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## Aligning Education with Market Demands: A Case Study of Marketing Graduates from Daffodil International University

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**Abstract.** This study conducted a comprehensive tracer analysis of 197 graduates from Daffodil International University's Marketing bachelor program between 2019 and 2022. The main objective was to evaluate the program's alignment with labor market requirements and its effectiveness in equipping students with the necessary skills to navigate the complexities of the global market. A cross-sectional descriptive design was employed, utilizing a survey questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument. The target population consisted of graduates of the marketing program, selected through purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of individuals with relevant experience. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify trends and percentages. Key findings revealed a significant gender disparity, with more male graduates than female, and high unemployment rates, which highlighted ongoing employment difficulties. While 75.5% of graduates affirmed the curriculum's relevance to their professional roles, a gap was noted between the theoretical knowledge imparted and its practical application. The study suggests integrating comprehensive career preparation and extensive networking opportunities into the curriculum to mitigate employment barriers. Additionally, enhancing the curriculum to support entrepreneurial ventures is recommended. The findings emphasize the importance of ongoing curriculum revisions and the development of dynamic career support services to improve graduate employability and adapt to the evolving demands of the marketing profession. This research provides valuable insights for policymakers, curriculum developers, and educational researchers to enhance the relevance of higher education to the workforce, facilitating successful transitions into the labor market.

**Keywords:** DIU marketing graduates; tracer study; transition employment; curriculum; skills

## 1. Introduction

The role of higher education as a pivotal force in advancing national development goals remains unequivocal. As a foundation for individual growth and societal prosperity, higher education promotes social mobility, dignity, and access to superior employment opportunities. Collectively, these elements contribute significantly to enhanced health outcomes and wealth creation (Ashida, 2023). On a broader scale, higher education is instrumental in boosting productivity, encouraging innovation, nurturing entrepreneurship, and sustaining economic and political stability (Areesophonpichet et al., 2024; Tefera, 2018). The Labour Force Survey (LFS) of 2022, however, painted a picture concerning Bangladesh, revealing a 12 percent (BBS, 2023) unemployment rate among its tertiary sector graduates, the highest across all educational levels. This statistic underscores the formidable challenges graduates face in securing employment that aligns with their educational attainment (Afroz, 2023).

In an era marked by rapid global market changes, heightened competition, and swift technological advancements, higher education institutions, including Daffodil International University (DIU), renowned for their commitment to excellence and innovation, especially in information and communication technology (ICT) and other fields, are compelled to adopt a proactive and adaptable approach. The DIU has conducted a comprehensive evaluation of its Marketing bachelor's degree program, spanning from 2019 to 2022. To achieve this, a tracer study methodology was employed. This approach involves tracking and analyzing the career paths of graduates to assess how well their education prepares them for the workplace. Specifically, the study looked at how effectively the program helped students transition smoothly into employment and develop essential soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving (Akazaki et al., 2023).

This study aimed to evaluate the alignment between DIU's marketing curriculum and the career advancement of its alumni critically by analyzing job placements, assumed roles, and the cultivation of essential soft skills (Díaz-García et al., 2023). It endeavored to provide a detailed understanding of the program's impact on graduates' career trajectories and assess the curriculum's success in equipping students with the skills demanded of today's business landscape (Camuyong et al., 2023; Padgett & Donald, 2022). The primary objective of this research was to conduct a comprehensive review of and identify areas for improvement within the DIU marketing bachelor's program, ensuring that graduates are adequately prepared to meet professional challenges. This study contributes to the broader discourse on aligning academic programs with labor market requirements, thereby enhancing graduates' integration into the workforce (McDermott et al., 2021).

The research questions guiding this study were the following:

- What are the employment characteristics and transition experiences of DIU graduates in their initial years of workforce entry?

- How do the various curricular programs at DIU contribute to the development of soft skills in graduates, thereby enhancing their professional growth?
- How effective, adequate, and relevant are curricular programs for the professional development of DIU graduates?

## 2. Literature Review

Tracer studies have become a cornerstone for evaluating the efficacy of educational programs, particularly within the marketing education sector. These studies, defined by their methodological rigor, serve dual purposes: they assess educational outcomes and ensure that curriculum delivery aligns with industry standards, thereby facilitating graduates' transition into the workforce (Al-Kiyumi & Hammad, 2020; Dawaton, 2021). Furthermore, these studies contribute to a growing body of research emphasizing the importance of practical, industry-relevant education in preparing students for future careers.

Tracer studies are instrumental in identifying strengths and areas of improvement within educational institutions. They provide essential insights that contribute to high-quality education and align academic goals with the institution's overarching mission and vision (Dawaton, 2021). Recent studies have continued to recognize tracer studies as critical mechanisms for advancing higher education and enhancing the quality of educational programs (Areesophonpichet et al., 2024; Basabe et al., 2023). For example, recent research by the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization (ITCILO) highlights the increasing use of tracer studies to improve technical and vocational education and training (TVET) systems, which aligns educational outcomes with labor market needs and supports the transition from school to work (ITCILO, 2024).

