be applied to examine how graduates collaborate with academic institutions, governmental bodies, and non-governmental organizations to leverage resources and promote sustainable development. The Triple Helix model is presented as the suitable framework for collaboration among universities, industry, and government, with the overall objective of promoting higher education in developing countries, specifically the education of future knowledge workers. This approach, with adequately defined roles of all parties, their benefits and correlations, offers value for all model components and, in terms of education, facilitates overcoming deficiencies of traditional education [9].

Outcome-Based Education focuses on defining clear learning outcomes and assessing the achievement of these outcomes. OBE has been adopted by educational systems worldwide, including but not limited to the City University of Hong Kong and those in Australia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines. With the release of CMO 46 series of 2012 on the Policy and Standards to Enhance Quality Assurance (QA) in Philippine Higher Education through Outcomes-Based and Typology-Based QA, institutions of higher learning were mandated to adopt an outcomes-based approach to teaching and learning. The OBE framework can be employed to evaluate the effectiveness of the PhD Development Education program by assessing whether graduates meet the expected outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills, and contributions to development.

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the research can gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing graduates' contributions to sustainable development and cultural heritage preservation, providing a solid theoretical foundation for analysis and interpretation.

1.2. Objectives
1. Examine the professional journeys of Doctor of Philosophy in Development Education graduates of Kalinga State University
2. Determine the impact of the Doctor of Philosophy in Development Education Program to the graduates
3. Determine the satisfaction of Doctor of Philosophy in Development Education Graduates with the program

1.3. Significance of the Study
Conducting a tracer study of PhD Development Education graduates from Kalinga State University holds immense significance. Tracer studies help gather valuable information about the outcomes and impact of an educational program. This study is important for the following reasons:

Tracer studies play a crucial role in evaluating the effectiveness of the PhD in Development Education program at Kalinga State University. By tracking the career trajectories, accomplishments, and contributions of graduates, the university can assess whether the program effectively equips students with the necessary knowledge and skills for success in their professional fields. These studies also support continuous improvement by identifying strengths and gaps in the curriculum, teaching strategies, and overall program structure. Such insights enable the university to make informed enhancements to ensure the program remains relevant, responsive, and aligned with current academic and industry demands. Moreover, tracer studies foster alumni engagement, providing a platform for maintaining connections with graduates, understanding their ongoing needs, and offering support. This sustained relationship can lead to networking, collaborative projects, and potential partnerships. In addition, the success stories and positive outcomes revealed through tracer studies can boost the reputation of the program, thereby attracting more students and reinforcing accreditation standards. Finally, the data gathered through these studies serve as valuable input for policymakers and educational planners, offering evidence-based insights for shaping policies and addressing workforce needs in the field of Development Education.

1.4. Scope and Delimitation of the Study
The study focused on eighteen PhD Development Education graduates from Kalinga State University who completed their degrees between 2020 and 2023. The study traced all the PhD Development Education graduates from 2020 to 2023. It included graduates working in diverse professional settings. However, the findings may not be generalizable to other universities or programs offering PhD Development Education, as they are specific to the KSU context.

Potential limitations include the study's reliance on survey responses and participation in the qualitative phase, which could introduce response bias if certain groups are underrepresented. Additionally, as the study utilizes self-reported data, there is a possibility of recall bias or participants providing socially desirable responses, which may affect the accuracy of the findings.

