Profile, Employability Status, and Challenges in Job Hunting of Bachelor of Technology Graduates: A Tracer Study

[1]**Christine H. Ferolino**
[2]**Richard Justin P. Duran**
[3]**Maria Cecelia D. Dy**

[1,2,3]Sorsogon State University
[1]christineferolino28@gmail.com
[2]duranrichard@sorsu.edu.ph
[3]mariaceceliady.35@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The goal of every academic institution is to produce competent graduates who will meet the demands of both local and global industries. The result of the tracer study provides valuable information for evaluating the whereabouts and performance of the graduates. The study aimed to trace the graduates of Bachelor of Technology from the school years 2015-2020. Specifically, it identified the profile of the respondents, including the area of specialization, year graduated, sex, and civil status. The study also determined the status of their employability and recognized the challenges they encountered in finding a job. The main respondents were the 667 Bachelor of Technology graduates from nine majors covering the 2015-2020 school years. Results revealed that the majority of the technology graduates are male and single, regularly employed in private companies, and secured their first job in less than six months after graduation. The major challenges encountered by the graduates in finding a job include lack of self-confidence, financial pressure, seeking better job/career opportunities, and limited or no work experience. The relevance of the degree program to professional and career requirements was a key strength of the undergraduate curriculum of the Department. Conducting regular tracer studies leads to continuous updating, revising, and enhancing of the curriculum for better employability opportunities for graduates, particularly by the Technology Department. The school may organize Job Fairs and establish more partnerships and linkages to assist graduates, especially the unemployed and self-employed, in improving their career prospects. Likewise, the University may design a program to support students' employability skills.

Keywords: employability status, graduates, Sorsogon State University, tracer study

Introduction

The economy of a country heavily relies on the knowledge and skills of its people. Ramirez et al. (2014) strongly assert that these skill requirements evolve with external investment, technological advances, and globalization. Worldwide, various countries are striving to create closer synergies between the needs and purposes of their education training systems, local and regional labor markets, and their national economies.

To keep pace with changes, individuals need to acquire skills to be productive and earn a living, and education is a key means to achieve these goals (Unwin, 2003). These advancements necessitate significant explorations of national education systems, encompassing curriculum content, teaching and learning processes, skills acquisition, and the proficiency of educational professionals.

In addition to global demands, education stands as the most relevant mechanism for empowering people for socio-economic, political, and technological development. Hence, the possibility of conducting tracer studies has generated widespread interest in various education sectors worldwide, particularly at the tertiary level. Tracer studies, also known as graduate surveys, alumni surveys, or graduate tracking (ILO, 2016), provide quantitative structural data on employment and career, the nature of work and related competencies, and information on the professional orientation and experiences of graduates (Millington, 2001). Rogan and Reynolds (2016) assert that a Graduate Tracer Study (GTS) is useful for policy and equity implications in higher education. Tracer studies also play a role in curriculum evaluation, helping identify weaknesses and strengths. Evaluation data from tracer studies can guide decisions on retaining, enhancing, or discontinuing aspects of the curriculum.

The studies of Martin (2014), Mahmud et al. (2021), Hasibuan et al. (2019), Albina and Sumagaysay (2020) consistently highlight the significance of conducting regular tracers in colleges and universities to assess the relevance of tertiary college-level education and align curricula and program offerings with the current demands of local and global industries. The prevailing challenge that higher education has an essential role in the job market, fulfilling the workforce needs by field (Yudhanegara et al., 2020; Kalayci & Basaran, 2010; Schomburg, 2010; Pasaribu et al., 2020), has been extensively studied, particularly with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the local setting, the Philippines, as a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), is taking initiatives to uphold the goals of the organization. As stipulated in the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Blueprint, higher education has to assist member countries in preparing for ASEAN integration. Therefore, ASEAN expects higher education to play roles in enhancing economic development and reducing the development gap in the region. One of these roles is to support the implementation of ASEAN member countries by equalizing education and qualification systems, promoting lifelong learning, and creating a competitive workforce (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009). This led to the establishment of Executive Order no. 83, series of 2012, or the "Institutionalization of Philippine Qualifications Framework," which mandates agencies like DepEd, CHED, TESDA, PRC, and DOLE to review learning standards in basic education, technical skills development, and higher education for alignment with licensure examinations and other assessment and certification programs. This initiative addresses the emerging and complex nature and challenges of the 21st century, where higher education stands out as a major key to coping with reforms. Through its essential functions of instruction, research, extension, and production, higher education constitutes a vital and strategic part of development.