The utility of tracer studies extends beyond simple assessment; they are crucial for understanding graduates' employment performance, competency development, and the acquisition of desirable graduate attributes. For instance, Basabe et al. (2023) demonstrated positive correlations between satisfaction with program delivery and the development of competencies that further socioeconomic advancement. Other researchers have highlighted the role of tracer studies in competency development and career advancement (Lopena & Madrigal, 2023; Nevhudoli & Netshandama, 2023).

A recurring theme in tracer studies is the alignment of educational curricula with graduate employment sectors. Khan and Mojkury (2021) underscored the necessity of curriculum alignment with industry demands, which is particularly emphasized in studies focusing on specific-degree programs. For example, the Bachelor of Science in Information Technology (BSIT) program's success in aligning its curriculum with the software development sector is a testament to the effectiveness of such an alignment (Micabalo et al., 2021; Velandia-Mesa et al., 2021).

Despite the recognized benefits of tracer studies, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding Marketing bachelor's programs, especially at the DIU in

Bangladesh. This gap is significant, given the evolving demands of the global marketing industry and the pressing need for educational institutions to adapt their curricula accordingly. The growing importance of technology and digital marketing in businesses has further highlighted the urgency for universities to integrate these subjects into their programs (Patay, 2023).

### **2.1 Critical Analysis of Methodologies**

The methodologies used in tracer studies vary widely, affecting the robustness and applicability of their findings. Common methodologies include surveys, interviews, and mixed-method approaches. Surveys are advantageous because of their scalability and ability to gather quantitative data efficiently. However, they often suffer from low response rates and potential biases in self-reported data (Basabe et al., 2023; Ghazy et al., 2022).

Interviews, on the other hand, provide deeper insights into graduates' experiences, but are time-consuming and may not be representative of the broader population (Lopena & Madrigal, 2023). Mixed-method approaches attempt to combine the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative data but require careful design and substantial resources to implement effectively (Nevhudoli & Netshandama, 2023).

A critical limitation of many studies is the reliance on retrospective data, which can be subject to recall bias. Moreover, the timing of tracer study post-graduation varies, affecting the comparability of the results. Early tracer studies may not capture long-term career trajectories, while delayed studies may miss immediate post-graduation challenges (Khan & Mojokury, 2021; ITCILO, 2024).

### **2.2 Comparative Insights**

A comparison of tracer study findings across different regions and institutions revealed both common challenges and best practices. For instance, studies in developed countries often show a higher alignment between education and employment due to well-established industry-academia linkages. In contrast, developing countries frequently report mismatches due to evolving labor markets and less adaptive educational curricula (Micabalo et al., 2021; Velandia-Mesa et al., 2021).

In Bangladesh, the high unemployment rate among tertiary graduates highlights systemic issues in aligning educational outcomes with market demand (Patay, 2023). This issue is further compounded by the lack of industry-academia partnerships in Bangladesh, which hinders the development of skills and knowledge relevant to the job market. Conversely, countries with strong vocational training systems, such as Germany, exhibit lower graduate unemployment rates and higher satisfaction with program delivery (ITCILO, 2024).

### 3. Hypothesis Development

#### 3.1 Employment Characteristics and Transition to Employment

This hypothesis examined the overarching influence of the marketing bachelor's program, as presented by the DIU, on the holistic development of graduates as they ventured into the professional world. By "employment attributes", the researcher refers to an expansive set of skills and characteristics, ranging from foundational job readiness to nuanced industry-specific competencies. The term "proficient transition" captures graduates' capacity to integrate their academic learning seamlessly with real-world professional demands (Abdulloh et al., 2022; Hasibuan et al., 2022; Ssekamatte et al., 2022). The emphasized role of the program in this context suggests an all-encompassing educational framework that offers rigorous theoretical grounding and instills pragmatic skills and mindsets indispensable for navigating the complexities of contemporary professional landscapes (Abdulloh et al., 2022).

- Hypothesis 1 (H1): Employment characteristics are related to transitioning to employment

#### 3.2 Various Curricular Programs and Growth of Soft Skills to Enhance Professional Growth

In the contemporary corporate landscape, soft skills have increased in importance, often determining an individual's success in tandem with their technical expertise (Abdulloh et al., 2022; Hasibuan et al., 2022; Ssekamatte et al., 2022). Soft skills, as delineated in this context, comprise a myriad of attributes such as proficient communication, collaborative teamwork, agile adaptability, and adept problem-solving techniques, among others. The hypothesis posits that the Marketing bachelor's program at DIU has strategically integrated elements in its curriculum that accentuate the development of soft skills (Zainal Shah et al., 2022). This integration ensures that while graduates emerge with a robust technical foundation in marketing, they are equally prepared with the requisite interpersonal proficiencies to maneuver through, collaborate within, and contribute effectively to diverse corporate settings. The symbiotic relationship between curriculum and soft skill enhancement emphasizes DIU's forward-thinking educational approach, aligned with the multifaceted demands of today's professional realms (Ganiera et al., 2024; Huang et al., 2022; Shivoro et al., 2017).

