RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Tracer Study on the Bachelor of Agricultural Technology Graduates of Batch 2019 of Isabela State University – San Mateo Campus

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Abstract
A tracer review is one of the easiest ways to gauge the efficacy of a system. The study's aim was to determine the graduates 'profile, the status of employability, the relevance of their course to their present job, the graduates' learning skills to their present job and to evaluate the quality of education at the ISU-San Mateo campus. Data were collected by sending online questionnaires with their active social media and email accounts to graduates and handing out questionnaires to graduates working nearby agencies and institutions. Findings from the study revealed that graduates revealed that their degree is relevant to their job, and they are equipped with different skills to compete in the global market but still experienced tight competition and no immediate vacancy that causes them to be on probation, part-time, and seasonally employed.

Introduction

Education plays an important role in manpower development which can provide leadership to national development efforts. It forms the human capital required to promote at least two essential growth drivers-education and study. This research is important in order to understand how a university has done in terms of improving its students 'competencies and preparing them for the work world (Cagasan, 2017).

Institutions engaged in human resource development through long-term and short-term programs have a responsibility to keep track of their graduates' success in evaluating accountability and whether their programs have impacted the person, organization, etc or not. Tracer research constitutes one type of analytical analysis that offers useful information for assessing the outcomes of a specific higher education institution's education and training. Such knowledge can be used in the sense of quality control to further improve the institution. (Mundo et. al., 2019) The graduates are seen as the strongest proof of the success of a program in terms of jobs and positions held. In addition, they provide a clear source of input about the importance of the system in the current labor market.

The survey questions were related to the graduates' qualifications prior to their entry into higher education, their education background, their eligibilities, their employment, their length of time in looking job, the reasons for the delay of employment, the factors that facilitate their first or present job, employment status, the relevance of their college degree in their present job, their competencies learned in college that is useful in their job and assess the quality of education at ISU-San Mateo Campus. The Bachelor of Agricultural Technology is now in its fifth year of service and has been able to deliver the first batch of graduates in 2019, this paper looks at a tracer analysis to assess the importance of the curricula. The results obtained from the first batch of graduates will provide the necessary inputs to help the Campus develop its services. The Commission on Higher Education orders all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to conduct a report on the tracer. Tracer studies are also expected of HEIs seeking accreditation from accrediting bodies such as the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (AACCUP) for state universities and colleges like ISU.

This tracer research aimed to classify the graduates ' situation after completing their qualifications to determine the effect of further and higher education. The study also tackled the fit between the training provided and the labor market needs. It may help to increase the importance and sensitivity of further and higher education to the needs of the labor market on the one hand, and the needs of the community of the diverse students on the other.

The research focused only on the Bachelor of Agricultural Technology first batch of graduate jobs using a descriptive survey method using the GTS questionnaire which was developed by the Commission on Higher Education as the basis for constructing the questionnaire to derive the necessary details from the study's respondents. The questionnaire consisted of three sections that reported the following inputs: the respondent profile, educational background, and relevant information, and respondents' job status data. A random sample of the first class of BAT Graduates in 2019 was included in the actual responses, with a sample size of 25. Data obtained from the questionnaire used were tabulated and analyzed. The frequency count and percentage were the instruments used to measure the data derived from the survey conducted.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 indicates the frequency and percentage distribution according to age of the respondents and sex. It can be gleaned from the table that, when the questionnaire was administered, most of the BAT graduates fall between 21 – 23. This implies that the respondents are still young as they have just graduated from their baccalaureate. 14 males or 56% of the total number of participants and 11 females or 44% of the respondents were tapped to answer the data gathering instrument used in the study.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Respondents According to Age and Sex

	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
18 – 20	3	12%
21 – 23	20	80%
24 – 26	2	8%
Sex		
Male	14	56%
Female	11	44%

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents According to their Employability

	Frequency	Percentage
Length of Time		
Below 1 Year	24	96%
More than 1 Year	1	4%
Employment Status		
Permanent	1	4%
Temporary	3	12%
Casual/Contractual	4	16%
Job Order	5	20%
Other	12	48%
Job After Graduation		
Private	18	72%
Government	7	28%
Monthly Salary		
Below – 5, 000	1	4%
5, 000 – 9, 999	11	44%
10, 000 – 14, 999	5	20%
15, 000 – 20, 999	7	28%
20, 000 – 24, 999	1	4%
Reasons for Delay of Employment		
Delay in the issuance of school-credentials	1	4%
Delay in the issuance of other needed documents	2	8%
No immediate vacancy	6	24%
Tight competition for the job	6	24%
Available jobs are not in line with specialization	4	16%
Lack financial support for job hunting	5	20%
Not emotionally ready	1	4%

Table 2 represents respondents' frequency and percentage distribution based on the period of time they are searching for work, job status, and reasons for employment. The graduates took a short time to land a job with 1 graduate who was able to land a job for more than one (1) year. It was also gleaned from the data presented in the table that one (1) of the respondents was given a status of permanency while three (3) as temporary, four (4) for Casual or Contractual, five (5) for job order while the other respondents are under probationary, part-time, and seasonal job. It also reflects that most of the graduates or eighteen (18) of them had their first jobs under the private sector while seven (7) were connected with the government. This implies that there are many jobs offered in private establishments. Most also of the respondents' or eleven (11) of them received a monthly salary of Php. 5,000 – Php. 9, 999, seven (7) received a salary of Php. 15, 000 – Php. 20, 999, five (5) of them received Php. 10, 000 – Php. 14, 999 while the others received a monthly salary of below Php. 5, 000 and a monthly salary of Php. 20, 000 – Php. 24, 999. The salaries differ because of the different classifications of the jobs of the respondents. Nevertheless, it can be gleaned that the majority of graduates have encountered strong competition for the job and no immediate vacancy, while the others are facing other reasons for their delay.

