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Career Trajectories of Industrial Education Graduates: A Tracer Study

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Abstract

This study investigates the career trajectories and employability of Bachelor of Technical-Vocational Teacher Education (BTVTED) graduates from the Palompon Institute of Technology Tabango, previously the Bachelor of Science in Industrial Education program. Using a graduate tracer study tool developed by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), the research examines the employment status, job relevance, and skill utilization of 58 graduates (78% of the total 74 graduates from 2016–2019). Findings reveal a 76% employment rate, with 61% of graduates working in fields related to their academic specialization. Food Technology emerged as the most preferred specialization, while Automotive Technology showed declining interest. Graduates identified human relation skills, communication skills, and IT competencies as the most valuable in their jobs. However, challenges such as declining job relevance, limited practical experience, and inadequate job-seeking skills hinder employability. Only 2% pursued self-employment, indicating minimal entrepreneurial activity. The study recommends aligning curricula with labor market demands, enhancing industry linkages, and incorporating practical training to improve job readiness. Emphasizing career counseling, entrepreneurial training, and soft skills development can further address employability gaps. The findings provide valuable insights for program enhancements and policy formulation to ensure that graduates are well-equipped for diverse career opportunities in the modern workforce.

Keyword: *Employability, career trajectories, tracer study, industrial education*

Introduction

Graduate tracer studies are essential tools for assessing the effectiveness of educational programs and their alignment with labor market demands. They provide valuable insights into the employment status, job relevance, and skill utilization of graduates, serving as a feedback mechanism for academic institutions to refine their curricula and support services. By understanding

graduates' professional trajectories and the challenges they face, institutions can enhance their programs to produce competitive, industry-ready professionals.

A tracer study is a practical tool that helps determine if the investment in higher education is paying off, aligning with the goals outlined by de Ocampo et al. (2012). As they stated, tertiary education plays a crucial role in reducing poverty and promoting national development. Equipping individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge is essential for achieving these goals. However, if graduates are unable to find suitable employment and contribute to the economy, the investment in their education is considered wasted. This is where tracer studies come in.

The importance of graduate tracer studies is underscored by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). They mandate these studies as a requirement for obtaining program compliance certification. This requirement is further echoed by Biscante et al. (2019), highlighting its role in program evaluation for accreditation purposes within higher education institutions. These studies serve to measure the effectiveness of programs by tracking graduates' success in the workforce.

Additionally, the employability of graduates is one of the outcome indicators under the curriculum and instruction parameter of the new Outcomes-Based Quality Assurance (OBQA) instrument used by the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (AACCUP). Given the aforementioned research and the accreditation requirements for Teacher Education programs in the country, it is crucial to study and trace the engagement of graduates to inform program development and establish a baseline for future research.

While numerous tracer studies have been conducted to evaluate the employment outcomes across various programs, there is limited research on technical-vocational teacher education graduates, especially in rural or regional institutions like Palompon Institute of Technology Tabango. Most existing studies emphasize general employability metrics, neglecting to delve into how program-specific skills translate to workforce requirements or identify curriculum gaps hindering job readiness.

Furthermore, the unique challenges faced by rural graduates, such as limited job opportunities, weak industry linkages, and access to professional development, remain understudied. This creates a gap in understanding how external factors influence employment outcomes and how institutions can better support these graduates.

To address the growing gap between the skills demanded by the industry and the skills acquired by graduates, it is crucial to examine the relevance of current educational programs. Ogwo (2023) emphasized the need to align curricula with industry requirements to produce job-ready graduates.

To ensure the relevance and effectiveness of teacher education programs and to enhance the curriculum to meet the needs of the 21st century, graduate tracer studies are essential. These studies provide valuable insights into the curriculum's impact on graduates' knowledge, skills, values, and global competitiveness, as concluded by Daguplo (2019). As Millington (2001) noted, tracer studies also offer quantitative data on employment, career paths, and professional

experiences.

By tracking graduates' employment outcomes, job relevance, and skill utilization, institutions can identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments to their curricula. As Millington (2001) highlighted, tracer studies provide valuable quantitative data on employment and career paths.

