

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Employment Profile of Graduates in a State University in Bicol Region, Philippines

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Abstract

The conduct of a tracer study is a potent tool that documents the profile of the graduates which gives implications of how well pre-service training is given. This study focused on the employment profile of the graduates of Bicol University Gubat Campus, Philippines from 2015 to 2017 and analyzed the congruence of courses taken and the employment of the graduates. It gathered feedback from the employers of the graduates as to extent of the competencies they demonstrated in the performance of the job assigned to them. The study covered the seven (7) courses offered namely: Bachelor in Secondary Education, Bachelor of Elementary Education, AB in Peace Studies, BS in Computer Science, BS in Entrepreneurship, BSBA major in Microfinance, and Bachelor of Agricultural Technology. Using the descriptive data analysis method, the study probed on the frequency of responses of its key informants/subjects. Data generated were taken from two sets of instruments administered to both graduates and their employers. Results revealed that the graduates are employable. Most of the graduates were in jobs that are highly congruent with their school training. However, the college must still take measures to improve the skills of the graduates.

KEYWORDS:

Employment Profile, Graduates, Courses, Tracer Study

1 | INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions serve as instruments in delivering the quality education that students need towards achieving a better future. The outcomes of students are important, and the improvement of knowledge, skills, and competencies are the main concerns that should be taken up in every educational institution (Terano, 2015, 2018). Employment of students after graduation can be determined by how the expected student outcomes were achieved. Thus, educational institutions' designed curriculum and its implementation are factors for achieving student outcomes (Terano, 2019).

The labor markets in the Philippines and abroad have become very competitive. When parents are confronted with the choice of Universities and Colleges where their children will attend and get a degree, the prospects for future employment carry much weight. Employability, thus, becomes a matter of crucial consideration when schools define their curriculum and their policies on recruitment, entrance, and retention. (Albina et al., 2020).

Institutions have to keep track of the performance of their graduates to determine accountability and whether or not the programs have impacted the individual, the institution, or the country. Moreover, in our globally competitive knowledge economy, where change is an everyday reality, the importance of employability is generally agreed upon by policymakers and scholars alike

(Peeters et al., 2019) Tracer study constitutes one form of an empirical study that provides valuable information for evaluating the results of the education and training of a specific institution of higher education (Schomburg, 2003).

In line with this period of globalization, higher education has been concerned with the development of the whole person as well as knowledge, attributes, and skills which any educated person should expect to have by the time of graduation. It further aims to inspire and enable individuals to develop their capabilities to the highest potential levels throughout life so that they grow intellectually, contribute effectively to society, achieve personal fulfillment, and are well-equipped for work. (Abas, et. al, 2016).

Higher education institutions need to prepare students for jobs that do not exist yet, for using technologies that have yet to be invented, and for solving problems that nobody has yet thought of (Kumar 2007). Once they are part of the labor market, graduates need to continue working on their employability to find and keep jobs (Akkermans et al., 2013). Hence, the need to compel policymakers and higher education professionals to prioritize the topic of employability in strategic agendas.

Abas-Mastura, Imam Osman argued that “HEIs should demonstrate a greater commitment to developing the generalized expertise that graduates can transfer to whatever working environment they find themselves in after graduation” In other words, they are expected to have developed not only subject-specific skills but also employability skills to make them both specialists and generalists.

