

From Classroom to Workplace: Contributions of Pursuing Graduate Studies on Personal and Professional Development

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Abstract. The knowledge and skills gained in the classroom play a vital role in developing the professional abilities of graduate students as they enter the workforce. Using a qualitative approach, this study examined the experiences of seven selected graduates of the Master of Public Administration program at Mountain Province State University. Relying on interview narratives as the primary basis for discussion, this study found that pursuing graduate studies significantly contributes to participants' personal and professional growth. Personal development aspects include career advancement, increased confidence, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and communication skills. Professional development encompasses enhanced leadership abilities, improved policy analysis and development skills, expanded public sector expertise, proficiency in resource management, better decision making, and crisis management capabilities. Based on these findings, the study recommends the following: updating the curriculum to adapt to political and administrative disruptions; offering workshops and training sessions to foster skill development for real-world challenges; improving faculty expertise and classroom environments by providing conducive learning spaces; forming research collaborations with government and research institutions; promoting mentorship programs; engaging with alumni; and creating networking opportunities.

Keywords: career progression; graduate studies; master's in public administration; personal development; professional development

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1. Introduction

The knowledge and skills acquired in the classroom play a crucial role in shaping the professional abilities of graduate students as they transition into the workplace. Graduate studies allow students to deepen their understanding of specialized subjects, develop critical thinking skills, and gain practical knowledge that can be directly applied in real-world settings. As students enter their respective fields, connecting academic learning with workplace demands allows them to contribute meaningfully to their organizations, adapt to emerging challenges, and drive innovation. This seamless application of classroom learning in the workplace is essential for career advancement and tangible impact across industries.

Investing in professional development, primarily through advanced studies, can be a game-changer in today's competitive job market. As industries constantly evolve and new technologies emerge, individuals pursuing higher education or specialized training often gain a significant advantage in career opportunities, such as permanent positions or promotions (Shiri et al., 2023). Advanced studies do more than expand knowledge in a specific field; they also demonstrate commitment to personal and professional growth (Harvard Division of Continuing Education, 2022).

This journey equips people with valuable skills and enhances their credibility and visibility in the workplace (Hastwell, 2025). When companies seek candidates for leadership roles or permanent positions, those with advanced qualifications typically stand out—they convey a sense of ambition and a proactive approach to their careers. Investing time and effort in advanced studies can lead to greater responsibilities and career advancement, underscoring the importance of lifelong learning for achieving professional aspirations (Luwei, 2024).

In the past, having an advanced professional degree was often viewed more as a bonus than a necessity for advancing one's career. Employers typically valued experience, personal skills, and job performance when promoting or hiring. However, the job market has changed dramatically in recent years. As the global workforce expands and the demands of various roles become more complex, more people recognize the importance of further education.

There has been a significant surge in individuals pursuing graduate studies, demonstrating that advanced qualifications can provide job seekers with a substantial advantage. As technology evolves and innovation takes center stage, employers are increasingly favoring candidates with solid experience, deep expertise, and critical thinking skills developed through advanced academic programs. This trend is especially prominent in fields such as healthcare, technology, finance, and education, where specialized knowledge is essential for overcoming challenges and contributing to a company's success.

The growing emphasis on further education largely stems from employers' evolving expectations. They are seeking professionals who can not only contribute to strategic decision making but also lead teams effectively. For recent graduates,

pursuing a graduate degree can significantly set them apart in a competitive job market; it demonstrates their commitment to their careers and willingness to invest in their future. For those already established in their careers, undertaking advanced studies is not only about personal growth; it is a wise move to prepare for more senior roles or permanent positions. Conversely, many companies are beginning to recognize the importance of developing their employees. They actively promote continuous learning by offering tuition reimbursement, scholarships, and partnerships with educational institutions. This fosters a sense of loyalty among employees and helps create a workforce that is better equipped to handle industry changes and challenges.

Mountain Province State University (MPSU) has established itself as a key player in addressing the evolving needs of the workforce through its School of Advanced Education. Since its inception, MPSU has prioritized the creation of graduate programs that not only meet current educational requirements but also prepare future leaders to effectively address challenges in their respective fields, particularly in education, business, and public administration. A notable program is the Master of Public Administration (MPA), which has greatly influenced the region since its introduction in 1992. This program has successfully cultivated a group of skilled professionals who have assumed pivotal roles across various sectors. The success of the MPA program is evident in the diverse positions occupied by its graduates, who are making significant contributions in both government and private sectors.

Many graduates of the MPA program have advanced to key leadership roles across various government agencies. For example, professionals in the Department of Public Works and Highways are leading the planning and execution of infrastructure projects that enhance community safety and accessibility. Similarly, alumni from the Department of Education play a crucial role in shaping policies and initiatives to improve educational outcomes for students nationwide. In Local Government Units (LGUs), MPA graduates are indispensable in developing and implementing local governance strategies that address community needs while promoting sustainable development. Their efforts ensure local policies align with national objectives while effectively addressing regional challenges.

Graduates in the Department of Health are actively engaged in health policy development, healthcare management, and public health campaigns. They are well-equipped to address pressing health issues, thereby enhancing service delivery and enabling effective responses to public health crises. The positive impact of MPA graduates is also evident in institutions like the Philippine National Police (PNP), where they promote good governance, ethical practices, and community relations, ultimately fostering greater public trust and safety.

Furthermore, many alumni assume administrative roles within state universities and colleges, advancing higher education and research initiatives. Additionally, in the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, MPA alumni leverage their expertise to contribute to policy development focused on sustainable

resource management and environmental conservation – elements increasingly crucial in contemporary discussions of climate change and ecological stewardship.