This study aimed to bridge the gap between education and employment by focusing on BTVTED graduates. By investigating their employment profiles, job relevance, and skill utilization, insights can be gained into the factors hindering their employability. Additionally, the study examined the specific reasons for graduate unemployment and underemployment, providing insights into how academic institutions can adapt their programs to enhance employability and meet industry needs effectively. Specifically, this study evaluated graduates' employment status, the relevance of their jobs to their academic background, and the applicability of their college-learned skills. Moreover, the study sought to identify barriers to employment and propose solutions to address them. The findings will help bridge the disconnect between education and employment, particularly in the context of technical-vocational teacher education

The findings of this study will serve as a foundation for program enhancements, policy formulation, and the establishment of industry partnerships to boost employability. Ultimately, this tracer study aims to contribute to the continuous improvement of educational quality and relevance, ensuring that graduates are well-equipped to meet the demands of the modern workforce.

As a developing country, the Philippines faces significant economic and socio-political challenges, primarily driven by high unemployment and underemployment rates among higher education graduates. The disparity between the rapidly increasing population and job creation is a pressing issue. Despite producing a growing number of graduates in various disciplines, including law, education, social work, medicine, and health services, many Filipino graduates struggle to find employment in both private and public sectors.

Objective of the Study

The study aimed to determine the employability of the Bachelor of Technical-Vocational Teacher Education (BTVTED) graduates of Palompon Institute of Technology Tabango from 2016 to 2019.

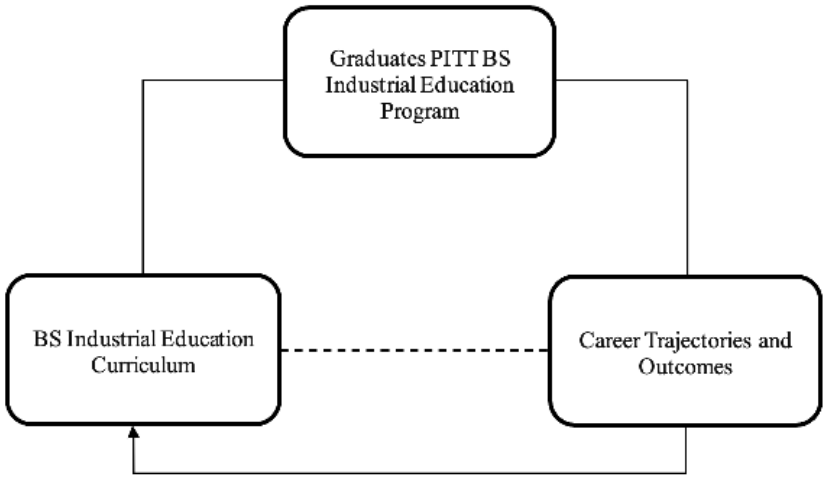
Specifically, the study aimed to answer the following questions as to:

a. Percentage of employment;
b. Employability status;
c. Reasons of Unemployment;
d. Relationship of Current Job to Course Graduated; and
e. Useful Academic Competencies on their Job

Conceptual Framework of the Study

Human capital theory, as defined by Deming (2022), posits that education and training are investments in oneself, yielding future benefits like increased earning potential and improved career prospects. This theory provides a robust framework for understanding the career trajectories of industrial education graduates.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework of the Study



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By investing time and resources in acquiring technical skills and knowledge, industrial education graduates aim to enhance their employability. To assess the effectiveness of these programs, it is crucial to examine the alignment between the skills and competencies acquired by graduates and the demands of the labor market. This involves analyzing the specific skills valued by employers and comparing them to the curriculum and training offered by industrial education programs.

Furthermore, the study aligns with human capital theory by exploring the relationship between educational investments and labor market outcomes. By investigating the career paths of graduates, a program can be assessed through the extent to which their education and training have contributed to their success.

Research Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey technique, which examined the subject's current situation and longitudinal approach to track graduates over time. The survey solely included Bachelor of Science in Industrial Education graduates from Palompon Institute of Technology Tabango. It covered four batches of graduation data from the academic years 2015-2016, 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019.

The researchers used a standardized questionnaire developed by the Commission on Higher Education to collect data from graduates. Various methods, including social media, email, Google Forms, phone interviews, and in-person submissions, were used to contact participants. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: Part 1: Respondent's demographic profile; Part 2: Graduate's job statistics.