- Hypothesis 2a (H2a): The various curricular are programs related to enhancing professional growth
- Hypothesis 2b (H2b) Soft skills are related to enhancing professional growth

#### 3.3 Effective, Adequate and Relevant Curricular Programs for Professional Development

In an ever-evolving professional milieu, the alignment between academic instruction and industry requirements has become an imperative benchmark for educational institutions (Hasibuan et al., 2022). This hypothesis is zero in the multifaceted curricular programs offered by the DIU for its marketing bachelor's students. By deeming the curriculum as "effective", it acknowledges the structured pedagogical methods and strategies employed (Abdulloh et al., 2022; Ssekamatte et al., 2022). "Sufficiency" underscores the comprehensive nature of

the curriculum, ensuring that all pertinent areas within marketing are addressed (Cosenza & Taylor, 2014). Most critically, the term “industry relevancy” captures the alignment of the curriculum with the dynamic needs and expectations of business sectors in Bangladesh (Fakir, 2019; Morris & Reid, 2020).

This study’s hypothesis has two implications. First, it postulates that DIU graduates are poised for a smoother transition into a professional world equipped with knowledge and skills that resonate with industrial demands. Second, it infers a reduced necessity for rigorous on-job training, signifying that employers can anticipate that DIU graduates will immediately contribute to organizational objectives. This synergy between academic preparedness and industry requirements signifies DIU’s commitment to bridging the academia-industry gap, producing graduates who are not only academically adept but also professionally astute.

- Hypothesis 3 (H3): Curricular programs are related to effective, adequate, and relevant professional development

## **4. Conceptual Framework**

### **4.1 Model Adaptation**

This study adopts a synthesized model that integrates insights from Al-Kiyumi and Hammad (2020), Dawaton (2021), Morris and Reid (2020), and Schomburg (2010). It emphasizes aligning educational inputs with pedagogical processes to achieve measurable educational and long-term graduate outcomes. This alignment enhances student engagement, improves learning outcomes, and enriches (Sabeh et al., 2021) overall educational experience.

### **4.2 Key Theoretical Underpinnings**

This framework is grounded in the principles of educational effectiveness and curriculum alignment theories. Students are expected to grasp theories in marketing strategies, consumer behavior, and market analysis, equipping them with practical skills that are crucial for contemporary business environments. The mastery of these concepts enables students to apply knowledge effectively in real-world scenarios and contribute meaningfully to future employers.

#### *4.2.1 Expected student knowledge*

Students are required to demonstrate proficiency in fundamental marketing theories and practices such as market segmentation, branding strategies, and digital marketing techniques. The curriculum emphasizes critical thinking, analytical skills, and ethical decision making, preparing students to meet industry demands comprehensively. Additionally, it fosters effective communication and problem-solving abilities, ensuring that graduates are versatile and prepared for dynamic industrial challenges.

#### *4.2.2 Integration with research*

This study utilizes a conceptual framework (Figure 1) to assess the coherence between educational inputs and processes systematically, aiming to achieve the desired educational outputs and outcomes. By evaluating the Marketing bachelor’s program through this structured approach, this study identifies

strengths and areas for enhancement, promoting the alignment of higher education with labor market demands. This framework builds on extensive scholarly research exploring higher education outcomes, graduates' employability, and the relevance of curriculum design to industry needs. In addition, the framework also considers the role of technology in enhancing the learning experience and preparing students for future work.

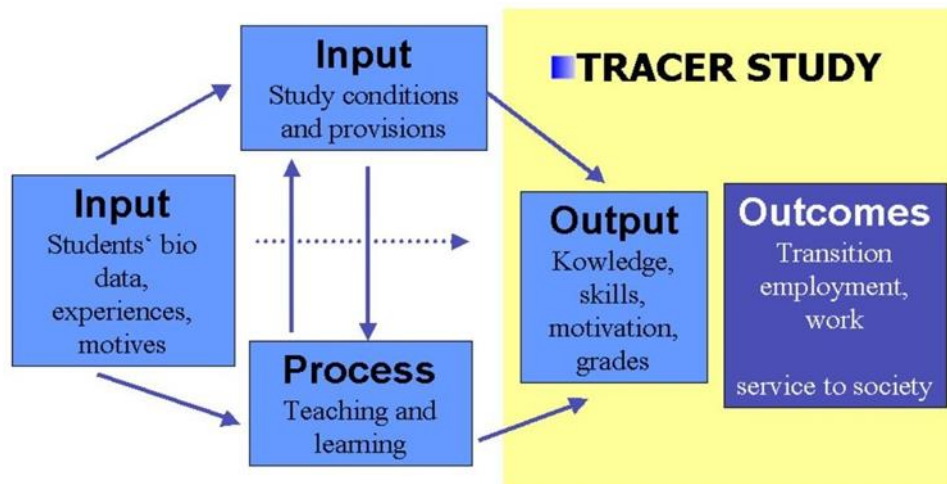


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of tracer studies (Al-Kiyumi & Hammad, 2020; Dawaton, 2021; Morris & Reid, 2020; Schomburg, 2010)

## 5. Methods

### 5.1 Research Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional descriptive design with a quantitative approach to assess career outcomes and perceived educational effectiveness among marketing graduates at the DIU. The cross-sectional method, which is commonly used in quantitative research (De, 2024), was employed to collect and analyze the data. This method was selected because it provides a comprehensive description of the current situation. For more reliable results, using a quantitative method, such as a cross-sectional survey, is essential for gathering and analyzing data effectively (Kalaw, 2019).