This study aimed to examine the impact of the MPA program on the professional development and career advancement of its graduates. It specifically highlighted how the program has equipped them for their respective roles, whether in entry-level or leadership roles.

1.1 Research Questions

1. What is the key professional and personal outcomes experienced by graduates of the MPA program that contributed to their effectiveness in their various public and private sector roles?
2. What recommendations are identified by the graduates to improve the implementation of the MPA program?

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The MPA program aims to equip graduates with the skills to function effectively in public and private sector roles. According to Sørensen's systematic literature review, a notable correlation exists between student satisfaction in public sector management education and their ability to apply what they have learned in real-world organizational contexts (Sørensen, 2023). This suggests that crucial professional outcomes, such as improved managerial competencies and enhanced leadership skills, are closely linked to educational experience. Moreover, personal outcomes, like increased self-efficacy, are vital for graduates navigating complex organizational landscapes.

The literature suggests that graduates frequently evaluate the relevance of their academic experiences concerning real-world demands. Research shows that MPA curricula that include practical applications typically produce graduates who feel more prepared for their roles (Van der Meer & Marks, 2016). Experiential learning opportunities, such as capstone projects, enhance alignment between educational content and professional responsibilities (Campbell & Lambright, 2011), helping graduates understand how their education translates into actionable outcomes in their careers. On the other hand, disconnects can arise when program content does not reflect current industry practices, underscoring the need to regularly revisit and update curricula to ensure relevance (Van der Meer & Marks, 2018).

Various challenges hinder ongoing improvement in MPA programs, including institutional inertia, resource limitations, and the need for adaptive governance structures (Van der Meer & Marks, 2018). As Van der Meer and Marks point out, without systematic re-evaluation and refinement of program content and teaching strategies, MPA programs risk becoming outdated and ineffective in addressing the evolving needs of both students and employers (Van der Meer & Marks, 2018). Moreover, insufficient faculty support and inconsistent levels of administrative engagement can undermine the quality of the educational experience. While the reference by Perkins et al. (2020) discussing monitoring programs in marine protected areas is not directly relevant, it has been excluded from this context.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Professional Outcomes of Pursuing Graduate Studies

The pursuit of graduate studies has significant implications for professional outcomes. Research indicates that advanced educational qualifications enhance graduates' employability and professional competencies, thereby positively influencing their career trajectories across various fields. A notable finding in the literature is that interdisciplinary approaches, mainly through capstone projects, effectively cultivate employability skills among graduates. This model allows students from diverse educational backgrounds to collaborate on real-world issues, enhancing their employability and promoting scalability and sustainability in educational practices (Barber et al., 2022). Furthermore, participation in such initiatives correlates with improved academic performance and job readiness, crucial factors for navigating complex job markets (Hester et al., 2014).

Moreover, tailoring graduate programs to include essential research competencies has been emphasized to foster interest in pursuing further academic qualifications, such as a PhD. For instance, students who engaged more actively with research methodologies during their master's studies expressed a greater interest in advanced degrees than their peers with less exposure to research (Myotte et al., 2010). This aligns with findings that professional development opportunities raise awareness of workplace challenges and bolster graduates' confidence, ultimately impacting their transition from education to employment (Edirippulige et al., 2012; González-Romá et al., 2015).

The role of graduate education is particularly salient in fields that demand specialized competencies, such as healthcare. Programs that prioritize professional readiness—such as communication skills, direct patient care, and ethical practice—significantly prepare graduates for roles in clinical settings (Hester et al., 2014). Furthermore, alumni of such programs tend to report heightened self-efficacy and competence, translating into successful performance in professional environments (Machado et al., 2024). This encapsulates the broader understanding that graduate education not only prepares individuals with theoretical knowledge but also equips them with practical skills that are critical for their professional journeys (Traill et al., 2016).

In addition, studies have examined the relationship between educational backgrounds and labor market outcomes. Graduates with specific skill sets aligned with industry demands tend to secure better job placements and experience greater clarity in their job search. This relationship underscores the importance of aligning curricula with contemporary workforce needs to enhance employability outcomes (Humburg et al., 2017; O'Donovan et al., 2023). Likewise, a focus on lifelong learning and integrative skills development is recognized as vital in preparing professionals to adapt to evolving work environments—an increasingly important quality in today's fast-paced job market (Hidayat et al., 2019; Uhlenbrook & Jong, 2012).

2.2 Personal Outcomes of Pursuing Graduate Studies

A central theme in the literature is the positive correlation between higher education and self-esteem. Studies indicate that graduates from advanced degree programs report higher self-esteem than those without such qualifications. This relationship stems from the skills and confidence developed during graduate studies, which enhance graduates' perceptions of their capabilities and social worth (Heckman et al., 2018; Ismail, 2017; Serhan & Tsangari, 2022). Ismail's research highlights that individuals with higher self-esteem are better equipped to demonstrate employability skills, suggesting that self-esteem contributes to career readiness (Ismail, 2017). Transitioning from graduate studies to professional environments is crucial in reinforcing self-worth, as graduates often engage in more meaningful and autonomous work than their peers who entered the workforce directly after their undergraduate programs (Ismail, 2017; Serhan & Tsangari, 2022).

Furthermore, self-esteem is closely linked to career adaptability – a vital attribute in today's dynamic workforce. Graduates with strong self-esteem are generally more adaptable to career changes and challenges that arise in professional settings. The ability to adjust to new roles and contexts can significantly impact job satisfaction and career advancement (Ismail, 2017; Kvasková et al., 2023). Research shows that graduates' career adaptability improves when they have a solid foundation of self-esteem, enabling them to address employment uncertainties and pursue growth opportunities confidently (Ismail, 2017; Kvasková et al., 2023). This adaptability is essential in sectors characterized by rapid progress and evolving job requirements.