The questions were distributed via Google Forms or personally administered. Interviews were also conducted to gather additional data. Upon completion and administration, the questionnaires were collected and retrieved. The collected data were analyzed using statistical techniques such as mean, percentage, and frequency counts to describe the graduates' job status and proportion.

To ensure the ethical conduct of this study, the researchers obtained informed consent from all participants. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. Data were collected and analyzed in accordance with ethical guidelines, and all personal information were kept confidential

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the number of respondents of the study. A total of 74 BSIED/BTVTED graduates from 2016 to 2019 were identified. Of these, 58 (78%) participated in the study. This indicates that a significant portion of the graduates responded to the survey.

Table 1

Number of Respondents

Batch	No. of Graduates	No. of Respondents	%
2016	21	21	100%
2017	16	11	69%
2018	19	14	74%
2019	18	12	67%
Total	74	58	78%

In addition, as noted by Cornesse and Bosnjak (2018), there is a positive association between representativeness and response rate. By ensuring that the sample is representative of the

population, researchers can increase the likelihood of obtaining a higher response rate and more accurate results.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents in Terms of Sex

	Profile Sex (N=58)			
Batch	Male		Female	
	f	%	f	%
201 6	11	52%	10	48%
2017	5	45%	6	55%
2018	7	50%	7	50%
2019	6	50%	6	50%
Total	29	50%	29	50%

Table 2 indicates that the study had an equal number of male and female respondents. Across all batches, the male-to-female ratio is perfectly balanced at 1:1. This suggests that both sexes are equally represented in the BSIED/BTVTED programs and among the respondents. While some batches exhibit slight imbalances (e.g., 2016 and 2017), these differences are not significant. The consistent gender parity in later batches (2018 and 2019) reflects an inclusive and balanced demographic trend.

This balanced representation ensures that any findings or conclusions drawn from the survey are not biased by gender. Both male and female perspectives are equally captured, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the graduates' experiences. As highlighted by Sun et al. (2019), it is crucial to consider gender bias in research. Ensuring a balanced representation of genders in a research sample, as shown in Table 2, is a crucial step in mitigating this bias.

Table 3

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents in Terms of Specialization

	Profile Specialization (N=58)							
Batch	Food Technology		Electrical Technology		Machine Shop Technology		Automotive Technology	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
2016	11	52%	4	19%	3	14%	3	14 %
2017	7	64%	0	0%	2	18%	2	18 %
2018	7	50%	7	50%	0	0%	0	0%
2019	6	50%	2	17%	4	33%	0	0%
Total	31	53%	13	22%	9	16%	5	9%

Table 3 presents the number of students categorized by their field of specialization. Food Technology was the most popular major, comprising over half (53%) of the graduates across all batches. Electrical Technology and Machine Shop Technology experienced fluctuating popularity, with significant increases in 2018 and 2019, respectively. Conversely, Automotive Technology consistently declined, suggesting a lack of interest or perceived career opportunities in this field.

According to Nowosad et al. (2020), pulsed electric field (PEF) technology can be applied to a wide range of food products, including fruits, vegetables, meat, and dairy. This potential can lead to the development of innovative and improved food products, which could subsequently increase the demand for food technologists with expertise in this area.

Additionally, the application of high-voltage electrical pulses in PEF technology requires a strong understanding of electrical engineering principles. This could create opportunities for electrical technologists to work in the food industry.

Furthermore, the design and maintenance of PEF equipment require specialized skills in mechanical technology. This could create job opportunities for machine shop technicians in the food industry.

Table 4

Employability Status of Graduates

Batch	Employability Status									
	Regular or Permanent		Temporary		Casual		Contractual		Self-employed	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
2016	13	68%	1	5%	0	0%	5	26%	0	0%
2017	9	90%	0	0%	0	0%	1	10%	0	0%
2018	2	25%	1	13%	0	0%	4	50%	1	13%
2019	0	0%	2	29%	0	0%	5	71%	0	0%
Total	24	55%	4	9%	0	0%	15	34%	1	2%

As indicated in Table 4, a significant proportion (55%) of BSIED graduates have attained regular or permanent employment, indicating a strong demand for the skills and qualifications offered by the institution. This finding aligns with Kahn's (2018) research, which demonstrates that permanent workers often hold positions with higher levels of complexity, skill requirements, and autonomy. The data suggest a strong demand for the institution's graduates, particularly in regular/permanent roles, highlighting the value placed on their qualifications and the potential for long-term career growth.

