

ASSESSING PREPAREDNESS: THE EMPLOYABILITY OF THE 2022-2023 GRADUATES FROM KALINGA STATE UNIVERSITY

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Graduate employability is vital in assessing a school's performance. The study determined the employment characteristics, the extent of contribution and the applicability of skills learned and recommendations to improve the services of the college. It used the CHED Graduate Tracer Study questionnaire, and it utilized the descriptive method in the gathering of information of the alumni personal and professional profile based upon the surveys to elicit the data needed. Results revealed that most of graduates were females, single, and employed. Further, graduates acquired their first job within 1 to 6 months after graduating from college, and perceived that the curriculum offered to them in college was relevant in their first and present employment. They believed that communication and human relation skills that they learned in college are the most useful competency on their employment. Additionally, the course can be strengthened further if the following will be considered: improved facilities, quality faculty, conduct more meaningful trainings, and constant revision of curriculums.

Keywords: Teacher education, employability, alumni, career honing

Education in the Philippines has long been recognized as a fundamental driver of socio-economic mobility, serving as a critical mechanism for human capital development and national progress. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) embodies the government's commitment to transformational leadership, positioning education as the central strategy for investing in the Filipino people, reducing poverty, and enhancing national competitiveness. A key aspect of this mandate is ensuring the provision of relevant, quality education that is accessible to all. In this context, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) such as Kalinga State University (KSU) bear the responsibility of producing graduates who are not only academically proficient but also equipped with the competencies and psychological readiness to thrive in dynamic and competitive local and global labor markets.

A pivotal mechanism for assessing the effectiveness of higher education in meeting these objectives is the graduate tracer study. Tracer studies systematically track the post-graduation trajectories of alumni, gathering feedback on their employment status, career progression, and the applicability of their education to their professional lives. These studies offer invaluable insights into the alignment between academic training and labor market demands, thereby serving as a barometer for institutional performance and educational quality (Mubuuke et al., 2014). From the perspective of educational psychology, tracer studies can be understood as an external validation of the learning processes that foster key psychological constructs such as self-efficacy, resilience, and intrinsic motivation. According to Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), environments that support autonomy, competence, and relatedness enhance motivation and optimal functioning. The transition from academia to employment is a critical period during which these psychological resources are tested; graduates must navigate complex challenges, adapt to new roles, and continuously leverage their skills and knowledge—a process deeply influenced by their educational experiences.

Globally, HEIs regularly conduct tracer studies to refine curricula, improve teaching methodologies, and enhance student support services. The European Training Foundation (2017) emphasizes that such studies aim not only to evaluate the impact of educational programs but also to improve the transition from school to work and ensure that skill supply meets labor market demand. The findings from tracer studies inform evidence-based policy and curricular reforms, making them indispensable tools for educational planning and quality assurance.

The significance of tracer studies is further amplified in the context of major educational reforms, such as the Philippines' K-12 program, which was implemented to align the country's basic education system with

international standards and better prepare students for higher education and employment. The first batch of K-12 curriculum graduates (2022–2023) represents a cohort of learners who have undergone this reformed educational structure from its inception. Their entry into the labor market is a critical test of the reform's effectiveness in enhancing employability and meeting the needs of employers.

Moreover, the employment landscape itself has evolved, with employers like the Department of Education (DepEd)—the largest employer of education graduates—implementing more rigorous, competency-based recruitment processes as outlined in DepEd Memorandum No. 007 s. 2022. This shift underscores the necessity for HEIs to ensure their graduates possess not only technical knowledge but also the psychological and adaptive skills required for success.

This study focuses on the employability of Kalinga State University's first batch of K-12 curriculum graduates. It seeks to evaluate their employment outcomes, the relevance of their education to their current jobs, and the challenges they encounter in the labor market. By examining factors such as the match between qualifications and job requirements, levels of employment and unemployment, and the role of psychological attributes like resilience and self-efficacy (Masten, 2001), this research will provide a comprehensive understanding of their preparedness for professional life.