### 5.2 Setting and Duration

The investigation was centered on the DIU, focusing on alumni who graduated from the marketing bachelor's program between 2019 and 2022. This timeframe provided insight into the program's recent performance and relevance.

### 5.3 Participants

The research targeted 197 graduates who had completed a bachelor's degree in Marketing at DIU within the study period. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that the sample included graduates with relevant experience and insight. This method involves identifying and selecting individuals who meet specific criteria, such as having completed the Marketing program and being active in the labor market. Alumni records were used to identify eligible graduates, ensuring the sample was representative of those who

could provide valuable information on career outcomes and perceived educational effectiveness. Purposive sampling is particularly effective in educational research for selecting participants who can provide rich, relevant, and diverse information (Albina & Sumagaysay, 2020).

#### **5.4 Sampling Method**

The total population for this study comprised 250 graduates who had completed a bachelor's degree in Marketing at the DIU within the study period. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who could provide relevant insights into career outcomes and perceived educational effectiveness. This approach ensured that the sample included individuals with the necessary experience to address the research questions. To minimize selection bias and promote data representativeness, the sample was carefully chosen from alumni records, ensuring a diverse representation of the graduate population in terms of graduation year, gender, and employment status.

#### **5.5 Data Collection Instruments**

A meticulously crafted questionnaire, featuring closed-ended inquiries, served as the primary means of data collection. To assess the internal consistency of the questions, Cronbach's alpha was employed, yielding a satisfactory value of more than 0.70. The questionnaire underwent a pre-test with a small group of graduates who were not part of the final sample to ensure its clarity and relevance. Feedback from the pilot study led to improvements, addressing ambiguities and ensuring accurate capture of information related to graduates' workforce transitions and professional development (Jiang et al., 2023).

The questionnaire presents several advantages over alternative data collection instruments. Firstly, it allows for the efficient collection of data from a large sample size, enhancing the generalizability of the findings (Creswell, 2014). Secondly, it enables the quantification of respondents' opinions and experiences, facilitating statistical analysis (Bryman, 2016). Lastly, the structured format ensures uniformity in responses, reducing the likelihood of interviewer bias (Fowler Jr, 2013). The development of the questionnaire was guided by relevant literature on graduate employability and educational effectiveness, incorporating validated questions from previous studies where appropriate. This adaptation process ensured that the instrument was robust and capable of providing reliable and valid data for the research (Astuti et al., 2024).

#### **5.6 Data Collection Procedure**

Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire administered via telephone interviews. This method was chosen to facilitate direct engagement with the participants and to ensure the collection of detailed and accurate information regarding their post-academic professional experiences.

#### **5.7 Nature of the Tool**

The structured questionnaire used in the telephone interviews included closed-ended questions. The closed-ended questions were employed to measure aspects, the effectiveness of the educational program, and the development of soft skills.



### 5.8 Preparation and Adaptation

The questionnaire was carefully designed based on existing literature on graduate employability and educational effectiveness. It was pre-tested with a small group of graduates who were not part of the final sample. Their feedback was used to refine the questions and ensure clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness.

### 5.9 Data Collection Process

Of the 250 graduates approached for participation, 197 responded, resulting in a significant response rate. Telephone interviews were conducted by trained interviewers who followed a standardized protocol to ensure consistency and reliability in data collection. Each interview lasted approximately 20-30 minutes, during which the participants answered questions. This method allowed for an in-depth understanding of graduates' career outcomes and their perceptions of the educational effectiveness of the Marketing bachelor's program at the DIU. The high response rate underscores the relevance of the study and participants' willingness to engage, providing robust data for analysis.

### 5.10 Data Processing and Analysis

Upon collection, the responses were systematically edited, coded, and analyzed using SPSS version 25. The analysis hinges on descriptive statistics, presenting findings through various illustrative methods such as tables and charts to depict trends and percentages.

### 5.11 Ethical Considerations

Before commencement, the study received ethical approval from the institutional review board of the DIU. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring voluntary participation. In addition, adherence to confidentiality and data protection standards was maintained throughout the research process.

## 6. Analysis of the Study

Table 1 presents the demographic statistics based on gender.

**Table 1: Demographic statistic of gender**

Gender (N = 197)			
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
Male	134	68.0%	78.4
Female	63	32.0%	100.0
Total	197	100.0	

A tracer study conducted on the alumni of DIU's marketing bachelor program for the period 2019-2022 has elucidated the gender composition of the respondents, as summarized in Table 1. The dataset was comprised of 197 participants. Analysis of the demographic data revealed a prominent disproportion in gender representation among program graduates, with male students constituting 68.0% (n=134) of the sample, indicating a male predominance within the program across the studied timeframe. Conversely, female graduates represented 32.0% (n=63), denoting a lesser proportion when compared to their male counterparts. The data

provided a cumulative percentage with a final accounting of 100% after female demographic entry, thereby delineating a male-to-female ratio of approximately 3:1.

