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Tracer Study of Graduate School Graduates of a State Higher Education Institution in the Philippines from 2016 to 2020

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ABSTRACT

In a highly competitive global marketplace, the academic preparation of graduates provides them with better job opportunities and a higher chance of employment. With graduate studies, one will be more qualified, eligible, and competent to face new jobs and work assignments, especially when holding managerial positions. This study generally aimed to trace the graduates of a State Higher Education Institution in the Philippines. Specifically, it determined the profile of graduates, employment status, employability characteristics, the extent of contribution and applicability of the skills gained, assessed the graduate program offerings, and recommendations to improve the services of the Graduate School. The study used a descriptive research design. The study gathered data from ninety-two graduates of the three program offerings of the Graduate School. The questionnaire was used to gather the necessary data and analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency count and percentage, mean, and rank. Based on the result, graduates have a very high employability rate. There is a very high application of the competencies gained by the graduates specifically on the enhanced academic profession to their personal and professional growth; there is a very high assessment of graduates to the graduate program they enrolled in the College. The graduates recommended the offering of more terminal programs and improvement of facilities to improve the services of the Graduate School. With these conclusions, the study recommends a periodic review of the curriculum and continuous capability building of professors to make the programs more responsive and relevant to the needs of the students and the standards and requirements of the industry.

Key words: Descriptive, Graduate School Programs, Philippines, Tracer Study

INTRODUCTION

Advanced Higher education stands out as one of the significant keys to coping with reforms brought about by the emerging complex nature and challenges of the 21st century. Graduate education has long been considered one of the nation's active and humane machinery to counter poverty and push socio-economic upliftment. It develops and cultivates the national development workforce and instills and fosters the necessary and applicable knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values for each individual to become a productive and valuable member of society (Daguplo et al., 2019). If graduates do not move into significant social roles that enable them to support a government monetarily, the educational investment will be considered "wasted" (de Ocampo et al., 2012).

The Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College (ISPSC) offers various programs and is established as one of the State Colleges in the 2nd District of Ilocos Sur under Republic Act (2013). At present, it is envisioned as a vibrant and nurturing Polytechnic Service College for transforming lives and communities. In order to achieve this vision, ISPSC improves the lives of people and communities through quality instruction, innovations, productivity initiatives, environment, and industry-feasible technologies, resource mobilization, and transformation outreach programs and services.

The Philippine Qualifications Framework mandates agency responsibilities like DepEd, CHED, TESDA, PRC, and DOLE to examine, evaluate, and recommend learning standards in primary education, technical skills development, and higher education and in the alignment of licensure examination (Gines, 2014). All HEIs should establish a system to ensure the socio-economic condition of all graduates, according to the Commission on Higher Education of the Philippine Higher Education.

According to Ramanick et al. (2015), the graduates' achievement and realization of their specific goals and plans are crucial for assessing and upgrading training programs. Tracking of graduates will assist Colleges and universities update the current subjective evidence—"because the graduates and their parents tell them they have succeeded"—with the "hard data" those external evaluators are increasingly seeking. To guard off intrusive state thrusts, all universities and colleges need to develop a system of acquiring "hard data" as evidence.

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Tracer studies are essential information about graduates of academic programs at higher education institutions (HEIs). Tracer study findings could be used to define further/redefine an HEI's mission and market niche and highlight how academic programs and course offerings can be changed to suit institutional goals. Stakeholders can also use the results to identify where they should look for expertise. Finally, the evaluation will lay a foundation for further enhancing existing curricula and substantive procedures and providing innovative ones. For these reasons, this study is put into fore.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to define the graduates' career profiles as a feedback mechanism for determining the relevance of the program of Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College. Specifically, this research aimed to describe the profile of graduates, educational background, employment information, and current employment status. In addition, it also examined the contribution of the College's program offerings, the overall rating of graduates in the graduate programs, and the recommendation of the graduates to improve the services of the Graduate School.

METHODS

The present undertaking utilized the descriptive research design. This research specifically used the survey. The respondents were the graduates of the three offered programs which include the Master of Arts in Education, Master of Science in Education, and the Master of Science in Agriculture. Total enumeration was used in determining the respondents; however, only ninety-two (92) out of the ninety-five (95) responded with a response rate of 96.8%.