With the steady increase in the number of college graduates, employment opportunities for students have become highly competitive. Most universities have a policy to strengthen existing links and create new bridges with the world of work. Sorsogon State University, as the prime institution in the Province of Sorsogon, is aligned with this mission of creating an open space for higher learning within a lifelong perspective. It envisions developing globally competitive and values-oriented leaders and professionals. Specifically, the Technology Department commits to providing quality instruction and training in various areas of technology, promoting research, extension, and production, strengthening linkages, and establishing and implementing development programs supportive of regional and national thrusts (SSC Student Handbook,

2013). The university is actively working towards achieving CHED's goal of building the country's human capital and innovation capacity for the development of the Filipino nation.

In the Philippine educational system, the Commission on Higher Education requires all HEIs to conduct a tracer study, which is also reflected as a required document by accrediting bodies such as the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (AACCUP), Inc. For quality assurance of course programs, higher education institutions can contribute meaningfully by applying the principles of tracer studies to create a sustainable learning empowerment environment for the continuous professional development of students.

The current study shares similarities with Billo's et al. (2017) research in terms of the variables used to trace respondents' employability status. However, the cited study focused on B.S. in Information Technology (BSIT) and B.S. in Computer Science (BSCS) graduates from Batch 2014, 2015, and 2016. In contrast, the present study aims to track the employability status of graduates from various courses: Architectural Drafting, Automotive Technology, Mechanical Technology, Civil Technology, Electrical Technology, Electronics Technology, Welding & Fabrication, Food Service Management, and Garments, covering school years 2014-2015 to 2019-2020. Both researchers sought to determine the socio-demographic profile of graduates, employability of graduates (employment status, present occupation, companies graduates are employed in, reasons for staying in the job, reasons for accepting the job, length of time it took the graduates to land their first job, gross monthly income), and reasons for not having a job.

The researchers undertake this evaluation as part of their accountability to stakeholders and to determine if curricular programs are being appropriately implemented at the classroom level, eliciting the desired effect on student achievement and employability.

Objectives

This study aims to trace the graduates of Bachelor of Technology from the school years 2015-2020. Specifically, it is designed to: (1) Determine the profile of the graduates, including their area of specialization, year of graduation, sex, and civil status. (2) Assess the status of employability by examining employability status, types of employment, monthly earnings, the time taken to secure their first job, the relevance of their employment to their majors, and the perceived usefulness of the curriculum to their job. (3) Identify the challenges encountered by the graduates in finding employment.

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive research design, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative research methods to determine the status of Bachelor of Technology graduates. The descriptive design provides detailed information about the profile and employment status of the graduates.

The respondents for this study included Bachelor of Technology graduates from the school years 2014-2015 to 2019-2020, totaling 740 graduates across nine majors who participated in the questionnaire. Data collection took place from January 2019 to February 2020, involving 30 key informants.

The primary instrument was a survey questionnaire consisting of two parts. The first part gathered general information about the graduates, including sex, age, year of graduation, permanent address, contact numbers, and email address. The second part focused on employment data, covering employment status, types of employment, monthly earnings, time taken to secure the first job, relevance of the first job to their majors, and the perceived usefulness of the curriculum to their jobs. The questionnaire underwent expert validation during a quarterly meeting in 2019, incorporating feedback from placement officers and the Head of Placement Services.

In the data gathering process, the researchers sought permission from the program chair before distributing the questionnaire to the graduates. Google Forms facilitated the distribution, with links sent through Messenger and cellphone numbers. Unstructured interviews were conducted to gather qualitative data on the challenges faced by graduates in finding jobs.