While a smaller percentage (9%) are in temporary roles, this still represents a viable employment pathway for some graduates. A substantial number of graduates (34%) are employed

on a casual or contractual basis. This suggests a potential reliance on flexible work arrangements within the industry, a trend supported by research such as Bhalla's (2016) study on the positive impact of flexible work arrangements on productivity.

Only a small fraction (2%) of graduates have opted for self-employment. This could be due to various factors, including lack of entrepreneurial support or a preference for traditional employment.

Table 5

Relationship Between Current Job and Course Graduated From

Employability (N=58)								
Batch	Employed		Not Employed		Related		Not Related	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
2016	19	90%	2	10%	15	79%	4	21%
2017	10	91%	1	9%	6	60%	4	40%
2018	8	57%	6	43%	5	63%	3	38%
2019	7	58%	5	42%	1	14%	6	86%
Total	44	76%	14	24%	27	61%	17	39%

Table 5 shows the association between the graduates' present employment and their degree of study. The data displays their work status (employed or unemployed) as well as whether or not their job is connected to the course from which they graduated. It displays the number of hired graduates from 2016 to 2019. It clearly demonstrates a better employability rate of BSIED program graduates, with 44 (76%) out of 58 employed and 27 (61%) obtained positions relevant to their field of expertise. The employment rate in 2018 and 2019 is much lower than in previous batches (2016 and 2017), which might indicate that fewer graduates from these years found work or encountered difficulties in getting jobs. The 2019 batch has a significantly lower proportion of graduates in relevant occupations (just 14%) compared to 2016 (79%). This trend suggests that by 2019, graduates may have found work in sectors other than their degree or faced increased competition for relevant positions.

The same study by Abelha et al. (2020) highlights a common issue in higher education: a mismatch between the skills and knowledge that graduates acquire and the actual needs of employers. This aligns with the data in Table 5, which shows a significant number of employed graduates working in jobs unrelated to their course of study.

Therefore, it is emphasized that graduates need to develop a diverse range of skills, including technical skills, soft skills, and problem-solving abilities. This aligns with the need for graduates to secure relevant employment in a competitive job market.

Table 6

Reasons for Unemployment

Reasons why some BSIED/BTVTED graduates are not yet employed	F	Rank
Reasons		
Advance or further study	1	5
Family concern and decided not to find a job	4	2
Health-related reason	0	6
Lack of work experience	4	2
No job opportunity	4	2
Did not look for a job	**7**	1

Table 6 presents the primary reasons cited by BSIED/BTVTED graduates for their current unemployment status. The data are categorized and ranked based on the frequency of responses. The most common reason for unemployment is the lack of job search, with seven (7) respondents citing this as the primary factor. This suggests that a significant number of graduates may not be actively seeking employment. The high number of graduates who have not actively sought employment suggests a need for improved career counseling and job search strategies.

The study by Wanberg et al. (2020) emphasizes the importance of a proactive and strategic approach to job seeking. This includes actively networking, utilizing online job boards, and tailoring resumes and cover letters to specific job requirements. The high number of unemployed graduates in Table 6 who did not actively seek employment supports the findings of Wanberg et al. (2020), which emphasize the importance of a proactive job search strategy.

Lack of work experience and no job opportunity. These reasons are tied as the second most common reason, with four (4) respondents citing each. This indicates that a lack of practical experience can hinder job seeking efforts, indicating the importance of internship programs and industry partnerships to bridge the gap between academic learning and industry needs. As noted in the study of Pusiran et al. (2020), internships are the most important experience in terms of student exposure to the real world of the industry. On the other hand, employers also use internship programs to recruit potential candidates to work in their organizations.

Advancement or further study. This reason have the lowest frequency, suggesting that they are less significant factors contributing to unemployment among this group of graduates.