A letter and a survey questionnaire were sent to each respondent using google form. Follow-up interviews were also conducted to validate the graduates' responses using messenger and email.

The data gathering tool used in the study was a researcher-made questionnaire. It was content and faced-validated by five experts. Data gathered were analyzed with a computed value of 4.16; hence the questionnaire is valid.

The questionnaire was pilot tested to be administered to thirty (30) respondents. The items in the survey questionnaire were analyzed to test their reliability. Using Cronbach alpha, it reported acceptable reliability of 0.78 on the contribution of the programs to the present employment of the graduates and 0.81 on the level of assessment of graduates with the services of the Graduate School.

The data gathered in the study were statistically treated and analyzed using frequency count and percentages, mean and rank.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Profile of Respondents

Table 1 presents the profile of graduates in terms of sex, civil status, income range, and the program they finished in the Graduate School.

Table 1. Profile of graduates

Profile	f	%
Sex		
Male	35	38
Female	57	62
Total	92	100
Civil Status		
Single	32	35
Married	59	64
Widowed	1	1
Total	92	100
Income Range		
10,001 – 20,000	9	9.8
20,001-30,000	72	78.2
30,001 – 40,000	9	9.8
40,001 – above	2	2.2
Total	92	100.00
Program		
MAEd	20	21.7
MSE	65	70.7
MSA	7	7.6
Total	92	100.00

Table 1 shows that 62% are females and 38% are males. The result shows that there are more female respondents than males. This data suggests that female teachers continue to dominate the teaching profession.

This result is parallel to the study of Buenvinida and Yazon (2017), showing a higher number of female teachers than males. Female teachers are critical in instructing in the classroom since they ensure that every learner enjoys and has access to learning opportunities. Female teachers are likely to feel at ease and secure (Awan & Riasat, 2015).

In terms of civil status, most of the respondents are married, with 64% of the distribution. This result is followed by those who are single with 35% of the distribution. One percent of the respondents are widowed.

It can be noted in Table 1 that the highest number of graduates are receiving a monthly income of Php20,001 – Php30,000 with 78.2%. The least are those below Php10,000 and Php40,001 and above with both 1.1%.

Table 1 further shows the more significant number of graduates in the Master Science in Education with 70.7%. This result is followed by those enrolled in the Master of Arts in Education with 21.7%. This finding implies that the education programs in advanced higher education are the most subscribed programs for employment. This finding complements the study of Rocaberte (2016). With the changes in the educational landscape in primary education under Republic Act (2013), teachers must upgrade themselves to teach the spiral curriculum in most content, specialized, and contextualized courses.

Employment and Employment Characteristics

Table 2 shows a more significant number of respondents (70.7%) who are not working or are still unemployed when they enroll in graduate school.

Only 27 or 29.3% are already employed when they first enter graduate school. This indicates that graduates continue to enhance their knowledge, skills, and competencies as they are exploring for job opportunities in line with their completed undergraduate programs. They believe that there are better and greater opportunities when they have units in graduate studies since employers in private schools prefer graduates who have higher educational qualifications. In addition, units in graduate studies are given additional points when they apply to teach in the Department of Education.

Woya (2019) pointed out that the quality of instruction and outcomes achieved is a vital consideration in the quality of education in higher education. Higher education provides value by enhancing the job-related skills and competencies that prepare students for the world of jobs.

Table 3 disclosed that almost all graduates (98.9%) were permanently employed. The only one which is equivalent to 1.1% is self-employed. This finding indicates that the graduate school curriculum is industry-driven, as evidenced by the high employability of the graduates. The respondents subscribed that the units they earned and the skills they learned in graduate school give them a better opportunity and higher chances of employment when there are openings of jobs and vacant positions. The faculty and administrators of the College designed a curriculum that is responsive to the needs of the industries, specifically, the education sector.

This result further indicates that the College has achieved its mission and vision and its objectives to produce highly productive and employable graduates, "glocal" (global and local) technopreneurs who are ethically crafted and environmentally conscious of meeting globalization demands.

