The Role of Instruction and Student Involvement in the Manifestation of Graduate Attributes in the Workplace

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Abstract

Research indicates that developing graduate attributes is crucial for maintaining high educational standards. Universities have sought to prioritize and develop these attributes in their students. However, studies have also shown that there is often a gap between the knowledge graduates acquire and their ability to apply it in practice consistently (Arteaga, et al. 2024; LeHeron & Sligo 2005). The call to consistently live out the graduate attributes anchored on the institution's philosophy, vision, mission, and objectives beyond academic years is paramount. In this study, a sequential explanatory mixed-method research design was employed. Quantitative data was collected to assess the extent to which graduates have learned the necessary skills and attributes from their education and whether they can apply them in their workplace. After this, qualitative data was collected to validate the results. The study indicated that two specific variables, the instruction through spiritual life formation and involvement in volunteer groups manifested through the orientation to serve, enabled graduates to adapt the graduate attributes and thrive in the workplace. By strengthening the link between graduate attributes and practical application, the university can embark on a new journey to prepare graduates for a fulfilling future.

Keywords: *Catholic Higher Education Institution, Formation Program Graduate Attributes, Philosophy, Vision - Mission, Objectives (PVMO), Volunteer Groups*

INTRODUCTION

Graduate attributes (GA) refer to the key skills, knowledge, and personal qualities that universities aim to develop in their graduates (Wong et al., 2022). Graduate attributes encompass critical thinking, communication, teamwork, problem-solving, research skills, and global/cultural awareness (Barrie, 2004; Hill et al., 2016; Mahon, 2022). These attributes are seen as essential for graduates to thrive in an interconnected, rapidly changing world and go beyond the scope of academic endeavors. They are qualities that also prepare graduates as agents of social good in an unknown future (Bowden et al., 2000) and enable them to qualify for the higher expectations and standards of employers regarding employability skills (Harun, 2017). Thus, the universities endeavor to define and assess their graduate attributes to ensure that their programs are aligned with the needs of employers and society. As a result, universities develop unique lists of graduate attributes, often to differentiate themselves and communicate their values to stakeholders. A well-established and strengthened GA would manifest in the graduate's attitude, competence, and adaptability in the workplace. David (2010) reiterated this when he suggested that academics in departments, faculties, and at the senior level in institutions spend time discussing and defining the attributes students should develop through their time in higher education. Some common graduate attributes that have gained favor include critical thinking, communication, teamwork, problem-solving, research skills, and global/cultural awareness (Hill et al., 2016). Most of the studies dwell on the development and assessment of the graduate attributes in higher education (Hill et al., 2016; Hughes & Barrie, 2010; Oliver & Jorre de St Jorre, 2018; Daniels & Brooker, 2014; Mahon, 2022).

The call to the emergence and visibility of graduate attributes is also present in Catholic Higher Education Institutions (CHEIs). To prepare its alumni for the world arena, CHEIs must consider what will happen to its graduates when they have completed their education and formation there. As a result, GAs—as the outcome of the CHEI experiences—are realized, lived, and even manifested at work. The previous studies on GAs looked into the need to develop university-wide GAs to address the challenges of implementation, sustainability, employability, and adaptability of the graduates to the workplace. These studies focused on GA contextualized in the field of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). So far, none have worked on the general GA anchored on the philosophy, vision-mission, and objectives (PVMO) of a Catholic Higher Education Institution (CHEI).

True to its mandate, CHEIs commit "to the service of the people of God and of the human family in their pilgrimage to the transcendent goal which gives meaning to life" (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, no. 13). CHEIs envision changing the world by encouraging students to get involved in outreach programs, community service, and other endeavors that improve society (Boyle et al., 2018). Furthermore, CHEIs have a distinct philosophy, vision, and mission that are based on their commitment to the common good of society, moral education, the integration of faith and reason, and the holistic development of students (Miller 2006). This PVMO highlights a strong commitment to moral principles, social responsibility, and a shared sense of purpose.

A clear sense of purpose and direction for an organization, effective communication of values and aspirations to stakeholders, guidance for strategy development, employee motivation, alignment of actions with organizational goals,

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and a foundation for decision-making and behavior within the organization are all characteristics that can be expected as outcomes of philosophy, vision, mission, and objectives. Together, these components create the corporate culture, impact decision-making procedures, and offer a framework for success that satisfies the organization's fundamental goals and values.

