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Job Search Time and Self-Perceptions of Curriculum Impact among Technology and Livelihood Majors in Mindanao University of Science and Technology

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ABSTRACT

Higher education is more than just a simple production line for job-ready graduates as it is the role of HEIs to provide relevant technical and vocational trainings on top of a well-planned curriculum, solid teaching force, and sustainable instructional infrastructures. Pursuant to RA 7722, this graduate tracer study of BSEd-TLE alumni from SY 2008-2009 to SY 2011-2012 measures job search time and self-perceptions of curriculum impact on self-esteem, financial assistance extended, and financial capability. This descriptive research (n=41) examined these variables as influenced by personal and educational profile. Waiting time for the first job with a mean of 6.44 months (between one to 18 months) is seem to be unaffected by both personal and educational profile. On average, the respondents expressed optimism on the effect the TLE curriculum on their self-esteem. Evidence suggests very high ratings in competence, confidence, commitment, compassion, faith, hope, honesty, diligence, hard work, punctuality, self-discipline, and zeal for service. Inferential statistics shows

only grade point average had a significant influence on self-perceptions of self-esteem effects. Furthermore, TLE majors explained they are moderately able to support basic, educational, and shelter needs. The results warrant further analysis and follow-up so necessary revisions to the curriculum may be in order.

Keywords – Education, job search time, self-perceptions, curriculum impact, descriptive design, Mindanao University of Science and Technology, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally viewed as an investment for the future, education is key to providing individuals with knowledge, skills and competencies needed to participate effectively in society and economy. By investing in people, education serves as a powerful driver of development. Likewise, it is one of the strongest instruments in poverty alleviation (World Bank, 2008).

The significant place education has in improving the quality of life is felt in multifarious international and national efforts. One prominent example is the launching of World Bank's Education Strategy 2020, Learning for All: Investing in People's Knowledge and Skills To Promote Development. This ten-year roadmap is keen towards increasing learning for all by investing early and smartly for the good of all. What does learning for all means? It is simply making education an equal opportunity for all so that knowledge and skills may be acquired for healthier and more satisfying lives. "Learning for All" is also intended in the creation of law-abiding and productive citizenry of the society. The Philippine Constitution states that "The State shall give priority to education, science and technology, arts, culture, and sports to foster patriotism and nationalism, accelerate social progress, and promote total human development" (The Constitution of the Philippines, 1987). Access to education holds both individual and national implications to economic sustainability.

As it has been observed for the past five years, global economies have plunged into recession- deemed to be deeper and far-reaching. In January, the International Monetary Fund global growth forecast was reduced from 2.2% to 0.5% in 2009 (Chandy, Gertz, & Linn, 2009). The IMF projection came as no surprise when economists around the world gave the same estimate. The economic scenario behind the figures should motivate leaders of developing nations to synchronize their programs in developing skills and capacities of the workforce that are critically needed for economic security and success. The reality is that poverty and unemployment are on the rise especially in emerging nations

(Playfoot, 2009; Hall, 2009).

Research findings suggested that "the lack of a critical pool of graduates with the necessary thinking, technical and behavioral competencies are among the factors constraining the achievement of the full potential of the service sectors. The reality of an ASEAN community by 2015, will facilitate the free flow of qualified labor in the region will either open up opportunities for graduates of Philippine HEIs or threaten their employment even in their own country, " (Section 5, CHED MEMO No.46, series of 2012).

Regardless of HEI, quality of graduates is regarded as a yardstick in measuring the extent of any university's investment in developing its human resources. Thinking along this line, the graduates represent the university's human capital and epitomize the image that their alma mater has. The success of the graduates gain in their employment will certainly enhance the image of the university and their educators who nurtured them. On the other hand, graduates' failure will adversely affect the standing of the institution where they received their tertiary education. "More than ever before universities are being relied upon as a vehicle for the advancement of both the national economy and wider society. They do this through the creation of new knowledge and by preparing graduates with appropriate skills and attributes. It makes sense, then, for them to maintain a focus on keeping graduate capabilities in line with the needs of the economy and society" (DEST, 2002 p. 25).