An essential aspect of quality in higher education is the quality of the outcomes achieved. Higher education adds value by developing job-related skills and competencies that prepare students for the workplace. Thus, adequate knowledge on employment outcomes of training graduates could assist in formulating policy towards combating some of the social problems such as unemployment. Students, particularly graduates of any course, are required to earn a sense of competence in their field of interest and develop the confidence to explore new possibilities and new employment especially if there is increasing competition among rivals at work. (Ashenafi Abate Woya, 2019)

The state university in this study is the Bicol University which is mandated to give professional and technical training, and provide advanced and specialized instructions in literature, philosophy the science, and arts, besides providing for the promotion of scientific and technological researches (Section 3, R.A. 5521). It needs to adhere to the constitutional mandate that “The State shall protect and promote the right of every citizen to quality education ...” (Section 1, Article XIV, 1987 Philippine Constitution). Moreover, it has to comply with the 2016 Levelling Instrument for State Universities and Colleges (SUC) of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Department of Budget and Management (DBM), and Philippine Association of State Universities and Colleges (PASUC). The Bicol University has to move forward to SUC Level V if it aims to be comparable to the best universities in Asia. Grounded on these legal foundations, it is expected to support the primary mandate of State Universities and Colleges that is, to produce the required human resource for regional and national development. It envisions giving rise to highly trained, globally competitive, and employable graduates in various fields. It should continuously innovate to effectively respond to the needs of its clients and immediate environment. In this manner, the University assures that its graduates follow through with the university’s missions and goals through tracing their professional practice in their workplace. This data is useful for the university’s database as an essential input to institutional planning, policy formation, and decision-making (Theme 6: Improving University Management Services, BU RD Thrusts and Directions 2007-2010). There were also existing studies in the university documented to trace the employment status of its graduates. One is the study of Rico and Lomibao (2014) which revealed that 93.66% of its College of Education graduates, within the period covered by the study, are employed. The very high employability rate is attributed to “excellent college academic performance as showcased in their professional portfolios, content and pedagogical skills demonstrated during the interview and actual teaching. One of the policy recommendations forwarded by the researchers is that the University’s College of Education should be encouraged to go for Level 4 accreditation and pursue quality assurance programs on a holistic basis, as it gives a significant impact on the employability of graduates.

Bicol University Gubat Campus (BUGC) is one of the satellite campuses of the said university which upholds its core values of solidarity, integrity, stewardship, commitment, social responsibility, synergy, and excellence. In the past eighteen years, the campus has proven its worth as evidenced by the number of students who graduated and passed the board examinations and are now occupying noble positions in the Department of Education and other private and public institutions. Meeting this challenge demands aggressive and sustained efforts in formulating and adopting appropriate and relevant policies/strategies to further enhance its capability. It has to offer programs responsive to market needs, the ASEAN Integration, the K-12 curriculum, and the academic landscape it plans to pursue.

Concerning this satellite campus, above-mentioned concerns can be effectively addressed if available data can be used as a basis in formulating policies/strategies or programs/projects/activities. Thus, this study will able to (1) Determine the employment profile of graduates in terms of (a) employment characteristics; (b) transition to employment; 2. Analyze the congruence

of courses taken by the graduates vis-a-vis their employment profile; 3. Gather feedback from employers as to extent of graduates' competencies in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes; and 4. Recommend policies/projects/activities to enhance the competencies of the University graduates. These research goals were deemed relevant for paralleling employment status versus the institutional standards of the said University Campus.

Employability of graduates, therefore, has become an issue that is not easy to be ignored in the global economy" (Misra Khurana, 2017). Studies like this have become the main instruments to determine the areas of strength and weakness of an institution's graduates. "Graduate tracer studies (GTS) are important to Higher Education Institutions since it enabled such institutions to accommodate changes in the society especially the demands of the actual and potential employers, through evaluation and constant review of their curricula" (Cañizares, 2015, p. 82). Also, various studies (Atian, 2020; Pontillas, 2018; Loquias, 2015; Balingbing, 2014; Gines, 2014) confirm that tracer studies are important activities that determine the employment rate of graduates and assess the satisfaction of graduates on services, learning environment and facilities, program's contribution to the skills' development on communication, human relations, leadership, problem solving and research, and assessment on effectiveness, adequacy, and relevance of the curricular programs.