Table 7

Competencies that BSIED/BTVTED Graduates Find Useful to their Jobs

Competencies	f	Rank
Human relation skills	22	1
Communication skills	21	2
Information technology skills	20	3
Critical thinking skills	17	4
Problem-solving skills	15	5
Entrepreneurial skills	14	6

Table 7 lists the academic skills that Bachelor of Science in Industrial Education (BSIED) graduates find most beneficial in their careers. It demonstrates the abilities acquired by BSIED/BTVTED graduates that are relevant to their employment.

Human relation skills and communication skills emerged as the most valuable competencies, occupying the top two ranks. This highlights the importance of interpersonal skills in the workplace. Rahim's (2020) study highlighted the critical role of interpersonal skills in fostering harmony within organizations and improving managerial performance. Effective interpersonal skills are essential for managers to interact successfully with team members and achieve organizational goals.

IT skills rank third, indicating a growing reliance on technology in education and technical occupations. Graduates are likely to employ information technology for instructional delivery, resource generation, and workplace productivity, making it a crucial ability. According to Kucharska et al. (2020), IT-competency drives job satisfaction.

Critical thinking and problem-solving skills ranked fourth and fifth, respectively, emphasizing the need for analytical and problem-solving abilities in the workplace. Tang et al. (2020) also emphasized that critical thinking skills are skills required in the 21st-century workforce. Critical thinking plays an important part in issue analysis, decision-making, and solution development. This is crucial in instructional planning and technological troubleshooting. While problem-solving abilities are vital, their lower ranking suggests that graduates may rely on predetermined answers or collaborative approaches rather than individual problem-solving.

While ranked sixth, entrepreneurial skills are still considered valuable, which may indicate that graduates see their positions as more linked with organized employment rather than entrepreneurial initiatives. However, these talents may still be valuable for resource management or innovation in their respective industries. Additionally, according to Jardim (2021), entrepreneurial skills are important in today's dynamic and competitive job market. By developing these skills, individuals can become more adaptable, innovative, and entrepreneurial, which can benefit them in various work settings.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that the BSIED/BTVTED programs effectively prepare graduates for employment, with a notable 76% employment rate and 61% of graduates working in fields aligned with their specialization. Food Technology emerged as the most sought-after specialization, reflecting strong industry demand, while other fields like Automotive Technology face waning interest, indicating a need for program reevaluation. Competencies such as human relations, communication, and IT skills were identified as essential for graduates' success, highlighting the importance of holistic education.

However, challenges remain. Declining job relevance in later batches suggests a growing mismatch between academic training and industry needs, while unemployment factors such as lack of work experience and inadequate job searching skills highlight areas requiring intervention. Minimal entrepreneurial engagement also suggests the need to foster innovation and self-employment pathways.

In conclusion, while the programs exhibit strengths in producing employable graduates, there is room for improvement. Enhancing curriculum relevance, strengthening industry partnerships, and offering robust career support can address employability gaps. Additionally, promoting soft skills, practical experience, and entrepreneurial training will better prepare graduates for diverse career paths in an evolving job market. Continuous evaluation and adaptation of programs are essential to maintaining graduate success and industry alignment.

Recommendations

To enhance graduate employability and address key challenges, the institution should focus on aligning its programs with industry demands, particularly for less-preferred specializations such as Automotive Technology. Incorporating emerging interdisciplinary knowledge, like PEF technology applications, can broaden career opportunities for graduates. Strengthening industry partnerships through robust internship programs and collaborative projects is essential to provide students with practical experience and ensure alignment with employer expectations.

Additionally, comprehensive career support services, including enhanced counseling, job placement assistance, and entrepreneurial training, should be prioritized to equip graduates for both traditional employment and self-employment pathways. Soft skills development, such as communication, human relations, and problem-solving, must be integrated into the curriculum to address workplace expectations and foster adaptability. Entrepreneurial training should also be emphasized to encourage innovation and independence among graduates.

Continuous evaluation and improvement are critical. Regular tracer studies, alongside alumni and employer feedback, should be conducted to identify evolving industry trends and align programs accordingly. These measures will ensure that the institution's programs remain relevant and responsive to market needs, better preparing graduates for diverse career opportunities while addressing existing gaps in employability and skill alignment.

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