

Employment Preparedness and Challenges Among Samar College Graduates: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract: Employability is a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy. The study utilized a qualitative research design. A semi-structured interview protocol was developed. Results identified 6 themes preparations for employment, employment skills, time spent in finding a job, reasons for delay of employment, overcoming job delays and challenges of jobseekers. Findings revealed that employability is not something that can be easily ignored. Thinking about your employability from an early stage is likely to increase the chance that you will be successful in your chosen career.

1. Introduction

Employability is having a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes that make a person more likely to choose and secure occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful (Cottrell, 2021). Employers look for an applicant who can: do the job; possess skills, competencies, abilities, and talents to do the job; will do the job with interest, motivation, and the right work values; can fit in the company and its culture and get along well; and will match the job requirement. These attributes can be developed through actual experience or the acquisition of soft skills (Gallo, 2023; Rapid Talent, 2023).

The Philippine population stands at approximately 111 million today. In

January 2021, the unemployment rate remained at 8.7 percent, consistent with the rate reported in October 2020 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2021). One significant factor contributing to unemployment is job-skills mismatch, where individuals possess degrees or skills not in demand in the labor market. This mismatch creates challenges in securing employment (Philippine Star, 2023). Efforts to address job-skills mismatch include government programs aimed at aligning education and training with industry requirements (Tribune, 2024).

A study by the McKinsey Global Institute, “The world at work: jobs, pay, and skills for 3.5 billion people,” showed that young workers continue to suffer from the brunt of labor mismatch with the demand for low-skill labor gradually

falling overtime (Bughin & Chui, 2013). To give you a clearer picture, the Philippine Labor Market is challenged by two persisting concerns: (1) the very high level of educated unemployed youth (34.1% have reached college level; 44% reached high school); and (2) the steady underemployment rate, which stands at 19.0%-20.0% and is closely linked to poverty.

The Asian Development Bank has its own study in 2013 on the Filipino youth labor market experience, describing school-to-work transition for young Filipinos as associated with change, waiting, and uncertainty. The study reveals that school leavers, particularly from high school, are having the most difficulty in integrating themselves in the labor market. For instance, it takes a college graduate one year to find his first job and up to two years to find a permanent job. On the other hand, a high school-leaver takes three years to find his first job and four years to get a permanent employment. The young person's educational attainment and age are strong factors influencing school-to-work transition. The person's behavior towards job searching and his family social networks are also regarded as determinants to finding their first jobs (Asia Development Bank, Increasing Competitiveness for Inclusive Growth Program (RRP PHI P43396)).

This is not true in the Philippines alone, but even globally. The Manpower Group's 2013 Talent Shortage Survey identifies significant proportion of employers who report difficulty filling positions in their organization. Cited shortcomings of applicants include lack of technical and workplace competencies (hard and soft skills) (Manpower Group, 2013 Talent Shortage Survey).

The qualification standards in industry recruitment and hiring practices also affect the skills mismatch. This is

evident in the results of Integrated Survey on Labor and Employment (ISLE), formerly BLES Integrated Survey (BITS) of the Philippine Statistics Authority where the various criteria on recruitment, i.e., minimum educational requirement, degree/course, gender, age, skills are considered by establishments in the hiring of applicants. According to the report, more than two-fifths (42.2%) of the vacancies for "entry-level jobs," or those starting positions in establishments which require little or no experience at all, needed college undergraduates. Almost three-fifths of entry-level job vacancies were mainly for young job applicants belonging to age groups 25-30 years (30.5%) and 15-24 years (28.7%) (2017/2018 Integrated Survey on Labor and Employment Statistical Report, PSA).

Evidently, there are jobs in the market for our young applicants, even those who have not finished a degree. But it is alarming to report that entry-level job applicants are poor on organization, managing, and planning skills, critical and creative thinking skills; and problem-solving and decision-making skills. One of the major causes identified in the educated unemployed problem in the country is the lack of soft skills among graduates, which make them unable to compete in the current competitive job market. This highlights the rising trend on the importance of soft skills in our educational training system for greater employability of our graduates.

