



## **Effects of Graduates Tracers as A Quality Assurance Vector on Graduate's Career Readiness in Cameroon State Universities**

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DOI: 10.53103/cjess.v3i1.114

### **Abstract**

This study examines the influence of graduate's tracer on graduate's career readiness in Cameroon states universities. Tracing the graduates in the job market and creating a close interaction with the university system is an effective quality assurance technique that improves employability among graduates. This study employs the descriptive survey design and using simple random sampling technique, a sample of 448 participants were reached. The data collected was via questionnaire and analysed using the structural equation modelling. The findings indicated that graduate tracers are strong moderating predictors of graduates' career readiness in Cameroon state universities. Therefore, we recommend that Cameroon state universities should intentionally design respective graduates tracers programs.

Keywords: Graduates Tracers, Career Readiness, States Universities

### **Introduction**

Educational systems in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are expected to adapt categorically to the evolving exigencies of the job market. Today's job market is characterised by critical thinking, creative thinking, collaboration and communication skills. Graduates are expected to acquire these skills during the teaching-learning process and be able to employ them to perform given tasks in the world of work. In order to ensure learners, acquire these skills upon graduation, most institutions have recently employed quality assurance techniques that ensure the employability of graduates. Among the quality assurance practices used we have graduates' tracers, employer's involvement, lecturer's quality, pedagogic methods, among others.

According to the European Training Foundation (2017), graduates' tracer is a retrospective analysis of graduates through a standardized survey, which takes place sometime after graduation (most often between 6 months and 3 years) depending on the

institution. Tracer studies are also known as graduate surveys, alumni surveys, follow-up study or graduate tracking. The focus of a tracer study can be manifold, but common areas include questions on study progress, the transition to work, work entrance, job, career, use of learned competencies, current occupation and bonds to the education institution (school, centre, university), (UNESCO, 2018).

According to the Manual for creating tracer studies by the international cooperative (n.d), tracer studies are retrospective analyses of samples to evaluate the long term impact of intervention programmes. The results of tracer studies highlight circumstances that produce meaningful change in populations. A graduate tracer helps researchers identify effective and ineffective components in educational and vocational programs. A tracer study in the field of education includes data from former students of learning institutions or vocational programmes. The instrument for conducting a tracer study is often a questionnaire.

According to ILO (2005), as cited in Adelaida (2014), a tracer study is an instrument through which the impacts on target groups are traced back to specific elements of an academic programme so that effective and ineffective programme components may be defined. In this light, Schomburg (2003, p. 6) thinks that the outcomes of tracer studies are important for the analysis of the relationship that may exist between higher education and the job market. This relationship creates a connection that enables training to be skill incline as the alumni keep informing the system. Furthermore, Millington (2001) states that graduate tracers are a source of quantitative structural data on employment and career, the character of work and related competencies, and information on the professional orientation, and experiences of their graduates. Additionally, the collected data is an important indicator of the quality of higher education

For Waya (2019), tracer studies, graduate's tracer or graduate survey is a means of maintaining curriculum relevance and providing targeted benefits to graduates to enhance the marketability of educational programmes. Adequate knowledge of employment outcomes of training graduates could assist in formulating policy towards combating some of the social problems such as unemployment. Students, particularly graduates of any course, are required to earn a sense of competence in their field of interest and develop the confidence to explore new possibilities and new employment. By conducting a survey on the cohort of graduates from a specific institution, profession, discipline, level of education, their employment characteristics, competencies and skills development, and have a comparative analysis, the information gained from these can be used by the graduate's alma mater and other education stakeholders for curriculum development and other emerging reforms. Finally, INCHER-Kassel (n.d) believes that tracer study data offers the career service and the study counselling insights about study and professional careers that they can pass on to the students.

Graduates tracing is evidently an inevitable tool or strategy through which

graduates employment could be enhanced right from the school's curriculum, pedagogy and other practices as shown in the above experiences. Despite the several advantages gained by the institution and its graduates upon completion of the survey, Cameroonian higher institutions probably seldom carry out such activities to help connect their institutions with the job market. This implies that the activities of the institutions are paralleled to the present changes in the job market since no effective mechanism is probably put into place to ensure that connectivity. This may be at the genesis of the school to job challenges as institutions work independently from the job market exigencies. In this situation, graduate's unemployment may be aggravated as independent training encourages skill mismatch between institutions and the career.