According to Laraya (2009), employability is a determinant to full employment. Year after year, the trend on the number of graduates in HEIs keeps on escalating. Yet, many graduates find themselves unemployed after earning a degree. In July 2009, youth unemployment accounted for more than half of total unemployed. Young persons in the 15 to 24 age group numbered 1,542,000 or 52.7 percent dominating the unemployed workforce (National Statistics Office, 2009 as cited in UNESCO, 2012). In addressing the problem of unemployment among graduates in HEIs, there is a marked interest in measuring employability skills through conduct of graduate tracer studies. McQuaid, Green, and Danson (2006) as cited in Belt, Drake, and Chapman (2010) provided a holistic framework of employability which depends on both individual and environmental factors.

To boost employability, Debono (2004) asserted that the course offerings in the school should accord students with necessary tools, increase awareness of these skills and heighten their capability of articulating them. Though acquired in school, honing them does not end in the confines of the classroom; it spans throughout a graduate's working life. However, course content may be limited in a semester. In tertiary courses, content is divided into theoretical and laboratory

where the former is taught in the classroom while the latter in the laboratory or field setups. Instructors are often constrained with time which translates to students gaining a good amount of knowledge on the theoretical aspect of the course while lacking practical skills (Knight; Yorke, 2004). HEIs should be encouraged to integrate and likewise review job-relevant attributes expected of graduates at the same time promote generic skill development (Crebert, Bates, Bell, Patrick, & Cragnolini, 2004; Wilton, 2008; Bridgstock, 2009) so they would be "appealing to multiple employers across multiple work contexts and disciplines" (Bridgstock, 2009, p. 32).

Time and time again, graduates are urged to enhance their personal experiences, qualities and skills further, in order to increase their competitiveness in the labor market (Moreau & Leatherwood, 2006; McQuaid 2005; Lindsay, 2005). The challenge ahead is to achieve a better understanding of employability in BSED-TLE graduates of Mindanao University of Science and Technology from SY 2008-2009 to SY 2011-2012. Thus, a tracer study should be in place not only for the purpose of locating them but more importantly generate a comprehensive and empirical portrait describing salient employment parameters of graduates. In this study, graduate employability was determined by taking into consideration the period/ of time from graduation to getting employed on the first job. Furthermore, impact of the TLE curriculum on their self-esteem, capability to provide financial assistance to their families was also determined.

Hopefully, the study will delineate policy imperatives for greater relevance of higher education curricula to industry needs and expectations. In like manner, it is vital to identify and document various skills gained by alumni while in college and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the program. It is also essential to determine the extent of relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of BSEd-TLE curriculum as a paradigm for curricular enhancement and revision in support of the newly implemented and launched K to 12 Educational System of DepEd.

FRAMEWORK

The study is grounded on the notion that the success of any educational program is largely dependent on both institution- and student-related factors. In like manner, employability and economic productivity and/or workplace success of graduates could be gleaned from academic performance. This can be measured by the graduates' theoretical knowledge and practical skills acquired in their chosen course that might be relevant to their work after graduation. One theory from which the study was based is the "Employability Skills Framework",

outlined in Employability skills for the future (DEST, 2002) which was being developed to identify various skills that must be developed and considers at the suitability of these Employability Skills Framework in the higher education sector. Communication, teamwork and innovation, for example, are skills widely recognized as important to the new economy and all job roles. The framework simply presents a generic suite of skills and attributes that are common across industries and are applicable to businesses of all sizes and types. It also applies to people at all levels in/ any given business enterprise, from the most junior to the most senior of employees.