This notable gender imbalance might be attributed to a multitude of factors, including sociocultural influences that guide vocational decisions, prevailing perceptions about the marketing discipline, or the specific outreach and admission strategies of the DIU. Additional qualitative inquiries could yield insights into the factors that contribute to this gender disparity. The implications of this gender distribution were manifold and possessed significant pertinence for academic administrators and industry stakeholders alike. For academic institutions, these statistics could inform targeted recruitment strategies and support measures to foster gender diversity within the academic environment. Concurrently, for the marketing industry, such data underscores the need for more equitable hiring practices to accommodate the forthcoming pool of professionals. While gender distribution provides a critical demographic perspective, a comprehensive analysis encompassing a spectrum of demographic and academic performance indicators would further enrich the understanding of the Marketing bachelor's program's graduate profile from 2019 to 2022.

### 6.1 Employment Status

Table 2 presents statistics on employment status.

**Table 2: Employment status**

Employment status			
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
Employed	93	47.2% (93)	47.2
Unemployed	78	39.6% (78)	86.8
Self-employed	26	13.2% (26)	100.0
Total	197	100.0	

In assessing the employment status of graduates, the tracer study meticulously documented the labor market outcomes for respondents of the DIU's Marketing bachelor program (2019-2022). The ensuing data, collated from 197 respondents, was explicated in Table 2 and Figure 1. The employment distribution among the alumni showed that 47.2% of graduates secured formal employment, denoting nearly half of the surveyed sample. This representation pointed towards graduates' assimilation into structured professional roles that ostensibly offer consistent remuneration and socioeconomic benefits. Concurrently, a substantial proportion of the alumni (39.6%) did not attain employment. This statistic is indicative of potential exigencies in the economic landscape or challenges endemic to the regional job market, thereby warranting further examination and intervention.

Complementing the aforementioned figures, 13.2% of respondents had embarked on entrepreneurial ventures, denoting self-employment. This segment of the cohort might be indicative of graduates' proclivity for innovation and enterprise

or might suggest an alternative path taken in the face of constrained employment opportunities within the traditional job sectors. The employment dynamics depicted in Figure 1 align with the findings reported in Table 2, further illustrating the dichotomous nature of labor market engagement among the respondents.

A secondary observation from the study indicated that 75.5% (149 respondents) affirmed satisfaction with the curriculum and pedagogical approaches of the DIU. This majority endorsement reflects the perceived efficacy and relevance of academic experience, as provided by the university. By contrast, 24.5% (48 respondents) expressed dissatisfaction, highlighting significant areas for pedagogical improvement. For the DIU, such feedback was pivotal, necessitating ongoing evaluative studies to refine the curriculum and align it with the evolving requirements of both the industry and the student body. Table 3 shows statistics on skills required by employers.

**Table 3: Skills required by employers**

Skill	Not expected (1)		Slightly expected (2)		Somehow expected (3)		Expected (4)		Expected to a high extent (5)		M	SD
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Willingness to learn	0	0.00	0	0.00	9	4.57	39	19.80	149	75.63	4.71	.556
Ability to express yourself in writing	0	0.00	0	0.00	19	9.64	31	15.74	147	74.62	4.65	.655
Communication	0	0.00	2	1.02	7	3.55	14	7.11	174	88.32	4.82	.534
Computer literacy	7	3.55	5	2.54	9	4.57	73	37.06	103	52.28	4.29	.981
Time management and organizational skills	9	4.57	14	7.11	5	2.54	22	11.17	147	74.62	4.43	1.148
Leadership skills	9	4.57	21	10.66	50	25.38	42	21.32	75	38.07	3.76	1.212
Problem solving skills	12	6.09	9	4.57	52	26.40	37	18.78	87	44.16	3.90	1.198

In Table 3, the evaluations conducted by employers delineated their perceptions of the requisite skills in graduates from the 2019-2022 cohorts of the DIU's marketing bachelor program. A synthesis of these appraisals is presented as follows. Employers commonly commended graduates for their enthusiasm to learn, with approximately 76.36% of respondents stating that it surpassed expectations, 19.80% noting that it met expectations, and only 4.57% indicating that there was room for improvement. In terms of written expressions, around 74.62% of employers believed that graduates exceeded expectations, 15.74% met expectations, and 9.64% identified areas for enhancement. Regarding