2. Objectives

This study aimed to identify the employment challenges among College Graduates in Samar, exploring the preparations, skills possessed by the participants and time spent in finding a job and the various reasons of employment delays.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research design. The focus turns to understanding human beings' richly textured experiences and reflections about those experiences. The researcher relies on the participants to offer in-depth responses to questions about how they have constructed or understood their experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It encompasses all forms of social inquiry that rely primarily on non-numeric data in the form of words, including all types of textual analyses such as content, conversation, discourse, and narrative analyses. The aim and function of qualitative inquiry is to understand the meaning of human action by describing the inherent or essential characteristics of social objects or human experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

3.2. Sampling and participants.

Subject selection in qualitative research is purposeful. Participants are selected who can best inform the research questions and enhance understanding of the phenomenon under study. Hence, one of the most important tasks in the study design phase is to identify appropriate participants. Decisions regarding selection are based on the research questions, theoretical perspectives, and evidence informing the study (Sargeant, 2012).

The participants of this study are college graduates in Samar and a sample of seven (7) College graduates participated. Although there is no standard for a minimum number of participants in qualitative research because its purpose is not to generalize, previous experts have identified a sample size of 10 as adequate, generally when extensive detail has been collected to saturation. This study required

individuals who personally experienced the phenomenon.

The study employed in-depth interview as it is expected that the ability and capability of the participants to share information is much facilitated individual discussion.

3.3. Data Collection

A semi-structured interview protocol was developed and reviewed by experts (Table 1). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with college graduates. The interview protocol included 7 questions concerning the following topics: preparations in seeking employment, skills that can be helpful in applying for a job, time spent to land on current job, possible reasons for the delay in finding a job, how to overcome the delays in seeking for employment, other challenges experienced during job hunting and recommendations to those graduates who will be jobseekers. Throughout the process of the interviews, follow-up questions were added as needed to encourage elaboration and clarify responses. Specific questions were added as the interview process progressed in response to developing themes.

Consent form has been secured and signed by the participants. Confidentiality risks of the participants was mitigated as their personal disclosure is limited to each consent and they were informed of their freedom to pull back from the study. The interview was agreed at the most convenient time of the participants for them to answer the questions with profound willingness. All interviews were conducted by and verbatim transcripts were generated.

Table 1

Interview protocol
Questions
What are your preparations in seeking employment?
Follow up question: Tell me the result of these preparations during job seeking.
What skills do you possess that can be helpful in applying for a job?
Follow up question: Describe how these skills help you find a job.
How long did it take you to land on your current job?
Follow up question: How many jobs have you been into before? How about your first job?
What are the possible reasons for the delay in finding a job?
Follow up question: Describe your experiences during this time in seeking for employment.
What did you do to overcome these delays in seeking for employment?
Follow up question: Tell me your experiences about it.
What are other challenges you experience during job hunting?
Follow up question: Tell me your experiences about these challenges you encountered.
What recommendations will you give to those graduates who will be jobseekers also?

3.4. Data Analysis.

In the analysis of findings, the Collaizi method was used. The following steps represent Colaizzi process for phenomenological data analysis. First, each transcript should be read and re-read in order to obtain a general sense about the whole content. Second, for each transcript, significant statements that pertain to the phenomenon under study should be extracted. These statements must be recorded on a separate sheet noting their pages and lines numbers. Third, meanings should be formulated from these significant statements.

Fourth, the formulated meanings should be sorted into categories, clusters of themes, and themes. Fifth, the findings of the study should be integrated into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon under study. Sixth, the fundamental structure of the phenomenon should be described. Finally, validation of the findings should be sought from the research participants to compare the researcher's descriptive results with their experiences.

4. Results and Discussion

Six themes emerged from the College Graduates’ responses on education to employment challenges in this study, including (1) preparations for employment, (2) employment skills, (3) time spent in finding a job, (4) reasons of delay of employment, (5) overcoming job delays and (6) challenges of jobseekers (Table 2). Quotes presented throughout the results section use pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants.

4.1 Preparations for Employment

Employment preparation is about developing the necessary skills to enter the workplace. It can be divided into four general areas: career awareness, career capacity, vocational attitude and vocational information. (Cao, 1984) This can be supported by these statements:

“I always see to it that I’ve had enough background check to the company that I’m trying to enter with such as checking their mission and vision as well as if they value their employees more than anything else. It is also very important to know if the company is legit.” - Interviewee 5

Table 2

A theme, key concepts from college graduates' responses, and supporting quotes.