Table 3. Frequency and Percentage Distribution where the respondents are working

	Frequency	Percentage
Government Agencies	3	12%
Local Government Units	2	8%
Agricultural Industry	12	48%
Merchandising Companies	4	16%
Not Indicated	4	16%

Table 3 presents employers and the type of establishment where the first batch of graduates are employed. The result connotes that most of the respondents or twelve (12) or 48% are working in agricultural industries followed by four (4) or (16%) who are employed at merchandising companies, three (3) or 12% are working in government agencies, and two (2) or 8% are working at local government.

Table 4. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents According to Relevance of College Degree in the Present Job.

	Frequency	Percentage
Very Relevant	14	56%
Relevant	6	24%
Fairly Relevant	3	12%
Not Relevant	2	8%

Table 4 data shows the frequency and percentage distribution of respondents in terms of the importance of their degree in their current work. The data showed that their college degree was highly important in getting them to land their current jobs; six (6) or 24% said it was significant, three (3) or 12% said it was relatively important, while two (2) or 8 %t said it was not significant. In the light of these facts, the information presented clearly showed the high percentage of graduates' employability as demonstrated by the importance of their degree to successfully landing their first jobs and as employees.

Table 5. Competencies Learned by the Respondents which are Relevant to their Present Job

	Frequency	Rank
Communication Skills	22	1
Human Relation/Inter Personal Skills	17	2
Leadership/Managerial Skills	13	4.5
Entrepreneurial Skills	7	8
Information Technology Skills	15	3
Problem Solving Skills	13	4.5
Critical Thinking Skills	11	6
Research and Extension Skills	10	7

Table 5 indicates that the respondents were prepared to be equipped with various skills as their tools to compete in the global job market. The communication skills were deemed the most important and appropriate as revealed by the respondents. In addition, their human relationships / interpersonal skills, IT skills, problem-solving skills, and leadership / managerial skills are even important in their current work. It was further stated that because of the skills they possessed, they easily adapted themselves to their respective employment. According to Panit (2013) skills have a highly influential connection with the status of the job because their skills may be an influential or added attribute to their employability.

Table 6. Assessment on the Quality of Education at ISU-San Mateo Campus

Factors	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Needs Improvement
Curriculum/ Course Content	21	4	0	0	0
Methods of Instruction	20	4	1	0	0
Faculty	18	6	1	0	0
Facilities					
Library	20	5	0	0	0
Laboratories	14	9	2	0	0
Physical Plan	16	8	1	0	0
Student Service	23	2	0	0	0
Career	12	4	4	2	3
Guidance	15	4	0	0	1
Housing/ DormsJob	9	2	0	0	1
Placement					
Academic Counseling					
Research Services	15	7	2	0	1
Extension Services	17	6	1	0	1
General Administration	15	9	1	0	0

Table 6 shows how the ISU-San Mateo provides quality education to its students. The data revealed that most of the factors are excellent. The ability to understand the different factors is the most accurate way for learners to measure their success. Still, other factors need to be improved especially on the different students' services and research and extension. This support the claims of Macatangay (2013) that the school related factors were very relevant in the job placement of the respondents.

Conclusion

The Bachelor of Agricultural Technology pursued by the students was able to help them to improve the learning competencies that help them in their employment. The program is relevant in the work environment as proven by the high percentage of employability. These are manifested by the excellent quality education delivered by the ISU-San Mateo campus. Although the results of the study resulted in a satisfaction tracer study should be also conducted on all graduates of the program and a yearly update on the employment status of the graduates should be made to determine their status. This Tracer study was also conducted to enable our institution to get information on possible deficits in a given educational programmed

which can serve as a basis for curricular improvement or enhancement which might help to broaden perspectives among administrators, faculty and students. Furthermore, it also served as benchmark in establishing a stronger partnership and expansion of tie-ups with various institutions and agencies for the possible employment of graduates and it also looked into the skills and competencies in teacher education provided during their undergraduate studies if these existing programs were still effective, adequate and relevant in responding to the rapid and complex changes brought about by emerging developments. Further, based on the findings and conclusions of this study, other recommendations are as follows: Institutionalize system-wide the conduct of tracer studies every other school year to include not only the graduates but also the employers as respondents; Intensify and offer attractive incentives to graduating senior high school students to enter the agricultural courses. Lastly, the University/Campus should also help the graduates to seek employment for all the graduates by coordinating or creating linkages to other agencies or companies.

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