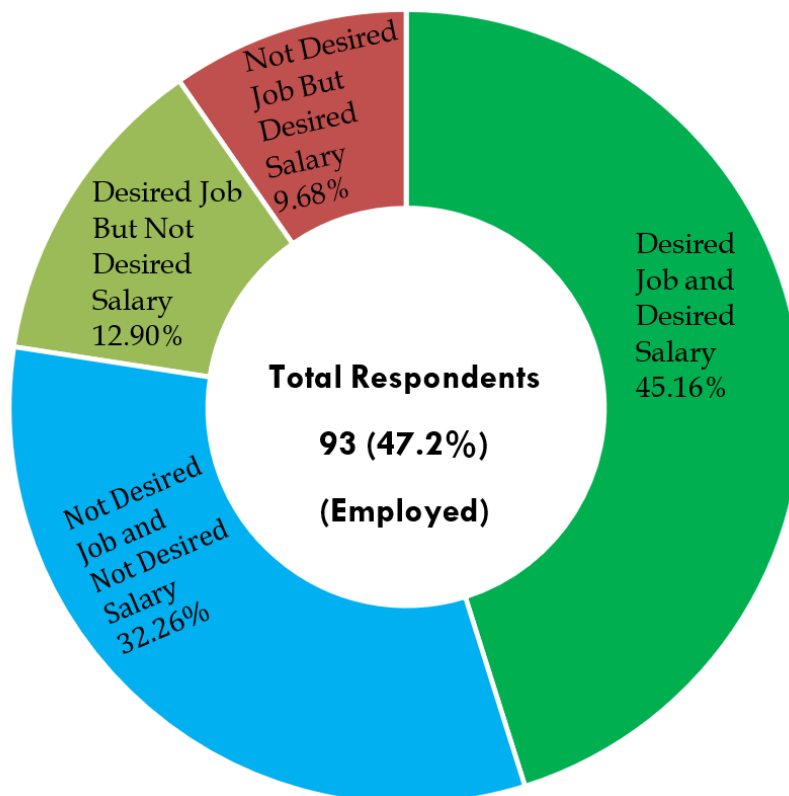
communication skills, roughly 83.82% of employers were impressed, while 3.55% thought they were slightly below par. The computer literacy of graduates was deemed satisfactory by approximately 82.28% of the employers, with only 7.18% expressing dissatisfaction. Time management and organizational skills were considered above expectations by 74.62% of employers, and met expectations by 11.17%. Regarding leadership skills, around 63.80% of employers found them to exceed expectations, while 25.38% thought they fell short. Problem-solving skills were highly regarded by approximately 74.16% of employers, while approximately 8.17% believed that they were inadequate.

Overall, employers expressed favorable opinions about graduates' eagerness to learn, effective communication, and digital literacy. Although areas such as writing, leadership, and problem-solving are generally positively evaluated, they also highlight areas where educational enhancements and curriculum refinement are necessary. Despite being perceived as strengths, these areas can be further improved through educational improvements and curriculum refinement. Table 4 presents statistics on the methods of job requirement.

**Table 4: Methods of job recruitment**

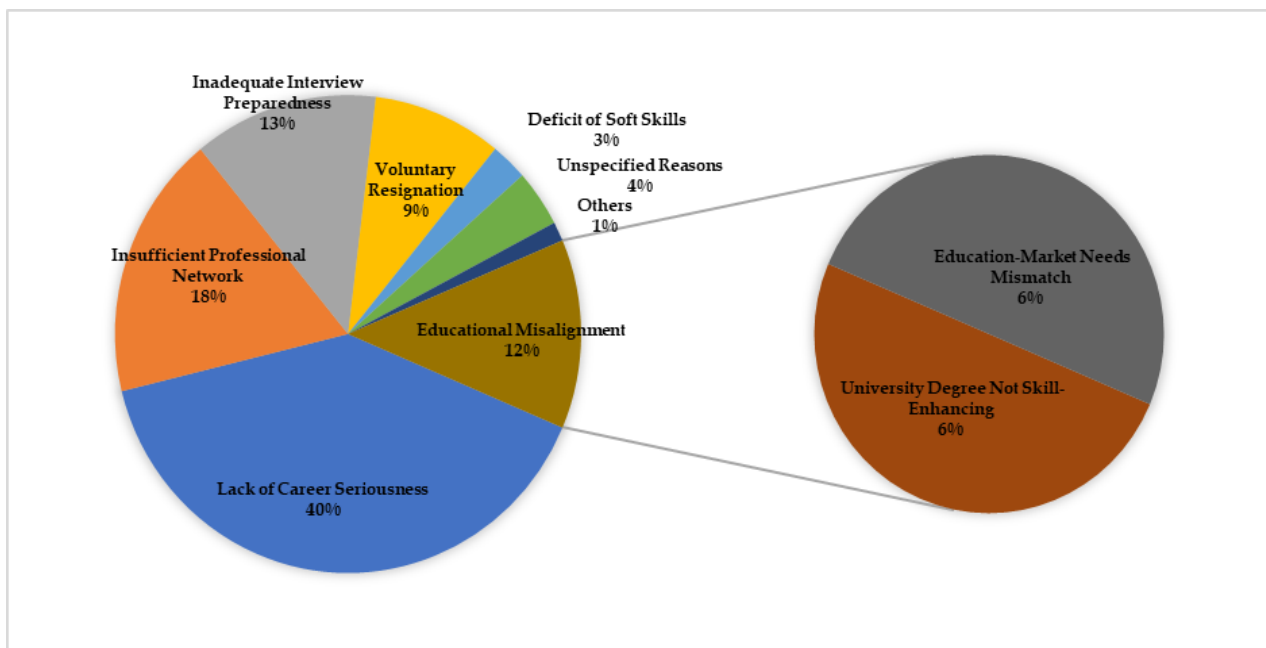
Methods of job recruitment			
Item	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
Employment agency	13	13.98%	13.98%
Web search	09	9.68%	23.66%
Internship	21	22.58%	46.24%
Personal contact	44	47.31%	93.55%
Newspapers	04	4.30%	97.85%
Other	02	2.15%	100.00%
Total	93	100.00%	

The findings in Table 4 and Figures 2 and 3 provide insight into the recruitment methodologies and the resultant job satisfaction among the employed alumni of the DIU's Marketing bachelor program. In this analysis, personal contacts constitute the primary channel of job recruitment, utilized for 47.31% of the employment opportunities. This prevalence signifies a pronounced reliance on professional networks. Internships served as an avenue for 22.58% of the hires, indicating employers' predilection for candidates with substantive practical experience. Employment agencies and online searches were moderately utilized (13.98% and 9.68%, respectively), reflecting their supportive role in recruitment strategies. Conventional media, such as newspapers and other non-traditional methods, collectively accounted for a minor 6.45%, delineating a diminished preference for these avenues in the current job market.