Psychological factors and their mediating effects on personal outcomes post-graduation have also gained attention in the literature. The interaction between psychological well-being, self-efficacy and personal motivation can significantly influence the successful application of skills developed during graduate studies (Serhan & Tsangari, 2022). Numerous studies demonstrate that positive psychological states mediate relationships between job-related dimensions and personal outcomes such as job satisfaction and life fulfillment (Reilly et al., 2014; Serhan & Tsangari, 2022). Individuals with high self-efficacy tend to experience greater career satisfaction as they view themselves as capable of overcoming challenges in their work environment (Reilly et al., 2014).

Moreover, the transition from the structured environment of graduate studies to the unpredictable labor market can evoke various psychological adaptations. While graduate education typically equips individuals with extensive knowledge and research skills, the real-world application of these skills often challenges their self-perception and self-efficacy, requiring graduates to adapt and develop resilience (Genç et al., 2021; Ismail, 2017; Kvasková et al., 2023). The longitudinal study by Filosa et al. confirms that the autonomy and opportunities associated with higher education positively influence the development of self-esteem throughout early adulthood (Filosa et al., 2022).

2.3 Challenges in Implementing Graduate Programs

Implementing graduate programs poses numerous challenges that can hinder prospective students' academic and personal development. The literature in the field highlights various barriers, including financial constraints, institutional policies, social perceptions, and the support systems essential to creating a conducive learning environment. A significant obstacle to pursuing graduate education is financial strain. Many potential candidates hesitate to enroll in graduate programs due to high tuition fees and related costs (Boyd & Bailey, 2011). This financial burden is especially pronounced for underrepresented groups, who may already face additional socio-economic challenges that limit their access to financial aid or scholarship opportunities (Tate et al., 2014).

Furthermore, institutions must recognize disparities in financial support and actively strive to make graduate education more accessible by providing funding or flexible payment plans, as maintaining enrollment and completion rates is vital to enhancing diversity in graduate studies (Boyd & Bailey, 2011). Another core challenge relates to institutional policies and the level of support offered to graduate students. For example, programs often lack comprehensive mentoring frameworks for guiding students through their academic journeys (Ransdell et al., 2021; Silverstein et al., 2023). Insufficient mentoring may lead to isolation or alienation among graduate students, particularly first-generation and low-income students who may lack familial guidance in navigating graduate education (Gardner & Holley, 2011).

Research indicates that effective mentoring relationships can significantly enhance academic persistence and success (Silverstein et al., 2023). Moreover, faculty's lack of awareness of the unique needs of graduate students—especially those from diverse backgrounds or with disabilities—can create an unwelcoming atmosphere that hampers academic development (Lund & Hanebutt, 2022). Social perceptions and cultural competency also significantly influence the graduate experience. The literature shows that graduates frequently encounter stigma or implicit bias based on their backgrounds, leading to feelings of insecurity and "impostor syndrome," in which individuals doubt their abilities despite evident achievements (Gardner & Holley, 2011). Addressing these perceptions through institutional workshops and training for faculty and staff can reduce stigma and promote inclusivity within graduate programs (Callahan et al., 2018).

Moreover, cultural competence is essential for ensuring that all students' academic and emotional needs are effectively met (Nyandieka, 2024). Furthermore, the rigidity of graduate curricula can deter prospective students. Many programs adhere to traditional pedagogical models that may not adequately address the evolving landscape of knowledge and skills required across fields (Collier & Blanchard, 2023). A lack of flexibility in course structures or an insufficient emphasis on practical skills and interdisciplinary approaches can disengage students, making it imperative for educational institutions to revisit and innovate their curricula to align with contemporary educational demands and student needs (Casasayas et al., 2021).

3. Method

This study employed a qualitative research design. According to Creswell (2014), this is an approach that focuses on exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. Creswell emphasizes that qualitative research uses open-ended questions, which allow participants to express their thoughts and feelings in their own words. This approach typically involves interviews, focus groups, and observations to gain insights into people's experiences, motivations, and social contexts. The ultimate goal is to develop a rich, detailed understanding of the studied phenomenon rather than quantifying data or generalizing results.

3.1 Participants

This study was conducted at MPSU, which is the only state-run higher education institution in the province. It offers various undergraduate and graduate courses, including the MPA program. Started in 1992, the program has produced 200 graduates serving in various public and private sector agencies.

As this study employed a qualitative design, we used purposive sampling. Considering the number of graduates and their interview accessibility, we purposively selected seven MPAs who were successful in their respective careers. This study recognized the limitations of its respondents and used a qualitative design to explore the problem identified through participants' narratives. The participants were as follows:

Table 1: Profile of the Participants

Participant	Affiliation	Position Before Taking MPA	Position at Present
Participant A	State Universities and Colleges (SUC)	Instructor I	SUC Vice-President III
Participant B	Provincial LGU	Planning Officer IV	Provincial Government Assistant Department Head
Participant C	Municipal LGU	Local Revenue Collection Officer I	Local Revenue Collection Officer III
Participant D	Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH)-Mountain Province	Engineer I	Engineer II
Participant E	Municipal LGU	Nurse 2 (from DepEd)	Local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) Officer IV
Participant F	DPWH-Mountain Province	Engineer II	Engineer III

3.2 Research Instruments

This study collected data from identified participants using an interview guide. The interview guide was designed to elicit information on the key professional and personal outcomes experienced by graduates of the MPA program that have contributed to their effectiveness in diverse roles within their respective sectors. In addition, recommendations from the participants were identified.