2 | METHODOLOGY

The study was descriptive using quantitative and qualitative research designs. Descriptive and inferential statistics were run to treat data requiring descriptions from percentages and differences. A descriptive developmental approach was also conducted for the generation of proposed projects/activities/programs to further improve the competencies of the graduates.

This study focused on the employment profile of Bachelor in Secondary Education (BSED), Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED), AB in Peace Studies (BAPS), BS in Computer Science (BSCS), BS in Entrepreneurship (BSE), BSBA major in Microfinance, and Bachelor of Agricultural Technology (BAT) graduates from 2015 to 2017. Analysis of course congruence with respect to the graduates' employment was also considered. A questionnaire was provided to gather feedback from the employers of the graduates as to extent of the demonstrated competencies on the nature of job assigned. Graduates from 2015-2017 were also sent another questionnaire yet retrieval was at 17.23%. Various modalities for collecting data were utilized through use of email, use of the tracer questionnaire on an electronic mode, and use of mobile phones.

Statistical treatment of data used a percentage of responses for profiling the graduates, and Poisson rate test in determining the significance of the difference between relevant employment status to their course taken. This statistical test is necessary to determine the significance of the difference in the responses that fall within a specific occurrence in a set of options (Krishnamoorthy and Thomson, 2002) After which development of suggested recommendations was proposed grounded on the findings of the study.

3 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A total of 154 retrieved questionnaires from graduates were consolidated for analysis at a retrieval rate of 17.23%. Succeeding discussions were the results of the study based on the employment status of its graduates.

3.1 | Profile of the BU Gubat Campus graduates from 2015-2017

Using percentages, result of profiling to the surveyed BU Gubat Campus graduates were summarized in Table 1 .

Consolidated responses showed that the majority of the graduates were, or have been, employed at 88.97% summing up results in the 1st to 4th column of Table 1. Records have also shown venturing on self-employment through engaging in business at 0.65%. Nonetheless, the percentage revealed that all graduates of BS in Computer Science (BSCS) were, or have been, employed in comparison to other baccalaureate graduates of different courses. This figure is still above the 2016 national employment rate of the Department of Labor and Employment. Moreover, this percentage of employability is even higher compared to the findings in the study of Del Rosario (2019) which reported only 68% employability of Bachelor of Industrial Technology graduates from the year 2013–2016. Thus, the graduates were employable and were able to impart in the national and local economy.

Tracing the premier employment of the graduates revealed that private and public schools, private and government offices, were forerunners in employing first-hand experience employees and fresh graduates across all seven (7) degree programs of the BUGC. The data signified that graduates have developed the desirable skills before their exit in the university, and preparation to

work realm. More so, the data indicated that graduates were employable and employed at par with graduates of other prestigious universities. This is further supported by the data arguing that the first job experience of all graduates was obtained within six (6) months after graduation. These findings were contrary to the research findings of the Billo et al. (2017) study which found out that it took less than one month for most of the respondents (48.95%) to land their first job. Another contradictory finding found out that within five months after students graduated, the total graduates employed are 56%, while another 10% decided to further continue their studies at master's level, and the remaining 34% are still unemployed (Ahmad et al., 2012). Also, in the study of Del Rosario (2019), 42% of their respondents were able to find jobs in 2–5 months after graduation. Likewise, graduates of BSED and BEED had accepted teaching positions in the opening of classes following their graduation while simultaneously reviewing for the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET). Extending the meta-analysis of the existing contradictory research findings revealed that school identity and prestige play a major role in the immediate hiring of fresh graduates. This is reiterated in JobStreet.com Philippines in their Fresh Graduate Report that a simple majority of employers still care about the college or university where an applicant graduated. Also, the Bicol University that served as the medium for the study was listed as one of the top universities in the Bicol Region.

