

Alumni and Stakeholder Satisfaction Toward the Political Science Department of UNTL

Por Henrique Cesário da Costa*, Martinho Martins, Abrão dos Santos, Saturlino
Esteves, Franquelino Freitas

Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e (UNTL), Timor Leste

Email: henriquedacosta@rocketmail.com*

ABSTRACT

The evaluation of higher education quality requires active participation from all stakeholders, particularly alumni and employers. This research investigates the degree of satisfaction and feedback from alumni and stakeholders in five municipalities (Aileu, Baucau, Ermera, Manatuto, and Liquiça) regarding the Political Science Department of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Politics (FCSP) at the National University of Timor-Leste (UNTL). Using a qualitative descriptive approach with semi-structured interviews, the study collected perceptions from 27 alumni and 21 employers about course relevance, training quality, and labor market applicability. Results indicate that 93% of alumni worked in the public sector, with 93% reporting that their training significantly contributed to professional performance. Alumni satisfaction was high, with 81% very satisfied and 15% satisfied with the course. Employers confirmed that Political Science graduates demonstrated strong adaptation abilities and rule compliance in the workplace. The study recommends infrastructure improvements, continuing education programs, and enhanced training in political science and citizenship to maintain the department's relevance in developing future leaders for Timor-Leste.

Keywords: political science education; alumni satisfaction; stakeholder feedback; higher education quality; Timor-Leste

INTRODUCTION

The evaluation of higher education quality has become increasingly important in the contemporary academic landscape, requiring the active participation of all stakeholders—particularly alumni and employers—who serve as key indicators of educational effectiveness (Green et al., 2016; Guolla, 2020; Harvey, 2018; Holmes, 2015). In the context of developing nations, understanding the relevance and impact of academic programs becomes even more critical as these institutions work to align their offerings with national development needs and labor market demands (Aldridge & Rowley, 2018; Allen & van der Velden, 2015; Alzafari & Kratzer, 2019; Araújo et al., 2014).

The Department of Political Science at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Politics (*Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Política*, FCSP) of the National University of Timor-Lorosa'e (*Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e*, UNTL) plays a crucial role in preparing future leaders and civil servants for Timor-Leste. As a relatively young nation that gained independence in 2002, Timor-Leste faces unique challenges in building democratic institutions and governance structures. Political science education therefore occupies a strategic position in developing the

human resources necessary for effective state-building and democratic consolidation (Belloni, 2020; Betts et al., 2017; Borden & Kernel, 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Political science, as an academic discipline, is dedicated to the systematic study of political systems, governmental institutions, political behavior, and international relations (USCS, 2025). In the global context, political science provides a fundamental framework for understanding the processes that structure power, democratic institutions, and the relations between the state and society. This field offers a comprehensive view of political dynamics, preparing students for various professional opportunities in both public and private sectors (Breuning et al., 2018; Butt & Rehman, 2010; Cabrera et al., 2016; Cardoso et al., 2020).

Despite the recognized importance of political science education, there remains a need for systematic evaluation of how well academic programs meet the needs of their graduates and the expectations of employers (Ishiyama et al., 2018; Jackson & Wilton, 2017; Joshi & Quinn, 2017; Kallio et al., 2016). Understanding the perceptions of alumni regarding the quality of training received and the views of employers on graduate performance provides essential feedback for continuous program improvement. This participatory evaluation approach not only strengthens institutional accountability but also ensures that educational offerings remain relevant to evolving societal needs (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Douglas et al., 2015; Finch et al., 2016; Grasse et al., 2017).

The general objective of this research is to investigate the degree of satisfaction and feedback from alumni and stakeholders in the municipalities of Aileu, Baucau, Ermera, Manatuto, and Liquiça regarding the relevance, functioning, and sustainability of the Department of Political Science at FCSP-UNTL, as explored in *Alumni and Stakeholder Satisfaction Toward Political Science Department of UNTL*. The specific objectives include: a) collecting perceptions from former students about the quality of training received; b) obtaining perspectives from local employers on the performance of graduates in the labor market; c) evaluating the level of recognition and support for the continuity of the Political Science course; d) identifying suggestions for the development and future improvement of the department.

While international literature extensively discusses higher education quality assurance and stakeholder satisfaction, limited research has been conducted on the specific context of Timor-Leste's political science education (Maciel, 2010; Manatos et al., 2017; Marsh & Stoker, 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Previous studies on higher education in Timor-Leste have primarily focused on general institutional development and capacity building (Streck & Morais, 2014). However, systematic evaluation of political science programs through alumni and employer feedback remains largely unexplored, creating a significant gap in understanding program effectiveness and labor market alignment (King & Murray, 2019; Kruss et al., 2015; Lau & Ng, 2019; Lowndes et al., 2018).