Although it describes clearly what skills employers want, the Employability Skills Framework is also consistent with university educational objectives. In the time since Employability Skills for the Future was released, and the Employability Skills Framework implemented in the VET sector, employers have continued to emphasize both the importance of and need for employees and graduates who possess the required mix of these skills (AI Group 2006 in ACCI 2007). These problems present a significant impediment to employability: inadequate basic (numeracy, literacy) and key (interpersonal, IT, problem solving) skills, lack of skills pertinent to *a* specific type of work or job, low confidence and self-esteem, below-par social skills, absence of current work experience as well as behavioral and personal concerns. Similarly, Becker (1993) defined marketability as the individual's ability of obtaining and sustaining a job. Furthermore, economic productivity is operationally defined as the level of performance or success/ of certain educational program through an organized school system and is being manifested by its final products which are the graduates.

Guided by such definition, employability, or marketability and economic productivity as conceptualized is influenced by two clusters of factors which are student-related and school-related. The success of the educational program depends on the interplay and influence of the components of these two main factors. The student-related factors comprise the personal characteristics, family (cultural and religious) background, socio-economic status, previous working experience (prior to graduation), and grade point average (GPA). It is believed that the student's background and experiences including occupation, education, and income level of parents, parenting style of their parents and their behavior and/or temperament are factors that tend to affect the student's behavior, attitude and academic achievement and performance. Together with this background and parental influences, the grade point average or academic performance is developed which might affect the graduate's future employability.

In like manner, the institution constituting the training ground for student development is undeniably a contributory factor for his future economic productivity. The school should adopt a curricular program that caters into the needs of society. Its faculty members must be highly competent in their fields of specialization and training in order to produce competent graduates. The faculty should be masters of their respective discipline, with good command of the English language as a medium of communication. They must be friendly and approachable, but professionally and morally ethical. They should be knowledgeable of various teaching techniques and strategies tailored-to-fit according to the needs of students to maximize learning. On the other hand, the opposite characteristics of a faculty would make her inefficient and ineffective inside the classroom and would be disastrous to student learning processes resulting in a sub-standard and irrelevant training for the students (Indo, 1999).

Moreover, inadequate and outmoded school facilities would result in low-quality outputs/products, who are graduates. Regarding community service or outreaches, the school should establish a collaborative income generating projects to promote close and cordial relationships. Ideally, the students should be exposed to the actual works in industries through intensive occupational internship program according to their chosen field of specialization, to meet their manpower needs. By identifying those factors that influence employability/ marketability and economic productivity, it would also be valuable to determine its indicators. More specifically, some indicators economic productivity are being identified, as follows: period of job waiting to land the first job; monthly income/ salary; professional skills acquired; present position and salary rate; relevance of training activities/skills acquired during an internship.

Those providing education as well as the training are duty-bound to conduct and participate in internal and external evaluations. Evaluation is applied to gather data to aid in drafting educational policies and steering performance- and information-based assessment. Levin (1989) asserted that education generates skills. It is in schools that workers are prepared to meet skills requirement and labor demand. Thus, curricular design should harmonize with job fit and compatibility. What this theory implies is that HEIs should design curricula vis-à-vis social efficiency which enables workers to prepare for the existing economic stability. Smith et al. (2000) mentioned that the use of employability as a performance parameter in HEIs is widely acknowledged. Hills, Robertson, Walker, Adey, and Nixon (2003) as cited in de Guzman (2008), stated that HEIs' role in the national economy is to be a supplier of skilled graduates in the workforce. This wide awareness of employability in HEIs proved to be viable when taking into

consideration the varying nature of graduate employment, immense diversity in student intake, and development of a knowledge-based economy (Harvey, Locke & Morey, 2002; Kimani, 2005; Shah et al, 2004 as cited in de Guzman, 2008).

Employers typically perceive graduates (HEQC, 1997) as sufficiently equipped with skills, qualities and general dispositions (Purcell and Pitcher, 1996). Yorke's work (2006) showed that employability in students is developed depending on their personal circumstances. Schools expressed optimism that their products are capable. As outlined by Stephenson (1998), capable individuals means they are confident to: 1. take effective and appropriate action; 2. explain what they are seeking to achieve; 3. live and work effectively with others, and 4. continue to learn from their experiences, both as individuals and in association with others, in a diverse and changing society. Public and private HEIs acknowledge that employers are searching for candidates that did not just finish a degree.

