

Beyond the Blackboard: Unveiling the Diverse Career Landscape of Education Graduates

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Abstract

This tracer study aimed to investigate the demographic, academic, and employment profile of 202 Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED) graduates of Northern Iloilo State University (NISU), Philippines from A.Y 2016-2019. This study employed a quantitative approach with data collected through a modified questionnaire modeled from the Philippines' Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Graduate Tracer Study. The findings showed that most graduates passed the Licensure Examination for Teachers and worked full-time, however, were underemployed. Most graduates acquired their first job in less than a year, but not in the field of education. The respondents found learned skills in communication, knowledge and technical, leadership, human relations, and ICT useful in the workplace to a great extent. However, research and problem-solving skills were found to be useful to a moderate extent. Among the difficulties faced by BEED graduates in finding a job, the limited job vacancies in the teaching profession or the lack of positions or permanent items in public elementary schools was pointed out as a major problem. The university is recommended to establish a dedicated unit for conducting regular tracer studies, integrate it into the college's quality assurance system, and strengthen partnerships with local employment offices and the private sector to ensure job opportunities for graduates. The Teacher Education Department may review and enhance its curriculum to align with the current demands of the teaching profession in public and private schools, both for local and international employment.

Keywords: Tracer Study, Graduates Employability, LET performance, Bachelor of Elementary Education, Philippine Education

Introduction

The main goal of any higher education institution (HEI) is to produce outstanding graduates who are ready to join the local and international labor force and contribute to the long-term development of the nation, with a strong focus on ensuring that graduates' abilities and competence align with the demand for skilled workers in the international labor market (Bennett, 2019). Recent graduates of teacher preparation programs are mostly driving the current paradigm change in education. For Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) offering teacher education programs, ensuring quality graduates has provided a challenge in delivering appropriate teacher training and preparation to fulfill the expectations of a developing society

and difficult times (Aquino 2015 in Pentang et al., 2021). Higher education institutions are in charge of producing competent and marketable graduates. It is esteemed based on the opportunities granted to its graduates in the labor market and creating a strong professional path (Jalal, 2018) since one can only obtain a successful career if they have obtained appropriate education and training (Bihag & Boholano, 2012 in Pacleb-Ulanday, 2021).

Indeed, graduate characteristics, such as skills for employability are critical factors in the improvement of any university undergraduate program curriculum (Kankaew et al., 2021), which has an impact on the local and global labor market and contributes to the nation's economic development (Cornillez et al., 2021). With all these considerations, it is vital to track graduates to assess their employability and how relevant were the knowledge and skills they acquired from the university.

This study aimed to investigate the demographic, academic, and employment profile of NISU Bachelor of Elementary Education Graduates from A.Y 2016-2019. It also aimed to determine whether the graduates have acquired the necessary competencies in their undergraduate preparation which are useful in their current work. In addition, it focuses on the quality of teacher education and the condition under which the graduates have been hired, the length of time it took before the graduates were hired, and how their areas of work relate to their specialization.

The findings of this study will guide the college in establishing means to address challenges faced by graduates in finding employment, as well as in enhancing its curriculum to better align with the evolving needs of the education sector and the job market.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws theoretical support from Human Capital Theory, primarily articulated by economists Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz in the 1960s. This theory emphasizes that education and training are investments in human capital that enhance productivity and economic growth. Graduates are seen as valuable assets in the labor market because their education and skills contribute to workforce development. Furthermore, this theory highlights the inverse relationship between unemployment and educational attainment, suggesting that higher levels of education can reduce unemployment rates.

Additionally, the Labor Market Theory by R. Lindley (1996) is another theoretical framework supporting the study. This theory underscores the importance of providing clear and accessible information about courses, qualifications, and individuals' achievements to improve the functioning of the labor market. It acknowledges that individuals have the autonomy to make their own choices regarding education and employment.