TABLE 1 Employment Profile of the Graduates of Bicol University Gubat Campus(2015-2017)

| COURSES | n | C1† | C2† | C3† | C4† | C5† | C6† |
|-------------------|-----|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|---------|-----------|
| BSED | 38 | 4= 10.53% | 16=42.11% | 11=28.95% | 0=0.00% | 1=2.63% | 6=15.79% |
| BEED | 39 | 2=5.13% | 15=38.46% | 17=43.59% | 0=0.00% | 0=0.00% | 5=12.82% |
| AB Peace Studies | 10 | 3=30.00% | 4=40.00% | 1=10.00% | 1=10.00% | 0=0.00% | 1= 10.00% |
| BSCS | 20 | 1= 5.00% | 12=60.00% | 6=30.00% | 1=5.00% | 0=0.00% | 0=0.00% |
| BSBA Microfinance | 17 | 0=0.00% | 8=47.06% | 7=41.18% | 1=5.88% | 0=0.00% | 1= 5.88% |
| BSE | 21 | 4=19.05% | 8=38.10% | 7=33.33% | 0=0.00% | 0=0.00% | 2= 9.52% |
| BAT | 9 | 0=0.00% | 5=55.56% | 3=33.33% | 0=0.00% | 0=0.00% | 1=11.11% |
| TOTAL | 154 | 9.09% | 44.16% | 33.77% | 1.95% | 0.65% | 10.39% |

C1†Employed but currently unemployed

C2†Employed but presently working for the same employer

C3†Employed but currently working for a different employer

C4†Employed but currently engaged in business

C5†Engaged in a business

C6†Never been employed

On the contrary, Thomson (2014) stated that employers named the most important elements in hiring a recent graduate, college reputation, GPA, and courses finished at the bottom of the list. Work experience is the crucial attribute that employers want even for students who have yet to work full-time. These mean employers have varied criteria in hiring employees. Some would give more points on the college reputation but others might give more points on the skills, attitude, and values of applicants. Also, the increasing number of graduates increases the probability of mass hiring in the foregoing years. This was proven based on the number of samples used on the date of data gathering and the school level through where the following studies were conducted. In this current research, the number of graduates was comparatively higher increasing the chances of hiring. This is contrary to the study of Pan and Lee (2011) that “owing to the dramatic increase in enrolment rate of higher education, a diploma is no longer a guarantee of employment and higher education institutes are expected to equip students with employability skills and attributes.”. This may imply that although the number of graduates is higher, there will be a greater chance of hiring. Since the employability skills and attributes of the applicant matter.

Graduates were also qualified for employment as supported by their attained eligibility. Among the respondents, 89 claimed to have passed licensure examination/s. Ranking the attainment of eligibility showed that Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) got the highest frequency, followed by the Civil Service Examination, National Competency (NC), and then Licensure Examination for Agriculture. This implies that the graduates of Bicol University Gubat Campus prioritized the taking of the Licensure examinations as well as Civil Service Examinations for them to land a permanent job.

Data also demonstrated the unemployment rate at 10.39% attributing the factors to inadequate experience, limited job vacancies, and personality factors. Although some studies have shown parallelism to the study of Balingbing (2014) which yielded an interestingly low unemployment rate with only 2.60% (or 4 out of 155 respondents). Furthermore, the attributing factors for unemployment are also supported by the study of Olfindo et. al (2017) that 10% of the respondents regarded the value of interpersonal skills in seeking employment. Lack of it becomes a hindrance to employment. One may have superb technical competence but without the ability to relate with people, a contrary finding of Del Rosario (2019) noted that most of the reasons of unemployed graduates are due to contract termination with 287 of the total respondents with minimal considerations of female graduates under maternity concerns. The issue of the end of the contract was very evident both in the manufacturing and service industries and this also hampers the career development and security of tenure of most of the working professionals.