The philosophy, mission, vision, and objectives of educational institutions provide the foundation for these graduate attributes and core values. They should communicate a clear sense of purpose effectively (Bueno, 2019), convey the institution's values and aspirations, provide guidance for strategy development, motivate students and align their actions with institutional goals, and serve as a basis for evaluating the success and fulfillment of the institution's core purpose.

Astin's theory (1984) suggests that the success of a college or university depends on how students grow and develop while attending. He proposes that this growth is influenced by three main factors:

1. Student Characteristics: These are the student's personal qualities, background, and prior experiences.

2. College Environment: This includes all the experiences a student has on campus, both academic and social.

3. Student Outcomes: These are the changes in a student's knowledge, beliefs, and values after graduating.

In essence, Astin's theory argues that a positive college experience, shaped by both the student's personal attributes and the campus environment, leads to positive outcomes for the student and the institution.

Research Problem

There is a significant gap between the knowledge and skills graduates acquire in their studies and their ability to use them in professional settings effectively. The researchers assess the extent to which the graduate attributes anchored on the philosophy, vision, mission, and objectives (PVMO) of a Catholic Higher Education Institution (CHEI) influence its graduates' professional and personal development.

Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Determine the extent to which graduates perceive the development of graduate attributes during their academic journey.

2. Identify the specific factors within the CHEI's formation program that contribute to developing graduate attributes.

3. Explore how these attributes are manifested in the graduates' professional and personal lives.

4. Recommend strategies further to enhance the development of graduate attributes within the CHEI.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a sequential explanatory mixed-method research design, interfacing the quantitative and qualitative data. The first phase employs a quantitative research design. Using Google Forms, the questionnaire was circulated to the alumni

for three weeks, and four hundred eighty-five (485) respondents participated. Results from the questionnaire were analyzed. To provide strong and valid support to the quantitative results, the researchers proceeded to the next phase.

In the second phase, qualitative data was gathered using purposive one-on-one interviews via phone calls or face-to-face with the respondents to validate the results from the first phase of the study. The researchers chose to interview alumni from varied fields of expertise: two from the field of politics, two from the academe or school, two from the food industry, another two from the BPO industry, and one from the auditing firm. Inclusion criteria for the participants are as follows: a graduate of a four-year course at the university has worked for at least three years since graduation and is willing to participate in the interview.

The study was conducted at the University of San Jose-Recoletos from November 2023 until June 2024. The participants' voluntary participation is evidenced by the informed consent they gave. Transcripts of the interview are kept confidential and are anonymized. This study is approved by the Recoletos Ethics Review Office (RERO) of the University of San Jose-Recoletos with ethics clearance number SAC - 2023 - 006.

RESULTS & FINDINGS

For the quantitative phase of the study, the following are the results:

Table 1. Cross-tabulation results between school and gender of the respondents (n=482)

School	Female	Male	All
Allied Medical Sciences	11	2	13
Arts and Sciences	61	23	84
Business and Management	24	6	30
Commerce	155	64	219
Computer Studies	5	6	11
Education	26	14	40
Engineering	19	40	59
ICCT	7	10	17
Law	4	5	9
Total	**312**	**170**	**482**

Notably, 45% or almost half of the total population comes from the College of Commerce considered as the flagship program of the university. The least number of respondents, not counting the respondents from the College of Law, came from the College of Computer Studies, which also has the least number of enrollees.

Accordingly, more than half of the respondents are graduates of 2011 up to the latest (2024) who are expected to be more frequent users of social media and the internet as shown in Table 2.

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Table 2. Cross tabulation between the year of graduation and the semester that respondents graduated (n=482)