Quantitative data on profile and employment status were analyzed using frequency count and per-

centage, while qualitative data on challenges were analyzed through thematic analysis based on Swales and Feak (1994).

Results and Discussion

The results of the study were categorized into three sections: the profile of the respondents, the status of employability, and the challenges in finding a job. Tables were employed to present the data analysis, and themes were utilized to organize the qualitative data.

The subsequent tables illustrate the profile of the respondents, including their major, year of graduation, sex, and civil status. The data were presented and analyzed using frequency and percentage.

Table 1A presents the number of graduates per school year categorized by their major. Notably, Electrical Technology, Automotive Technology, and Food Service Management have the highest number of respondents, corresponding to the specializations with the most enrolments and graduates each year. Conversely, Civil Technology and Welding and Fabrication rank lower, representing the specializations with the fewest enrolments and graduates annually. This suggests a proportional distribution of respondents to graduates per year.

The data further reveals a higher response rate from graduates of SY 2017-2018 and SY 2018-2019, indicating that individuals with one or two years of job experience are more likely to participate. This may imply a stronger connection to Sorsogon State

Majors	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	Total	%
	f	f	f	f	f	f		
Architectural Drafting	18	5	8	8	46	8	**93**	**13**
Automotive Technology	29	19	6	16	40	13	**123**	**17**
Civil Technology	1	0	6	5	5	2	**19**	**3**
Electrical Technology	15	9	2	61	57	24	**168**	**23**
Electronics Technology	8	14	1	15	19	16	**73**	**10**
Food Service Management	26	6	4	33	24	10	**103**	**14**
Garments Technology	12	0	8	11	32	0	**63**	**9**
Mechanical Technology	21	4	2	9	32	12	**80**	**11**
Welding and Fabrication	4	1	0	2	11	0	**18**	**2**
Total	**134**	**58**	**37**	**160**	**266**	**85**	**740**	**100**
Percentage	**18**	**8**	**5**	**22**	**36**	**11**	**100**	**-**

Table 1A. Profile of the Graduates along their major and year graduated

University, as these respondents were recent graduates.

Table 1B provides an overview of the respondents' profile based on gender. The data reveals a higher representation of males than females, with varying percentages across different majors. Specifically, the majors Welding and Fabrications, Automotive Technology, Civil Technology, Mechanical Technology, and Electrical Technology exhibit male-dominated enrollments, constituting 100%, 93%, 84%, 81%, and 70% males, respectively. This observation aligns with the typical gender distribution in male-dominated technology courses.

Conversely, in the majors of Food Service Management and Garments Technology, female students

outnumber their male counterparts. This finding is consistent with research by Synder & Dillow (2015), which highlights the dominance of men in the technology field. The study notes that women earned only 18% of undergraduate degrees in computer and information sciences in 2012, emphasizing the gender disparity in technology-related disciplines.

Majors	Male		Female	
	f	%	f	%
Architectural Drafting (n_1 = 93)	46	49	47	51
Automotive Technology (n_2= 123)	115	93	8	7
Civil Technology (n_3 = 19)	16	84	3	16
Electrical Technology (n_4= 168)	117	70	51	30
Electronics Technology (n_5=73)	29	40	44	60
Food Service Management (n_6 =103)	29	28	74	72
Garments Technology (n_7= 63)	5	8	58	92
Mechanical Technology (n_8 = 80)	65	81	15	19
Welding and Fabrication (n_9 = 18)	18	100	0	0
Total (n_t= 740)	440	59	300	41

Table 1B. Profle of the Graduates in terms of sex

Table 1C indicates that the majority of the respondents are single, comprising 706 out of 740 graduates, while only 5% or 34 graduates are married. This finding closely aligns with the results of Albina and Sumagaysay (2020), who reported that 93.79% of their respondents were single. Additionally, Rich (2019) and Wu (2017) support this trend, noting the growing number of young people opting to stay single due to perceived benefits.