### **Empirical Literature Review**

Many researchers have found interest in this area of study and have conducted significant research in different areas and situations. The findings from most of these studies showed that effective graduates tracers studies are significant in improving career readiness among graduates. Most of the studies affirm that tracer studies result help institutions to review and change their managerial strategies, programmes, pedagogies and the environment towards skill enhancement. However, despite the numerous tracer study conducted by most institutions, there is still considerable gap between the graduates and the skills they are expected to master. Altarawneh (2015) accounting graduates lack, in particular, the necessary (generic) skills and that there is a significant gap between the skills employers need and consider important, and the skills accounting graduates possess and can demonstrate in practice.

### **The Problem**

We are looking at how possible tracing the graduates in the job market may create a beneficiary bridge between the Cameroon higher institutions and the job market. The researcher observed that no higher education in Cameroon has an effective design graduate's tracer strategy put in place for its graduates. This is deep-rooted by the fact that tracer studies are not carried out in Cameroonian state universities at all, evidently, graduates will struggle and the institutions too might not be aligned with the latest changes in the society. The absence of graduate tracers by Cameroon state institution might be implying that once students graduate, no further follow-up is done by the institution or the department and the graduates (alumni) have to fight on their own for survival. In most cases, the Alumni might never help the institutions in any way because once they graduate, that connection is terminated. They hardly invite alumni to partake in the affairs of their school or given any relevant information on how they are treated in the job market. This

sometimes makes institutions to train on such skills that may not immediately be desired at the job markets.

### **Research Objective**

To examine the influence of graduates' tracers on graduate career readiness in Cameroon state universities.

### **Research Question**

How does graduates' tracer influence graduate career readiness in Cameroon state universities?

### **Research Hypothesis**

Ha: there is a relationship between graduates' tracers and graduate career readiness in Cameroon state universities.

H0: there is no relationship between graduates' tracers and graduate career readiness in Cameroon state universities.

### **Research Methodology**

This study adopts a descriptive survey. Via the simple random sampling, we collected data from 448 participants (graduates, lecturers and employers) with the help of questionnaire. The data was analysed using the Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) which is an exploratory technique that uses the data to test the relationship between the latent variable and to analyse the path relationship in the model.

### **Findings**

Table 1: Descriptive statistics on graduates' tracers

Graduates' tracers	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. My faculty contacted graduates to examine their experiences in the job market	448	1.00	4.00	1.6250	.93765
2. My department had some active alumni that was involved in curriculum design	444	1.00	4.00	1.7928	.98858
3. The graduates from my department were able to create jobs for themselves	448	1.00	4.00	2.1964	1.15733
4. My department had a job orientation and placement office that connects its graduates to available jobs	452	1.00	4.00	1.7434	.88123
5. My department constantly organized workshop with alumni involved	448	1.00	4.00	1.6696	.96830
6. My faculty's alumni group provided new graduates with job opportunities	448	1.00	4.00	1.5536	.84440
7. My faculty studied graduates and used their success stories to inspire learners	448	1.00	4.00	1.9107	.98810
8. I was mentored and given a job by a senior Graduate	448	1.00	4.00	1.6071	.77266
9. Graduates informed my department about skill changes in the job market	448	1.00	4.00	1.8482	1.02941
Valid N (listwise)	436				

1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree;3=Agree; 4=Strongly Agree

Source: Field data (2023)

According to the results presented on table 01, the item “My faculty contacted graduates to examine their experiences in the job market” was responded by 448 participants who knew something about it. Their responses range between the minimum of 1 and maximum of 4 following the 4point likert scale. These responses gave a mean of 1.6250 and a standard deviation of .93765. The nature of this finding indicates that the faculties never contacted graduates from their institution to examine their experiences in the job market. This therefore explains that if the institution does not contact graduates to examine their experiences in the job market, the resulting consequence will be that learners in that institution will not be career ready upon graduation.

From the results presented on table 01, on item “My department had an active alumni association that was involved in curriculum design” 444 respondents gave their responses to this preoccupation. Their responses range between the minimum of 1 and maximum of 4 following the 4point likert scale. These responses gave a mean of 1.7928 and a standard deviation of .98858. The nature of this responds is an indication that the training institutions never had any active alumni association that was involved during curriculum design. This explains that if in the department there is not active alumni association that is involved in curriculum design, the resulting consequences will be that the learners from this institution will not be career ready upon graduation.