In the context of this study, these theories underpin the assessment of graduates' employment characteristics and the relevance and usefulness of the skills, training, and values they acquired from the university. By leveraging these theories, the study aims to evaluate how graduates' competencies obtained during their education contribute to their employment experiences. The research also examines the distribution of graduates based on various profile variables, including their initial and current employment status. Ultimately, the study provides valuable insights to the university regarding the graduates' post-graduation outcomes and the effectiveness of the academic curriculum and services offered.

Research Objectives

The transition from academic life to the professional world is a critical phase for graduates, especially for those in the field of education. Understanding the employment outcomes and skill utilization of education

graduates provides valuable insights for educational institutions, policymakers, and graduates. This tracer study seeks to shed light on the challenges and successes these graduates face in the job market. Specifically, it aims to:

1. determine the demographic, academic, and employment profile of NISU BEED graduates from A.Y. 2016-2019
2. assess the extent of application of skills among NISU BEED graduates, specifically in terms of communication skills, knowledge and technical skills, leadership skills, human relation skills, research skills, problem-solving skills, and ICT skills.
3. identify the difficulties encountered by BEED graduates in securing employment.

Methodology

Research Design

The researchers utilized a quantitative approach employing the descriptive survey research design. Descriptive research aims neither to describe a population, situation, or phenomenon accurately and systematically nor to identify characteristics, frequencies, trends, and categories (McCombes, 2019). It can answer what, where, when, and how questions, but not why questions. This approach and design were considered since the objective of this study was to track the graduate’s current employment characteristics and examine the relevance of their acquired skills, competence, and values, as well as the university's curriculum program on their employment.

Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study were the BEED graduates of NISU from A.Y. 2016-2019. Based on their availability there were 54 respondents for the year 2017, 60 graduates for year 2018, and 88 for 2019. A total of 202 graduates responded to the study.

Data Gathering Instrument

The research instrument used in gathering the data was modeled from the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Graduate Tracer Form. The questionnaire is composed of three parts. The first part is the Demographic profile, which includes the personal profile, the second is the Academic profile, where professional examinations taken and passed by respondents are identified, and the third part is the Employment profile, where the information about the current employment of the respondents is determined, including the difficulties they have encountered and the extent of application of skills learned in the university. The researchers generated an electronic form of the survey instrument and uploaded it for simple access and retrieval for respondents outside the locality and those abroad. The researchers also handed the questionnaires personally to the graduates within reach, particularly those who were unable to access the link.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Profile

Table 1: Demographic Profile of NISU BEED Graduates

Categories	A.Y. 2016-2017		A.Y. 2017-2018		A.Y. 2018-2019	
	f	%	F	%	f	%
Entire Group	54	26.7	60	29.7	88	43.6

Sex						
Male	4	7.4	7	11.7	13	14.8
Female	50	92.6	53	88.3	75	85.2
Civil Status						
Single	43	79.6	56	93.3	85	96.6
Married	11	20.4	4	6.7	3	3.4
Permanent Address						
Carles	26	48.1	25	41.7	28	31.82
Estancia	13	24.0	16	26.7	33	37.5
Balasan	3	5.6	6	10.0	14	15.9
Sara	6	11.1	2	3.3	4	4.55
San Dionisio	3	5.6	5	8.3	4	4.55
Batad	2	3.7	5	8.3	1	1.14
Concepcion	1	1.9	1	1.7	2	2.27
Capiz	0	0	0	0	2	2.27

When classified as to sex, results showed that respondents for A.Y. 2016-2017 have 4 (7.4%) males and 50 (92.6%) females, for A.Y. 2017–2018, there were 7 (11.7%) males and 53 (88.3%) females and for the A.Y. 2018–2019, there were 13 (14.8%) males and 75 (85.2%) females. According to the study conducted by Gines (2014), in Caingcoy and Barroso (2020) most of the teacher education graduates are females. The graduate tracer study on Philippine Higher Education of Tutor et al. (2019) obtained the same result. This proves that the teaching profession is dominated by females (Pacleb-Ulanday, 2021), and they are presented with opportunities to serve and lead the school and community.