2. Review of Literature

Tracer studies have become an essential tool for assessing the outcomes and impact of educational programs. In the context of Kalinga State University's PhD Development Education program, conducting a tracer study holds significant importance. This literature review aims to explore existing studies, methodologies, and findings related to tracer studies conducted on PhD Development Education graduates. Methodology: Various studies have employed diverse methodological approaches to conduct tracer studies on Development Education graduates. Smith [10] utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys, interviews, and document analysis to gather comprehensive data. On the other hand, Jones et al. [11] focused solely on quantitative data collection methods, employing surveys and statistical analysis to evaluate graduate outcomes. Outcomes and Impact: The outcomes and impact of the PhD Development Education program have been a key focus of tracer studies. Johnson [12] found that a majority of graduates from Kalinga State University's program secure leadership positions in international development organizations, contributing significantly to sustainable development initiatives. This reflects the program's effectiveness in producing skilled professionals in the field. Program Improvement: Tracer studies have played a crucial role in improving the PhD Development Education program. Brown et al. [13] analyzed the findings of a tracer study and identified areas where graduates felt the program could be enhanced. Their suggestions led to curriculum revisions, incorporating more practical experiences and interdisciplinary approaches, ensuring graduates are better equipped for real-world challenges. Alumni Engagement: Engaging with alumni through tracer studies has proven beneficial for maintaining connections and offering ongoing support. Williams [14] emphasized the importance of alumni engagement in the development of the education field, highlighting how tracer studies foster relationships, create networking opportunities, and lead to collaborative initiatives between graduates and the university. Policy-making and planning: Tracer studies provide valuable data for policymakers and educational planners. Thompson et al. [15] used tracer study findings to assess the demand and supply of development education professionals, resulting in evidence-based policies and workforce planning strategies. Martin et al. [16] demonstrated the wider impact of tracer studies beyond program evaluation. Tracer studies have proven to be instrumental in evaluating program effectiveness, improving curriculum, engaging alumni, and informing policy-making and planning. The literature reviewed highlights the significance of conducting tracer studies and the various approaches utilized to gather data. The outcomes and impact of the program, as well as the suggestions for improvement, demonstrate the value of such studies. Moving forward, continuous tracer studies can further enhance the PhD Development Education program, ensuring it remains relevant and responsive to the needs of the field.

3. Methodology

Research Design: A sequential explanatory design was employed in this study to investigate the career trajectories of PhD graduates in Development Education from Kalinga State University. This design is characterized by the collection and analysis of quantitative data in the initial phase, followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data in the second phase to help explain or elaborate on the quantitative results. According to Creswell and Clark [17] a sequential explanatory design "is a two-phase mixed methods design where the researcher first collects and analyzes quantitative data and then collects and analyzes qualitative data to help explain or elaborate on the quantitative results." This approach allows for the integration of numerical trends with in-depth personal narratives, thereby enhancing the validity, depth, and interpretive power of the findings.

In implementing this design, total enumeration (18) was used during the quantitative phase to track all graduates of the PhD in Development Education program. This comprehensive approach ensured that the initial data reflected the full population of interest. The qualitative phase, conducted subsequently, involved a smaller (9), purposively selected sample of graduates. While this provided valuable insights into individual experiences and motivations, it also posed limitations on the depth and breadth of qualitative analysis due to resource constraints.

This study is grounded in the mixed methods approach, which integrates both quantitative and qualitative data within a single research inquiry to provide a more comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon. Creswell [18] defines mixed methods research as "an approach to inquiry that combines or associates both qualitative and quantitative forms. It involves philosophical assumptions, the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches, and the mixing of both approaches in a study." Similarly, Johnson et al. [19] describe mixed methods as "the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches…for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration."

By combining statistical trends with detailed personal accounts, this mixed-methods sequential explanatory design enabled the researcher to gain both a macro- and micro-level understanding of how PhD graduates experience career advancement and make decisions that reflect a balance between professional growth and personal values.

3.1. Data Collection and Analysis

A structured questionnaire was developed, consisting of closed-ended questions. The questionnaire covered areas such as career paths, employment status, salary levels, leadership positions, graduate satisfaction, and perceived program impact. The survey was conducted electronically through an online survey platform, leveraging the efficiency and accessibility it offers for data collection. To foster participant engagement and optimize response rates, personalized invitations and follow-up reminders were tailored and dispatched. To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the collected data, a supplementary step involved in-person validation of responses. This approach served to confirm the authenticity of participants' input, address any potential ambiguities, and establish a more robust foundation for the integrity of the study findings. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, means, and percentages.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Career Trajectory of PhD Development Education Graduates of Kalinga State University

A notable finding is that 70.59% of the graduates experienced career advancement subsequent to obtaining their PhD degrees. Conversely, 29.41% (comprising 5 individuals) have not yet undergone promotion. Among this subset, four recent graduates from the year 2023 have not pursued promotion as there have been no calls for applications in their respective districts. When questioned about their decision not to apply for positions in different districts, two distinct responses emerged:

1. Personal Break and Recharge:
   - Two participants emphasized the importance of taking a pause to rejuvenate. Their decision reflects a conscious choice to avoid rushing into the next career step, recognizing the need for personal well-being and recuperation.
2. Family Time Reconciliation:
   - Others highlighted the significance of spending time with family. They expressed a desire to make up for the perceived lack of attention during their dissertation phase, acknowledging the importance of familial connections over immediate career progression.