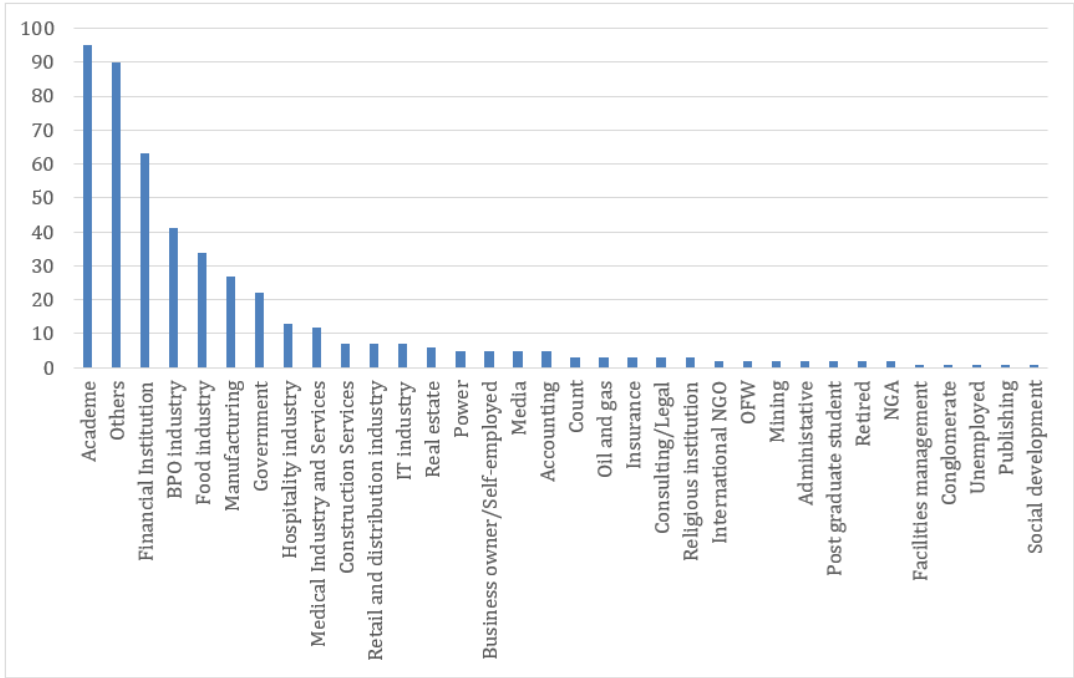| Year of Graduation	First	Second	Summer	All
1990 and before	7	43	1	51
1991-1995	4	15	0	19
1996-2000	2	9	0	11
2001-2005	20	48	4	72
2006-2010	14	56	1	71
2011 and above	48	196	14	258
Total	**95**	**367**	**20**	**482**

Table 3. Work Affiliation

Table 3 shows that a significant number of the respondents are working in the academe. Looking at the respondents' academic backgrounds in Table 2, it can be surmised that graduates from different courses found attraction in the academe. In fact, two of the participants of the one-on-one interview, P2 and P7, were not education graduates but are now engaged in the teaching-learning process. However, it can also be noted that a significant number of respondents chose not to mention their work affiliation as they only opted to select OTHERS from the form.

Table 4 reveals that respondents perceived themselves as having an exemplary social commitment for others. Results show that the graduates believe that they can work and relate positively with their co-workers, share their time and talents in the workplace, and show genuine concern for others, especially the marginalized. This result was validated during the one-on-one interview with the participants. One of them shared, "When we study here we know how to become socially-responsible

para pagdating sa labas hindi na masyadong mahihirapan to adapt to the society like to serve the general public." (while studying here, we know to become socially responsible, so that it won't be too difficult for us to adapt to the society, and serve the general public). It is interesting to note that the capacity to live out this graduate attribute stems from the experiences and formation the graduates received during their stay at the university. The participant added, "We are already trained here. We are communitarian. We need to be in a community. So, hindi ka mag-iisa." One of the Augustinian Recollect charisms emphasizes the value of being a communitarian where constituents show love and concern for family, church, and society by building friendship and solidarity, as children of God and brethren of Christ. Activities such as "Pakighimamat", University Days, Intramurals, and many others help Josenians experience the beauty of a community and help Josenians to be in one heart and one mind intent upon God. These activities foster friendship and solidarity that pave the way to becoming a community looking out for each other. Thus, providing the training ground for the formation of a socially responsible communitarian.

Table 4. Respondent's Manifestation of the Graduate Attribute of Being Socially-Responsible Communitarian (n=485)

Socially-Responsible Communitarian	MEAN	SD	Interpretation
1. I show genuine concern for others, especially the marginalized	4.52	0.573	Exemplary social commitment for others
2. I work and relate positively with others	4.64	0.503	Exemplary social commitment for others
3. I willingly share my time, talent, and resources for the betterment of society	4.53	0.635	Exemplary social commitment for others
OVERALL, I practice being a socially-responsible communitarian	**4.58**	**0.550**	**Exemplary social commitment for others**

Table 5 shows that the graduates see themselves as having a God-centered and exemplary faith expressed through the practice of ethical values that are worthy of emulation in the workplace, among others. Work attitude and work ethics help the Josenian graduates to successfully land a job as reiterated by one of the interview participants (P9). He said that, "Madaling mahire sa trabaho ang mga Josenian dahil sa work attitude and work ethics." (Josenians are easy to hire because of their work attitude and work ethics). Moreover, P7, in the one-on-one interview, highlights the importance of knowledge about the duties of being a follower of Christ which compels an individual to "know how to address the challenge in life, the demands, the pressures" and helps in making the right decisions in the workplace. He reiterated that when he said, "especially having guided with the Christian duties in making a decision in life, mas may impact talaga." (there is really an impact). It is important to note that God-centeredness though, is not a tangible attribute, but it can be manifested in the practice of ethical values at work, observance of proper etiquette in

all places, and upholding moral norms in the workplace as practiced by the Josenian graduate.