Furthermore, considering the results presented on table 01, the item “The graduates from my department were able to create jobs for themselves”, 448 participants responded to this item. Their responses range between the minimum of 1 and maximum of 4 following the 4point likert scale. These responses gave a mean of 2.1964 and a standard deviation of 1.15733. From this result, it indicates that graduates from these departments have never been able to create jobs for themselves. This is hence explained that if the graduates from a particular institution have never been able to create jobs for themselves, the resulting consequences will be that the learners in that department will not be career ready upon graduation.

Furthermore, according to the results presented on table 01, the item “My department had a job orientation and placement office that connects its graduates to the jobs available”, was responded by 452 respondents. Their responses range between the minimum of 1 and maximum of 4 following the 4point likert scale. These responses gave a mean of 1.7434 and a standard deviation of .88123. The result portrays that the various departments never had any job orientation and placement office that connects its graduates to the available jobs. This is however explained that if a training institution does not have a job orientation and placement office that connects graduates to available jobs, the resulting consequence will be that the learners from that institution will not be career ready upon graduation.

Moreover, looking at table 01, the item “My department constantly organized workshop with alumni involved” was responded by 448 participants. Their responses range between the minimum of 1 and maximum of 4 following the 4point likert scale. These responses gave a mean of 1.6696 and a standard deviation of .96830. This result exhibits that the departments never organized any workshops that involved alumnus. This is explained that if the faculty does not organize any training programme that involves alumnus, the resulting consequence will be that the learners will not be career ready upon graduation.

Moreover, based on the result presented on table 01, the item “My faculty’s alumni group provided new graduates with job opportunities” was responded by 448 participants. Their responses range between the minimum of 1 and maximum of 4 following the 4point likert scale. These responses gave a mean of 1.5536 and a standard deviation of .84440. This result is an indication that the faculty alumni groups never provide new graduates with job opportunities. This therefore explains that if in a training institution and that institution’s Alumni association is not effective enough to welcome other graduates and introduce them in new job opportunities, the resulting consequence will be that graduates from that institution will be unemployed; they will have challenges in starting and running their career.

Again, looking at the results presented on table 01, we have 448 respondents who gave their responses to the item “My faculty studied graduates and used their success stories to inspire learners”. Their responses range between the minimum of 1 and maximum of 4 following the 4point likert scale. These responses gave a mean of 1.9107 and a standard deviation of .98810. This result is an indication that their faculties never studied their graduates and their success stories were never used to inspire learners. This therefore explains that if faculties never studied their graduates and use their success stories to inspire learners, the resulting consequence will be that the learners will not be career ready, will not be motivated, challenged and determine to succeed.

In addition, according to the findings presented on table 01, the item “I was mentored and given a job by a senior Graduate”, was responded by 448 participants who had the knowledge on the situation. Their responses range between the minimum of 1 and maximum of 4 following the 4point likert scale. These responses gave a mean of 1.6071 and a standard deviation of .77266. The nature of this result indicates that the learners were never mentored and given jobs by their senior graduates. This explains that if in an educational system, senior graduates cannot mentor and even employ younger graduates, the resulting consequence will be that the graduates will not be employed, they will not be career ready.

Finally, according to the results presented on table 01, on the item “Graduates informed my department about skill changes in the job market”, 448 respondents found interest and gave their responses to the preoccupation. Their responses range between the

minimum of 1 and maximum of 4 following the 4point likert scale. These responses gave a mean of 1.8482 and a standard deviation of 1.02941. This result is an indication that graduates never informed the department about skill changes in the job market. This therefore explains that if in an institution the graduates do not inform their former institution about changes in skillset in the job market, the resulting consequence will be skill mismatch, learners from the institution will not be career ready upon graduation.

### **Verification of Research Hypothesis**

Alternative Hypothesis (Ha)

There is a relationship between Graduate Tracers and graduates career readiness in Cameroon state universities.

Statistical Hypothesis (H0)

There is no relationship between Graduate Tracers and graduates career readiness in Cameroon state universities.