Statistics on the nation's employment status of graduates remain a perennial problem (Ranario, 2012). However, the offering of the new curriculum under the K to 12 has significantly contributed to the high employment of graduates in the teacher education due to the high need for a teacher to handle subjects in the senior high school.

It can be seen from Table 4 that most graduates find their present job through friends' referral, with 42.4% of the respondents. This result is followed by written inquiries (37%) and through relatives (22.8%). Hence, the result shows that referral from friends helps graduates to look for full-time and permanent jobs. Referrals from friends significantly boost the opportunities for the graduates to be hired in the jobs they applied for.

Graduates' most significant concern is finding work after graduation. A student's quest to obtain work after graduation is one of the struggles and predicaments of most fresh graduates. Most graduates take a reasonable amount of time to find work (Awan & Riasat, 2015). Diaz (2012) pointed out that most employers and job applicants rely extensively on informal referrals to fill vacancies or to find a job. The widespread use of job contacts has been largely associated with labor outcomes, such as finding a job or even affecting wages.

Table 5 reflects the type of organization where the graduates are employed.

It can be noted that most of the graduates (40.4%) are employed in the public schools, specifically the Department of Education, State Colleges and Universities, and the Local Universities and Colleges. Some (10.8%) are hired in the private sector, while seven (7.7%) work in LGUs.

The results imply that graduates could land jobs in the public sector and agencies after earning units in advanced studies. The competencies and skills earned in graduate school give them an edge in obtaining full-time or permanent work in the public sector.

DepEd Order No. 7 (2015) provided that Educational qualification is a crucial requirement when seeking employment in the Department of Education. Units in graduate studies are given credits and points in the selection of teacher applicants.

Table 6 present the occupational classification of graduates.

With 91.3% of the respondents, most graduates are employed as professional teachers, 7.6% are agriculturists, and 1.1% are managing proprietors. These results imply that most

Table 2. Work status while studying in ISPSC

Program	f	%
Working	27	29.3
Not Working	65	70.7
Total	92	100

Table 3. Present job status

Work Status	f	%
Permanent	98.9	91
Self-Employed	1.1	1
Total	92	100

Table 4. Profile of graduates on modes to find job

Modes	f	%
Through friends	39	42.4
Through relatives	21	22.8
Through written inquiries	34	37.0
Advertisement in media	8	8.7
Former professor	1	1.1
Job opening	1	1.1
Application/Ranking	1	1.1
Through call from an administrator	1	1.1

Table 5. Type of organization

Type	f	%
Public (SUC/LUC/DepEd)	74	80.4
Public (LGU)	7	7.7
Private	10	10.8
Self-Employed	1	1.1
Total	92	100

Table 6. Occupational classification

Classification	f	%
Professional Teacher	84	91.3
Managing Proprietor	1	1.1
Agriculturist	7	7.6
Total	92	100

of the graduates are employed related to their undergraduate course and the programs they enrolled in the College. This also implies that pursuing graduate studies will lead to a greater chance of being hired as a professional teacher. Since the employability skills and characteristics and attributes of the applicant significantly matter when applying for a job. The result is similar to Rojas and Rojas (2016), stating that graduates' employment is aligned and matched with the graduates' preparation.

As shown in Table 7, almost all of the graduates (98.9%) agree that the skills they learned in graduate school are related to their present job. Only one (1.1%) said that the skills he/she has acquired in graduate studies are not relevant to his present work. This result indicates that the knowledge, leadership skills, and academic learnings in the College prepared them for work. This further implies that the curriculum they had in the College is indeed relevant and responsive to the needs of the education sector and industry.

The Graduate School maintains its commitment in providing students with essential professional skills they will need in the workplace. Graduate students' ability to adapt quickly to a situation, anticipate the consequences of a course of action, connect with other colleagues, maximize the use of ICT, and use knowledge and tools to develop new products, ideas, and concepts is enhanced by the quality and responsive instruction in the graduate school.