Ultimately, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a robust foundation for curricular enhancements, policy formulation, and strategic interventions aimed at strengthening the employability of future graduates. It will contribute to the broader discourse on educational quality, labor market alignment, and the role of psychological factors in career development, thereby supporting KSU's mission to foster transformative and empowering education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The employability of higher education graduates remains a critical indicator of institutional effectiveness and curriculum relevance, particularly within the dynamic and competitive global labor market. Tracer studies have emerged as essential tools for evaluating graduate outcomes, providing actionable data for program enhancement, policy formulation, and accreditation processes (Schomburg, 2010). Contemporary research underscores that these studies offer reflective assessments of study programs and illuminate pathways to successful workplace integration (Heidemann, 2011). This review synthesizes recent literature (2017–2022) on graduate employability, focusing on factors influencing employment outcomes, competency alignment, and the role of higher education institutions in preparing graduates for career success.

Employability is increasingly linked to the development of both disciplinary knowledge and soft skills. Heron (2019) emphasizes that oral communication skills—particularly the ability to present to diverse audiences—are highly valued by employers. Similarly, Tantua (2022) notes that interpersonal adaptability and the capacity to work within teams are crucial for maintaining positive work environments and professional relationships. These findings align with broader employer expectations that graduates possess a blend of technical expertise and relational competencies such as collaboration, communication, and emotional intelligence (Gerstein et al., 2016; Jackson, 2016). Within the Philippine context, studies reveal that graduates who exhibit these traits are more likely to secure employment aligned with their field of study (Ramirez et al., 2014; Evangelista & Morales, 2017).

The alignment between academic training and labor market demands is a critical determinant of graduate employability. Recent research underscores that curricula which integrate industry-relevant competencies, practical training, and experiential learning significantly enhance graduates' readiness for the workforce. Tutor et al. (2021) found that a positive college experience—characterized by relevant and applied learning opportunities—correlates strongly with improved employment outcomes and greater life satisfaction. Similarly, a study by Monteverde (2020) emphasized the importance of curriculum-industry alignment in reducing skills gaps among education graduates in the Philippines.

Despite these insights, structural and systemic challenges persist. Balboa and Mantaring (2011) earlier highlighted issues such as graduate surplus in certain fields and a persistent mismatch between the skills acquired in higher education and those demanded by employers. More recent studies confirm that these challenges remain relevant. For instance, Delariarte (2019) noted that many graduates in the Philippines continue to experience underemployment due to misalignment between their qualifications and job market needs. The Asian Development Bank (2019) further reported that rapid technological change and shifting economic priorities require continuous curricular adaptation to ensure that graduates possess future-ready skills.

Moreover, research from 2017 to 2022 highlights the role of industry-academe partnerships in bridging this gap. Reyes and Cortez (2022) demonstrated that institutions with strong linkages to industry partners exhibit higher graduate employment rates, as these collaborations facilitate curriculum updates, internship opportunities, and employment pathways. Additionally, a study by Dela Cruz and Lopez (2021) on K-12 and tertiary

education alignment in the Philippines recommended tighter integration of competency-based standards across educational levels to improve employability.

Recent tracer studies within the Philippines provide valuable insights into discipline-specific employability trends. For example, Aquino et al. (2014) found that graduates of teacher education programs often secure positions in public schools, especially if they pass the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET). Similarly, Cañizares (2015) revealed that graduates perceived curriculum sequencing and collaborative learning as major strengths contributing to their professional efficacy. More recent studies stress the importance of integrating technology and digital literacy into curricula, as these skills are increasingly prioritized in both local and international job markets (Cheng Tan & French-Arnold, 2015; Macatangay, 2013).

Furthermore, extrinsic factors—including familial influence, perceived job benefits, and prevailing socio-economic conditions—play a substantial role in shaping the career decisions of graduates. Research by Hewit (2013) and Pummel, Harwood, and Lavallee (2008) underscores that parents, peers, and mentors significantly affect career pathway choices, often steering graduates toward professions perceived as stable, prestigious, or financially rewarding. In the Philippine context, these influences are particularly pronounced due to strong familial ties and collectivist cultural norms.