3.2 | Analysis on the congruence of courses taken by the graduate's vis-a-vis their employment profile

Data from responses showed that 44.53% of the graduates were employed in a job that highly corresponds to their academic degree. It was closely followed by an employment rate of 41.61% descriptively described as moderately related, whereas 1.46% claimed that their employment has no relevance to their degree sought. The study of Del Rosario (2019) recorded a much higher percentage of eighty percent of the university graduates from 2013 to 2016 indicating that their program was related to the present job while only 20 percent were not related. Most of the traced graduates uttered that they were satisfied and motivated to do their job. Statistical analysis of the congruence was further testified by Poisson rate to determine the occurrence of relative employment in the frequency of graduates per course. Table 2 is the summary matrix of the result of Poisson rate per course.

TABLE 2 Congruence through poisson rate test to determine the significance of difference of relative employment to the frequency of surveyed graduates per course

| Courses | N† | x† | Rate of Occurrence* | p-value | Difference† |
|-------------------|-----|-----|---------------------|---------|-----------------|
| BSED | 31 | 29 | 0.93 | 0.79 | Not significant |
| BEED | 34 | 28 | 0.82 | 0.35 | Not Significant |
| AB Peace Studies | 9 | 6 | 0.56 | 0.19 | Not Significant |
| BSCS | 20 | 15 | 0.75 | 0.27 | Not Significant |
| BSBA Microfinance | 19 | 16 | 0.84 | 0.57 | Not Significant |
| BSE | 16 | 16 | 1.00 | 1.00 | Not Significant |
| BAT | 8 | 8 | 1.00 | 1.00 | Not Significant |
| TOTAL | 137 | 118 | 0.86 | 0.12 | Not Significant |

N† Employed

x† Highly and moderately related job employment

*Hypothesized mean at 0.99

† (p=0.05)

Across all courses, the Poisson rate test revealed no significant difference ($p > 0.05$) in the occurrence of relative employment vis-a-vis the employed graduates per degree sought. This statistical no difference is a manifestation of similarity indicating congruence in the numbers. This finding supports the analytical claim for graduates that there is a parallelism and job match between employment and degree sought in the BUGC. This is further supported by the study of Albina et.al (2019) that the majority of the respondents (69.78% or 97 out of 139) declared that the curriculum of the program they had in college is indeed relevant. The result in this study lends support to the idea that “competitive graduates in the job market often depend on a strong curriculum of the programs” (Ahmad et al., 2012).

3.3 | Feedback from the employers

A total of twenty-nine (29) employer-respondents participated in the study. They were employers of graduates in Secondary Education, Elementary Education, Peace Studies, Computer Science, Entrepreneurship, Microfinance, and Agricultural Technology.

TABLE 3 Feedback from employers as to extent of graduates' competencies in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes

| Competency | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 | |
|-------------------|---|---|----|----|----|----|-----|----|----|----|
| | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % |
| BSED | 0 | 0 | 10 | 5 | 56 | 26 | 69 | 32 | 78 | 37 |
| BEED | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 29 | 14 | 113 | 50 | 79 | 36 |
| AB Peace Studies | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 13 | 71 | 81 | 5 | 6 |
| BS Com Sci. | 3 | 5 | 16 | 28 | 5 | 10 | 25 | 40 | 10 | 16 |
| BS Entrep. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 44 | 68 | 19 | 28 | 3 | 4 |
| BSBA Microfinance | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 25 | 87 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| BAT | 2 | 1 | 7 | 5 | 39 | 35 | 49 | 52 | 3 | 9 |

1To a very limited extent

2To a limited extent

3To a moderate extent

4To some extent

5To a great extent

Data revealed a significantly higher proportion in the frequency of 4 described as to some extent across all courses except for BSED graduates who gained the majority of rates at 5 or to a great extent. Indeed, the competencies of the graduates may not be fully reached, particularly in another course, or the workplace has higher expectations and skill requirements for its employees. The development of skills and values acquisition of the knowledge may also be dependent on various factors such as individual differences, interests. The learning environment may also affect the learner to a great extent, or the curriculum itself. The data also showed that some competencies of graduates in other degree programs were rated to 1 describe as to a very limited extent. It should be noted by the teachers and administrations that these figures may form part of the output of the college/university. Measures must still be planned and implemented to address these concerns. This implies that curriculum has to be relevant with the demands of the industry, because "impractical university curriculum is one of the factors that cause graduates' skills gap, along with other factors like constant changes in the labor market, and students' passivity in planning and developing their career" (Tran, 2018).