Table 5. Graduate Attribute of being a God-Centered Individual (n=485)

God-Centered Individual	MEAN	SD	Interpretation
1. I live life by the moral norms	4.51	0.616	God-Centered and Exemplary faith
2. I show ethical values worthy of emulation in the workplace	4.63	0.516	God-Centered and Exemplary faith
3. I observe proper etiquette in all places	4.61	0.562	God-Centered and Exemplary faith
Overall, I am a God-centered individual	**4.59**	**0.60**	**God-Centered and Exemplary faith**

Table 6. Graduate Attributes of being a Highly Competent Professional (n=485)

Highly Competent Professional	MEAN	SD	Interpretation
1. I perform my assigned tasks efficiently	4.57	0.524	Exceptional Proficiency
2. I implement plans effectively	4.42	0.594	Exceptional Proficiency
3. I demonstrate resiliency in doing things	4.52	0.559	Exceptional Proficiency
4. I manifest the ability to solve problems	4.52	0.578	Exceptional Proficiency
5. I generate and share new ideas and undertake innovations	4.50	0.603	Exceptional Proficiency
Overall, I am a Highly Competent Professional	**4.50**	**0.556**	**Exceptional Proficiency**

Table 6 shows the manifestation of being exceptionally proficient, supported by the efficiency, resiliency, and ability of the respondents to solve problems. The need for a solid foundation of training and formation in the school is important for competence and professionalism to be achieved (Madrigal, 2015). The interview participants mentioned being praised for their work in their field of specialization and their ability to develop innovative solutions to respond to different workplace challenges. As one of the participants underscored, "Kung gusto natin na yung graduates natin effective professionals, siguro iremind natin sila tungkol sa work ethics, attitude towards works, being open." (If we want our graduates to be effective professionals, maybe we should remind them about work ethics, attitude towards works, being open). Moreover, the necessity of repetition that leads to retention is found effective in making graduates become efficient, resilient and effective problem-

solvers in the workplace. P3 highlighted that "'Pag may itinuturo, kailangan ng constant reminder. Kasi repetition creates retention. Yan yung talagang ginagawa naming through coaching. Kapag may itinuro ka ulit-ulitin mo. "(When teaching something, a constant reminder is needed. Because repetition creates retention. That's what we really do through coaching. When you teach something, repeat it over and over again.) Thus, making them become highly competent professionals stems from the consistent training received in the university.

Table 7. Graduate Attributes of being an Effective Communicator (n=485)

Effective Communicator	MEAN	SD	Interpretation
1. I demonstrate effective oral communication skills	4.39	0.629	Exceptional Communicator
2. I can communicate clear ideas in writing	4.43	0.622	Exceptional Communicator
3. I can establish rapport/connection with others	4.51	0.613	Exceptional Communicator
Overall, I am an effective communicator	**4.41**	**0.627**	**Exceptional Communicator**

Table 7 displays that the respondents see themselves as effective communicators through building rapport with the recipients of the message (Halim, 2015). Fostering a comfortable and trusting environment allows a successful exchange of information and better receptiveness, and promotes an open and honest dialogue. However, it is worth noting that although the respondents rated themselves with an average of 4.61, which means that they see themselves as an effective communicator, this particular attribute received the lowest rating among the five Josenian attributes. The result presents a pressing need to strengthen training that will ensure graduates are equipped with the capacity to effectively communicate not only through building a rapport but also to excel in oral and writing communication skills.

Table 8 reveals that respondents are always eager to improve themselves and seek opportunities to grow and develop as individuals. The respondents constantly strive to develop and improve their knowledge and skills to be effective in their work and for personal fulfillment. Thus, they become transformative learners. Among the five attributes, this attribute scored the highest. This finding shows that the school was able to teach the students the value of self-improvement and ongoing education to serve better and for personal fulfillment. P6 acknowledges the importance of learning new things as the participant said, "Tinanong po ako bakit ka nag apply dito, ang sinabi ko po kasi gusto ko pang matuto." (I was asked why I applied here, and I said because I want to learn more.) An appropriate venue to learn more in a certain field is necessary to ensure lifelong learning. A participant in an interview said "Every now and then may mga inaaral kami. So as we go up the ladder may mga itinuturo, may mga roll out. "(Every now and then, we learn something. So as we go up the ladder, there's something being taught, there are roll outs.)