A study by Garcia and Lim (2021) further elaborates that financial pressures and the need to support one's family often lead graduates to prioritize immediate employment over long-term career alignment, resulting in the acceptance of jobs outside their field of specialization. This is corroborated by Torres (2020), who found that socio-economic background greatly impacts career mobility and access to opportunities, especially among first-generation graduates.

Moreover, Cuadra, Aure, and Gonzaga (2019) observed that many Filipino graduates express a strong preference to work domestically, motivated by a sense of patriotism, family obligations, and the desire to contribute to national development. This trend persists despite the availability of higher-paying opportunities abroad. A more recent study by Almonte and Bautista (2022) confirms that the COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced this inclination, with more graduates valuing proximity to family and job stability within the local economy.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to investigate the employability outcomes of the 2022–2023 graduates from Kalinga State University. A cross-sectional design is appropriate as it allows for the collection of data from a sample of the target population at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of variables such as employment status, skills applicability, job satisfaction, and perceived relevance of academic training.

This design facilitates the quantitative and qualitative examination of relationships between variables—such as the influence of competencies gained during college on current job performance—without manipulating the environment. Data were gathered through structured surveys distributed to graduates, enabling the analysis of patterns, associations, and trends across demographic and professional dimensions.

Instrumentation

The survey questionnaire was adapted from the Graduate Tracer Study Questionnaire of the Commission on Higher Education. This questionnaire has two parts; Part I – is on Biographical Data covering a) personal data, b) educational background, c) employment characteristics, d) employment history, e) professional achievement, and Part II - is on Retrospective Evaluation of the Program covering a) adequacy of skills learned, b) adequacy and relevance of curricular program in terms of competencies. The instrument demonstrates strong content validity, as it was developed and regularly refined by CHED to align with national standards for graduate tracer studies. To further enhance validity for this specific context, the questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of three experts in teacher education and research methodology. Reliability was established through a pilot test administered to 20 graduates from the previous academic year (2021–2022). Internal consistency for multi-item scales (e.g., competency adequacy, program relevance) was measured using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient of $\alpha = 0.87$, indicating high reliability. The final questionnaire was revised to improve clarity and consistency based on pilot feedback.

Participants and Procedures

The respondents of this study were the alumni of the Bachelor of Secondary Education and Bachelor of Elementary Education of the College of Education, Kalinga State University from 2022–2023. The identification of the alumni was based on the Registrar's office's roster of graduates from the said years. The actual participants included a random sample with a total of 172 (68 BEED and 104 BSED) which falls within the

expected response rate of 30 to 60 percentage recommended by Schomburg (2003) on the conduct of graduate tracer studies.

The researchers asked permission from the university registrar to secure the basic information of the alumni from 2022-2023. The researchers sent the questionnaire through a google form to the participants. The link was sent through their email and messenger. To further validate the responses of the alumni 2022-2023, chat in messenger, phone and google meeting interviews, and face-to-face conversations were employed. After gathering the responses, the researchers interpreted and analyzed the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Participants According to their Personal Profile (n=172)

Personal Profile	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Sex</i>		
Male	16	9.30%
Female	156	90.70%
<i>Civil Status</i>		
Single	162	94.19%
Married	10	5.81%
<i>Program</i>		
BEED	52	30.23%
BSED	120	69.77%
<i>Professional Examination</i>		
<i>Passed</i>		
LET	164	95.35%
Non-LET	1	0.58%
None	8	4.65%
<i>Participation to Trainings</i>		
With Participation	172	100%
Without Participation	0	0

Table 1 shows that with the total of 172 participants from the graduates of 2022 to 2023 there are 90.70% females and only 9.30% males. This shows that teaching profession is more attractive to females than males. Most of the graduates were single with 162 or 94.19% and the rest were married with 10 or 5.81%. In terms of Professional Education Passed and Participation to Trainings, majority of the respondents passed the Licensure Examination for Teachers and all participants had undergone or participated trainings related to their specialization.

