

Tracing The Employability Success

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Abstract

This study aimed to trace the employability success of the graduates from 2002 to 2021 at Lyceum of the Philippines University Manila. It discussed the competencies relevant to the respondent's first job and the work-related values in their employability success. It utilized a descriptive method with the application of Pearson correlation to get the relevance of values to the length of time they land their first job. 478 respondents participated and the majority came from the year 2017-2019 batches. Results showed that 57.1% of the respondents landed a regular or permanent position in their present employment status, while 69.6% have been gainfully employed with either holding a regular position or a full-time job that is related to their field of specialization. Salaries and benefits are the top considerations why most LPU graduates stay longer and commit to their present job. Most of the respondents stated that they were able to find a job within the six (6) month period. In terms of acquired competencies relevant to their first job, communication skills, followed by critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills are among the top skills graduates have learned in college. In upholding the Lycean values, it is work efficiency that showed significance in terms of landing their first job after graduation. Though the results are favorable, the online survey instrument itself is vulnerable to invalid data inputs as some respondents provided irrelevant details that are not consistent with the choices of the item questions, consequently contributing to the nullity of some data. The study yielded recommendations on the use of closed-ended responses or consider textual analysis for open-ended responses, and a regular tracer study per program should be done in tracing the employability success of the graduates, to provide deeper insights on curriculum development and program refinement.

Keywords: Graduate Tracer Study, Employability Success, Higher Education Institution, Curriculum Assessment.

INTRODUCTION

The Philippine labor economy has become competitive especially when job seekers are being classified in terms of what degree programs they completed, what school they attended to, and what competencies and skills they acquired during their study life. The employability rate of graduates is one of the key factors in the improvement of quality instruction of any higher education institution (HEI). They are responsible for honing the skills and developing core competencies of graduates to help contribute to economic growth at both national and global level (Abana et.al, 2021). Albina and Sumagaysay (2020) also articulated that employability has a crucial role to play in the development of program curriculum of schools, and their strategic direction towards recruitment and retention.

Lyceum of the Philippines University (LPU) concurred with the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to conduct graduate tracer studies to assess and improve the quality and relevance of training and educations provided by HEIs to their graduates. It is part of the minimum criteria of instructional quality of a degree program to be identified as either a center for excellence or center of development (Cuadra et. al, 2019). This mandate enables HEIs to improve their policies in terms of decision making on creation, retention, and expansion of academic program offerings. The general objective of the study is to determine the relevance of LPU core values in the employability rate among the graduates of LPU. It also evaluates learning outcomes of program curricula in relation to quality assurance (Schomburg, 2016) and industry relevance.

Tracer studies, in general, allow HEIs to estimate the career trajectory of their produced graduates in terms of analyzing the job search time from the moment of their graduation. Furthermore, it allows for the examination of institution-provided training, graduates' career pathways, employment kind and position, professional and job satisfaction, and regional dispersion (Abana et. al, 2021).

Other LPU campuses, particularly, LPU Batangas regularly releases tracer studies on the employability status of their graduates, to determine the job placement profile of the graduates and to identify the work-related values and skills that contribute to meeting the demands of their work (Celis, Festijo & Cueto, 2013). Using the same instrument, this study takes a step further by relating the identified work-related values to the length of time they land their first job.

The study discussed the following questions:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of graduates in terms of gender, year graduated, and degree programs?
2. What are the statuses of employability of the graduates in terms of:
 - 2.1 Present employment status
 - 2.2 Nature of employment
 - 2.3 Reasons for staying in the present job
 - 2.4 Length of time to land their first job
 - 2.5 Considerations in pursuing advanced studies
3. What competencies are relevant in the respondent's first job?
4. How significant are the identified work-related values in the length of time they land their first job?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Graduate tracer studies collect evaluation and feedback from graduates to follow their career development and provide academic policymakers with critical information, according to Cuadra et al. (2019). Further, they are designed to assess the medium-to-long-term effect of educational programs. A better fit between supply and demand for skills is one of the more specific goals (Tun, 2020). According to Heriyadi (2021), tracer studies are crucial for every program of study to guarantee that its curriculum remains current, of high quality, and aligned with labor market needs. Career achievement and knowledge and skills required for their profession are examples of information relevant to tracer studies. Moreover, Apolinario & Oasan (2021) state that many tracer studies assess curriculum relevance, graduate satisfaction, and program completion.