3.3 Procedures

A formal communication was sent to all participants to obtain their informed consent for participation in the study. After the research proposal was approved, interview schedules were carefully arranged to accommodate participants' preferences and availability, ensuring maximum participation and comfort. Each participant was interviewed individually due to the small number. At least 30 to 45 minutes were allotted for each interview. Data were systematically gathered from the participants' narratives. This narrative approach comprehensively captured the participants' viewpoints, providing valuable insights into the overall research objectives.

3.4 Data Analysis

In qualitative research, transforming raw data into coherent insights through coding and thematization is essential. In this context, researchers collected data from various sources, including interviews and surveys regarding the MPA program. They then followed a systematic coding procedure.

Coding involves breaking down qualitative data into manageable units, allowing researchers to categorize and label the information effectively. Each interview transcript and focus group discussion was carefully examined to highlight recurring themes related to graduates' professional and personal outcomes, perceptions of program alignment, and challenges faced in implementing the MPA program. This coding process employed both inductive and deductive approaches. Specific codes were developed from the data itself (inductively) while also informed by existing literature on higher education, public administration, and organizational effectiveness (deductively).

Thematization involved organizing codes into broader themes to identify patterns, such as "Professional Growth" (including career advancement, leadership, and networking) and "Personal Development" (including belonging, relevance, and application). This framework structured the findings to facilitate understanding and communication. The analysis integrated these themes with existing literature to validate and contextualize results. For example, "Professional Growth" linked to employability suggests that the MPA program enhances graduates' labor market readiness. Addressing implementation challenges, such as faculty engagement and curriculum relevance, aligns with the literature on institutional frameworks, leading to recommendations to improve the program's effectiveness in meeting student and organizational needs.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Professional Contributions of the MPA Program to the Graduates

The MPA program provides professional and personal benefits by equipping graduates with essential leadership, policy analysis, and public sector management skills, thereby enhancing their careers in government, nonprofits, and public service. It prepares individuals to create, analyze, and evaluate policies, manage teams, and address societal challenges effectively. On a personal level, the MPA promotes ethical leadership, community engagement, and improved communication skills while fostering cultural competence and a strong sense of social responsibility. Graduates contribute to public well-being and derive personal satisfaction from knowing their work positively impacts society.

4.1.1 Enhanced leadership skills

Graduates often develop strong leadership and management skills, enabling them to lead teams effectively and make informed decisions in complex environments. In the narrative of Participant A, he emphasized how earning an MPA signals a dedication to personal and professional development. He narrated:

"The MPA degree I earned signaled my commitment to professional growth and my willingness to invest in gaining advanced skills. This, probably, coupled with my work commitment, led to greater acknowledgment from the administration and may likely have been a consideration for the roles I was entrusted throughout the different school administrations."

The participant acknowledges that this, along with his work commitment, led to greater recognition and trust from the administration. This highlights that an MPA is not just an academic credential but also a symbol of a person's dedication to continuous improvement and a desire for more responsibility. Participant B's reflection directly addresses the practical application of the knowledge gained from the program. He argued: *"The knowledge I gained in the program helped me become more familiar with heading programs and coordinating initiatives."* The program enhanced his ability to oversee and coordinate programs effectively. This implies that MPA equips graduates with essential managerial tools, such as project management, resource allocation, and program coordination, which are critical for leadership roles in public and private organizations.

This is particularly relevant in environments where strategic planning and overseeing complex projects are part of daily operations. Participant D's statement reveals a shift in his leadership style after completing the MPA program: *"Graduating from the MPA program transformed my leadership approach, fostering teamwork and enhancing client relations."* The transformation noted here involves fostering teamwork and improving client relations. This reflects the program's emphasis on soft skills like communication, emotional intelligence, and relationship-building, which are crucial for leaders who must engage and motivate teams while maintaining strong relationships with clients or stakeholders (Quinto et al., 2024). The ability to shift from a more authoritative to a collaborative and relational approach is a significant outcome of MPA

education. It aligns with research on the development of “future-ready” human and social skills in public administration contexts.

Participant E’s statement centers on learning how to manage her office and subordinates. *“Finishing my MPA degree taught me how to deal with my subordinates and how to manage my Office, especially since I transitioned from being a School Nurse to a Disaster Risk Reduction Management Officer”*. This reflects the program’s practical applications in personnel management and organizational behavior. Leaders must understand how to manage teams effectively, delegate tasks, and navigate workplace dynamics (Krpálek et al., 2021). The MPA offers graduates tools and frameworks that improve their capacity to handle administrative and managerial responsibilities, ultimately shaping their leadership identity and approach—demonstrating that soft leadership skills are increasingly central to effective public sector leadership in the 21st century.

Participant G recalled, *“Having been appointed at a young age as department head, my learnings in the MPA program is my guide and my tool in personnel organization, organizational structuring, finance and budgeting, planning, and others.”* Participant G highlights the early appointment to a department head position and how the MPA program became an essential guide in their leadership journey. The statement illustrates how the program provides graduates with foundational skills in personnel organization, finance, and budgeting. This points to the comprehensive nature of the MPA program, where leadership training spans across critical managerial domains, empowering leaders to oversee departments effectively and navigate the financial and organizational challenges they face.

4.1.2 Improved policy analysis and development skills

MPA programs emphasize understanding policymaking processes, equipping graduates with the skills to analyze, develop, and implement policies that address public needs. Participant C acknowledged:

“The knowledge I gained from the program, especially in fiscal administration, enhanced my abilities in local taxation. As the Local Revenue Collection Officer for the Municipality, the program has helped me carry out the mandates of my office, such as taking custody and properly managing local funds and maintaining and updating the municipal government’s tax information system.”

