



Research Article

Assessing Demand for a Graduate Nutrition and Dietetics Program in Northern Mindanao

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ABSTRACT.

The demand for Nutrition and Dietetics professionals in Mindanao Philippines is on the rise. Conducting this research work, the researchers determined the potential of the Master of Science in Nutrition and Dietetics (MSND) program, at Central Mindanao University (CMU). Market profile, demand situation, institution's readiness, faculty competency, location appropriateness and program viability were thoroughly examined. There were ninety-five (95) Bachelor of Science in Nutrition and Dietetics (BSND) students and alumni from Mindanao who participated in the survey. The findings revealed that majority of the respondents are willing to enroll to the MSND program due to growth, career advancement and is accessible in Mindanao. The respondents perceived that CMU can deliver the program well because of its professors, facilities and reputation. There is also a need for advanced nutrition professionals in both public and private sectors. The study found that the proposed MSND program is timely, relevant and meets the job needs of the region. The MSND program at CMU can help meet the growing need for nutrition and dietetics experts in Mindanao. Nutrition and dietetics practice can be improved with the program. The region's health and development efforts can benefit from the program.

Keywords: Nutrition and Dietetics, graduate education, program feasibility, higher education, Mindanao

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nutrition and dietetics are essential to addressing current public health concerns, such as malnutrition, food insecurity, obesity and diet-related non-communicable illnesses. The demand for highly skilled nutrition professionals is increasing worldwide and regionally as health care systems recognize the benefits of preventative and evidence-based nutrition interventions. The RNDs are required to have enhanced abilities in clinical nutrition, public health nutrition, food service management, research and policy development to be able to respond effectively to the increasing health challenges.

Higher education institutions are of great importance for developing specialized experts for the needs of society and the labor market. Recent studies have highlighted the importance of graduate education to professional competence, employability, innovation and regional growth. Graduate education in nutrition and dietetics develops research competence, evidence-based practice, leadership capabilities, and multidisciplinary collaboration of the professionals.

The Philippines' 2016 Nutrition and Dietetics Law (Republic Act No. 10862) acknowledge the significance of nutrition and dietetics professionals in developing and advancing the nation's health. However, even with the mandate, options for graduate study in Nutrition and Dietetics are still largely available in Luzon. At present there is just one graduate school in Nutrition and Dietetics (MSND) in Mindanao. Many professionals have to go out of the region for graduate studies. (Graduate School, University of Southern Mindanao. 2026. This geographical constraint creates financial, logistical and professional barriers that may dissuade RNDs and BSND graduates from pursuing additional studies. Nutrition and Dietetics Law of 2016, [n.d.]. Existing studies on the profitability of graduate programs and on the demand for higher education market but little study on the viability of launching an MSND program in Northern Mindanao. (Quinatac-an et al., 2025, pp. 3790–3809) There is a great deal of writing on the relevance of the undergraduate curriculum, employability or graduate education in various academic subjects. Further, little study has been conducted to explore the combined effect of institutional readiness, market demand, accessibility and industry needs on the feasibility of graduate nutrition programs in underserved areas. (Daud et al., 2025, pp. 1-10) (Khandelwal et al. 2014).

The study gap identified the absence of institutional capacity and market acceptance of CMU to provide MSND program to be assessed. CMU is well placed to address this gap in education. It is one of the best higher education institutions in Mindanao with extant undergraduate programs in nutrition and dietetics and great performance in licensure examinations. (CMU is the TOP PERFORMING SCHOOL November 2024 Nutritionist-Dietitians Licensure Examination, 2024).

Thus, this study was performed to assess the demand and feasibility of providing MSND program at CMU. The study also conducted an evaluation of the socio-demographic profile of prospective enrollees, managerial, market, operational, geographical and industrial feasibility of the proposed graduate program.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

This study used a cross-sectional descriptive research approach to determine the feasibility of establishing a Master of Science in Nutrition and Dietetics (MSND) degree at Central Mindanao University (CMU). The study was designed to assess the market demand, management viability, operational readiness, site suitability and industry viability of the proposed graduate program.

2.2. Respondents and Sampling

The respondents were BSND students and graduates of colleges within Mindanao and its neighboring regions. Simple random sampling was used to achieve representation from a range of institutions offering nutrition and dietetics programs. Ninety-five respondents participated in the survey.