There are many advantages brought forth by graduate tracer survey studies. According to Schomburg (2016), universities employ tracer studies to acquire data from graduates to evaluate the value of higher education, enhance the university, contribute to accreditation, and educate stakeholders. Aspects of graduates' performance outside of higher education (workforce, local adaptability, personal motivation) must also be identified.

Aside from universities, it may give valuable insight on the higher education-workplace connection. They may give precise information regarding job fit horizontally (within scientific domains) or vertically (between educational levels/strata). Thus, tracer studies may assist close employment opportunity disparities (Hariyanto et al., 2021). Several studies have stated that the findings of tracer surveys are inconclusive since only successful or satisfied people participate. However, Andari et al. (2021) found that tracer surveys give essential information on employment and labor market entry, as well as program evaluation.

A skilled workforce is one of the major requirements for South Asian economic success. According to the recent findings of an Asian Development Bank research (Barai, 2021), to move up the value chain, South Asian economies must invest in human capital, especially during this COVID-19 pandemic. The global economy today favors technology and information, according to Cervantes et al. (2019). As such, an effective higher education system should assist graduates to gain knowledge and skills in their chosen career.

Seemiller (2016) proposed the Student Leadership Competencies model, noting that many schools have mission statements that concentrate on developing student leaders who will impact their communities and professions. They explored how the model may be transferred to program/curriculum design. According to Seemiller, a competency-based approach places more focus on the leader than the process of leadership. A common vocabulary for discussion and evaluation of workers' leadership skills may still be provided through the competencies approach.

In the Philippines, there have been several graduate tracer studies conducted in various colleges and universities. In a graduate tracer study by Tun (2020), on Lyceum of the Philippines University-Laguna (LPU-Laguna) graduates in Management Accounting, Marketing Management, and Operations Management, results show that majority of respondents were hired within 1 to 6 months in a field related to their degree. Further, 84% of graduates found work within 6 months after graduation which implies that Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA) graduates are highly employable. It matches the characteristics of management accounting and marketing management academic programs of the said university.

Further, an analysis of Philippine Normal University (PNU) graduates by Gines (2014) revealed the curriculum's strengths and weaknesses in terms of sufficiency, quality, and marketability. A semester-long practicum for male graduating high school students was also proposed. Results of Cornillez et al.'s (2021) teacher education graduate tracer study show that respondents are public school teachers who stayed in the academic sector for financial reasons. The study's findings may assist the college to enhance links with local schools and governments while expanding job choices for graduates. This must be properly addressed while offering balanced and appropriate training for students to improve their occupational competence.

However, results of Ramirez et al.'s (2014) tracer study of graduates from Rizal Technological University (RTU) which focused on single female graduates from school year 2006 to 2011, in the business administration discipline, had a distinct perspective on its results. Those graduates who chose local employment over international work, had little unemployment, and almost no self-employment. A few graduates continued their education to advance personal or professional objectives. In this manner, education needs to improve communication, analytical thinking, interpersonal relationships, and information technology skills.

With this, the findings and suggestions reported in the reviewed literature and studies highlight the importance of graduate tracer studies especially in curriculum development, program refinement, and future career growth.

DESIGN AND METHODS

This study utilized cross-sectional survey which was conducted at Lyceum of the Philippines University (LPU) Manila campus. It was distributed via online Google Forms at the height of Covid-19 pandemic between February to May 2021.