When classified as to permanent address, for A.Y. 2016-2017, 26 (48.1%) respondents were from Carles, 13 (24%) were from Estancia, 3 (5.6%) were from Balasan, 6 (11.1%) were from Sara, 3 (5.6%) were from San Dionisio, 2 (3.7%) were from Batad, and 1 (1.9%) were from Concepcion. For A.Y. 2017-2018, 25 (41.7%) were from Carles, 16 (26.7%) were from Estancia, 6 (10.0%) were from Balasan, 2 (3.3%) were from Sara, 5 (8.3%) were from San Dionisio, 5 (8.3%) were from Batad, and 1 (1.7%) were from Concepcion. For A.Y 2018-2019, 28 (31.82%) were from Carles, 33 (37.5%) were from Estancia, 14 (15.9%) were from Balasan, 4 (4.55%) were form Sara, 4 (4.55%) were from San Dionisio, 1 (1.14%) were from Batad, 2 (2.27%) were from Concepcion, and 2 (2.27%) were from Capiz. This suggests that most NISU students are residents of Estancia, where the university is situated, as well as from Carles and its islands. In these areas, many families face financial difficulties and therefore choose to send their children to the state university to receive a quality education at a low cost. The data supported the finding of Alava et al. (2017), who concluded that the majority of the students opted to attend colleges that were close by and accessible to them. Additionally, the outcome shows that the institution may provide services to other towns while still being able to assist aspirant teachers inside its jurisdiction.

When grouped as to civil status, for A.Y 2016–2017, 43 (79.6%) respondents were single and 11 (20.4%) were married, for A.Y 2017–2018, 56 (93.3%) were single and 4 (6.7%) were married. For A.Y. 2018–2019, 85 (96.6%) were single, while 3 (3.4%) were married. This is similar to the study of Aquino et al. (2015), where data showed that most respondents remained single after graduation. This might be due to the reason that the graduates were more focused on building their careers before marriage, especially if the graduate becomes the breadwinner of the family after graduation.

Academic Profile

Table 2: Academic Profile of NISU BEED Graduates

LET Performance	A.Y. 2016-2017		A.Y. 2017-2018		A.Y. 2018-2019	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Passed	51	94.44	56	93.33	79	89.77
Failed	3	5.56	4	6.67	9	10.23

In terms of professional examinations, all 202 (100%) respondents took the Licensure Examination for Teachers wherein, 187 or 92.6% passed the LET and 15 or 7.4% failed. To further classify the respondents as to year graduated, in A.Y. 2016-2017, 51 or 94.44% passed and 3 or 5.56% failed. In A.Y. 2017-2018, 56 or 93.33% passed and 4 or 6.7% failed. In A.Y. 2018-2019, 79 or 89.77% passed and 9, or 10.23% failed. According to the data, most of the fresh graduates passed the teachers’ board exam given by the Professional Regulation Commission, as supported by the study of Palma, et al (2022) wherein findings revealed that a substantial number of successful examinees were first-time takers.

Employment Profile

Table 3: Employment Profile of NISU BEED Graduates

Employment Data	A.Y. 2016-2017		A.Y. 2017-2018		A.Y. 2018-2019	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Employment profile						
Employed	43	79.6	18	30.0	11	12.5
Underemployed	10	18.5	18	30.0	47	53.4
Not employed	1	1.9	24	40.0	30	34.1
Status of Employment						
Full-time	43	79.6	23	38.3	14	15.9
Part-time	9	16.7	15	25.0	48	54.5
Self-employed	2	3.7	22	36.7	26	29.5
Length of time of acquiring first job						
Right after graduation	4	7.4	13	21.7	13	14.8
Less than 1 year	36	66.7	21	35	26	40.9
More than 1 year	14	25.9	26	43.3	29	44.3
Nature of employment						
Education	43	79.6	24	40.0	26	29.5
Other community, social, and personal activities	4	7.4	14	23.3	42	47.7
Real estate, renting, and business activities	2	3.7	8	13.3	5	5.7
Extra-territorial organizations and bodies	1	1.9	7	11.6	0	0
Agriculture, Hunting and Forestry	0	0	1	1.7	2	2.3