Participant C’s statement emphasizes how the MPA program improved her capacity to manage local taxation and fulfill their responsibilities as the Local Revenue Collection Officer. The knowledge acquired, particularly in fiscal administration, helped refine her local funds management, ensuring proper financial handling and compliance. Furthermore, the program contributed to the participant’s ability to maintain and update the tax information system, demonstrating an understanding of both financial and technological systems in public administration.

4.1.3 Expanded public sector expertise

MPA graduates gain a deep understanding of public sector operations, which prepares them for roles in government, nonprofits, and international organizations. Participant A recounted:

"Immediately after graduating from the program, the Graduate School Dean invited me to teach in the MPA program in the summer term. So, some or most of my students then were my former classmates. In the MPA program, I was able to engage with diverse perspectives and experiences. The discussions and debates with fellow students who work in various government agencies enriched my understanding across all subjects in the program."

Participant A's reflection highlights the value of engaging with classmates from diverse government backgrounds, which broadened his understanding of public sector operations. The program's emphasis on discussions and debates enhanced his ability to approach issues from multiple perspectives. In addition, being invited to teach in the MPA program right after graduation demonstrates the program's preparation of graduates for leadership roles and reinforces their expertise.

4.1.4 Resource management proficiency

Knowledge of budgeting, financial planning, and resource allocation enhances graduates' ability to manage public funds efficiently. Participant B shared,

"Drawing on the skills and knowledge I gained from the MPA program, particularly in collaborative planning and strategic resource allocation, I applied what I learned in coordinating the Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG) program of the Department of the Interior and Local Government, where I am the program focal person. This and other factors have led to the Provincial Local Government Unit's successful achievement of the CY 2023 and CY 2024 SGLG awards."

Likewise, participant G noted, *"The knowledge and skills I gained from the MPA program helped me organize and plan daily and monthly targets and courses of action, as well as manage office finances, budgets, and supplies."* Both participants underscore how the MPA program's emphasis on budgeting, financial planning, and resource allocation enhances their ability to manage public funds effectively. Participant B used these skills in strategic planning to successfully coordinate the SGLG program, contributing to the organization's achievement of SGLG awards. Similarly, Participant G applied their knowledge to efficiently manage office finances, budgets, and supplies, ensuring smooth daily operations. These examples illustrate how the MPA program prepares graduates to manage resources effectively, driving operational success and achieving broader strategic goals in public sector roles.

4.1.5 Improved decision-making skills

MPA programs often emphasize ethics in public service, helping graduates navigate the moral complexities of their professional roles. According to Participant A:

"The knowledge and insights I gained from the MPA program have enriched my decision-making frameworks, enhanced my problem-solving abilities, and equipped me with strategies for managing uncertainty. Given the nature of my administrative role early in my employment, I saw it as an indispensable requirement for growth and development in my field."

This emphasizes how the MPA program enriched his decision-making frameworks and problem-solving abilities, which are crucial in handling the ethical dilemmas often encountered in public administration. The participant's mention of managing uncertainty suggests that the program also helped him develop strategies for dealing with ambiguous or morally complex situations where the right course of action may not always be clear.

By noting the role of the MPA program in their early career growth, Participant A acknowledged that the program provided theoretical knowledge and practical strategies for ethical decision-making in real-world situations. The participant's statement also indicates that ethical decision making is indispensable in public administration, emphasizing the importance of applying learned frameworks to balance competing interests, promote transparency, and uphold integrity in professional roles (Lindenwood University, 2024; "Program Mission Statement", 2023).

Participant C shared:

"I believe that my MPA education contributed to my success. Real property tax delinquencies have long been an inherited problem in our municipality. However, after my graduate thesis and with the involvement of municipal officials, employees, barangay officials, and public-school teachers in elementary and secondary education as my respondents, along with consultations with them, I can say that the problem has been minimized. My engagement in my MPA thesis opened my eyes to the need for collaboration in addressing RPT [Real Property Tax] Adelinquency issues. Additionally, my thesis inspired the municipal legislative body at that time to create a Committee on Revenue Generation, which was added to the existing functions of the Ways and Means Committee. They became our partners in advocating for RPT payments."

This discusses the collaborative nature of MPA education, particularly in resolving ethical and community issues, such as RPT delinquency. The participant attributes their graduate thesis, which involved consultations with various stakeholders, including municipal officials, barangay leaders, and educators, to helping alleviate a longstanding problem in their municipality. This illustrates

how the MPA program promotes inclusive decision making, where stakeholder engagement and public consultation are vital components of ethical governance. The creation of the Committee on Revenue Generation exemplifies how the MPA program motivated the participant to take proactive measures in addressing a community issue. This underscores that ethical collaboration and advocacy are essential elements of public administration, as the participant collaborated with various groups to formulate a solution that aligned with public interests and ethical standards.

Participant D discussed the importance of leadership and decision making in public administration, particularly when managing projects requiring strategic planning and coordination. He said:

"Leadership and decision making are vital in public administration, particularly when managing projects that necessitate coordination, strategic planning, and problem solving. Throughout my MPA studies, I learned that not all lessons are handed to you; rather, success requires initiative, independent learning, and critical thinking. This practice is even more pertinent in government service, where effective leadership demands proactivity and adaptability. "

He emphasized that success in government service requires initiative, independent learning, and critical thinking, all of which are necessary for making ethical decisions in challenging circumstances. This statement reflects how the MPA program fosters ethical leadership that is proactive and adaptable, qualities essential for managing public projects where moral complexities often arise. The participant's acknowledgment that not all lessons are handed to you suggests that the program encourages self-reflection and personal accountability in decision making. Leaders in public administration must often make tough choices, and the MPA program helps graduates develop the ethical frameworks and independent judgment needed to navigate those decisions.