The survey for Manila campus yielded a total of 478 responses. It covered those who graduated between 2002 to July 2021. A call to participate was posted on the official Facebook page of the school and was aggressively promoted by respective colleges. Those graduates who were not reached were not considered as respondents in this study. The survey was part of a larger cohort study composed of the four (4) campuses of LPU.

Some limitations of the study include: (1) limited access on the survey as it was administered using online Google form; (2) Responses were provided at a hurried pace, which makes the questionnaire vulnerable to invalid coding; (3) The questionnaire was in an open-ended form which produced some unreliable and invalid data. Recommendations were provided at the end of the study to bridge this gap and to consider future improvement in the content of and delivery of the survey questionnaire.

Instrument Tool

The survey instrument tool used in the study was a Graduate Tracer Study (GTS) by which pertinent information were lifted from the GTS of Commission on Higher Education (CHED) of the Philippines. Data was processed, organized, and analyzed using Microsoft Excel and Jamovi statistics software.

The survey is composed of three (3) parts covering the demographic variables, nature of their employment, and the competency skills developed by LPU. The first two (2) parts utilized a combination of open-ended and multiple-choice response, while the last part is in the form of 5-point Likert scale. It was administered institutionally to all colleges within the three (3) month period. Five (5) colleges participated in with the College of International Tourism and Hospitality Management having the highest respondents (see Table 1) while the College of Arts and Sciences gained the least responses from its graduates.

Analysis

To address the research questions, the study applied a combination of descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation. Descriptive statistics was utilized to get the frequency tables, cross-tabulations, and summary percentages of (1) graduates' demographic characteristics; (2) status of employment; (3) reasons for staying in the job; (4) job search time; and (5) considerations in pursuing advance studies. Correlations are tested for statistical significance using Pearson's r . The p-values of the relevant test statistics are shown in the tables.

Ethical consideration

Ethical considerations were strictly followed during the data gathering process. The researchers ensured that the respondents have fully read and signed the informed consent form prior to their actual participation by ensuring the there was a consent agreement notice signed and agreed at the beginning of the form.

Curated data removed all personal information of the respondents that may lead to their identification. Finally, the researchers, in the entire duration of the study respected the decision of the respondents who decided to withdraw their participation.

Table 1. Number of graduates according to degree and program

| Degree/Program | <i>f</i> | % |
|--|----------|-------|
| BA in Communication Major in Integrated Marketing Communications | 2 | 0.42 |
| BA in Journalism | 4 | 0.85 |
| BA in Broadcasting | 8 | 1.71 |
| BA in Multimedia Arts | 6 | 1.28 |
| BS in Psychology | 8 | 1.71 |
| BA in Legal Management | 3 | 0.64 |
| BS in Accountancy | 6 | 1.28 |
| BS in Management Accounting | 45 | 9.63 |
| BS in Customs Administration: | 40 | 8.56 |
| BS in Business Administration: | | |
| Major in Business Management | 12 | 2.56 |
| Major in Marketing Management | 11 | 2.35 |
| Major in Operations Management | 2 | 0.42 |
| BS in Computer Science | 36 | 7.7 |
| BS in Information Technology | 43 | 9.2 |
| AB Foreign Service: | | |
| Major in Diplomacy | 59 | 12.63 |
| Major in International Trade | 17 | 3.64 |
| BS in International Travel and Tourism Management | 68 | 14.56 |
| BS International Hospitality Management: | | |
| Major in Hotel and Restaurant Administration | 18 | 3.85 |
| Major in Cruise Line Operations in Culinary Arts | 40 | 8.56 |
| Major in Cruise Line Operations in Hotel Services | 19 | 4.06 |
| Major in Culinary and Kitchen Operations | 20 | 4.28 |
| Prefer not to mention | 10 | 2.09 |

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Characteristics

As shown on Table 2, 278 (58.28%) out of 477 respondents were female while 199 (41.72%) were male. Majority who participated in the survey came from the year batches 2017-2019 with 123 (39.05%) males and 192 (60.95%) females. Although the survey originally designed to cover graduates between 2014 to 2021, there were still alumni from previous batches who participated in. A total of 37 (7.76%) came from 2008- 2013 batches and 4 (0.84%) respondents came from batches 2002-2007. 6 (1.2%) respondents preferred not to indicate their batch year for unknown reasons.