2.3. Research Instruments

Data were collected through a standardized online questionnaire based on past feasibility studies. Forlales & Lilang (2022); Roble & Tan (2021); Patalinghug & Patalinghug (2021). The instrument was somewhat modified to suit the objectives of the present study. In the pilot testing, Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.80 was obtained which indicated acceptable reliability and internal consistency.

2.4. Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by the institutional ethics review committee (IERC). Participation in this study was optional and all respondents provided informed consent prior to data collection. Respondents were promised of anonymity and confidentiality and of the ability to withdraw from the study at any stage.

2.5. Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected using Google Forms and analyzed using descriptive statistical tools, such as frequency counts, percentages and weighted averages

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Profile of the Respondents

The respondents of this study is comprised of female and single (85.26%) and aged between 22 and 35 years. This matches trends in nutrition, where women mostly choose careers in dietetics and nutrition. Most respondents (96.84%) had a Bachelor of Science in Nutrition and Dietetics. This supports the idea that graduate programs work best when based on undergraduate training.

Table 1. Socio-demographic Profile of the Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	14	14.74
	Female	81	85.26
Civil Status	Single	81	85.26
	Married	14	14.74
Educational Attainment	BSND	92	96.84
	MS Degree holder	3	3.16
Employment	Government Agency	34	35.80
	Hospital/Clinical Setting	25	26.30
	Self-employed	22	23.30
	Others	14	14.60

A large number of respondents worked in government agencies (35.8%) hospitals (26.3%) or as self-employed nutrition professionals (23.3%). This variety shows that an MSND program needs to suit career paths like clinical, food service and community nutrition.

The findings also agree with studies of Thurech, Pelly, and Cooper (2020) and Zhou et al. (2024), that state that graduate programs should be in alignment with people's careers to increase job satisfaction and professional skills. These jobs show that people with a nutrition background want to advance their careers.

The study also found that the people with a degree in nutrition want to work in areas. The results agree with research that shows graduate programs are more effective with good undergraduate education. Most people who answered were women. Had a degree in nutrition, which is common in this field.

They were also mostly single and young which fits with trends. The jobs they had like working in hospitals or as self-employed nutritionists show they want to use their skills in ways. This supports the need, for a program that helps them advance their careers.

3.2. Management Viability

The management viability is the ability and efficiency of management in successfully managing and administering a new degree program (Wu and Cormican, 2021). It evaluates the management's present abilities, expertise, and strategic vision to see whether they can succeed in overcoming challenges,

exploiting opportunities, and ensuring the long-term sustainability and expansion of the proposed new degree program (Abo-Khalil, 2024). Stakeholders

assessed the managerial viability of the MSND through a survey undertaken by the Department.

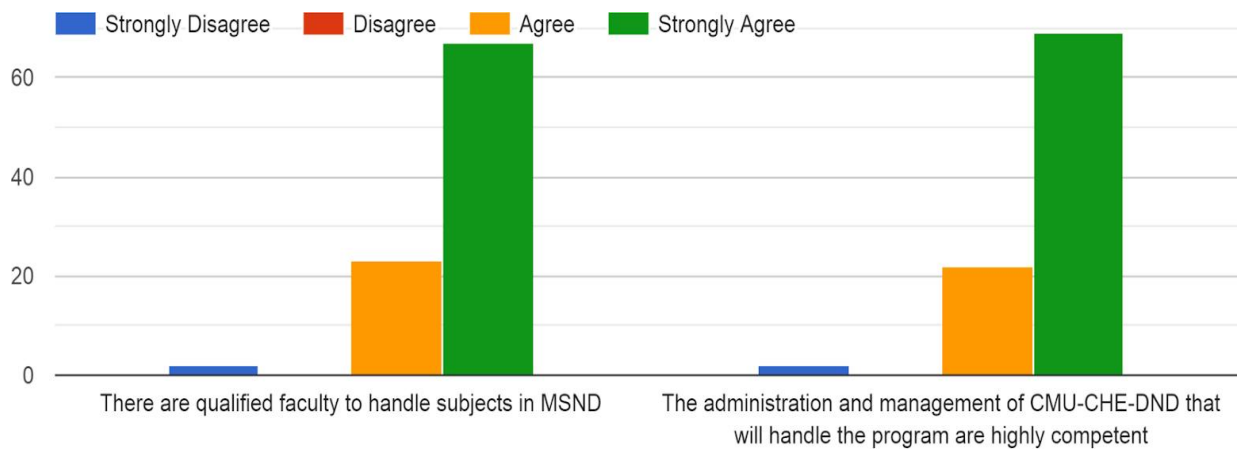


Figure 1. Management Viability of MSND

MSND program for career improvement and professional development. Result of this study simply presents how potential students perceive graduate study as a means to gain skills, increase professional opportunities, and develop expertise in the field of nutrition and dietetics.