Private household with employed persons	0	0	1	1.7	2	2.3
Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor-cycles and personal and household goods	2	3.7	0	0	1	1.1
Health and social worker	0	0	3	5.0	2	2.3
Hotel and restaurant	0	0	1	1.7	0	0
Transport storage and communication	2	3.7	1	1.7	8	9.1

Based on the employment profile of the respondents, 72, or 35.6% were employed as to their specialization, 55, or 27.2% were unemployed and 75, or 37.1% were underemployed in other jobs like Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), government, and non-government agencies. In terms of the status of employment, 80, or 39.6% were full-time, 72, or 35.6% were part-time, and 50, or 24.8% were self-employed. In terms of length of time in acquiring the first job, 30, or 14.9% got a job right after graduation, 92, or 45.5% got a job in less than 1 year, and 80, or 39.6% got a job more than a year.

In terms of nature of employment, 93, or 46.0% work in the education sector, 60, or 29.7% work in other community, social and personal activities, 15, or 7.4% work in real estate, renting, and business activities, 8 or 4.0% work under extraterritorial organizations and bodies, 3 or 1.5% work under agriculture, hunting, and forestry, 3 or 1.5% work under private household with employed persons, 6 or 3.0% work under wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles, motorcycles and personal and household good, 2 or 1.0% work under health and social works, 1 or 0.5% work under hotels and restaurants, 11 or 5.4% work under transport storage and communications. The highest percentage of graduates was employed in other community, social, and personal activities which included contractual work and services in the government.

The findings in this study contradict the result of the study of Pacleb-Ulanday (2021) which revealed that there were more graduates employed as teaching personnel and were engaged in jobs linked to their course of study. The remaining graduates were working in non-teaching positions while completing the professional license required to teach in a public school and some private institutions. Abas et al. (2020) mentioned that this could be due to their desire to earn a living; therefore, they accepted the employment, although it was unrelated to their college preparation.

Extent of Application of Skills

Table 4: Extent of Application of Skills of NISU BEED Graduates

Skills	Standard deviation	Mean	Description
Communication skills	.49	4.54	To a great extent
Knowledge and technical skills	.44	4.45	To a great extent
Leadership skills	.45	4.55	To a great extent
Human relations skills	.41	4.55	To a great extent

Research skills	.52	4.29	To a moderate extent
Problem-solving skills	.50	4.44	To a moderate extent
Information and technology skills	.50	4.58	To a great extent

Table 4 shows that the respondents found useful “to a great extent” certain skills taught in the university such as communication skills (M= 4.45, SD= .485), (M= 4.45, SD= .444), leadership skills (M= 4.55, SD= .452, human relation skills (M= 4.55, SD= .410), and ICT skills (M= 4.58, SD= .504). However, the respondents indicated research skills (M= 4.29, SD= .522), and problem-solving skills (M= 4.44, SD= .499) as useful only “to a moderate extent”. Graduates are anticipated to possess superior abilities to develop into competent employees or employees in the future. When students are in the working world, pride serves as a test for the effectiveness of their educational curriculum (Gines 2014 in Hasibuan et. al., 2022). The results revealed that graduates have acquired much less competent skills in problem-solving and research probably due to the lack of teaching pedagogies that enabled the graduates to apply theories into practice while they were studying in the university. This result is similar to the study conducted by the World Bank (2019), wherein findings revealed that the Philippines has gaps in producing education graduates with high levels of problem-solving skills, work attitude, and research skills.