4.1.6 Crisis management abilities

Training in crisis management equips graduates with strategies to handle emergencies and unforeseen challenges effectively. Participant A's statement reflects the personal growth they experienced in decision making through the MPA program. He said, *"To be decisive has always been the challenge. I have learned that sometimes, it is better to admit the fault of subordinates rather than to be seen as somebody who is not in control."* The challenge of being decisive in crises is highlighted, showing that leaders must sometimes make difficult choices to maintain control, even when it involves accepting responsibility for their subordinates' mistakes.

This admission of fault, rather than shifting blame, suggests a leadership style grounded in accountability – an essential trait in managing crises or emergencies. The lesson of decisiveness is that crisis management is not just about making quick decisions but about making thoughtful, ethical choices that demonstrate control, responsibility, and leadership. This approach is crucial for managing

emergencies, where clarity and authority are necessary, and quick decision making is often required under pressure (Dwinanda et al., 2025).

Participant D's reflection underscores the challenge of navigating bureaucratic delays and red tape common in government offices. He shared the following:

"Government offices often involve complex approval processes. Delays caused by red tape are a common obstacle. The MPA program provided me with knowledge of public policy analysis, legal frameworks, and strategic management. This enabled me to develop strategies for streamlining processes while maintaining transparency and accountability."

She gained knowledge in public policy analysis, legal frameworks, and strategic management through the MPA program. This knowledge helped her to develop strategies to streamline approval processes while ensuring transparency and accountability. This narrative shows that the MPA program not only prepares graduates for immediate crisis management (such as responding to a specific event) but also equips them with long-term strategic solutions to address recurring challenges, such as bureaucratic inefficiencies. This combination of practical crisis management skills and strategic thinking is invaluable for overcoming barriers that may arise during unforeseen challenges or emergencies.

4.2 Personal Contributions of the MPA Program to the Graduates Career Progression

The MPA degree plays a role in career progression within the public sector. From securing promotions to opening doors for further academic achievements and leadership opportunities, the MPA serves as both a qualification and a catalyst for professional growth in government and public administration. It also increases confidence and develops critical thinking, problem solving and communication skills.

4.2.1 Leadership opportunities

Participant B's experience illustrates how the MPA degree directly impacted their promotion to the position of Provincial Government Assistant Department Head. She recounted:

"In CY 2022, the Provincial Government Assistant Department Head position was published as vacant for application. Among the four applicants, I was fortunate to secure the position as the other applicants do not have a master's degree, which is a requirement for the position. I can say that my promotion was like entering through a needle's eye. Without my MPA degree, I would not have been promoted to the Assistant Department Head position. As the Assistant Department Head, I believe my MPA degree will provide me with the necessary skills and knowledge to lead effectively and explore the possibility of getting promoted as the department head, considering the retirement of our Head in the next few years."

The fact that she was one of the few applicants who met the educational requirements, while others did not have a master's degree, highlights the competitive advantage that an MPA provides in advancing within the public sector. The statement also indicates that the MPA degree is crucial for career advancement in positions that require education, a common feature of government roles. Furthermore, Participant B's forward-looking perspective on using the MPA to secure the department head role in the future demonstrates how the degree helps prepare professionals for higher leadership responsibilities, particularly as senior officials retire.

Participant C's promotion within 10 years of earning their MPA highlights the program's direct impact on her career trajectory. Two promotions in a relatively short period demonstrate that the MPA degree can serve as a fast track to higher positions, particularly in government, where educational credentials are highly valued. She shared, *"The year I earned my MPA in 2014, within 10 years, I was promoted twice."* This implies that the MPA is not only a tool for qualifying for promotions but also acts as a signal to employers of the individual's readiness for increased responsibility, making them more competitive for new roles and higher positions. Participant D shared, *"One of the key benefits of completing my MPA degree was the opportunity to pursue further academic advancement, and I was able to enroll in a PhD program. As a result of my academic achievements and growing competencies, I was entrusted with an additional function as a unit head aside from my usual work."*

For Participant D, the MPA served as a stepping stone to further academic advancement, enabling them to enroll in a PhD program. This illustrates how the MPA degree can also enhance academic careers and foster lifelong learning. Additionally, her promotion to a unit head position, based on her growing competencies and academic achievements, suggests that the MPA supports career progression and positions graduates to assume expanded leadership responsibilities. In this case, the degree acted as a catalyst for academic and professional growth.

Participant E had a unique narrative : *"I was qualified for the Local DRRM Officer IV position through my master's in public administration. Before this promotion, I worked as a School Nurse at the Department of Education."* His story underscores the MPA's qualifying power, particularly in specialized positions such as the Local DRRM Officer IV. Before earning the MPA, he worked as a School Nurse, a position seemingly unrelated to the new role. This illustrates how an MPA can open doors to entirely new career paths, allowing professionals to shift roles or take on more complex responsibilities. An MPA degree can enable career transitions or lateral moves into higher-level government positions, even for individuals with non-traditional backgrounds.

Participant F's comment highlights how the MPA degree provided additional points during the promotion evaluation process. He said, *"With my MPA degree, I earned additional points in the evaluation for my promotion."* This reflects the value of formal education in promotion decisions within public administration, where degrees like the MPA are often considered in the evaluation criteria for advancing

to higher roles. It further underscores the recognition of the MPA degree as an important credential that can influence both formal assessments and promotion outcomes, thereby enhancing the chances of career advancement.