Moreover, the strong interest in enrollment can be explained by human capital theory. Human capital theory states that the reason for taking higher education is to increase the productivity, employability and career prospects of the individual in the long run.

The results show that graduate education is a strategic investment in one's career development. This is in agreement with the findings of Patalinghug and Patalinghug (2021), who highlight the importance of graduate education for career development. Moreover, Boak et al. (2025) discovered that students still prefer graduate programs in nutrition when they meet the needs of the market and professional development goals.

Also, the institutional image of Central Mindanao University may have added to the respondents' confidence in the proposed program. Previous research indicates that students' decision to pursue graduate study is significantly influenced by institutional legitimacy, teacher competency and program quality.

The analysis revealed a considerable market interest in the MSND program being offered. Most of the respondents said they would enroll if the program will be available in Mindanao. The main reasons that respondents gave were professional advancement, personal improvement and employability.

Figure 2 shows that there is a current educational gap in the area, with professionals wanting advanced nutrition education facing geographic and cost constraints due to restricted program choices. This would expand access to the MSND program, and reduce the burden for those who wish to pursue graduate courses outside Mindanao.

Other results indicate that the proposed program matches workforce demands in the healthcare, public health, community nutrition, and academic areas. The growing awareness of health problems related to nutrition shows the need for advanced nutrition specialists capable of conducting research, implementing interventions and contributing to evidence-based practice.

This approach strategically makes academic programs flexible to the changing needs of the labor market and employment trends, thus remaining relevant and attractive to prospective students (Abir et al., 2024). By proactively analyzing these factors, institutions can capitalize on emerging opportunities and enhance the effectiveness of the programs (Kalebar et al., 2024).

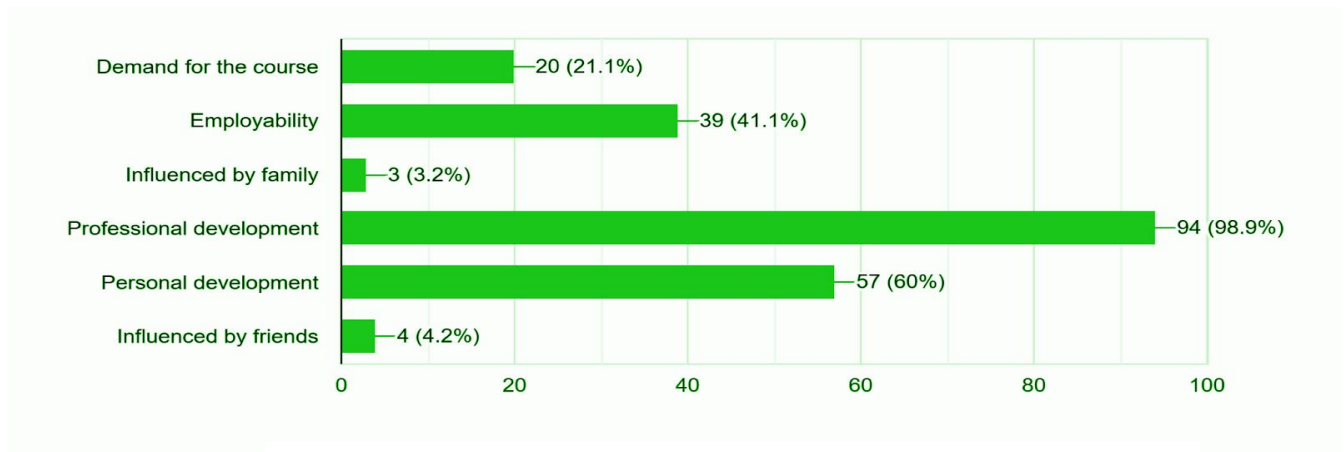


Figure 2. Respondents' Reasons for wanting to take MSND

Enrollment projections and market feasibility are valuable insight for academic institutions for program development and resource allocation (Parker, Walser, and Dighe, 2024). Learning of prospective student interest and market need for a specific program helps institutions to optimize resources, prepare for growth and improve student recruitment.