Rich (2019) and Wu (2017) highlight some advantages of staying single, such as enhanced focus, flexibility, reliability, and a greater willingness to relocate. According to Dr. James Hughes, Dean of the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University, single individuals, especially those who are not homeowners, have the ability to pursue job opportunities wherever they arise, even if it requires relocation. This emphasizes the professional advantages associated with being single, including the flexibility to follow job opportunities without the constraints often faced by married individuals.

Majors	Single	Married
	f	f
Architectural Drafting (n_1 = 93)	87	6
Automotive Technology (n_2= 123)	119	4
Civil Technology (n_3 = 19)	18	1
Electrical Technology (n_4= 168)	159	9
Electronics Technology (n_5=73)	70	3
Food Service Management (n_6 =103)	96	7
Garments Technology (n_7= 63)	62	1
Mechanical Technology (n_8 = 80)	77	3
Welding and Fabrication (n_9 = 18)	18	0
Total	706	34
%	95	5

Table 1C. Profile of the Graduates in terms of Civil Status

Status of Employability of the Graduates

The following tables contain information about the employability of the graduates. Frequency and percentage were utilized to present the gathered data. Table 2A presents the frequency distribution of graduates along with their employment status.

Majors	Employed		Unemployed		Self Employed	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Architectural Drafting (n_1 = 93)	72	77	15	16	6	6
Automotive Technology (n_2= 123)	88	71	26	21	9	7
Civil Technology (n_3 = 19)	14	74	4	21	1	5
Electrical Technology (n_4= 168)	123	73	33	20	12	7
Electronics Technology (n_5=73)	56	77	11	15	6	8
Food Service Management (n_6 =103)	73	71	23	22	7	7
Garments Technology (n_7= 63)	45	71	11	17	7	11
Mechanical Technology (n_8 = 80)	55	69	21	26	4	5
Welding and Fabrication (n_9 = 18)	17	94	1	6	0	0
Total (n = 740)	**543**	**73**	**145**	**20**	**52**	**7**

Table 2A. Employment Status of the BS Technology Graduate

It can be gleaned from the table that the percentages of graduates employed in the 8 majors mostly fall within the range of 69% to 77%, with welding and fabrication standing out at 94%. The table also indicates a total of 543 employed graduates, 145 unemployed, and 52 self-employed, representing percentages of 73%, 20%, and 7%, respectively. According to O'Neill (2021), the Philippines reported a 3.36% unemployment rate in 2020 and 2.24% in 2019. This suggests that the unemployment rate of SorSU graduates is higher than the national average, indicating a significant challenge, particularly for the Technology Department. As highlighted by Misra and Khurana (2017), the employability of graduates has become a pressing issue in the global economy. Indeed, one of the objectives of this study is to identify the employability of technology graduates and communicate the results to administrators for appropriate consideration and action.

Legend: Reg – Regular, Con – Contractual, Cas – Casual and Temp - Temporary

Majors	Government Employed					Privately Employed				
	Reg	Con	Cas	Temp	Total	Reg	Con	Cas	Temp	Total
Architectural Drafting	2	6	2	1	11	35	18	4	4	61
Automotive Technology	2	2	0	0	4	63	18	1	2	84
Civil Technology	1	1	0	0	2	5	7	0	0	12
Electrical Technology	4	6	0	0	10	71	26	11	5	113
Electronics Technology	2	1	0	0	3	39	12	0	2	53
Food Service Management	1	4	1	3	9	39	14	3	8	64
Garments Technology	1	2	1	1	5	30	8	1	1	40
Mechanical	1	1	0	1	3	32	16	3	1	52
Welding and Fabrication	1	4	0	1	6	7	4	0	0	11
Total	15	27	4	7	**53**	321	123	23	23	**490**
%	3	5	1	1	**10**	59	23	4	4	**90**

Table 2B. Types of Employment of the Graduates

Table 2B summarizes the types of employment status of the graduates, categorized into government -employed and privately employed. The table reveals that out of the 543 employed graduates, 53 (10%) are working for the government, while 490 (90%) are employed in the private sector. Further analysis shows that 59% of the employed graduates have regular positions in private companies, and 23% are privately employed as contractual employees. This suggests that graduates of the Technology programs are predominantly employed in private sectors, either in regular or contractual roles. Many graduates secure permanent positions after their OJT, as illustrated by one automotive graduate who shared his experience: 'I had my OJT in 2016, became a contractual employee in 2017, and fortunately became a regular employee by December 2018.' He emphasized that Sorsoganons, in general, are hardworking, making it easier for them to be absorbed and promoted to permanent positions. According to him, employers consider attitude and attendance as crucial factors when deciding to absorb OJTs and promote them to permanent staff.