This research addresses this gap by establishing a participatory mechanism for continuous evaluation, directly involving those who have experienced the training and those who interact with graduates in work contexts. By systematically collecting feedback from five key municipalities, the study contributes to the literature on higher education quality in post-conflict nations and provides practical insights for institutional improvement. The findings will

strengthen the quality of teaching, enhance course relevance, and contribute to the social and institutional recognition of political science education in Timor-Leste.

METHOD

This research adopted a qualitative and descriptive approach. The study employed purposive sampling (Usman & Akbar, 2000), targeting alumni of the Political Science course working in five selected municipalities: Aileu, Baucau, Ermera, Manatuto, and Liquiça. These municipalities were chosen to represent diverse geographic and demographic characteristics of Timor-Leste. The final sample consisted of 27 alumni who had completed the Political Science program and were currently employed in various capacities, and 21 employers or stakeholders who had direct experience working with or supervising Political Science graduates (Messum et al., 2017; Moleong, 2017; Monroe, 2020; Novelli et al., 2017).

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection instrument. The interview protocol included open-ended questions about educational experiences, perceptions of course quality, professional performance, workplace adaptation, and suggestions for program improvement. This approach allowed respondents to provide detailed narratives while ensuring that key research themes were consistently addressed across all interviews.

The research team consisted of five professors from the Department of Political Science at FCSP-UNTL. Data collection was conducted over 15 days, with three days allocated to each municipality. This extended fieldwork period enabled researchers to build rapport with respondents and ensure thorough data collection. All interviews were conducted in accordance with ethical research standards, with informed consent obtained from all participants.

Interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying recurring patterns, themes, and insights across respondent narratives. The analysis focused on key evaluation indicators including employment sectors, training contribution to professional performance, satisfaction levels, and stakeholder perceptions of graduate competencies. Quantitative descriptors (percentages) were used to summarize response patterns while preserving the qualitative richness of individual experiences through direct quotations and narrative descriptions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Alumni Employment Patterns and Sector Distribution

Analysis of employment patterns among the 27 interviewed alumni reveals a strong orientation toward public sector employment. Specifically, 25 alumni (93%) were employed in the public sector, serving in various capacities including civil servants, municipal authority presidents, post administrators, directors, and department heads. Only 2 alumni (7%) worked in the private sector, namely Mr. João Tilman do Rêgo from Aileu Municipality and Mrs. Dátia Ester V. Freitas from Baucau Municipality.

This predominance of public sector employment reflects both the nature of political science education and the employment landscape in Timor-Leste. As a developing nation with a relatively small private sector, public institutions remain the primary employer for university graduates, particularly those with training in governance, politics, and public administration. This finding aligns with the original purpose of the Political Science program, which aims to

develop human resources for state-building and democratic governance. The data presented in Table 1 shows the distribution of alumni across different employment sectors and positions, demonstrating the diversity of roles that Political Science graduates occupy within public institutions.

Table 1. Alumni Employment Sector Distribution

Sector	Position Types	Percentage
Public Sector	Civil Servants, Municipal Authority Presidents, Post Administrators, Directors, Department Heads	93%
Private Sector	Private Company Employees	7%

Source: Research data, 2025

Alumni Evaluation of Course Contribution to Professional Performance

The evaluation of course contribution to professional performance reveals overwhelmingly positive feedback from alumni. Among the 27 interviewed alumni, 25 (93%) indicated that the training they received contributed significantly to their professional performance. This high percentage suggests strong alignment between the curriculum and the competencies required for professional success in their respective positions.

Only 1 alumnus (3%) rated the contribution as moderate, while another (3%) indicated that the course contributed little to their professional performance. These isolated cases warrant further investigation to understand specific factors that may have limited the perceived value of their education. Possible explanations might include misalignment between specific job requirements and curriculum content, or individual differences in learning experiences and career trajectories.

The findings, summarized in Table 2, demonstrate that the Political Science program effectively equips graduates with knowledge and skills applicable to their professional contexts. This positive assessment validates the pedagogical approaches and curriculum design of the program.

Table 2. Alumni Evaluation of Training Contribution to Professional Performance

Contribution Category	Number	Percentage
Contributed significantly	25	93%
Moderate contribution	1	3%
Limited contribution	1	3%

Source: Research data, 2025

Alumni Satisfaction Levels and Recommendations

Alumni satisfaction with the Political Science course demonstrates remarkably high levels of positive sentiment. Among the 27 former students interviewed, 22 (81%) expressed

being very satisfied with the course, 4 (15%) reported being satisfied, and only 1 (4%) indicated indifference. Notably, no alumni reported being dissatisfied with the program, which represents a strong endorsement of the educational experience provided by the department. This high satisfaction rate can be attributed to several factors. First, the curriculum appears well-designed to address the practical needs of professionals working in governance and public administration contexts.