This strategic approach supports enrollment management strategies and ensures long-term profitability and sustainability of new degree programs. As seen in Figure 2, the respondents had high motivations in enrolling the Master of Science in Nutrition and Dietetics (MSND).

Respondents (98.9%) are motivated by professional development, 60% personal development and 41.1% employability. popularity in the nutrition and dietetics business (23.2%) and near the places where they are currently residing. Such foresight helps the institutions to decrease the risks, to make contingency plans and to optimize financial resources efficiently (Ušpurienė, Sakalauskas & Dumskis, 2017).

Financial planning and budgeting of colleges and universities can be improved through assessment of enrollment projections and market potential. Institutions can enhance their financial stability through revenue estimation, cost-effectiveness analysis, and data-driven decision-making. The respondents of the study are interested in the Master of Science in Nutrition and Dietetics (MSND) in Central Mindanao University (CMU) because of the good reputation (62.1%) as presented in Figure 3.

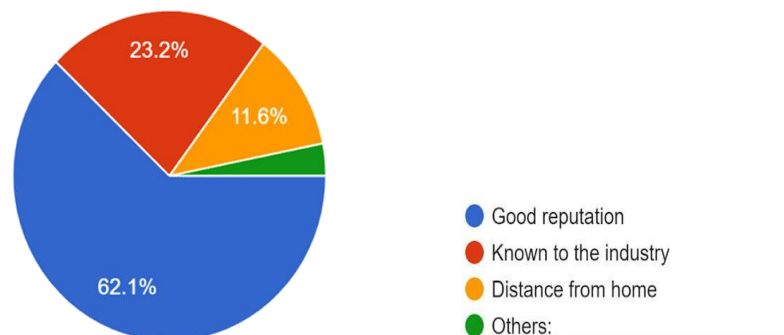


Figure 3. Respondents' Reasons for Wanting to Take MSND in CMU

3.4. Operational Viability

Introduction of a new degree program in an institution, it is necessary to determine the operational and financial feasibility that will ensure the success and sustainability of the program (Fernandez et al., 2025). Operational feasibility determines the ability of the higher education institution to implement the new program effectively including the availability of resources, facilities and expertise (Rodriguez–Zurita et al., 2025).

This evaluation identifies operational gaps or challenges that must be addressed before the program can commence to ensure smooth implementation and delivery.

Among people who took the survey, majority strongly agreed that Central Mindanao University (CMU) has what it needs to start the MSND graduate program (Figure 4). Respondents considered CMU to be equipped with the right facilities, adequately resourced for teaching, and staffed with qualified teachers. readiness of the school is actually a key thing for a program to flourish.

An unprepared university may negatively impact the teaching quality and student outcomes.

Based on the survey results, CMU can offer graduate education in nutrition. CMU has the existing nutrition programs, excellent teaching facilities and highly qualified teachers. These factors can contribute to the new program's success.

On top of that, being operationally ready means that the university can provide teaching assistance through research and extension activities, for graduate students. These are elements of preserving high academic standards and fulfilling what people expect from higher education. CMU has facilities and qualified faculty members to support graduate nutrition education. The readiness of the university is very important for the success of the program.

CMU has the ability to provide quality graduate level instruction with its current resources.