Majors	**Below Php 10,000**	**Php 10,001 -Php15,000**	**Php 15,001 -Php 20,000**	**Php 20,001 -Php 25,000**	**Php 25,001 -Php 30,000**	**Above Php 30,000**
Architectural Drafting	10	26	29	3	1	3
Automotive Technology	41	32	13	5	2	6
Civil Technology	1	7	3	2	0	2
Electrical Technology	43	40	35	7	2	5
Electronics Technology	10	10	28	6	2	5
Food Service Management	21	33	13	8	1	4
Garments Technology	16	19	6	5	0	1
Mechanical Technology	9	26	14	1	2	4
Welding and Fabrication	8	5	4	0	0	0
Total (n=579)	**159**	**198**	**145**	**37**	**10**	**30**
Percentage	**28**	**34**	**25**	**6**	**2**	**5**

Table 2C. Monthly Earnings of the Graduates

Table 2C contains the frequency distribution of the monthly earnings of graduates from different majors. The table reveals that out of 579 respondents who provided information on their monthly earnings, 198 (34%) fall within the Php10,001.00 to Php15,000.00 range, 159 (28%) earn below Php10,000.00, and 145 (25%) earn between Php15,001 and Php20,000.00. This indicates that a majority of the graduates earn not more than Php20,000.00 monthly. Additionally, many graduates are employed in the NCR and Bicol Region. According to the National Wages and Productivity Commission, the minimum wage in NCR is Php428.23, and in Bicol, it is Php228.78. Therefore, 72% of the graduates receive a salary equal to or higher than the minimum wage (PSA-CPI, 2021).

Table 2D summarizes the length of time it took for graduates to secure their first job. The table indicates that out of 740 graduates, 664 provided responses to this indicator, implying that 76 graduates were never employed. Among the respondents, 74% secured their first job in less than 6 months, 15% took between 6 months to almost a year, 8% took 1 year to almost 2 years, and 3% found their first job after 2 years.

Majors	less than 6 months	6 months - less than 1 year	1 year - less than 2 years	2 years and more
Architectural Drafting	66	9	5	1
Automotive Technology	78	12	14	9
Civil Technology	11	3	2	1
Electrical Technology	116	24	9	2
Electronics Technology	54	10	2	2
Food Service Management	66	11	9	2
Garments Technology	39	13	5	1
Mechanical Technology	48	14	7	1
Welding and Fabrication	12	4	2	0
Total (n=664)	**490**	**100**	**55**	**19**
Percentage	**74**	**15**	**8**	**3**

Table 2D. Length of time it took for the graduates to have their first job

Table 2E displays the frequency and percentage of graduates who found their first job related and not related to their majors. It can be noted that more than 50% of the graduates in all majors answered that their first job is related to their chosen majors. In fact, there are a total of 448 or 67% of the graduates who said that their first job was related to their courses. Only 33% answered that their first job was not related to their majors. Badillo-Amador & Vila (2013) posited in their tracer study that education mismatches appear to capture different aspects of the accuracy of the job-worker pairing, and therefore, have separate consequences for workers (both in monetary and nonmonetary terms). Skill mismatches are recognized by employees as a more serious and relevant issue than education mismatches. The wage and job satisfaction consequences of skill mismatches are strongly negative, while education mismatches show much weaker effects.