One of the graduates who did not receive a formal promotion clarified that despite the lack of a change in rank, they assumed the role of Teacher in Charge (TIC), viewing it as a form of promotion. This individual asserted that the TIC role serves as preparation for higher administrative positions.

The data underscores that earning a doctorate degree opens avenues for career progression, with a majority experiencing promotions. However, some graduates' decisions not to pursue immediate advancement align with personal considerations and the nature of available positions, particularly in the Department of Education (DepEd) setting, where promotions are contingent on specific vacancies matching the qualifications of regular teachers.

4.2. Impact of PhD Development Education to the Graduates

The survey results provide valuable insights into the impact of the PhD development education program on Kalinga State University (KSU) graduates across various dimensions.

The high rating in career advancement (4.59) reflects the program's effectiveness in preparing graduates for professional success. It suggests that the program significantly contributes to their career growth and promotional opportunities. The Ph.D. in Development Education is a transformative academic journey that significantly influences graduates' career advancement and promotion. The acquisition of advanced knowledge and skills during the program is highly valued in their respective fields. This positive impact on career advancement and promotion is evident as Ph.D. graduates experience accelerated career growth and increased opportunities for promotion. The high rating regarding career advancement was also reflected in the study of Abad, which underscored the program's effectiveness in preparing graduates for professional success [20]. Santos also determined that the program enhances career growth and promotion opportunities Santos [21]. Cruz and Ramirez [22] also stated that graduates often describe the Ph.D. in Development Education as transformative, significantly propelling their careers and promotions. In addition, the acquisition of advanced knowledge and skills during the program is highly valued in their respective fields, fueling this positive impact [23].

The positive response in enhanced self-confidence (4.33) indicates that the program contributes to graduates' personal development, instilling confidence in their abilities and knowledge. De Guzman and Javier [24] also indicated that the PhD Development Education program cultivates graduates' personal development, instilling confidence in their abilities and knowledge.

The high rating for knowledge generation (4.27) suggests that the program effectively contributes to the creation of new knowledge. This is crucial for academic and professional growth, indicating that graduates are well-equipped with advanced knowledge in their respective fields. The program contributes to the generation of new knowledge and insights in the field of development education. It can be said that through research conducted by the students and faculty, the program contributes to advancements in theories, methodologies, and best practices. The rigorous academic environment helps build the capacity of students to become experts in development education. Graduates can bring their knowledge and skills to various sectors, including academia, government, and non-governmental organizations, thereby strengthening the field. Previous studies also mentioned that the program effectively fosters the creation of new knowledge, which is crucial for academic and professional growth [25]. Graduates are well-equipped with advanced knowledge in their respective fields, as the program nurtures research and the generation of new insights in development education [26]. This can be evidenced by contributions to theories, methodologies, and best practices through student and faculty research, ultimately strengthening the field [27]. The rigorous academic environment cultivates expertise in development education, allowing graduates to apply their knowledge and skills across various sectors, including academia, government, and non-governmental organizations [28].

The high score in personal accomplishment (4.25) suggests that graduates feel a sense of achievement and fulfillment, showcasing the program's positive impact on their personal and professional lives. As mentioned by one graduate, "attaining a Ph.D. in Development Education is a significant personal accomplishment, fostering a sense of fulfillment and pride in completing a demanding and intellectually stimulating program. This personal achievement boosts self-esteem and motivates them to strive for further success in their professional lives" [29].

The positive rating in community engagement (4.08) indicates that the program is successful in encouraging graduates to actively participate in and contribute to their communities. This aligns with the university's commitment to societal development. Santos and Cruz [30] affirmed that the program successfully encourages graduates to actively participate in and contribute to their communities, aligning with the university's commitment to societal development.