**Figure 2: Level of current job satisfaction of students who are employed**

Figure 2 delineates the job satisfaction levels of employed graduates. The preponderance of the diagram likely corresponded to the 47.31% attributed to personal contacts, visually reinforcing the importance of networking in job satisfaction. Internships claim a considerable segment commensurate with their substantial share in recruitment. Smaller portions of the diagram represent recruitment through agencies and online platforms, indicating a moderate degree of satisfaction from these sources. The least favored methods, depicted as the smallest segments, were newspaper advertisements and other methods, confirming their relatively minor role in job satisfaction.



**Figure 3: Reasons for unemployment**

Figure 3 presents the reasons for unemployment among respondents. A significant 39.74% attributed their unemployment to a lack of career seriousness, highlighting a potential disconnection with professional engagement. Nearly one-fifth (17.94%) ascribed their jobless status to inadequate professional networks, thereby emphasizing the criticality of industry connections. Suboptimal interview prowess was noted by 12.82% of respondents, while voluntary job resignation accounted for 8.97%, suggesting either dissatisfaction with prior employment or personal circumstances. A small percentage (2.56%) believed that they lacked the necessary soft skills. A fraction (3.85%) faced undetermined obstacles, and 12.82% cited educational misalignment with labor market demands, indicating a potential incongruity between academic preparation and industry expectations.

Based on the data, it can be inferred that there is a noticeable inclination towards personal networking and experience-based hiring methods, which are accompanied by varying levels of job satisfaction derived from these recruitment techniques. In addition, the factors contributing to unemployment among graduates encompass aspects that call for a comprehensive approach to improve employment preparedness and align with the job market.

## 7. Results

This tracer study focused on the employment characteristics and transition experiences of DIU graduates from the Marketing bachelor program between 2019 and 2022. Nearly half (47.2%) of graduates secured formal employment, 39.6% were unemployed, and 13.2% were self-employed. This distribution highlights the varied transition experiences of the graduates. The relatively high unemployment rate suggests challenges in the job market or possible mismatches between academic preparation and job market demand. This aligns with findings from other studies, indicating similar challenges that recent graduates face in

securing employment (Tian, 2021). Furthermore, these findings highlight the importance of providing support and resources to recent graduates as they navigate the job market.

Employers evaluated graduates on several soft skills that are crucial for their professional growth. Graduates were particularly commended for their enthusiasm to learn, communication skills, and computer literacy, with the majority of employers indicating that these skills either met or exceeded their expectations. These findings are consistent with literature that emphasizes the importance of soft skills in enhancing employability and professional growth. According to recent studies, the demand for employees with strong soft skills is on the rise, as employers seek to hire individuals who possess not only technical expertise, but also the ability to communicate effectively, work well with others, and adapt to changing circumstances (Schippers et al., 2015).

The effectiveness, adequacy, and relevance of the curricular programs were evaluated on the basis of employer feedback and graduate outcomes. The data indicated that personal contact and internships were the most effective recruitment methods. This suggests that practical experience and networking are crucial components of the professional development of DIU graduates. The curriculum should thus emphasize real-world applications and opportunities for networking, aligning with theories of experiential learning and the importance of industry connections (Chukwuedo & Ementa, 2022). In addition to emphasizing real-world applications and networking opportunities, the curriculum should incorporate a variety of learning styles and technologies to cater to the diverse needs of students (Haghanikar, 2019).

## **8. Findings and Discussion**

The findings of the tracer study conducted at the DIU's Marketing program provide crucial insights for aligning education with market demand. The high rate of unemployment among graduates highlights the necessity for enhancements to the curriculum, such as the incorporation of practical components such as internships and real-world projects, to bridge the gap between academic training and industry requirements. Soft-skill development, particularly in leadership and problem solving, is crucial to meeting market demands (Tian, 2021; Schippers et al., 2015).

Networking and practical experiences, regarded as vital for job placements, support experiential learning. Educational institutions must provide more opportunities for industry engagement and practical training (Chukwuedo & Ementa, 2022). Addressing gender imbalances through targeted recruitment and support programs can promote a more inclusive learning environment (Gerland et al., 2014). Strengthening career services, including career guidance and job placement support, is necessary to aid graduates' transition into the workforce (Rahman et al., 2018). Implementing these strategies will enhance the employability and professional growth of graduates, aligning educational offerings with the evolving job market needs.