Majors	Related		Not Related	
	f	%	f	%
Architectural Drafting (n_1 = 81)	57	70	24	30
Automotive Technology (n_2= 113)	71	63	42	37
Civil Technology (n_3 = 17)	10	59	7	41
Electrical Technology (n_4= 151)	93	62	58	38
Electronics Technology (n_5=68)	50	74	18	26
Food Service Management (n_6 =88)	62	70	26	30
Garments Technology (n_7= 58)	45	78	13	22
Mechanical Technology (n_8 = 70)	50	71	20	29
Welding and Fabrication (n_9 = 18)	10	56	8	44
Total (n =664)	448	67	216	33

Table 2E. Relatedness of the Graduates' Initial Job to their Major

Table 2F presents the frequency and percentage of graduates who find their curriculum useful in their jobs. It can be noted that 83% of the graduates said that the curriculum is useful in their job, and only 17 said it is not useful. It can be gleaned from the table that in each major, 71% to 89% of the graduates per major answered that the curriculum is useful. In fact, the graduates of FSM and Electronics Technology noted 89% and 88% of the graduates, respectively, said that the curriculum was useful in their job opportunities and careers. Although this finding suggests positive feedback to the curricular offerings of the department, there is still a need to constantly align the curriculum with the current needs of the students and graduates to make them competitive and to address the demands of the global economy. Accordingly, this claim is supported by the recommendation stipulated in the study of Gines (2014) that existing undergraduate curricular programs, although still very adequate and relevant, should be at par with international standards, responsive to the upcoming ASEAN 2015 integration, relevant to the competency framework of Southeast Asian teachers of the 21st century, and incorporate lifelong learning skills.

Majors	**Useful**		**Not useful**	
	f	**%**	**f**	**%**
Architectural Drafting (n_1 = 81)	66	81	15	19
Automotive Technology (n_2= 113)	87	77	26	23
Civil Technology (n_3 = 17)	12	71	5	29
Electrical Technology (n_4= 151)	122	81	29	19
Electronics Technology (n_5=68)	60	88	8	12
Food Service Management (n_6 =88)	78	89	10	11
Garments Technology (n_7= 58)	50	86	8	14
Mechanical Technology (n_8 = 70)	59	84	11	16
Welding and Fabrication (n_9 = 18)	14	78	4	22
Total (n =664)	**548**	**83**	**116**	**17**

Table 2F. Curriculum Relevance to the Graduates Employment

Challenges in finding a job. While the long-term goal for most college students involves productive employment following school, the prospects of turning the page on higher education and entering the workforce are intimidating for many graduates. Even the most prepared graduates face ever-changing employment conditions, so the key to navigating the complex waters of entry-level employment is to remain flexible (Brooks, 2021). Finding a job comes with many obstacles and challenges. Many recent graduates face challenges when searching for employment, including work experience, lack of networking skills, interview preparation, the need to relocate for a job opportunity, increased competition due to globalization, and even the tendency of graduates to not follow up on their job applications (Indeed, 2023). In this study, the graduates of the Technology Department revealed the major chal-

lenges they encountered in looking for a job.

Lack of self-confidence. Self-confidence is an attitude about your skills and abilities. It means you accept and trust yourself and have a sense of control in your life. You know your strengths and weaknesses well and have a positive view of yourself (University of South Florida, Counseling Center). The lack of self-confidence in our graduates indicates that they do not feel confident about their skills and abilities, perceiving that their acquired skills are insufficient for them to start working.

As one of the graduates said, "*Natatakot ako, ma'am, kasi baka hindi ko kaya ang trabaho, pakiramdam ko po kulang pa ang knowledge at kakayahan ko pagdating sa actual na trabaho*." According to an article published on July 14, 2023, by Indeed's Editorial Board, a job search engine catering to job seekers, there are skills that can only be gained through hands-on experience, even if the jobs themselves may not seem directly related. Therefore, graduates may benefit from spending time on job search research, exploring specific companies, the job market in general, hiring trends, successful job search strategies, participating in internships, volunteering opportunities, or taking on projects. These experiences can provide knowledge and skills. The more knowledge an individual gains about the task of finding a job, the more likely they are to have confidence.