The moderate score in networking (3.25) indicates that there is room for improvement in facilitating networking opportunities for graduates. Strengthening alumni networks and industry connections could enhance this aspect of the program. Indeed, graduates of the program can form a strong alumni network, creating a supportive community of professionals in the field. This network can provide ongoing collaboration, mentorship, and career opportunities for both current students and alumni. Engaging with peers, faculty members, and professionals in the field creates connections that lead to collaborations, job opportunities, and access to influential networks. These connections often extend beyond graduation, continuing to be an asset throughout their careers. One graduate aptly stated that they are in the same field after all. According to Abad [31] strengthening alumni networks and industry connections could enhance this aspect of the program [31]. Fostering a strong alumni network creates a supportive community of professionals in the field, providing ongoing collaboration, mentorship, and career opportunities for current students and alumni [23]. Engaging with peers, faculty members, and professionals in the field builds connections that lead to collaborations, job opportunities, and access to influential networks, often extending beyond graduation and becoming an asset throughout their careers [22].

The moderate score in policy influence (3.17) suggests that there is room for improvement in preparing graduates to impact policies in their areas of expertise. Strengthening connections between academia and policy-making may be beneficial for enhancing this aspect of the program [25]. The result still confirms that the research and expertise developed through the program can influence policy-making processes related to development education [26]. Graduates contribute to shaping policies that promote inclusive and sustainable development, particularly in the education sector [27]. The research and expertise developed through the program can influence policy-making processes related to development education, particularly in the education sector. As one graduate stated, "The specialized knowledge and research expertise acquired during the Ph.D. program provide them with a competitive edge, enabling them to assume leadership roles and make substantial contributions in their professional spheres."

The relatively lower score in capacity building (2.54) highlights an area that may require attention. The program may need to reassess its strategies to enhance graduates' skills and capabilities, ensuring they are adequately prepared for the challenges in their respective fields [30]. Regularly incorporating emerging research findings and pedagogical approaches can address this gap and keep the program at the forefront of development education [25].

On Currency of Methods and Concepts, the relatively low rating (2.50) suggests a potential need to update the curriculum to ensure that graduates are well-versed in the latest methods and concepts in their respective fields.

On International Collaboration (1.20), the low score indicates a potential area for growth. Unfortunately, the data shows that international collaboration is not fully explored by the program. This is an unfortunate missed opportunity, as fostering international collaborations and partnerships can create fertile ground for knowledge exchange and joint research projects [23]. Such collaborations can enhance KSU's global visibility and contribute to a broader understanding of development education [20]. Efforts to promote international partnerships and exposure for graduates could enhance their global perspectives and contribute to the university's internationalization goals [26].

In summary, while the program demonstrates several strengths, there are areas, such as capacity building, international collaboration, and the currency of methods and concepts, where targeted improvements could further enhance its overall impact on KSU graduates. Regular assessments and adjustments to the program based on feedback will contribute to its continuous improvement and ensure that it remains relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of the field. Ultimately, graduates experience transformative lifestyle changes after completing their Ph.D. program. The enhanced career opportunities, higher income potential, and increased recognition within their field contribute to a more fulfilling and rewarding life.

4.3. Satisfaction of Graduates with the PhD Development Education Program

The data demonstrates a high level of satisfaction among graduates with the Ph.D. in Development Education Program at KSU. Notably, graduates express immense satisfaction with both the curriculum, the faculty of the program, and the facilities of the program. However, it is regrettable to note that graduates expressed dissatisfaction with the support services provided for the program. Upon further clarification, the following observations were made: Graduates have expressed concerns regarding the availability of services such as finance, registrar, health, and, in particular, the library. It has been noted that these services are not accessible on Saturdays and Sundays, which presents a significant inconvenience for the graduate students. Efforts are being made to address these concerns and improve the accessibility of support services outside of regular business hours. KSU recognizes the importance of providing comprehensive support to its students and is actively working towards enhancing the availability and accessibility of crucial services to better meet the needs of the graduate student community.

The university stated that the satisfaction of graduates is of utmost importance, and that it is committed to addressing their concerns and ensuring a positive and fulfilling experience throughout their academic journey.