### **8.1 Employment Characteristics and Transition Experiences**

The employment outcomes of DIU graduates highlight significant challenges to their transition to the workforce. With nearly 40% of unemployed graduates and a notable portion engaging in self-employment, there are clear indications of a challenging job market and possible gaps in the alignment between academic training and market needs. This is consistent with the broader literature on graduate employment challenges, which often points to the necessity of aligning educational programs more closely with labor market demands. Studies such as that by Tian (2021) have noted similar trends, emphasizing the importance of educational institutions adapting their curricula to better match the skills required by employers. As a ship must adjust its course to account for changing winds and currents, educational institutions must adapt their curricula to ensure that students are prepared for the demands of the modern workplace (Khan, 2023).

### **8.2 Development of Soft Skills**

Positive feedback on graduates' soft skills, such as enthusiasm for learning, communication skills, and computer literacy, underscores the effectiveness of DIU curricular programs in these areas. However, the deficiencies in leadership and problem-solving skills indicate areas for curricular enhancement. These findings align with contemporary studies that emphasize the critical role of soft skills in career success, and suggest that educational institutions should continually adapt their curricula to address these needs. For instance, Schippers et al. (2015) highlights the importance of soft skills in enhancing employability and professional growth, suggesting that universities should place greater emphasis on developing these skills within their programs. Developing soft skills is akin to building a strong foundation. Just as a building's foundation sets the stage for its longevity and stability, soft skills set the stage for employability and professional growth (Varhata et al., 2023).

### **8.3 Effectiveness, Adequacy, and Relevance of Curricular Programs**

The reliance on personal contact and internships for job placements highlights the importance of practical experience and networking opportunities. This finding supports theories of experiential learning that advocate learning through experience as a crucial aspect of professional development. Enhancing these opportunities within the curriculum could significantly improve graduates' employment outcomes. Chukwuedo and Ementa (2022) supported this view, noting that internships and practical experiences are vital for students to gain relevant skills and make valuable industry connections. Just as a farmer tends to his crops, internships and practical experiences nurture a student's potential, allowing them to blossom into valuable assets in the industry.

Several recommendations can be made to better align the Marketing bachelor's program with industry demands and enhance the overall employability and professional development of DIU graduates. Enhancing career services by strengthening career guidance, industry partnerships, and job placement services is essential to support graduates in securing their employment. Curriculum development should incorporate leadership training and problem-solving exercises to address the gaps identified by employers. Promoting networking and internships by facilitating networking events and practical training placements



will provide students with the necessary experience and industry connections. Finally, addressing gender disparities through targeted recruitment and support programs will encourage greater gender diversity within the program (Whitton et al., 2023). These measures aim to ensure that the DIU's Marketing bachelor's program remains relevant, effective, and aligned with the evolving needs of the job market.

#### **8.4 Limitations of the Study**

The study in question, while extensive in scope, was not without its limitations that warrant careful consideration. First, the research was limited to graduates from the DIU's Marketing bachelor program, which could restrict the applicability of the findings to other institutions or fields of study. The experiences and outcomes of graduates from this particular university may not be indicative of those of other universities with varying demographic compositions, educational approaches, or market conditions.

The data collection process utilized self-reported measures, which offer advantages but are prone to biases stemming from respondents' perceptions and recall abilities. The assessment of employment status, job satisfaction, and skill application effectiveness in the workplace relied on graduates' subjective evaluations, which may not always account for the intricate nature of their professional circumstances. The cross-sectional design of the study provided a snapshot of the employment landscape at a specific moment in time, which may not capture longitudinal changes or consider the influence of economic fluctuations, policy modifications, or unforeseen global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic on the job market.

The use of quantitative data revealed a drawback as it offers a general overview of trends and patterns, but fails to delve into the individual experiences of graduates or explore the qualitative aspects of their transition into the workforce. To overcome this limitation, future research could incorporate qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups to capture the depth and richness of graduates' experiences. In addition, the study did not consider external factors such as the personal networks of individual graduates, the level of industry engagement by the university, or the economic climate of the regions where graduates sought employment. These external factors could significantly impact employment outcomes and should be considered when interpreting the study findings. Despite these limitations, this study provides useful information on the effectiveness of the Marketing bachelor's program at the DIU and serves as a foundation for future research aimed at improving the education-to-employment pipeline for marketing graduates.

### **9. Conclusions**

This study meticulously delineated the post-graduation trajectories of alumni from the Marketing bachelor's program at the DIU, casting light on the efficacy of the curriculum and the preparedness of graduates for their professional journeys. The empirical findings highlight the importance of incorporating a robust soft skills component within the curriculum with an accentuated focus on

communicative competencies, which are paramount in the current professional milieu. Furthermore, the study underscored the need for a curriculum that emphasizes experiential learning, fostering practical applications through augmented training, and expansive networking opportunities. The study also identified the pivotal role played by cultural and market insights, technical proficiency, and ethical conduct in the realm of marketing. These elements emerged as vital curricular focal points that necessitate bolstering graduates with the requisite tools to effectively navigate the complexities of the contemporary business landscape.

To conclude, this investigation provides critical insights into the educational and professional development of marketing graduates, laying substantive groundwork for impending pedagogical advancements. The goal was to refine academic programs in a manner that maximizes graduates' success in an increasingly competitive labor market and fosters their entrepreneurial capacities. Through such scholarly endeavors, the institution can enhance its strategic alignment with industry requirements, thereby elevating the employment prospects and professional fulfillment of its graduates.

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## 11. References

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