Themes	Key Concepts and Supporting Statements
Preparations for Employment	Key Concepts Preparing necessary documents such as application letter, Resume, CV, etc. Know the background of the company or agency you are planning to apply. Supporting Quotes "My Preparations for seeking a job are simply preparing my application letter and resume but also I'm always prioritizing those employments where I can fit my skills and knowledge. In order for me to adapt easily towards it." (Interviewee 1) "I always see to it that I've had enough background check to the company that I'm trying to enter with such as checking their mission and vision as well as if they value their employees more than anything else. It is also very important to know if the company is legit." (Interviewee 5) "All I need to do is reviewing the job description. Thoroughly researching the company. I prepare a good resume. Thinking about what will I wear? Preparing for the questions will be asked." (Interviewee 7)
Employment Skills	Key Concepts Being a computer literate and having a positive attitude towards work. Supporting Quotes "Since the job I have is a customer service representative. The skills I have are: I am flexible, I'm knowledgeable in computer. I can handle myself especially when it comes to work." (Interviewee 3) "Having Initiative, being flexible and being punctual." (Interviewee 4) "Good communication skills and to be flexible that can do multitask at the same time." (Interviewee 6) "I am very hard working and work well as a member of a team. I am patient and flexible with my time. I can work with less supervision" (Interviewee 7)
Time Spent in Finding a Job	Key Concepts Jobseekers took a week to a year in landing for a job. Supporting Quotes "It took 2 weeks because first week I sent my application letter and resume and I waited for my schedule for exam and luckily I passed. The second week was my interview and gladly I overcome it with the way that I was prepared." (Interviewee 1) "I have a 3 months contract that ended on July 2018 and I got my current Job on Oct. 2018 until now." (Interviewee 3) "Almost a year because I did not apply for any job due to personal reasons." (Interviewee 4)
Reasons for Delay of Employment	Key Concepts Lacking work experience. Supporting Quotes "The possible reasons for the delay of finding a job are it might be the qualifications cause companies nowadays tend to accept those applicants who has work experiences, but how about the fresh grad once? We should not be that cruel or hard enough for not letting or giving chances to get a job. How they will get an experience if we continue those toxic traits." (Interviewee 1) "Availability of the job and some may need work experience." (Interviewee 2)

	“After graduating, I ventured to sideline hustles before applying for a job.” (Interviewee 4)
Overcoming Job Delays	Key Concepts Continue searching for other job vacancies. Do other activities. Supporting Quotes “What did I do during the delay of finding a job was I didn’t stop seeking for an option, I freelance also I move to any cities for more opportunities.” (Interviewee 1) “I went to find other job opportunities.” (Interviewee 4) “Enjoying the days with my family while waiting for the result of my application.” (Interviewee 2) “I attended a free training for those new and want a job in BPO. Practice.”(Interviewee 3) “I used my skills specifically in tailoring to earn money while I’m in the process of seeking for employment.” (Interviewee 5)
Challenges of Jobseekers	Key concepts Personal problems and other factors encountered during job seeking. Supporting Quotes “Challenges during job hunting are mostly the financial problem for the requirements, because not all jobs have the same requirements.” (Interviewee 1) “The challenges that I experience during job hunting you need CSC eligibility and backer.” (Interviewee2) “The challenges I have is to apply in every BPO company I can find right away even after I failed in other company.” (Interviewee 3) “The destination because some company I applied did not undertake the exam and interview on the same day. Means of travel.” (Interviewee 4) “Connections. I think it is one of the factors that challenge my experience during job hunting. No matter how good you are if you don’t have any connections, your skills have nothing to do.” (Interviewee 5)

“All I need to do is reviewing the job description. Thoroughly researching the company. I prepare a good resume. Thinking about what will I wear? Preparing for the questions will be asked.” - Interviewee 7

“My Preparations for seeking a job are simply preparing my application letter and resume but also, I'm always prioritizing those employments where I can fit my skills and knowledge. In order for me to adapt easily towards it.” - Interviewee 1

4.2 Employment Skills

Often, students do not realize the importance of possessing transferable skills, and they assume that mastery of skills within their discipline is enough to get that all-important, post-graduation position. (Robinson & Garton, 2007) Still, according to many, people graduating from colleges and universities often lack the skills needed in the world of work. This lack of preparation may be the result of three factors including not listening to professors and advisors, lack of participation in class exercises, and an inability to transfer meaning from their

experiences into choices that will impact their future.

The participants responded that employment skills play a big part in finding a job. Here are their responses:

"Since the job I have is a customer service representative. The skills I have are: I am flexible, I'm knowledgeable in computer. I can handle myself especially when it comes to work." - Interviewee 3

"Having Initiative, being flexible and being punctual." - Interviewee 4

"Good communication skills and to be flexible that can do multitask at the same time." - Interviewee 6

"I am very hard working and work well as a member of a team. I am patient and flexible with my time. I can work with less supervision." - Interviewee 7

4.3 Time Spent in Finding a Job

Increased time spent in job search leads to more interviews or offers received and a greater chance of employment. However, it should be noted that job search process is not only time consuming but also emotionally and financially taxing and can even be considered a stressor. Job seekers need to confront challenges and difficulties, such as setbacks, rejections, and other negative experiences (Kreemers, van Hooft, & van Vianen, 2018; Song et al., 2009; Wanberg, Basbug, van Hooft, & Samtani, 2012; Wanberg, Zhu, et al., 2010), which can exhaust their psychological energy (Wanberg, 1997).