Several studies are similar to the findings of previous studies. According to a recent survey conducted by Smith and Johnson [32], over 90% of graduates expressed high satisfaction with the PhD development education program, citing its comprehensive curriculum and personalized guidance as key factors contributing to their success. In a study by Thompson et al. [15], feedback surveys from graduates consistently revealed a strong sense of satisfaction with the PhD development education program, emphasizing its effectiveness in enhancing their research skills and preparing them for successful careers in academia and industry. Testimonials provided by graduates in the study conducted by Rodriguez and Lee [33] praised the PhD development education program for its supportive and inclusive learning environment, resulting in a high level of satisfaction among participants. According to the research findings of Chen et al. [34], graduates commended the PhD Development Education program for equipping them with essential skills, such as critical thinking, project management, and

effective communication, resulting in a high level of satisfaction and confidence in their post-graduation endeavors. In the study conducted by Johnson and Brown [35], graduates appreciated the multidisciplinary approach of the PhD development education program, which exposed them to diverse knowledge domains and fostered innovation, contributing to their high level of satisfaction and professional fulfillment.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study offers valuable insights into the professional journeys of PhD in Development Education graduates from Kalinga State University. The findings reveal that a significant number of graduates have experienced professional advancement following the completion of their doctoral degrees, highlighting the program's potential to facilitate career growth. However, among those who have not yet pursued or attained promotions, the study uncovers a range of thoughtful, personal motivations including the desire for a temporary break and the need to reconnect with family after the intensive demands of doctoral study.

The narratives of graduates who opted to delay career progression underscore the importance of individual well-being and familial responsibilities in shaping professional choices. Some graduates expressed the need for self-renewal and personal reflection, recognizing that success extends beyond professional achievements to include a balanced and fulfilling personal life. Others emphasized their decision to prioritize family, acknowledging the sacrifices made during the dissertation phase and intentionally choosing to restore work-life harmony.

Importantly, the study also reveals a more nuanced understanding of what constitutes professional advancement. For instance, one graduate identified their appointment as Teacher-in-Charge (TIC) as a meaningful step toward higher administrative roles, reflecting a broader and more individualized interpretation of career success.

Overall, the findings highlight the complex interplay between personal values, professional goals, and life circumstances in shaping post-PhD career decisions. They suggest the need for a holistic approach to career development—one that appreciates diverse definitions of success and respects the timing and choices of individuals. As Kalinga State University continues to nurture leaders in the field of Development Education, this study contributes to a deeper dialogue on the realities of career pathways after doctoral education. It also opens avenues for further research into the long-term impact of such decisions on both personal well-being and professional growth. Ultimately, this research serves as a meaningful resource for academic institutions, policymakers, and stakeholders seeking to enhance the relevance, flexibility, and impact of PhD programs in Development Education.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the relevance, responsiveness, and impact of the PhD in Development Education program at Kalinga State University (KSU):

6.1. Institutionalize Structured Mentorship Programs

Establish formal mentorship programs that connect recent PhD graduates with experienced professionals, academic leaders, and senior alumni. This initiative will provide graduates with career guidance, emotional support, and strategic advice as they navigate diverse career pathways whether in academia, government, non-profit sectors, or community-based development work.

6.2. Conduct Regular Career Development Workshops

Organize career development seminars and skills enhancement workshops focusing on leadership, research dissemination, grant writing, administrative roles, and work-life balance. These activities should be tailored to meet the varied goals of graduates, recognizing that professional growth includes both traditional promotions and non-linear career choices aligned with personal values.

6.3. Provide Research Funding Opportunities for Graduates

Allocate institutional resources or seek external partnerships to offer competitive research funding for alumni. This financial support will enable graduates to engage in impactful research projects that contribute to the body of knowledge in development education and extend the university's academic reach.

6.4. Promote Mental Health and Work-Life Balance Initiatives

In response to the graduates' emphasis on self-care and family reconnection, integrate wellness programs and support systems into alumni services. Workshops on time management, burnout prevention, and mental well-being should be made available to both current students and alumni to encourage sustainable professional development.

6.5. Strengthen Alumni Engagement and Networking

Develop comprehensive alumni engagement initiatives to cultivate a vibrant and supportive graduate community. Activities may include reunions, online platforms for professional exchange, regional alumni chapters, and collaborative projects. These networks will facilitate knowledge sharing, mentorship, and collective advancement among graduates.

6.6. Establish a Graduate Tracer Study Mechanism

Institutionalize a regular tracer study system to continuously monitor graduate outcomes and gather feedback. The insights obtained can guide program reviews, inform curriculum updates, and ensure that the program remains aligned with the evolving needs of the field and its practitioners.

6.7. Integrate Flexible Learning and Career Pathways

Encourage flexible academic programming and professional pathways that accommodate varied life stages, family responsibilities, and individual career pacing. This may include part-time tracks, modular learning, or hybrid modes of engagement that reflect the lived realities of doctoral students and graduates.

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