Nowadays, earning academic qualifications no longer guarantees employment after graduation. As such, instructional strategies of universities and colleges should produce well-rounded students. Graduates who are personally, socially, morally, and intellectually competent. In the matching theory, unemployed and underemployed graduates represent the mismatches between employers and the graduates which could be traced to numerous factors (Mason, 2006). For instance, in Coles and Smith's (1998) random matching model, mismatching of companies and job-hunters result from imperfect information, leading to search and time costs for potential partners to look for relevant information on better matches. Mason, Wiliams, and Cranmer (2006) and Allen and van der Velden (2001) who investigated trends in the labor market mismatches found no close correspondence between 'education-job mismatches' and 'skill-job mismatches'.

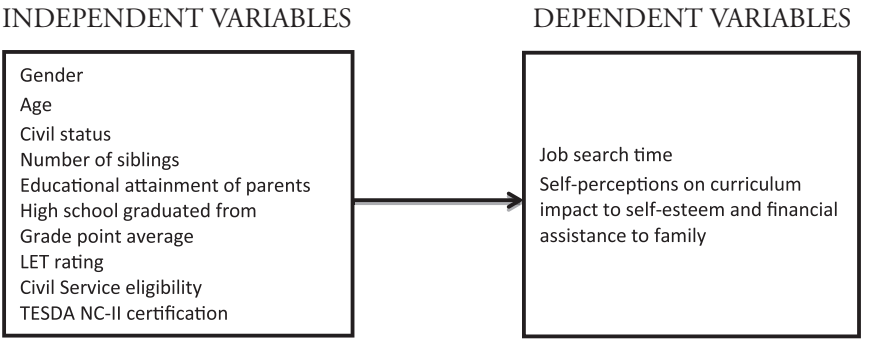

Figure 1. Research Paradigm

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Pursuant to RA 7722, CHED is mandated to "monitor the performance of programs and institutions of higher learning" by carrying out graduate tracer study which will look into the employability of HEI alumni. In this study, it is measured by job search/waiting time or number of months for waiting to find their first job from graduation. This tracer study is aimed to examine, validate and document employability of BSEd-TLE graduates of CPSEM-MUST from SY 2008-2009 to SY 2011-2012. Likewise, it will attempt to do an assessment on the program's contribution to self-esteem, financial assistance, and financial capability.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive method was carried out to analyze job search time and perceptions on the impact of curriculum on self-esteem, financial assistance, and financial capability in BSEd- TLE alumni of CPSEM- MUST from SY 2008-2009 to SY 2011-2012; however, only those currently employed as teachers were included. Respondents, selected through a snowball sampling procedure, completed a questionnaire-checklist in line with the study's main objectives. Prior to the actual data collection, permission was formally sought from the respondents' immediate supervisors. In administering the questionnaire, the researcher identified a key person in each alumni batch then secured their home address, mobile number, email address, Facebook and/or Skype account of their batch-mates. Student-enumerators were being hired to personally locate respondents' residences in Cagayan de Oro City. For those not personally reached, questionnaires were sent online. After the survey questionnaires were being administered and collected, responses were tabulated and analyzed using the appropriate statistical approaches in data analysis.

Data Gathering Instruments

The instrument was a self-developed questionnaire-checklist divided into two parts. Part I elicited personal and educational profile specifically gender, age, civil status, number of siblings, educational attainment of parents, high school graduated from, grade point average, LET rating, Civil Service eligibility, and TESDA NC-II certification. Part II asked job search time of the first job and

impact of BSED-TLE curriculum on self-esteem, economic assistance, and financial capability to support family needs. The questionnaire was submitted to a panel of experts for content validation, then revised based on the suggestions of the experts. The revised questionnaire was tried out to BSED-TLE graduates SY 2012-2013.