The study of Deblois (2021) and Del Rosario (2019) are parallel with the present findings showing the relatedness of the skills earned and learned to the requirement of their present job. Ahmad et al. (2012) also pointed out that the strong curriculum and programs of higher education have provided competitive graduates to man industries, businesses, and the education sector.

Table 8 shows that the enhanced academic profession obtained the highest mean of 4.86, which means this skill is used to a very high extent. Other skills such as communication, improved problem-solving skills, improved research skills, improved learning efficacy, improved information technology skills, enhanced team spirit, exposure to the local community within the field of specialization, critical thinking skills, salary improvement and promotion, and personality development show a high contribution to the overall development of the graduates.

The enhanced academic profession is considered by the majority as the foremost competency they learned and acquired necessary to their personal professional growth. These contribute to the performance of their functions and duties to their respective work. This skill shall be highlighted during curriculum reviews and shall be integrated into the new educational context to uplift the employability and productive force of graduates.

Cheng Tan and French-Arnold (2015) highlighted the importance of the enhancement of the academic profession of graduates. This is to ensure high employability and adequate preparation and training of graduates to meet the challenges of the world of work.

The global economy favors the quality academic preparation of students and an appropriate higher educational system is crucial for preparing a competent workforce.

Table 7. Relatedness of the skills learned to the present job

Classification	f	%
Yes	91	98.9
No	1	1.1
Total	92	100

Table 8. Perception of respondents towards the extent of applications of the skills learned to the personal and professional growth of the graduates

Indicators	Mean	DR	Rank
1. Enhanced academic profession	4.86	VH	1
2. Improved problem-solving skills	4.68	VH	8.5
3. Improved research skills	4.68	VH	8.5
4. Improved learning efficacy	4.79	VH	3
5. Improved communication/ interpersonal skills	4.78	VH	4
6. Improved information technology skills	4.63	VH	10
7. Enhanced team spirit/people skills	4.74	VH	6
8. Exposure to the local community within the field of specialization	4.72	VH	7
9. Exposure to the international community within the field of specialization	4.25	VH	12
10. Critical thinking skills	4.77	VH	5
11. Salary improvement and promotion	4.62	VH	11
12. Opportunity Abroad	4.13	H	13
13. Personality Development	4.82	VH	2
Overall	4.66	VH	

Kalaw (2019) also pointed out that work experience and developing an academic profession are the most vital considerations in getting a job while the lack of learning experience and learning outdated/irrelevant skills are the main barriers to landing employment. Graduates agree that the learning experiences they acquired had a very high effect on their critical thinking, intrapersonal and communication skills, and knowledge of the field. Overall, they believed that their experience in school to be very helpful as it developed a positive influence on personal and professional growth.

Overall, Table 8 revealed a very high contribution of the program completed by the graduates in their present job and to their personal and professional development. This finding is evidenced by the overall computed mean of 4.66, described as Very High. The finding implies that the students' knowledge, competencies, and skills acquired in College contributed to their present job and work. It has prepared and provided them with essential competencies that made them productive in their respective job assignments. The College is continually achieving its purpose to offer adequate and necessary skills to the graduate students.

According to Laguador et al. (2016), the application of the knowledge, and skills abilities to their individual job assignments equates to an expanded experience for continuous learning as well as work-related skills, which are

critical drivers of production and efficiency. As employees and individuals, they become valuable members of the knowledge-based society who contribute to the well-being of the communities they serve.

These abilities are critical in the graduates' day-to-day tasks. As a result, curriculum plays a role in developing competitive graduates. The school must emphasize developing these skills among the students (Aquino et al., 2015).

Graduate education is about developing people who can ask intriguing, challenging, and tough questions. It is also about developing skills beyond establishing a solid analytical mind for the student (Polziehn, 2011). Graduate students are fortunate to be raised in an institution with its core values: productivity, resiliency, accountability, ingenuity, synergy, and excellent work.

Table 9 presents the rating provided by the graduates in the graduate programs of College.

It can be noted that respondents provided the highest rating on the program's relevance to professional requirements and the professor's knowledge of the central subjects, with a computed mean of 4.85.