However, the lack of confidence should not be solely attributed to the graduates. Taking this into consideration, a study conducted by Mofleh (2023) suggests that university students should prioritize achieving a high grade percentage as their objective, followed by developing computer skills, fluent English proficiency, and building a network of supportive personal contacts. These factors are crucial for securing employment in Afghanistan's contemporary job market post-graduation. Moreover, another study suggested that higher self-confidence tends to correspond with lower anxiety levels, except for those with prior experience. Therefore, educators should prioritize the development of decision-making skills that can be both cognitively and intuitively applied because low self-confidence and heightened anxiety can hinder assertive decision-making, highlighting the need for the incorporation of deliberative strategies into the curriculum to address these emotional barriers. However, it is important to note that the study's respondents were nursing graduates (Rivera et al., 2019). In harmony with this stance, the institution has a significant responsibility to foster the employability skills of its students, creating suggestions on how to make the program offerings of its institutions more visible, align them with the needs for skills and creativity, and improve their allure to potential students from the state and beyond (OECD, 2022).

Financial Pressure. Financial pressure arises from any situation where money worries are causing stress. It may relate to debts you are facing now or financial concerns you have about the future. It could be about actual or feared changes in work or personal circumstances that affect your income (Lifeline WA, 2020). Financial sustenance is one major consideration in job hunting. In OECD countries, graduates of higher education often earn more in terms of employment and salaries compared to workers with only an upper secondary degree. Employers in several sectors claim that there is a shortage of qualified graduates, making it difficult for everyone to find jobs with full use of skills and support the start of fulfilling lives. The current alignment of educational systems with employment markets is becoming a concern for policymakers, given the increasing concerns they are beginning to have about the future of work and the robustness of education systems in challenging economic times (OECD, 2020).

Job application requirements and their submission necessitate finances. One respondent quoted in the interview: "*Kailangan talaga naming makakuha ng trabaho agad-agad para kumita, kaso lang kailangan din may pondo o dapat may budget para sa pag-apply*" (We are in dire need to get a job to earn; however, the budget allotted to apply for a job is also a foremost consideration). Studies suggest that the unemployed are more likely to search for work as a result of income stress, caused by benefits, penalties, or fatigue. However, the question of whether a more focused job search leads to better results in terms of quality employment is still lacking consensus. To dissect this gap, the researchers (Gerards R. & Welters, R., 2016) found out that in the face of financial stress, job searching becomes more intensive but does not improve results when it comes to employment quality. It's interesting to note that if a job is found, the unem-

ployed who searched under financial pressure perceive it to be of lower quality (in terms of satisfaction with pay and hours worked) even though it is objectively comparable to the jobs found by the unemployed who searched without financial pressure (in terms of actual pay and hours worked).

Seeking for better job/career opportunities. Many of the graduates answered that they took a while to get their first job because they wanted to have a rest and bond with their family after years of studying. Others expressed that they felt obliged to help with their family business before finding a job. Moreover, many respondents wanted a rewarding job that would fit their skills.

According to one survey participant, they were not ready to get a job immediately after graduation and were still figuring out where to find a job and what job to apply for. Another participant mentioned, "I've taken some time for myself first just to make sure that I'm ready to go out there, to the real world. I studied the backgrounds of every company that I've projected to work with, to ensure that my first job is going to be stable and gratifying." To substantiate this claim, according to the investigation carried out by (Ajay, K. & Saravanan S., 2014) in the business administration industry, there needs to be a mix of education and practical experience. Unfortunately, some weaknesses in the learning and skill acquisition of new employees have been created by this strategy. Since the majority of MBA graduates begin their careers in middle management or consulting businesses, they lack the necessary practical hands-on experience.