Statistical Treatment of Data

Collected data was further subjected to both descriptive and inferential statistics. In like manner, the analysis and interpretation of data employed the following:

1. Frequency and percentage described the profile of the alumni.
2. Mean and standard deviation determined central tendency and variability of data.
3. t-test and Analysis of Variance at 5% level of significance showed any statistical differences.
4. Pearson-Product-Moment Correlation found out the extent of the linear relationship between variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There is a need to conduct an evaluation of HEI alumni as it is crucial not only to the existence of HEIs but also, growth. This imperative is acknowledged by government institutions that safeguard quality of higher education like Mindanao University of Science and Technology. Results of this research would be utilized in the furtherance of leveling up the standard of tertiary education in Northern Mindanao. As professed by the VMGO of the College of Policy Studies, Education and Management, the attention must have been focused to know whether the curricular programs offered have enabled graduates to be productive partners in development.

Respondents of the Study

Forty-one respondents participated in the study. Majority are females (n=33, 80.5%) and single (n=39, 95.4%). On the average, respondents were 23 years old and living with four siblings. Most of their mothers and fathers graduated from tertiary (n=14, 34.13%) and secondary (n=12, 29.33%) levels. Almost all graduated from public high schools in Cagayan de Oro City and nearby provinces.

General point average and LET rating averaged 2.07 and 77.07, respectively. Likewise, majority have not taken civil service examinations (*n*=37, 90.2%) and had no TESDA-NC II certification (*n*=25, 61%).

First and foremost, the present study attempts to determine job search time of BSEd-TLE graduates from SY 2008-2009 to SY 2011-2012. Table 1 below reflected the results:

Table 1. Job search time of BSED-TLE alumni

Job search time	Frequency	Percentage
1-6 months	27	65.85
7-11 months	7	17.07
One year to less than two years	7	17.07

The span of time graduates take to land their first job is almost six and a half months (*X*=6.44 months; *SD*=4.66 months). Waiting time is slightly longer than 5.64 months in CHED and Arcelo (2001) for education graduates. By clustering job search data, as in similar studies, more than half are hired within one to six months. Research finding agrees with Rodriguez (2005), Canencia, Cabahug, Ibonia, Ansigbat, and Balase (2007), and Padilla (2008). Niones and Calape (2012) found in Bohol, a waiting period between seven and 11 months for most teachers. First job of respondents may not necessary be affiliated to teaching. The relatively short waiting time could be explained by Nurmi (2004) and Seginer (2009). Young adults are highly goal-oriented that they unceasingly invest their energies in realizing their goals; one of which is to be employed. Others had to postpone taking the LET examination for immediate hiring in private schools while some prepared before taking their first job. Canencia et al. (2008) maintained that graduates of the University favorably enjoy employability based on computed employability indices. By course, Bachelor in Technician and Teacher Education garnered the highest average employability index. There were few who waited from 14 to 18 months, which compared to others is relatively longer. CHED and Arcelo (2001) emphasized that a long search time stems not only from a singular factor. It is an intricate web of interaction involving several factors like dearth of job opportunities, job offers to provide no avenue for advancement, no vacancy information, low compensation of a job offer, and non-proximity of the workplace to residence.

Job search time across personal and educational variables of BSEd-TLE graduates from SY 2008-2009 to SY 2011-2012 was subjected to t-test for Independent Means, Pearson Product Moment Correlation, and Analysis of Variance at α=0.05. *P*-values for gender, age, civil status, number of siblings, high school graduated from, grade point average, LET rating, civil service, and NC II certification exceed α=0.05 resulting in the acceptance of the null hypothesis. In other words, the time from graduation to landing their first job is more or less the same despite differences in predetermined characteristics. Results of the present study did not agree with Shirai, Shimomura, Kawasaki, Adachi, and Wakamatsu (2013), Saks (2005), and Betz (2005) as cited in Brown and Lent (2005).