4.2.2 Increased confidence

The statements from participants A, C, and E demonstrate the profound impact the MPA program has on self-confidence, enabling graduates to take on leadership roles and make meaningful contributions in their professional environments. The boost in self-confidence that comes with acquiring advanced skills and knowledge in public administration often empowers graduates to navigate challenges, propose initiatives, and aim for higher positions within their organizations. Participant A said, *"The MPA program has not only enhanced my competence in public administration but also boosted my confidence in handling complex situations."* This statement emphasizes how the MPA program enhanced his competence in public administration and significantly boosted his confidence in managing complex situations.

The ability to tackle challenging tasks more confidently is a critical element of leadership. This suggests that the MPA provides a solid foundation of knowledge that helps graduates feel more assured in their decision making, problem solving, and overall leadership abilities. This self-confidence is essential in the public sector, where leaders often have to make tough choices and address multifaceted issues. Graduates who feel equipped to handle these situations will likely step into leadership roles and contribute effectively to their organizations (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2025).

Participant C shared a similar comment but in a different context:

"I was given confidence to recommend and inspire the policymaking body (Sagguniang Bayan) to legislate a revenue ordinance on parking fees and rentals, amended festival fees, and market fees that help increase our local resources for the development of our municipality."

Participant C's experience illustrates how the MPA program empowered her to propose changes and actively inspire others to implement them. By recommending and encouraging the Sangguniang Bayan (policymaking body) to legislate revenue ordinances, the participant played a critical role in increasing local resources for the development of their municipality. This demonstrates that the self-confidence gained from the MPA program can lead to initiating positive change and driving important policy decisions. The confidence to recommend and influence policy speaks to the leadership potential fostered by the MPA. Graduates feel more equipped to engage in decision-making processes, advocate for necessary changes, and take ownership of the outcomes. This sense of empowerment often leads to greater influence in their workplaces.

From a different perspective, Participant E highlights how his self-confidence was boosted by the MPA degree, prompting him to apply for a higher position in the government. He said, *"My degree in MPA boosted my self-confidence to apply for a higher position in the government."* The degree gave him the confidence to pursue

roles he might have previously felt unqualified for or hesitant to apply for, underscoring how education and professional development can enhance self-belief. The willingness to apply for higher positions indicates that the MPA program opens doors to greater opportunities by fostering the confidence to aim for roles with more responsibility and influence. Graduates are more competent and feel they have the skills and knowledge to excel in more demanding positions.

4.2.3 Critical thinking and problem solving

MPA programs foster critical thinking skills that allow graduates to approach problems systematically and creatively. Participant C shared, *"The knowledge, skills, and training learned from my MPA degree, which include critical thinking, analytical abilities, and time management, aided me in facing new responsibilities and accountabilities attached to my current position."* The statement from Participant C emphasizes how the MPA program enhances critical thinking, analytical abilities, and time management, which are essential for tackling complex challenges in public administration.

These skills help graduates approach problems systematically and manage new responsibilities efficiently. Critical thinking allows for thorough analysis, while time management ensures tasks are prioritized and completed effectively. While not explicitly mentioned, the development of creative problem solving is also implied, as critical thinking fosters innovative solutions (Liang & Gong, 2024).

4.2.4 Communication skills

Effective written and verbal communication skills are emphasized, enabling graduates to articulate ideas clearly and advocate for policies or initiatives. Participant B said,

"As a program focal person for several special programs in the provincial government of Mountain Province, I need to collaborate with top management, department heads, representatives from non-government organizations, and technical staff from the rank and file. The knowledge I gained from the program proved invaluable in my work, particularly in dealing with individuals at various levels of authority. I was able to do this because I had the opportunity to discuss and share experiences and knowledge with classmates from agencies such as PNP, DTI, DPWH, and other LGUs."

Participant B emphasizes the importance of collaborating with diverse groups, including top management, department heads, NGOs, and technical staff. The MPA program's emphasis on communication skills helped them navigate interactions across various levels of authority and with different sectors. The ability to communicate and share knowledge effectively within such a wide-ranging group of stakeholders suggests that the MPA program equips graduates to articulate ideas clearly and build consensus across different organizational levels. Exposure to classmates from diverse agencies also enhanced their networking and communication skills, enriching their collaborative work.

Participant C shared:

"When I was working with [the] graduate thesis, I realized the importance of networking with other agencies in accomplishing our office target. Collaborations with other agencies are necessary for the successful execution of the public administration plans, programs, and activities."

Participant C highlights the importance of networking and collaborating with other agencies to achieve goals. Her work with the graduate thesis reinforced the understanding that effective communication is not just about speaking or writing well but also about fostering partnerships to achieve public administration objectives. This experience demonstrates that the MPA program teaches graduates not only to communicate their ideas but also to coordinate with external entities, which is crucial for policy advocacy and the implementation of public programs. Thus, effective communication plays a vital role in ensuring the success of initiatives requiring multi-agency collaboration.

Participant D described how MPA has significantly helped him.

"Before pursuing the MPA program, I worked with DPWH as a civil engineer. In addition to my engineering responsibilities, my supervisor frequently assigned me various correspondence tasks, such as drafting responses to inquiries, RFAs, and complaints related to projects. While I deeply appreciated how the government operates and serves the public, I sometimes found myself responding without a comprehensive understanding of public administration principles and processes. The MPA program refined my ability to write clearly, present data effectively, and engage with stakeholders professionally. This has improved the quality of my communication with LGUs, NGOs, contractors, and the public, ensuring that DPWH projects are well documented and executed effectively."

Participant D's experience demonstrates how the MPA program improved his written communication skills, particularly in drafting responses to inquiries, complaints, and project-related documents. Before pursuing the degree, he found himself responding without a comprehensive understanding of public administration principles. The MPA program helped refine his ability to write clearly, present data effectively, and engage with stakeholders professionally, thereby improving communication with LGUs, NGOs, contractors, and the public. This suggests that the program does not focus solely on general communication skills but also applies them to the specific context of public administration, ensuring that projects are well documented and executed effectively.