In the words of another single respondent, "*Ang hahanap ko na kumpanya ay ang makahatag sin mayad na benepisyo nan hataas na sweldo para masuportahan ang pamilya ko, nan syempre ang trabaho na suitable sa skills ko.*" (I want to choose a company that suits my skills and capabilities, a company offering high compensation and sustaining benefits so I can provide for my family.) One should take into consideration that employers now favor recent graduates with professional experience. The skills required for employment do not apply to graduates who are picky about landing high-paying jobs. Therefore, it is essential to address the root of the problem as soon as possible (Jeffrey N. F. I., & Abdul Rahim R., 2023). To add more discussion, in the scholarly work published by (Boudarbat & Chernoff, 2009), their findings showed that 35.1% of graduates are working in an area that does not relate to their studies. Corroborating this viewpoint, some researchers have put the context into the business industry stating that economists have a higher probability of being employed in jobs that are not related to their course of study, compared with business administration majors. The degree mismatch is mainly due to changing employment objectives and ambitions rather than a lack of demand from graduates, especially for economics majors (Robst, J., et. al., 2012). While another respondent also said that they will be waiting for the dream job to open its doors for them.

Limited or no Work Experience. For some graduates who took a while to find a job, they struggled because most employers prefer candidates with work experience. One subject in the study expressed, "*Nakalima ako mam na apply, lagi ako di nakukuha kasi ang nakukuha lagi ung may experience na.*" (I applied five times to different companies, but to no avail because they prefer applicants with experience.) In confirmation of this position, another job search engine posted a similar article about challenges faced by graduates, stating that some factors affecting the graduate's performance in job seeking include the majority of employers preferring individuals with prior experience. Therefore, even if you have a degree and a general understanding of your business, it is still insufficient, and inadequate preparation for job interviews (LinkedIn, 2022).

Another feedback from one interviewee: "*Lagi lang ako mam pang 2 sa rank kasi daw wala pa ako experience.*" (I am always in the 2nd rank since I have no experience.) In alignment with this assertion, the article by the Beacon Hill Marketing Team (2019) stated that employees with past experience in a relevant industry offer some immediate benefits. They generally have some level of understanding of what your organization does and may have a variety of relevant, applicable skills that allow them to start contributing faster than a new employee who needs in-depth training. Even a new hire with experience in another field can bring developed soft skills, such as problem-solving, meeting the expectations of a professional workplace, and working together in groups.

An article posted on jobstreet.com (2021) asserted that job hunting at any stage in life can be daunting, especially for fresh graduates. It may seem that recruiters favor young applicants because of multiple factors, including age, lower asking salaries, and the opportunity to bring new ideas to organizations, but the reality is that job hiring for fresh graduates is tougher than it looks. Hence, successful graduates remain flexible and open to adjusting their career trajectory. Even the best plans don't always lead to immediate post-graduate success, so perseverance and adaptability help new graduates navigate the ever-changing job market. Also, the use of rehearsal strategies to get yourself ready for the interview can be beneficial. Additionally, an applicant should arrive at an appointment an hour early and know how to dress appropriately for an interview. Your ability to control your tone, pitch, expressions, and gestures throughout the interview will increase as a result of this exercise.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the results, the majority of technology graduates are male and single. They are predominantly employed in private companies, with salaries ranging from Php 10,001.00 to Php 15,000.00. Most of the employed graduates secured their first job within six months of graduation. In conclusion, the respondents express overall satisfaction with the delivery of undergraduate programs, as their jobs are related to their courses, and they find the curriculum practically beneficial to their careers. Notably, the major challenges encountered by the graduates in finding a job include a lack of self-confidence, financial pressure, the pursuit of better job or career opportunities, and limited or no work experience.

The primary goal of every academic institution is to produce competent graduates who meet the demands of both local and global industries. The results of the tracer study provide valuable information for evaluating the whereabouts and performance of the graduates. The relevance of the degree program to professional and career requirements emerges as a key strength of the undergraduate curriculum in the Department. Regular tracer studies lead to continuous updating, revising, and enhancing the curriculum to improve the employability opportunities of graduates, particularly in the Technology Department.

To further support graduates, especially the unemployed and self-employed seeking better career prospects, the school may consider organizing job fairs and establishing more partnerships and linkages. Additionally, the university could design programs focused on enhancing students' employability skills. These initiatives can contribute to the continuous improvement and effectiveness of the academic programs offered by the Technology Department, aligning them with the dynamic needs of the job market.

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