Table 2 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents according to Gender and Year Graduated

| Year Graduated | frequency (%) according to gender and year graduated | | |
|----------------|--|------------|-----------|
| | Male | Female | Total |
| 2002-2007 | 0 (0) | 4 (100.00) | 4 (0.84) |
| 2008-2013 | 13 (35.14) | 24 (64.86) | 37 (7.76) |
| 2014-2016 | 12 (27.27) | 32 (72.73) | 44 (9.22) |

| | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| 2017-2019 | 123 (39.05) | 192 (60.95) | 315 (66.04) |
| 2020-2021 | 47 (66.20) | 24 (33.80) | 71 (14.88) |
| prefer not to mention | 4 (66.67) | 2 (33.33) | 6 (1.26) |
| Total | 199 (41.72) | 278 (58.28) | 477 (100.00) |

Moreover, a total of 15 programs were identified as representation of responses (see Table 1). The most number of responses came from Bachelor of Science in International Travel and Tourism Management yielding 68 responses or 14.56%, followed by Bachelor of Arts in Foreign Service major in Diplomacy which received 59 responses or 12.63%. It is also worth noting to mention that out of 7 programs that received below 10 responses, 6 programs were from the College of Arts and Sciences. Additionally, there were 10 respondents or 2.09% preferred not to mention their programs.

On Employment Status

272 or 57.1% of the respondents landed a regular or permanent position in their present employment status, followed by being self-employed at 65 or 13.6% responses, with which includes being referenced to freelance work for someone or having one's own business (see Table 3.1).

52 respondents or 10.9% preferred not to mention their current employment status, which is a little lower than the response rate of those who have contractual employment at 54 or 11.3%. Temporary employment is represented by 23 or 4.8% and those having casual jobs in informal sectors from 11 respondents or 2.3%.

Table 3.1 Demographic characteristics of Respondents according to Present Employment Status

| Employment Status | <i>f</i> | % |
|-----------------------|----------|------|
| Regular/Permanent | 272 | 57.1 |
| Contractual | 54 | 11.3 |
| Casual | 11 | 2.3 |
| Temporary | 23 | 4.8 |
| Self-Employed | 65 | 13.6 |
| Prefer not to mention | 52 | 10.9 |
| Total | 477 | 100 |

As can be gleaned on Table 3.2, 332 (69.60%) respondents have been gainfully employed with either holding a regular position or a full-time job, that is related to their field of specialization, followed by 76 or 15.93% respondents who are underemployed, including those who hold a part-time job. There is a thin line of difference of only 7 respondents or 1.4% between those who are underemployed and self-employed, which implies the thin margin between the skills related to self-employment and underemployment. A study conducted by Ngwenya et al. (2020) found out the shock absorber role of informal employment to the skills of self-employed an underemployed worker. The prevalence of skills-related underemployment points to the informal sector including those who wish to own a business or enterprise.

Table 3.2 Consideration of Pursuing Advance Studies with reference to their Nature of Employment

| Nature of Employment | frequency (%) of Respondents who consider advanced studies | | |
|---|--|-----------------|-------------|
| | Yes <i>f</i> (%) | No <i>f</i> (%) | TOTAL |
| Gainfully Employed (with Regular or Full-time Job; Job held is related to the field of specialization) | 129 (38.86) | 203 (61.14) | 332 (69.60) |
| Underemployed (with Part-time Job; Job is not related to the field of specialization) | 33 (43.42) | 43 (56.58) | 76 (15.93) |
| Self-Employed (working for oneself or from one's own profession or business; not working for another firm and drawing a salary) | 24 (34.78) | 45 (65.22) | 69 (14.47) |
| Total | 186 (38.99) | 291 (61.01) | 477 (100) |

Of the 186 graduates who plan and is currently pursuing advanced studies, 149 (31.2%) believed it contributes to their professional development. Similarly, 21 or 4.4% deemed it important for promotion. Job requirements are the reasons of 9 respondents (1.9%) to pursue advanced studies while 7 (1.5%) pursue it for personal interest.