4.3 Recommendations to Improve the MPA Program

The feedback from participants offers several key areas where the MPA program can evolve to meet students' changing needs and address contemporary challenges in public administration. Suggestions include academic enhancements

to practical skill development, faculty improvement, and strengthening connections with alumni and external organizations.

4.3.1 Adapting to political and administrative disruptions by updating the curriculum
 Participant A suggested, "The program needs to closely watch out for the ongoing disruptions in the field of public administration. Trump is re-engineering the traditional nature of governance aspects of the political and administrative systems." This recommendation emphasizes the importance of the MPA program staying attuned to ongoing political changes, particularly regarding shifts in governance under figures like Donald Trump, who may alter traditional governance structures. The point suggests that the MPA program must remain adaptable and responsive to the dynamic political environment, ensuring that students are prepared for the evolving complexities of public administration.

The interpretation of this feedback suggests that a curriculum that includes an analysis of political and governance disruptions and contemporary governance challenges would be crucial. The MPA program should incorporate courses or modules that focus on the political shifts in governance systems, exploring case studies of political disruption, reforms, and challenges, especially those emerging from the global landscape of populism and political leadership changes.

4.3.2 Skill development for real-world challenges by providing workshops and training sessions

Participant B shared, "I recommend that the school look into the possibility of offering workshops focused on essential skills such as leadership, negotiation, and conflict resolution to better prepare students for real-world challenges." Participant B's recommendation emphasizes the need for practical workshops focused on essential skills such as leadership, negotiation, and conflict resolution. These soft skills are vital in public administration, where professionals frequently face intricate interpersonal and organizational challenges. The program should incorporate hands-on workshops and seminars emphasizing soft skills, such as leadership training, negotiation techniques, and conflict resolution. These sessions could use simulations, role-playing, and real-world case studies to help students practice their responses to real public administration scenarios and challenges.

4.3.3 Faculty improvement by increasing faculty expertise and classroom enhancement by providing conducive learning spaces

Participant C raises concerns about the limited number of professors and the necessity for MPA faculty to pursue MPA-specific education to provide adequate instruction and mentorship. This issue could lead to insufficient academic support for students, particularly during crucial milestones such as thesis defense. Moreover, the suggestion to enhance classroom environments indicates that improved learning spaces could elevate the student experience. There should be a focus on recruiting more professors with MPA-specific qualifications or encouraging current faculty to seek further education in public administration. The school should consider upgrading and improving classrooms to create an

engaging, modern learning environment that promotes interaction and collaboration. Participant C said:

"Based on my experience during my studies in MPA, there are limited professors for us. It is recommended that MPSU professors also undergo MPA education to provide additional professors to handle the academic subjects of future MPA students, and to ensure the availability of advisers and panel members during thesis defense. Improve also classrooms for a delightful place to conduct classes."

4.3.4 Research collaborations by partnering with government and research institutions and mentorship

Participant D suggests promoting more research collaborations with government agencies and institutions. This could provide students with practical, policy-driven experiences and the opportunity to conduct impactful research. Mentorship in publishing policy papers would further enhance students' professional development and help them build a portfolio of work that can be influential in their careers. The MPA program could seek to establish or strengthen partnerships with government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and think tanks.

This would enable students to conduct research on real-world policy challenges, access data, and develop actionable recommendations. Establishing a mentorship program that pairs students with faculty or professionals to co-author policy papers could help them gain experience publishing research that influences public policy. He recommended encouraging *"more research collaborations with government agencies and institutions, focusing on policy impact assessment, governance reforms, and service delivery improvements to include mentorship in publishing policy papers and recommendations."*

4.3.5 Engagement with alumni and networking opportunities

In his recommendation, Participant E emphasizes the importance of ongoing engagement with MPA alumni through workshops, seminars, and certification programs that promote lifelong learning. He said:

"The program could offer alumni access to workshops, seminars, or certification programs to remain relevant. This helps in maintaining a connection with graduates and fostering lifelong learning. Inviting resource speakers, mentorship, and networking opportunities, such as pairing students with public leaders to gain experience in public administration. Networking also helps, wherein students can communicate with LGUs and administrators to help them make connections that might assist in getting employed or gain insights into various career paths."

Furthermore, establishing connections with public leaders and LGUs would provide students with valuable career insights and opportunities. The program should develop a structured alumni engagement initiative that presents continuous learning options through workshops and certification programs. This

could take the form of specialized training to keep participants informed about new trends and innovations in public administration. The program should facilitate networking events and mentorship pairings with seasoned public administration professionals, including local government officials. These relationships can help students obtain internships, job opportunities, and career insights, and provide access to valuable mentorship.

5. Conclusion

The MPA program equips graduates with essential leadership, communication, critical thinking, and collaboration skills, empowering them to navigate complex public administration challenges effectively, drive positive change, and advance their careers. The feedback highlights key areas for the MPA program to adapt to evolving needs in public administration. Recommendations focus on enhancing academics, developing practical skills, improving faculty expertise, and strengthening connections with alumni and external organizations.

6. Recommendation

To improve the MPA program, it is recommended to enhance practical skill development through workshops, simulations, and expanded faculty expertise. Strengthening collaborations with government agencies, offering ongoing professional development opportunities, and fostering mentorship and networking will better prepare students for real-world challenges and advance their careers. The study was primarily a qualitative design, with selected participants. It may also be interesting to use quantitative data to better understand the positive and negative influences of pursuing graduate studies on the professional and personal development of graduate students.

AI Declaration Statement

This study made use of ChatGPT to enhance sentence constructions and Grammarly to proofread the manuscript.

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