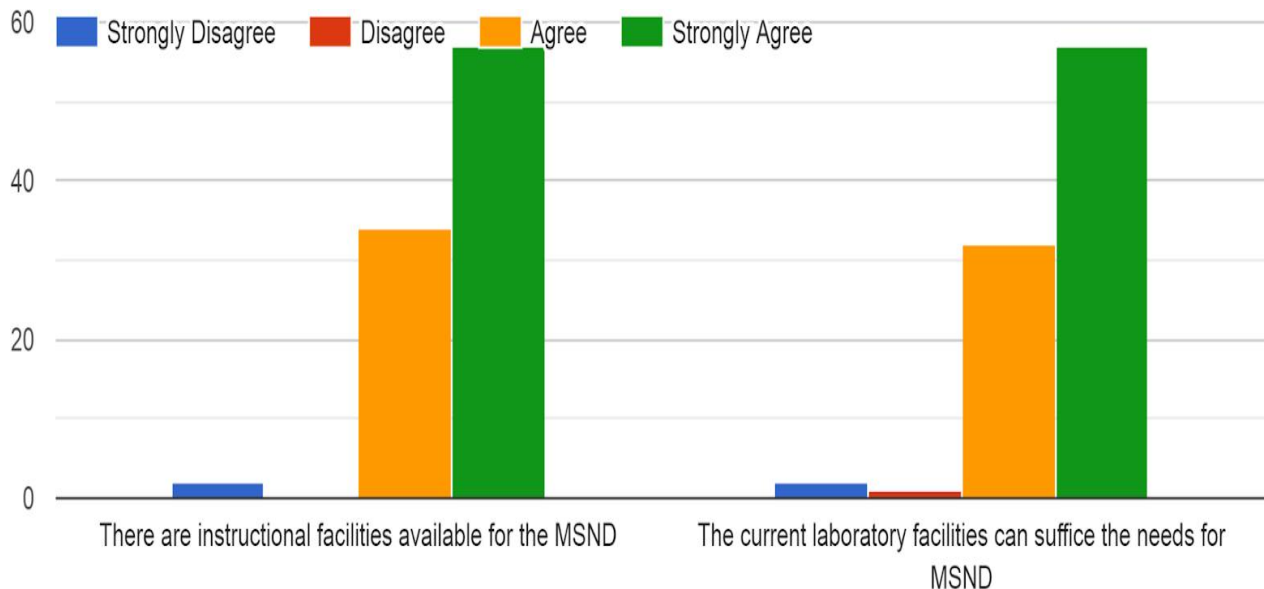


Figure 4. Operational Validity of MSND

3.5. Location and Industry Viability

The location of Central Mindanao University is a bonus for numerous people. Several participants revealed that they are ready to make the trip to CMU as it is conveniently accessible from different parts of Mindanao. For those in areas with no education options, being able to reach a school easily is a top priority.

One of the ways to find out if people really want to hire graduates from this program is by asking the extents of the demand through surveys or doing some research. The outcome is given in Figure 6.

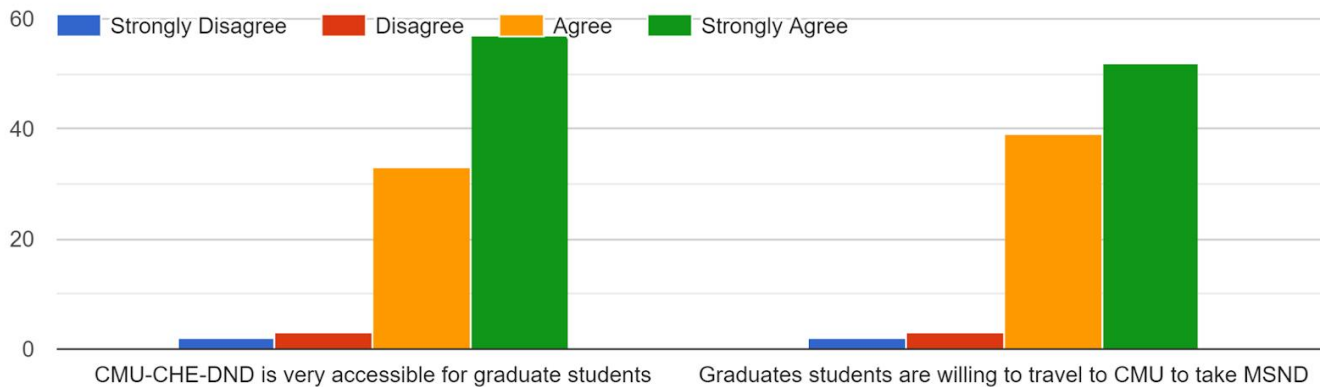


Figure 5. Location Viability of MSND

Most respondents in the survey find CMU very easy to reach and are willing to travel to attend the MSND program as seen in Figure 5. About location, CMU should also have the necessary infrastructure and qualified teachers to run the program. Having a pool of potential students locally is another essential aspect in ensuring the success of the program.

The population density in the surrounding areas and the availability of educational institutions mainly determine this. The industry appears to be looking for individuals knowledgeable in advanced nutrition and dietetics. This applies both to government as well as private sectors.

Presently, there is a lot of concern about food-related illnesses and unhealthy lifestyles. At the same time, there are efforts to achieve food security. Because of this, it is expected that the demand for nutrition professionals will continue for the next few years. This is the reason why the MSND program ranks high on the list of programs for the future. The MSND program has the capability to produce graduates with knowledge in nutrition, research, and leadership which is good for the overall development of the region.

Most respondents concurred that there is a demand for MSND graduates and that they can find jobs quite easily, in both private and public organizations. This shows the MSND program is something that the industry is really in need of.