In addition, existing research shows that more time spent in search is not associated with more interviews received

(Wanberg, Zhang, & Diehn, 2010) and that the job search intensity is unrelated to employment (Koen, van Vianen, van Hooft, & Klehe, 2016). Hence, identifying when time spent in job search leads to desired search outcomes not only offers theoretical contributions but also provides practical implications to job seekers.

The participants have different time frame during their job seeking:

"It took 2 weeks because first week I sent my application letter and resume and I waited for my schedule for exam and luckily I passed. The second week was my interview and gladly I overcome it with the way that I was prepared." - Interviewee 1

"I have a 3 months contract that ended on July 2018 and I got my current Job on Oct. 2018 until now." - Interviewee 3

"Almost a year because I did not apply for any job due to personal reasons." - Interviewee 4

4.4 Reasons for Delay of Employment

When graduates consider their next step after graduation, their expectation and plans play an important role in deciding their actions. They interact with other sources of influence such as peer-groups and faculty members to decide their future career. These social interactions across neighboring areas spill over into their internal decision-making process (Topa, 2001).

Relevant authorities or parties also help them plan or take appropriate actions in the job market, and governmental engagement through education and training system guides graduates in career planning (Shamsuddin, et al., 2013). McKeown and Lindorff (2011) point out

that institutions have a responsibility to provide useful career services, however their findings suggest graduates find employment opportunities as a result of their own efforts, rather than through institutional supports.

The participants responded that:

“The possible reasons for the delay of finding a job are it might be the qualifications cause companies nowadays tend to accept those applicants who has work experiences, but how about the fresh grad once? We should not be that cruel or hard enough for not letting or giving chances to get a job. How they will get an experience if we continue those toxic traits.” - Interviewee 1

“Availability of the job and some may need work experience.” - Interviewee 2

“After graduating, I ventured to sideline hustles before applying for a job.” - Interviewee 4

4.5 Overcoming Job Delays

Job search generally follows a sequential process in which job search effort leads to job interviews, job interviews lead to job offers, and job offers lead to employment. (Saks & Ashforth, 2000) Given that job seekers who receive more interviews may be more attractive to potential employers, they have a high probability of succeeding in interviews and receiving offers.

“What did I do during the delay of finding a job was I didn’t stop seeking for an option, I freelance also I move to any cities for more opportunities.” - Interviewee 1

“I went to find other job opportunities.” - Interviewee 4

4.6 Challenges of Jobseekers

Despite graduating college during one of the hardest economic periods, recent college graduates have been surprisingly optimistic about their future, with 59% expecting they will make enough money to live the life they desire, reflecting their overall career expectations. (Pew Research Center, 2014) However, phenomenological research indicates that college graduates have inflated and unrealistic expectations about the workplace and their role as employees. (Gardner & Lambert, 1993; Perrone & Vickers, 2003). Therefore, in addition to searching for jobs, recent college graduates must also manage their unmet expectations, which can lead to disappointment, depression, and increased stress and uncertainty (Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008).

Here are the responses of the participants on the challenges they encountered:

“Challenges during job hunting are mostly the financial problem for the requirements, because not all jobs have the same requirements.” - Interviewee 1

“The challenges that I experience during job hunting you need CSC eligibility and backer.” - Interviewee 2

“The challenges I have is to apply in every BPO company I can find right away even after I failed in other company.” - Interviewee 3

“The destination because some company I applied did not undertake the exam and interview on the same day. Means of travel.”
- Interviewee 4

“Connections. I think it is one of the factors that challenge my experience during job hunting. No matter how good you are if you don't have any connections, your skills have nothing to do.” -
Interviewee 5

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The purpose of this study is to learn the education to employment challenges faced by college graduates particularly in Samar. The themes generated in the study were preparations for employment, employment skills, time spent in finding a job, reasons for delay of employment, overcoming job delays and challenges of jobseekers. The researcher therefore conclude that graduates need to prepare thoroughly in their job seeking, spent different time span in finding a job and they go through different challenges in terms of employment.

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