This result indicates that the College sees to it that the programs offered are responsive to the professional and personal requirements of the students. The responsiveness of the program offerings is done through periodic academic review and updating of the syllabus to an abreast student with the latest trends and innovations in education. In addition, the respondents are also satisfied with the professional competencies of the professor, as evidenced by their competence in teaching and their high educational qualification. Professors are academically prepared to handle subjects in Graduate School.

On the other hand, laboratory and library resources rated the least with computed means of 4.36 and 4.17. This result means that graduates did not fully experience the utilization of library resources and laboratory resources. It requires the improvement of the laboratory facilities and the opening of the library on Saturdays in order for the students to access these services fully.

Table 10 shows the recommendations given by the respondents to improve the services of the Graduate School.

It can be noted from Table 10 that the offering of additional programs, specifically doctoral programs, is the first demand of the graduates. The majority (84.8%) requested the offering of doctoral programs followed by the improvement of buildings, ICT facilities, and laboratories, 58.7% of the respondents.

These findings indicate that graduates plan to pursue their doctoral studies in the College. The impressive and satisfying services of the Graduate School inspire graduates to pursue their studies in ISPSC. Other recommendations of the graduates include the offering of distance learning, construction of e-library and learning resources, and partnership with private institutions.

The adequacy of the facilities, laboratories, and other infrastructure could provide more experiences to the students as they stay in one institution. The experiences of graduate school students are more meaningful and fun when they are exposed to varied activities by utilizing these infrastructures.

Table 9. Respondent's overall rating of the graduate programs

Indicators	Mean	DR	Rank
Range of the Subjects Offered	4.73	VH	6
Relevance of the Program to Professional Requirements	4.85	VH	1.5
Extra-curricular activities	4.44	VH	12
Problem- solving	4.62	VH	9
Premium Given to Research	4.53	VH	11
Interdisciplinary learning	4.72	VH	7
Teaching and Learning Environment	4.77	VH	5
Quality of Instruction	4.79	VH	4
Teacher-Student Relationship	4.84	VH	3
Library Resources	4.36	H	13
Laboratory Resources	4.17	H	14
Class Size	4.65	VH	8
Infrastructure and Facilities	4.56	VH	10
Professor's Knowledge of the Major Subjects	4.85	VH	1.5
Overall Mean	4.63	VH	

Table 10. Recommendations to improve services of the graduate school

Indicators	f	%	Rank
1. Offer doctoral programs	78	84.8	1
2. Offer additional specializations in the master's programs	12	13.0	9.5
3. Partner with private institutions	23	25.0	5
4. Offer distance learning	38	41.3	3
5. Improve sports facilities and equipment	5	5.4	13
6. Construct e-library and learning resources	25	27.2	4
7. Proper scheduling of subjects	19	20.7	6
8. Conduct webinars/seminars to enhance students' professional growth and development	10	10.9	11.5
9. Improve buildings, ICT, and laboratory	54	58.7	2
10. Enhance curriculum	12	13.0	9.5
11. More qualified professors in some programs	15	16.3	7
12. Time management	10	10.9	11.5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Most of the graduates are female, married, with an average salary of Php20,001-30,000, graduated Master of Arts in Education, employed in public institutions, permanent, and commonly find their present job through friend's referral. There is high employability of graduates and the skills they learned are related to their present job.

There is a very high application of the skills learned to the personal and professional growth of graduates. In addition, there is a very high assessment of graduates in the graduate

programs of the College. The graduates recommended the offering of doctoral programs and distance learning education. The graduates ' primary demand is the improvement of buildings, ICT infrastructures, and laboratories.

It is recommended that periodic curriculum review, continual capability building, and enhancement program of professors, the Graduate School will maintain the quality of instruction and aim to make the curriculum relevant and responsive to the needs of students and industry. The College shall offer terminal programs through face-to-face and distance learning; and improve buildings, facilities, and resources to cater to stakeholders, students, community, and industry.

Finally, the Graduate School shall hold tracer studies periodically to provide up-to-date information that will be used to formulate policies to address the higher employability of graduates. It is highly recommended that all graduates, employers, and other industry partners be included.

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