Salaries and benefits are the top considerations why most LPU graduates stay longer and commit to their present job. On the other hand, career challenges are the second reason graduates stay. This remains unchanged from the graduates of LPU Batangas

who also consider salaries and benefits as top determinants of their length of stay in their current job, followed by career challenge (Celis, Festijo & Cueto, 2013).

Table 3. 3 Frequency Distribution of Respondents' Reasons for Staying in the Present Job

| Reasons for Staying in the Present Job | <i>f</i> | % |
|--|----------|-------|
| Career Challenge | 258 | 54.09 |
| Related to Special Skill | 168 | 35.22 |
| Proximity to Residence | 94 | 19.71 |
| Family Influence | 48 | 10.06 |
| Salaries and Benefits | 307 | 64.36 |
| Related to Course or Program Study | 189 | 39.62 |
| Peer Influence | 22 | 4.61 |
| Personal Choice/Exploring Myself | 4 | 0.84 |
| Excellent Work Environment | 4 | 0.84 |
| Prefer not to mention | 40 | 8.39 |

On Job Search Time

In terms of job search period from the time they graduated, 185 or 38.78% respondents were able to find a job within the six (6) month period. 154 or 32.28% aced to land a job in less than a month after graduation. A similar tracer study conducted by La Consolacion University Philippines (Cervantes, Centeno & Dayao, 2019) showed that their graduates were also hired in a span of one (1) to six (6) months.

Table 4 Frequency Distribution on the Length of Time to Land in their First Job

| Length of Time | <i>f</i> | % |
|-----------------------------|----------|-------|
| Less than a month | 154 | 32.28 |
| 1 – 6 months | 185 | 38.78 |
| 7 – 11 months | 41 | 8.59 |
| 1 year – less than 2 years | 48 | 10.06 |
| 2 years – less than 3 years | 11 | 2.31 |
| 3 years – less than 4 years | 5 | 1.06 |
| Prefer not to mention | 33 | 6.92 |

Table 5 shows the top competencies graduates acquired upon completion of their program in LPU Manila. The choice for acquired competencies are in the form of multiple response. Communication skills, followed by critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills are among the top skills graduates have learned in college which they find relevant when they landed their first job. It can be noted that entrepreneurial skills are the least relevant among the listed competencies. This is opposing to the findings of a study conducted by LPU Batangas in 2013 wherein Entrepreneurial skills topped among the listed competencies and in fact, it is included in the program curriculum as part of a graduate attribute (Celis, Festijo & Cueto, 2013). It is recommended that the following listed competencies be reviewed again and define them according to the usefulness or relevance in the current workplace setting.

Table 5. Frequency Distribution in terms of Acquired Competencies Relevant to their First Job

| Competencies Useful at Work | <i>f</i> | % |
|-----------------------------|----------|-------|
| Communication Skills | 364 | 76.31 |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|-----|-------|
| Course-related Skills | 224 | 46.96 |
| Critical thinking Skills | 292 | 61.21 |
| Problem-solving Skills | 250 | 52.41 |
| Human-relation Skills | 234 | 49.06 |
| Entrepreneurial Skills | 106 | 22.22 |
| Information Technology Skills | 160 | 33.54 |

Work-related Values among Lycean Graduates

Results in Table 6 show the attributes or work-related values that contribute to the employability success of the graduates. They are rated using a 5-point Likert scale with values: 5- very much; 4- much, 3- little, 2- very little, 1- not at all. It can be perceived that perseverance and hard work matters most among the graduates with the highest weighted mean of 4.71, followed by professional integrity at 4.70. Nationalism ranked the lowest with a weighted mean of 4.32.