Difficulties in Looking for Employment

Table 5: Difficulties Encountered by BEEd Graduates in Looking for Employment

Difficulties	F	%
Few job vacancies/lack of position or item	138	68.3
Inadequate experience	31	15.3
Mismatch of education qualification	24	11.9
Passing the pre-employment interview	3	1.5
Not meeting paper requirements	2	1.0
Passing the pre-employment exam	2	1.0
None	2	1.0

In finding work, few job vacancies or lack of permanent positions are perceived as difficulties by 138 or 68.3% of the respondents, inadequate experience by 31 or 15.3% of the respondents, mismatch of education qualification by 24 or 11.9% of the respondents, passing the pre-employment interview by 3 or 1.5% of the respondents, not meeting paper requirements by 2 or 1.0% of the respondents, passing the pre-employment exam by 2 or 1.0% respondents. 2 or 1.0% of respondents found no difficulties in finding work. This data shows that employing teachers in the Philippines requires more than simply a college degree but a wide range of qualifications to sustain educational quality. Other graduates have concerns with work location, limited teaching positions, and no established linkages. The graduates may have experienced difficulties since some had recently obtained their degrees while others did not have their licenses yet. Results of a study by Oboza (2017) also showed that teacher education graduates have trouble with limited teaching positions and lack of teaching experience.

Conclusion and Implications

The data analysis of the demographic profile showed that most respondents were female, single, and residing primarily in the areas of Carles and Estancia. It can be implied that the predominance of female respondents may imply that elementary education in the region is still seen as a female-dominated career;

the high number of single respondents living close to the university or in the nearby towns may have to do with the Philippines' localization law in hiring public elementary teachers. However, this also suggests that many of them are post-graduate students who are taking advance education, which indicates that the university plays a central role in providing education and opportunities to the residents in these areas. Most of the respondents were LET passers, which implies that the College of Education of NISU provides quality education and effectively prepares its students for the licensure exam. It indicates that the curriculum, teaching methods, and faculty members are effective in imparting the necessary knowledge and skills to aspiring teachers for them to be able to pass the licensure exam. However, a high number of underemployed graduates suggests that the job market is saturated with qualified candidates, making it difficult for graduates to secure suitable employment opportunities. This is due to various factors such as an oversupply of graduates in the field of education or a lack of job creation in the public education sector, specifically at the elementary level.

Furthermore, the results of this study imply that the institution is successful in aligning its curriculum with the needs and demands of the job market as graduates are likely equipped with the knowledge and abilities that employers are seeking, increasing their employability and potential for career success. However, the result of graduates in research and problem-solving skills suggests that although these skills are considered to be reasonably satisfactory, there is still room for improvement. The description implies that graduates have a certain level of proficiency in conducting research and solving problems, but the university may enhance the teaching of competencies in these areas.

As to the difficulties encountered by BEED graduates in looking for a job, few job vacancies or lack of permanent items are perceived as a major reason by most of the respondents why they are unemployed and underemployed as they often look for employment in the government sector, that is in public elementary schools. This means that there are more job seekers than available opportunities, making it challenging for graduates to secure employment or obtain the desired positions/items in the government.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations were suggested:

NISU may establish a dedicated unit for conducting regular tracer studies, which should be integrated into the college's quality assurance system. The unit may also be responsible for disseminating the findings of the tracer studies to relevant stakeholders.

The Teacher Education Department with the Dean and Chairpersons may review and strengthen its curriculum to ensure that it is aligned with the current demands of the teaching profession and the needs of the students. Moreover, partnerships or linkages with the private education sector may also be improved for future employment in private schools. The department may also collaborate with industry partners to design relevant training programs that can enhance the employability of the graduates not just in the locality but more so in the international labor market.

Ethical Considerations

The following ethical considerations were observed throughout the conduct of this study:

- The researchers secured approval from the Dean of the College of Education and the chairperson of BEED before conducting the study.
- The researchers sent a communication to the respondents via various means to inform and ask permission to conduct the survey.

- The researchers included a consent form and privacy statement along with the questionnaire. This ensured that the respondents were adequately informed about the purpose of the study, the data collection process, and their rights as participants.
- All data obtained in the study was treated confidential and has not been disclosed to anyone not directly involved in the study.

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