Second, the faculty's commitment to quality teaching and relevant content delivery likely contributes to positive student experiences. Third, the program's focus on developing critical thinking, analytical skills, and understanding of political processes aligns well with the competencies graduates need in their professional roles. Despite high overall satisfaction, alumni provided valuable suggestions for program enhancement. These recommendations focused on several key areas including infrastructure improvements, continuing education opportunities, and curriculum updates.

Table 3. Alumni Satisfaction Levels

Satisfaction Level	Number	Percentage
Very Satisfied	22	81%
Satisfied	4	15%
Indifferent	1	4%

Source: Research data, 2025

Employer Perspectives on Graduate Performance

The evaluation from 21 employers provides critical external validation of the Political Science program's effectiveness. Employers assessed graduates based on several key indicators including specialized training, demonstrated skills, and workplace performance. The overall assessment was highly positive, with employers confirming that Political Science graduates demonstrated strong abilities in adapting to work conditions and complying with established organizational rules (Streck & Morais, 2014; Suleman, 2018; Tight, 2019; Tomlinson, 2017).

Employers particularly emphasized graduates' capacity to contribute to achieving institutional goals. This finding is significant because it demonstrates that the theoretical knowledge and analytical skills developed through political science education translate effectively into practical workplace competencies. Employers noted that graduates showed proficiency in policy analysis, understanding of governmental processes, effective communication, and critical thinking—all core competencies emphasized in the Political Science curriculum (Sá & Serpa, 2020; Saunders & Zuzel, 2017; Schomburg & Teichler, 2011; Stoker & Evans, 2016).

However, employers also provided constructive feedback on areas for improvement. Several recommended enhanced focus on practical skills development, particularly in areas such as project management, data analysis, and technology use. Others suggested that graduates could benefit from more exposure to real-world political processes through internships and field experiences. These recommendations align with contemporary trends in professional

education that emphasize experiential learning and practical skill development alongside theoretical knowledge (Palinkas et al., 2015; Pedro et al., 2018; Richmond & Tellidis, 2018; Roskin et al., 2016).

Employers also emphasized the importance of continuous training in political parties, civic education, and electoral systems—areas that remain highly relevant in Timor-Leste's evolving democratic landscape. This feedback suggests that while the core program is strong, there are opportunities for expansion and deepening in specific areas of direct relevance to the country's political development needs.

Institutional Implications and Future Directions

The findings from both alumni and employers converge on several key points that have significant implications for the future development of the Political Science Department. First, the program clearly maintains strong relevance to labor market demands, particularly in the public sector. This relevance is evidenced by high employment rates, positive performance evaluations, and employer satisfaction. The program's contribution to developing human resources for state-building and democratic governance remains vital for Timor-Leste's continued development (Tran, 2016; Tymon, 2013; USCS, 2025; Usman & Akbar, 2000).

Second, while current program quality is high, stakeholders identified several areas for enhancement. Infrastructure improvements emerged as a priority, including constructing new buildings, increasing classroom capacity, improving library conditions, and enhancing internet access. These physical infrastructure needs reflect the university's growth and the increasing demand for political science education (Wahlke, 2016; Waylen, 2016).

Third, continuing education for both faculty and alumni represents an important strategic direction. For faculty, opportunities for advanced study at master's and doctoral levels would strengthen teaching quality and research capacity. For alumni, professional development programs would help maintain and update their competencies in a rapidly changing political and technological environment. The establishment of partnerships with UNTL for continuous training programs was specifically recommended by employers.

Fourth, the program should continue to emphasize training in political science and citizenship education. Employers consistently highlighted this as crucial for developing future leaders capable of contributing to democratic consolidation and good governance. This emphasis aligns with the broader national development goals and the specific needs of Timor-Leste as a young democracy.

CONCLUSION

This research affirms that the Political Science Department at FCSP-UNTL delivers high-quality education, effectively preparing graduates for public sector careers, with 93% of alumni employed in public service and reporting significant contributions from their training to professional performance; exceptionally high satisfaction rates (81% very satisfied, 15% satisfied) and positive employer evaluations of graduates' workplace adaptation, rule compliance, and institutional contributions underscore strong alignment between curriculum, pedagogy, and Timor-Leste's needs for democratic governance and state-building.

Stakeholders highlighted key areas for improvement, including infrastructure upgrades, faculty and alumni continuing education, enhanced training in political parties and electoral systems, and greater emphasis on practical skills. For future research, a longitudinal study tracking alumni career trajectories over 5–10 years could assess long-term impacts on Timor-Leste's public administration and democratic institutions, while comparing satisfaction metrics across other social science programs at UNTL.

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