The MSND program at Central Mindanao University can really help with development in the region and the whole country like the World Health Organization said would happen in 2018. Authors like Yang, Zhu and MacLeod (2018) and Basabe and Galigao think it is very important to have graduate programs that people in areas can get to (2024) so they can have a fair chance to get a good education and a good job.

Also, the market for this field is likely to keep growing. It is a good idea to have experts in this field. If the field is growing then more people will be needed to work in it which makes the MSND program a good idea.

It is great to see that the people who answered the questions think there will be a demand for the

MSND program in the next five years as shown in Figure 6.

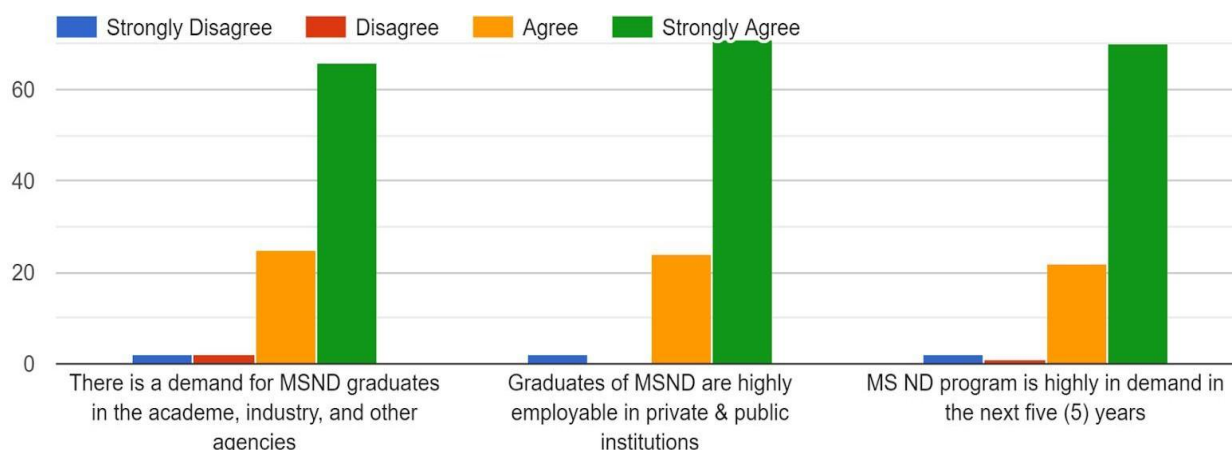


Figure 6. Industry Viability of MSND

When starting a new degree program, it is important to think about the location. If it is a good idea (Lou, Azadi, and Witlox, 2024; Vong et al., 2015; Zia, Tan, and Subramaniam, 2019). This is a move because it means the program will be relevant, sustainable and likely to succeed. It means the MSND program will meet the needs of the students the university and the community.

To gauge the perceived employability of MSND graduates, respondents were asked to assess the extent of industry demand for advanced nutrition and dietetics professionals. As shown in Figure 6, the majority of respondents agreed that there is a recognized demand for MSND graduates in both public and private sector organizations, and that graduates of such a program would have favorable employment prospects. These findings indicate that the proposed program is aligned with labor market needs and that prospective graduates are likely to secure relevant professional placements upon program completion.

4. CONCLUSION

The research revealed that the Master of Science in Nutrition and Dietetics (MSND) program of Central Mindanao University is suitable for the local setting. It may be instrumental in addressing the professional requirements of the residents here.

The figures indicated a lot of potential students, nutrition and dietetics young professionals inclined to pursue career advancement. They desire to specialize and climb the career ladder.

The capability of Central Mindanao University to offer the program is there. Besides that, they have faculty, good facilities, and a strong academic environment. And, the university is well accessible.

There is an increasing demand for competent nutrition professionals in the public and private sectors. So, the program should be relevant and sustainable for some time. Through the MSND program, nutritionist–dietitian professionals in Mindanao will have the advantage of continuing their studies at the graduate level in the field of nutrition and dietetics.

In conclusion, the proposed Master of Science in Nutrition and Dietetics program at Central Mindanao University holds considerable promise as a graduate program that addresses a documented gap in accessible advanced nutrition education in Mindanao. Subject to the completion of program development requirements, the MSND program is well-positioned to contribute meaningfully to professional capacity building, public health advancement, and regional development.

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Data Availability Statement: The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of the study are available within the article. Raw data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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