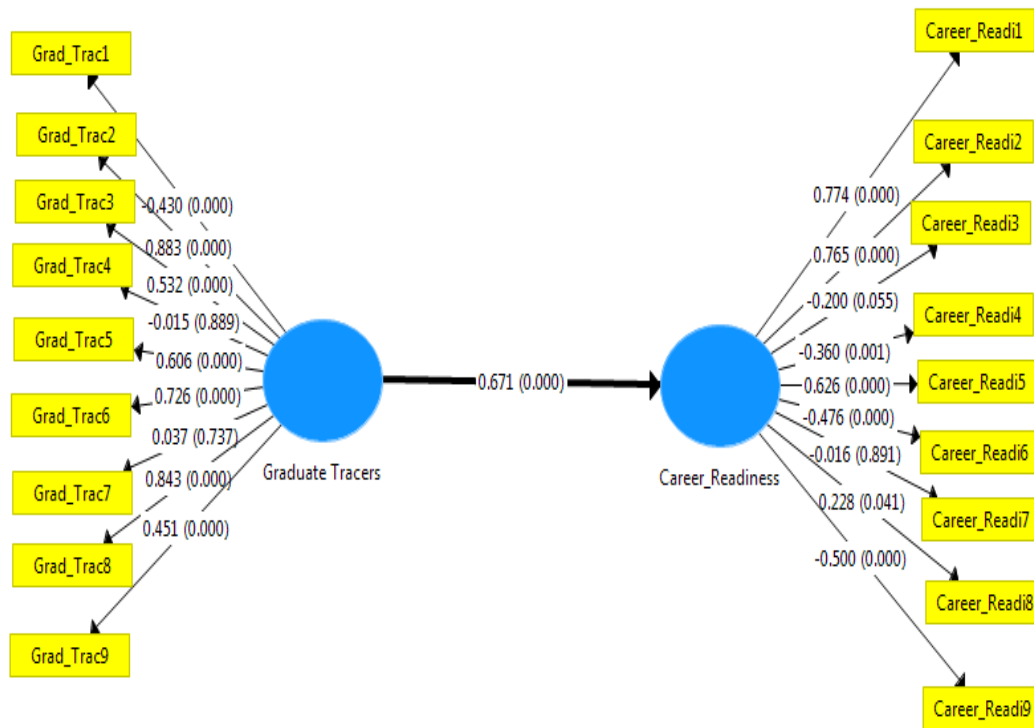


Figure 1: Path modelling estimations for graduate tracers and university graduates career readiness

Source: Field data (2022)

Figure 14 presents path coefficients to ease the vivid interpretation of the relations that exist between the latent variables and the various indicators of the model. Looking at the structural model (the inner model), we observe that the path coefficients are significant (p-values are less than the alpha-0.05).

However, the hypothesized path relationship between Graduate Tracers and university graduates career readiness is significant. So we conclude that Graduate Tracers are strong moderating predictors of Career Readiness. The path coefficient of 0.671 indicates that the Graduate Tracers influences 67.1% of the variations that occur in Career Readiness of higher education students. And the p-value of 0.000 indicates that there is no chance of making an error if we accept that such a relationship exists. Most of the p-values and the coefficients of determinations of the outer models indicates that the indicators are strong determinants of latent variables. With the above findings, we reject the null hypothesis and retain the alternative hypothesis which states that Graduate Tracers

significantly influences career readiness of university students in Cameroon.

### Conclusion

The Development of an individual, the community and the society in general depends strongly on the type of education, the quality of the education and the systems put in place to steer the education and society concomitance. Education is at the center of human development and the society is fast evolving technologically as well as in other domains. Cameroon has 8 state universities distributed all over the national territory. These institutions train approximately 50,000 students per annum. These number of students keep increasing as many youths develop interest for further education, couple with the fall in the value and quality of secondary schools in the country. The above findings demonstrate that these universities do not have any graduate's tracer systems put in place, therefore, there is no interaction with graduates from the system. Consequently, the universities have limited information about job market changes, the students are not mentored by more experienced graduates. Therefore, there is bound to be high unemployment rate, among graduates from Cameroon state universities.

Looking at the findings of this study, based on the research objective, we recommend that Cameroon state universities should intentionally design respective graduates tracers programs. these will keep the graduates (Alumni) connected to the system and provide quality service to the system for continuous improvement. If the recommendations made are considered and implemented, the Nation Development Strategy 2020-2030 (SND 30) launched for the second phase of 2035 emerging visions will record more success than the former.

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