Table 8. Graduate Attributes of being an Adaptive Lifelong Learner (n=485)

Adaptive-Lifelong Learner	MEAN	SD	Interpretation
1. I pursue knowledge consistently	4.49	0.581	Transformative Learner
2. I seek personal and professional growth continually	4.60	0.555	Transformative Learner
3. I express openness to continuous change and improvement	4.62	0.526	Transformative Learner
Overall, I am an Adaptive-Lifelong Learner	**4.59**	**0.591**	**Transformative Learner**

Table 9. Relevance of the Graduate Attributes to the Respondents (n=485)

How relevant are these Graduate Attributes to you as an individual?	MEAN	SD	Interpretation	Rank
Socially-Responsible Communitarian	4.55	0.568	Indispensable	4
God-centered Individual	4.64	0.558	Indispensable	2
Highly Competent Professional	4.57	0.580	Indispensable	3
Effective Communicator	4.48	0.619	Indispensable	5
Adaptive-lifelong Learner	4.64	0.525	Indispensable	1
How relevant are these Graduate Attributes to you as a working professional	**4.74**	**0.481**	**Indispensable**	

We can deduce that the respondents, particularly in their workplaces, find the graduate attributes indispensable as shown in Table 9. The GA with the highest relevance was the adaptable lifelong learner with a mean of 4.64. This exhibits that openness to ongoing change and progress, continuously seeking out new information, and continuously striving for both professional and personal growth are evident. However, of all the graduate attributes, despite receiving a high rating, the effective communicator falls at the lowest in both quantitative and qualitative data. This entails that there is much more to do to enhance this starting from the university grounds.

Table 9 invites the university's stakeholders to look into the university's vision and mission. The University of San Jose-Recoletos envisions itself as "a premier Gospel and community-oriented educational institution committed to transforming individuals to become more responsive leaders of the society through innovative integral formation." Examining the mission and vision of the University, it is clear that the primary goal of the formation is to be God-centered and socially responsible communitarian individuals. However, the study results reveal that these two attributes only ranked 2nd and 4th among the five attributes, implying that their relevance and manifestations in the graduates' lives are not that strong compared to the adaptive life-long learners. These findings call for a re-evaluation of the curriculum and programs of the university to examine its goals and priorities and see if they are truly geared towards the attainment of the mission and vision of the school.

Table 10. Activities that helped respondents' awareness of the Graduate Attributes

What activities during your college years helped you be aware of these attributes?	Total	Rank
Guidance Classes	291	2
REED or THEOLOGY Classes	338	1
Semestral Classroom Orientation	177	3
Word of mouth from friends	136	5
OTHERS (INVOLVEMENT in Volunteer and Formation Groups	161	4

Table 10 presents an overview of the pertinent activities that help foster GAs in the graduates. This result says that instruction through ReEd and Theology Classes, Guidance Classes, and Semestral Classroom Orientation plays an important role in the development of GAs in the graduates.

DISCUSSIONS

The role of instruction in fostering graduate attributes extends beyond the mere acquisition of fundamental knowledge. Hill et al. (2016) looked into the importance of good teaching approaches to improve graduate quality. They stressed that student-centered instructional strategies must be integrated into university programs to increase their efficacy in producing graduates who are knowledgeable in their field and possess the critical thinking, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills required for success in the workplace and beyond. Universities employ a variety of activities, approaches, and techniques to encourage students to be involved with the subject matter. According to one respondent, "*the entire USJR community worked together to develop these attributes*" (P4). Another participant stated, "*I already possessed these attributes since my high school days, but through the activities conducted by the Campus Ministry Office and OARs, and with the guidance of our mentors, I have become more mature, professional, and responsible not only to myself but also in extending my efforts or assistance to others. Indeed, USJR not only produces ambitious graduates but also kind-hearted and God-fearing ones.*". This highlights the importance of collaborative and supportive learning experiences in the development of graduate attributes. The presence of teaching and non-teaching staff, along with various activities, significantly impacts the development and maturity of graduate attributes in students, as noted by Madrigal (2005). It underscores that instruction, as shown in Table 10 that ReEd, Guidance, and Semestral Orientation, goes beyond simply imparting knowledge and actively cultivates graduate attributes in students. Magulod et al (2020) found out that students with high academic performance, through rigorous instruction, are perceived to have a high level of acquisition of graduate attributes. During the one-on-one interviews, two of the participants (P8 and P9) confirmed the importance of instruction in the formation and imbibement of the graduate attributes, and they said respectively, "*Reed Subjects had helped me adjust in the school. Ako I make friends with my Reed teachers and classmates*" and "*Kasi sa REED sinasabi talaga yung mga attributes, aware yung mga students na ito yung inaasahan ng school sa kanila pag graduate.*" With such an approach to instruction, universities can help students become well-rounded individuals who are prepared to succeed in both their personal and professional lives. Also, instruction can help in the development