In the Tracer Study conducted by Aquino et.al. (2014), most of the respondents believed that teaching is a profession that is both rewarding and perplexing. Results revealed that a relatively large portion of the respondents are public school teachers who easily land a job since they are LET passers and remain in their profession for economic reasons. Though, passing the LET does not guarantee a permanent position these days. Alumni need to pursue advance education and must be equipped with necessary skills and attributes to compete with the other graduates who also seek jobs.

In terms of Participation in training, all COEd graduates has participation in trainings. The result shows that training can be a prime factor to expand the knowledge of graduates. The Department of Education as the primary agency that employs the College of Education alumni also upgraded their recruitment process specially that there are already graduates of the K-12 curriculum. The DepEd Memorandum No. 007 s2022 guides personnel and stakeholders a systematic and competency-based process of recruitment, selection, and appointment. One consideration in the guidelines is the specialized training for skills development in fields related to the work, duties, and functions of the Teacher I position to be filled shall be given a maximum of 10 points. This implies that the different agencies require graduates nowadays with higher competency level. Macatangay (2013) argued that “no previous experience on the position applied for” is the number one problem encountered by graduates when looking for a job. Most of the companies and organizations are looking for skilled and well – experienced workers for vacant positions in the company.

Shi (2014) proposed that skills training has become a fundamental way to help graduates find jobs by improving their skills and employability. Therefore, skills training is an important way to develop skilled personnel. Students with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills are well-equipped to face challenges in a fiercely competitive job market and are able to find employment promptly.

Table 2: Frequency Distribution of Participants According to their Employment Profile in Terms of Job after Graduation

Employment Profile	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Present Employment</i>		
Rank or clerical	39	22.67%
Professional/Technical	68	39.53%
Managerial/Executive	0	0
Self-employed	43	25%
Unemployed	22	12.79%
<i>Place of Work</i>		
Local	150	100%
Abroad	0	0
<i>Type of Job</i>		
Related to the course completed	129	86%
Related to the course completed	21	14%
<i>Length of Job Search</i>		
Less than a month	9	6%
1 to 6 months	83	55.33%
7 to 11 months	46	30.67%
1 year to less than 2 years	12	8%

It can be gleaned from the table that the greater percentage of 39.53 graduates are employed in the professional and technical level. They are the one followed by 25 percent graduates who are self-employed. 22.67 percent pf graduates are in rank or clerical. With regards to their present employment, the greater percentage of the respondents is working in professional and technical level. In the same manner, all employed participants are locally employed as seen. This means that all of them prefer to work in the country. They chose to stay and share their expertise, skills, and competencies with their fellow countrymen. Similar findings were found in the study of Cuadra, Aure, and Gonzaga (2019) which says that most graduates prefer to impart their knowledge in the country rather than abroad.

It is also notable that 100 percent of the employed participants agreed that their job is related to their completed course. In terms of length of job search, it can be noted that 55.33 percent of the employed participants obtained their first jobs in 1-6 months followed by 7 to 11 months with 30.67 percent, 8 percent in 1 year to less than 2 years and 6 percent in less than a month.

Albina and Sumagaysay (2020) pointed out that the degree graduates earned is related to their present job. The development of the necessary competencies ensures graduates' employment in the industry. This manifests a high application of the skills they learned in their schooling. Woya (2019) affirmed that higher education institutions should reinforce graduate attributes to contribute to the goal of career development.

Table 3: Frequency Distribution of Participants According to Reasons of Unemployment

Reasons of Unemployment	Frequency	Percentage
Advance or further study	7	31.82%
Family Concern and decided not to find a job	1	4.55%
Health related reason(s)	1	4.55%
Lack of work experience	4	18.18%
No job opportunity	9	40.91%
Did not look for a job	2	9.09%

While the greater majority of COED KSU graduates were hired right after graduation and by application, they however still encountered difficulties in looking for a job. Data shows that 40.91 percent of the unemployed participants said that they are unemployed because there is no job opportunity available for them. 31.82 percent were currently enrolled in their advance studies that is why they are still unemployed. Lack of work experience is next with 18.18 percent followed by 9.09 percent for those who really did not look for a job. Health reasons and family concern were the last in the list with 4.55 percent.