Table 6. Work-related values or attributes among Lycean Graduates

| Work-related Values | Weighted Mean | SD | Rank |
|--------------------------------|---------------|------|------|
| Love of God | 4.37 | 0.99 | 13 |
| Honesty and Love for Truth | 4.64 | 0.66 | 3 |
| Punctuality | 4.61 | 0.70 | 5 |
| Obedience to Superior | 4.56 | 0.72 | 6 |
| Perseverance and Hard work | 4.71 | 0.61 | 1 |
| Creativity and Innovativeness | 4.49 | 0.76 | 10 |
| Courage | 4.54 | 0.73 | 7 |
| Professional Integrity | 4.70 | 0.64 | 2 |
| Love for Co-workers and Others | 4.45 | 0.77 | 11 |
| Unity | 4.50 | 0.74 | 9 |
| Fairness and Justice | 4.50 | 0.74 | 9 |
| Leadership | 4.53 | 0.80 | 8 |
| Tolerance | 4.41 | 0.79 | 12 |
| Efficiency | 4.63 | 0.66 | 4 |
| Supportiveness | 4.54 | 0.74 | 7 |
| Perseverance | 4.61 | 0.67 | 5 |
| Nationalism | 4.32 | 0.93 | 14 |
| Composite Mean | 4.54 | | |

Table 6 discusses the Pearson correlation results which explains the significance level of identified work-related values on the job search time of the graduates from the time they landed their first job. Among the 17 values, only efficiency as a work-related value resulted as significantly related at $p < 0.05$.

Table 6. Relationship between Work-related values and their job search time from their first job

| Work-related Values | How long they take to land their first job? | |
|---------------------|---|---------|
| | r score | p value |
| | | |

| | | |
|--------------------------------|--------|---------|
| Love for God | -0.013 | 0.777 |
| Honesty and love for truth | -0.084 | 0.077 |
| Punctuality | 0.032 | 0.508 |
| Obedience to superior | -0.034 | 0.478 |
| Perseverance and hard work | -0.082 | 0.084 |
| Creativity and innovativeness | -0.05 | 0.293 |
| Courage | -0.013 | 0.777 |
| Professional Integrity | -0.072 | 0.128 |
| Love for co-workers and others | -0.063 | 0.183 |
| Unity | -0.058 | 0.226 |
| Fairness and Justice | -0.053 | 0.264 |
| Leadership | -0.083 | 0.079 |
| Tolerance | -0.082 | 0.086 |
| Efficiency | -0.098 | 0.039** |
| Supportiveness | -0.031 | 0.517 |
| Perseverance | -0.033 | 0.491 |
| Nationalism | 0.026 | 0.584 |

** Correlation is significant at $p < 0.05$.

N= 444

CONCLUSION

Most of the respondents gainfully employed between one to six months after graduation while securing a regular or permanent position. This is an indicator of successful employability in terms of job search time from when they land their first job. Salaries and benefits are still the top considerations in staying or leaving their job. Competencies acquired during their college life are related to communication skills, critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills. Although there is a relatively small number of respondents who opted to pursue advanced studies, it is professional development that contributes to their choice of pursuing advanced studies. Perseverance, professional integrity, and honesty and love for truth are among the work-related values that contribute to the employability success of Lycean graduates. Additionally, it is work efficiency that shows high relevance in terms of landing their first job after graduation.

Recommendation

The correlational analysis shown above may help future researchers to explore more on the factors that contribute to or competencies that led to the graduate's work efficiency. The online questionnaire is also vulnerable to invalid data as some respondents provided irrelevant details that are not congruent to the choices of the item questions, thus contributing to the nullity of some data. Future tracer studies may utilize closed-ended responses or consider textual analysis for open-ended responses (those who answered prefer not to mention). Lastly, it is recommended that a tracer study per program should be done to trace the employability success of the graduates and its contribution to curriculum development and program refinement.

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