of attributes by saying, "*Kasi galing high school may CLF na, sa homeroom may Bible reading. I agree in a way na malaki yung part na naitulong ng REED to develop yung God centeredness.*" (P3). Three of the participants conveyed that, "T*he whole school siguro pero malaki talaga ang tulong ng REED kasi nasa REED yung theory*" (P4), "*So those subjects help you build your character. Kung anoman yung natutunan mo sa bahay nakatulong ang REED to give you the doctrine.*" (P6), and "*Kasi with the REED interaction, you spend two years, 4 semesters, with REED it nourished.*" (P7) enunciating the capacity of a good instruction to enhance and inculcate the expected characteristics and attitudes of students (GAs).

Another factor that helps in fostering GAs in the graduates is the involvement in different volunteer and formation groups. This factor is proving to be an effective way for graduates to become aware of essential attributes and integrate them into their lives. By including volunteer and formation activities in the educational journey, universities can equip graduates with the skills and values needed to succeed not only professionally but also as responsible and engaged citizens. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) discovered a favorable relationship between involvement in extracurricular activities and the growth of critical thinking, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills—all of which are regarded as graduate attributes. A respondent (P1) stressed, "*My experience as working student ang talagang nagdevelop sa akin kasi may mga recollection kami, may mga formations, masses, not necessarily REED. There are other avenues man*". This is confirmed by another participant (P2) when he expressed, "*Ah yung formation ko sa USJ-R extension ng formation ko sa Sisters of Mary Boystown. Na reinforce sa USJ-R yung mga values na natutunan ko sa Boystown*". Suggesting the interconnection of instruction to practical applications, the participant (P4) said during the interview when he said, "*The whole school siguro pero malaki talaga ang tulong ng REED kasi nasa REED yung theory then sa CMO ang practice.*" P5 also said, "*Yung itinuturo sa REED narereenforce sa CMO. Kasi talagang pinafollow yung mga pista, mga misa, yung iba may program pa talaga.*". However, P7 highlighted that instruction paired with involvement in volunteer groups makes a notable contribution. He said, "*Pero hindi lang naman sa REED. I also got it from other teachers and as a CMO volunteer.*" One respondent stated, "*Natural na dahil sa training sa SAO Office. O. talagang pinapractice ko yan dahil ipinapaalala din sa akin ng mga kasama ko sa trabaho lalo na yung mga Josenian dahil nga bago din ako sa work*"(P8). Another respondent said, "*USJ-R CMO has fully formed me as a true-blooded Josenian, and wherever I go, I am proud because I have an edge over others. The office has formed me not only intellectually but also spiritually. All the things I know would be nothing if I didn't have the heart to share what I have by serving others without expecting anything in return.*" It is interesting to note the effect of volunteering and voluntary group membership on students' persistence (Pusztai et al., 2021). This implies that volunteering experiences can help develop a sense of purpose and connectedness, leading to a more meaningful academic journey. Incorporating volunteer and formation activities into the educational journey can prepare graduates to succeed in both professional and civic domains. According to the study by Llenares and Deocaris (2019), compared to irregular and first-time volunteers, students who regularly participated in volunteer work had considerably higher measures of graduate attributes relating to professional competence, communication skills, and social and ethical responsibility. These rewarding experiences provide students with the necessary skills and values to become responsible and active members of society.

CONCLUSION

Instruction and student involvement play a vital role in the emergence and development of graduate attributes. This affirms Astin's Student Involvement Theory, stating the significance of student involvement in both instruction and formation groups in imbibing the expected characteristics and attitudes and applying the graduate attributes to the work environment beyond academic years.

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