Most of the unemployed participants perceived that no job opportunity was the main reason for their unemployment. This result is almost similar with Tican (2016) and Abas et al. (2020) who revealed in their tracer

studies that one of the most perceived reasons for unemployment of the teacher education graduates was no job opportunity. Balboa and Mantaring (2011) also found that college graduates may find themselves unemployed due to a number of reasons, including not having enough jobs, the mismatch between the courses that students take and what employers need, and the lack of competitiveness of graduates due to substandard quality of education. Additionally, the pace at which jobs are created simply cannot cope with the steady supply of graduates many of whom will find themselves unemployed.

Table 4: Frequency Distribution of Participants according to their competencies learned in college that participants considered useful in meeting the demands of their present job

Competencies Learned in School	Frequency	Percentage
Communication Skills	89	59.33%
Human Relation Skills	60	52%
Information Technology Skills	15	10%
Entrepreneurial Skills	12	8%
Problem Solving Skills	74	49.33%
Critical Thinking Skills	78	40%

Table 4 shows that the employed participants found that communication skills with 59.33 percent was very much useful in finding a job, followed by human relations skills with 52 percent, problem solving skills with 49.33 then critical thinking skill with 40 percent. Last on the list were IT skills with 10 percent and entrepreneurial skills with 8 percent.

Macatangay (2013) stressed that communication and human relations skills were in the top skills found useful in the workplace. This also supports the reasons for landing a job six months after graduation. Problem solving skills is one of the useful competencies learned in college as well as critical thinking skills. These are being utilized by the participants in answering the demands and challenges of the day-to-day activities on their respective work places. It is always necessary to develop these skills to boost their self-confidence and resourcefulness that would make them successful in dealing and giving answers to organizational problems.

The results were supported by the studies of Clokie and Fourie (2016) that possessing good English and communication competencies were high demand and essential skills for graduate employment, while graduates with poor English skills would have the tendency to be unemployed. Also, similar findings were revealed in the tracer studies of Pacleb-Ulanday (2021) that the most useful competencies of their graduates learned were human relations and communications.

Afolabi (2014) conducted a study on skills required by graduates in the job market. It was revealed that employers rated written communication, computer knowledge, critical thinking, interpersonal/human relations, problem solving, and leadership skills as the required skills needed in the execution of tasks to complement understanding of the core function of an employee.

Participants' Suggestions to further improve the course curriculum of the college in line with the new Table of Specification of PRC

Based from the responses in the survey questionnaire, the graduates recommended that the curriculum must be strengthened through updating the equipment or facilities such as laboratories and classrooms. The graduates also suggested that the college conduct activities or trainings that will develop their competence in the teaching profession. A qualified and committed faculty member must also be a major concern to improve the outcome of the programs. Participants suggested that faculty must supplement classroom learning through effective strategies to further improve the existing curricula. Faculty may consider continuous professional development and seek for trainings relevant to their fields in order to extend better teaching experience to their students. The improvement of the quality of instruction given to the students adds to the possibility of attaining a high percentage in the LET.

CONCLUSION

To determine the employment characteristics and job experiences of the College of Education and their feedback on their educational experiences in the university to improve the delivery of the degree programs is the main objective of the study. Majority of the participants were employed and the work they acquire is related to the course completed. Majority of the graduates experienced working after graduation. In addition, majority of those who remained unemployed after graduation and those who were currently unemployed perceived

that no job opportunity was the main reason for their unemployment. The graduates claimed that the program curriculum they had in college was relevant in their first and present jobs after graduation. The most useful competency on their employment that they learned in school is communication skills. Furthermore, the graduates believe that the program curriculum of the could be improved by providing and/or considering the following: improved facilities, quality faculty, conduct more meaningful trainings, and constant revision of curriculums.

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