Levine (1998) as cited in Boholano, Puco, and Cordillo (2012) stated that skills learning is achieved by education. Schools exist to prepare the workforce for skills requirement and labor demand. The present study likewise investigated BSEd-TLE alumni's self-perceptions of curriculum impact on self-esteem. General findings to this end show curriculum impact according to practicing teachers is met with much optimism. Self-esteem indicators suggest that the BSEd-TLE curriculum of MUST significantly helped boost diligence/ hard work (*X*= 4.51; *SD*=0.51). Competence, on the other hand, registered the lowest mean (*X*=4.23; *SD*=61); still, contribution of curriculum to this indicator is substantial. From these trends, it is highly likely that alumni view the training in MUST as sufficient to deliver in a dynamic workplace to the employers' satisfaction. The beliefs held by these teachers encourage high self-efficacy, which in turn leads to better classroom performance (Seijts, 1998). The MUST BSEd-TLE curriculum, therefore, is effective in helping undergraduate teacher-educators acquire "soft skills" apart from excellent instruction.

Ultimately, any degree program should gear towards producing graduates in work environments they were trained for. Feiman-Nemser (2003) as cited in Casey and Childs (2007) recognized that the teacher-education students are expected to learn the following elements: subject matter knowledge, the learning process, planning, instruction and assessment. Graduates should have a good mastery of competency and teaching skills during an internship. The teacher quality is the ability of teachers to engage their students in educational pursuits employing specific characteristics. This is not only to qualify themselves in teaching but also in getting their students' attention to learn and achieve. Superior teacher quality is categorized into three according to Wu (2003): abilities; morals, and knowledge. In relation to the foregoing, Chou (2011) maintained that the education industry requires employability skills which include the

following teacher's attributes such as: good expressive ability, patience, care, interest in teaching, communicative competence, optimism, proactive approach, responsiveness, and work enthusiasm. Looking at their responses, an industry-skills match may be gleaned, which extant research say, contributes to high job satisfaction and sustainability.

Personal perceptions regarding the impact of curriculum on graduates' self-esteem were further subjected to statistical analysis. It appears that only grade point average correlated significantly. Noteworthy is the negative correlation coefficient which means that those with grades approaching honor roll gave more positive feedback about the impact the curriculum has on their competence, confidence, commitment, compassion, faith, hope, honesty, diligence/hard work, punctuality, self-discipline, and zeal for service. Generally, honor graduates view themselves to be dedicated and committed in their work as shown by Boholano, Puco and Curdillo (2008). The problem most researchers have with self-assessment is the tendency to generate biased responses. A more reliable approach is to pool teacher performance ratings of immediate supervisors, colleagues, and clientele using secondary sources.

Economic benefits of present employment attributed to the BSEd-TLE curriculum are also ascertained. Modal financial assistance is between Php 5,000 and less than Php 10,000, followed by less than Php 5,000, and Php 10,000-less than Php 15,000. According to Mercado (2010), employment is deeply regarded the most important objective of tertiary education. Parents hope that once their children graduated college and received their diploma, stable and decent jobs await them. For Filipinos parents, a college education is a legacy they can pass on to their children to ensure a brighter future. The children are expected to reciprocate their parents' sacrifices by contributing a fraction of their salary to support family needs. When asked regarding the level of support they provide for basic family needs like health care, education, and shelter, most of them, rated moderate. The graduates responses are considered normal since the basic salary of an average teacher in Cagayan de Oro City ranges from Php 11,000-Php 18,000 depending on the type of institution.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

MUST BSEd-TLE graduates are employed in less than one year regardless of the type of industry. Means for self-esteem demonstrate positive responses, indicative of the high relevance of BSEd-TLE curriculum to their present career as

teachers. Economically, respondents are productive; proof of which is the sharing of financial resources to their respective families. However, further analysis and follow-up is needed so necessary revisions to the curriculum may be in order. It may be suggested that other HEIs offering BSEd-TLE be included. This is to come up with a good number of respondents so that more powerful statistical tools may be applied. Job search time to present employment must also be taken into account aside from their first job. A qualitative approach would also help in gaining a better understanding of their perspectives regarding the job search period experiences, as well as, the first job they had followed after graduation.

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