On the other hand, employers mostly responded that BUGC graduates were service-oriented, flexible, ICT literate, have mastery of the content, can easily adapt to the school environment/workplace, willing to be trained, and have the right attitude. There were also accounts from employers noting that BUGC graduates were poor in oral and written communication skills in the English language, the art of questioning, classroom management, financial management, and time management. Albina (2019) revealed in his study that communication skills are considered by the majority of the respondents as the foremost competency they learned in college that they find useful in their job. This finding is parallel to the claim of Martin (2014) "that communicative competence can greatly help new graduates to develop their potential, both socially and occupationally". His study further suggests that "the importance of communicative competencies should be included in the new educational context to enhance the employability and productive force of future graduates).

Along this line, the employers cited areas of improvement of graduates. These are commitment, attitude, skills and honesty, big heart for the pupils, teaching strategies that develop critical thinking and higher-order thinking skills, and engagement in action researches. This agrees with the findings of Olfindo et al.(2017) that employers regarded a positive attitude towards work and willingness to learn as extremely important. Other qualities may be consequentially be developed if a worker has that positive attitude and willingness to learn. (Olfindo et al., 2017). On the contrary, the study of Canizares (2015) revealed that

the majority of the top-rated character traits for professional efficacy being developed during their stay with the university has something to do with working with others, building a good team relationship, and establishing teamwork. The three character traits that ranked lowest at the bottom had something to do with self-coping up mechanisms like dealing with disappointments, assuming leadership roles, and controlling emotions.

3.4 | Recommendations to enhance the competencies of the graduates

Based on the findings of the study, certain recommendations were proposed to further develop the graduates of BUGC. There should be a conduct of a regular review of the curriculum objectives, activities, and assessment of outputs to ensure that the competencies in the different course programs will be developed by the graduates. The placement function of the Guidance program must be more aggressive in assisting the graduates in their job applications. The campus should link and coordinate with potential agencies and employers to determine their skill requirement among graduates hence, providing bigger potentials for their graduates to be employed. Industry immersion of faculty members must be conducted specifically for Bachelor of Agricultural Technology, Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, Bachelor of Science in Entrepreneurship, Bachelor of Arts in Peace Studies, and Bachelor of Science in Computer Science during semestral or mid-year breaks to identify the emerging and changing needs and competencies required in the industry and necessary revision of curriculum for a better fit. Provide an opportunity for the student's hands-on practicum or internship programs to diversify their skill development. Hire faculty members who are competent and practitioners in their field of expertise. Students should have a highly relevant on-the-job station with competent employees and employers to provide them with a rich opportunity to meaningfully experience and analyze the skills required in the world of work. Finally, provide intensive discussion and practical applications on oral and written communication.

4 | CONCLUSION

The Bicol University Gubat Campus graduates are employable and have imbued the desirable skills to its graduates leading to their immediate employment in the workplace. Graduates have given value to their degree sought and work in line with their passion which was apparent to the congruence of their degree to the type of employment. Their employers showed satisfaction with the quality of the graduates though some rooms for improvement must be take into consideration. The college/university must still take measures to improve the skills of the graduates.

Graduate tracer studies like this should be conducted regularly at least every other year covering wider scope in terms of graduates in previous years to establish more robust data that reflects the employability of the graduates. Other variables related to graduates' employability may be explored like effects to the graduates of being unemployed, number of times the respondents changed job, number of respondents with regular employment status whose jobs are either related or not related to their course, job satisfaction and promotion, congruence between curriculum and skills that industry expects from would-be employees, among others.

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