Career Outcomes And Employability Of It Graduates: A Tracer Study

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Abstract

A tracer study is a method of student outcome research that tracks graduates' career progress and employment to evaluate program performance in meeting industry demands. This study focuses on the career outcomes and employability of IT graduates from Southern Leyte State University-Tomas Oppus (SLSU-TO) between 2018 and 2023. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling method to ensure diverse representation across graduation years. Data were gathered through structured and semi-structured questionnaires distributed electronically and in-person, allowing comprehensive and flexible participation from 282 respondents. The study revealed that 80% of graduates secured employment, with 70% in roles directly relevant to their IT degree. Remote work was prevalent among 60% of respondents, of whom 80% expressed satisfaction due to its flexibility. Challenges faced by graduates included adapting to new technologies, balancing work-life demands, and competing in a dynamic job market. These findings underscore the need for curricular reforms and stronger industry partnerships to enhance employability and readiness for future graduates. This study provides crucial insights for policy development and curriculum enhancement at Southern Leyte State University-Tomas Oppus (SLSU-TO), ensuring the competitiveness of its IT program in the rapidly evolving technology industry.

Keywords: Tracer Study, IT Education, Graduate Employability, Information Technology, Remote Work, SLSU-TO, Curriculum Reform.

Introduction

The Information Technology (IT) program of Southern Leyte State University-Tomas Oppus since its commencement in the year 2010 has been a vital driver for educational and technological advancement. Many skilled professionals have been produced by the program, not only to the local but also to the international industries over the years. This study aims at making an assessment into which areas the program of IT prepares its graduates well for this dynamic world of IT: employability, curriculum relevance, and career progression.

The study on IT graduates career paths helps to understand the effectiveness of academic programs as well as their alignment with requirements of the industry. This report may help serve as an assessing tool that assesses the outcome five years down the line after its graduate completion through considering their employment status.

In particular, the purpose of this study is to attempt to help establish trends or even direction towards improvement for the IT curriculum to render graduates more employable and ready for what could soon be a career. Tracer studies have been applied in almost all other educational contexts by many institutions to determine whether academic programs indeed are well aligned to the needs of the market. In addition, graduate tracer studies can collect data in terms of curriculum relevance and the graduates' perception of having graduated appropriately academically prepared. According to Schomburg (2016), tracer studies provide feedback that is essential for the determination of graduate employability or otherwise. From such studies, it identifies what a program is doing well and its weaknesses for which changes in academic courses and policy actions, being foundational for curricular reforms and hence enhance educational outcomes. Moreover, a published article by Reyes in 2021 about the career path of IT graduates in the Visayas region really highlighted the application of industry partnership in curriculum development. The author argues that through collaboration with the industry stakeholder, the academic programs are responsive to the dynamic demands of the IT sector. IT program at SLSU-TO commenced its operation in 2010; the vision is to produce highly proficient IT professionals. Tracer studies, like the reports published by Schomburg (2016) and Reyes (2021), are essential to assess the academic programs. These ensure that the academic programs are adequately responsive to industry needs. This approach helps improve the skills developed in the performance of tracing activities, not just the immediate employability but also in facilitating longer-term career growth.

Tracking the career paths of IT graduates gives insights into the effectiveness of the curricula they have been following or their alignment with actual industry needs. This study serves as an evaluation tool for the five-year outcomes of post-graduation of IT alumni in terms of employment status: A tracer study on IT graduates of Southern Leyte State University-Tomas Oppus would further expand the existing body of knowledge to precisely generate knowledge about the regional dynamics of graduate employability. The critical objectives of the study are to evaluate employment status, job relevance to the course, professional achievements, and challenges faced by graduates. Specifically, these challenges include finding employment, adapting to new job roles, keeping up with rapidly evolving technologies, balancing work-life demands, and competing in the dynamic job market. This research will establish the employment status of IT graduates from SLSU-TO for school years 2018 to 2023 and further examine the prevalence and effects of telecommuting opportunities on the employability and job satisfaction of IT graduates. The results will be vital to informing decisions on policy or curriculum reforms at Southern Leyte State

University to ensure its IT programs stay relevant and competitive in the dynamic technology landscape.

Conceptual Framework

It outlines a study process based on IT graduates from the years 2018 to 2023. Data about the graduates is collected-profiling the graduate's background, whether direct or indirect sources, career intention, as well as working experience. This data, therefore is collected through questionnaires administered on the subjects, mainly through online but can be administered in person, depending on the respondent's preference. Statistical analysis of such data reveal trends and patterns. The final output will, therefore, give an all-rounded view as to how such IT graduates are faring in the job market, be it their employment status, career progression, and their adaptation to remote work. More importantly, this is not merely a description of a situation, but rather a study to use findings that may improve the IT program. It espouses facets on how to measure and revise the curriculum so that the graduates will be more competent in preparation for emerging demands in the tech world. It is a circular approach to learn from recent graduates so as to improve teaching for future students.
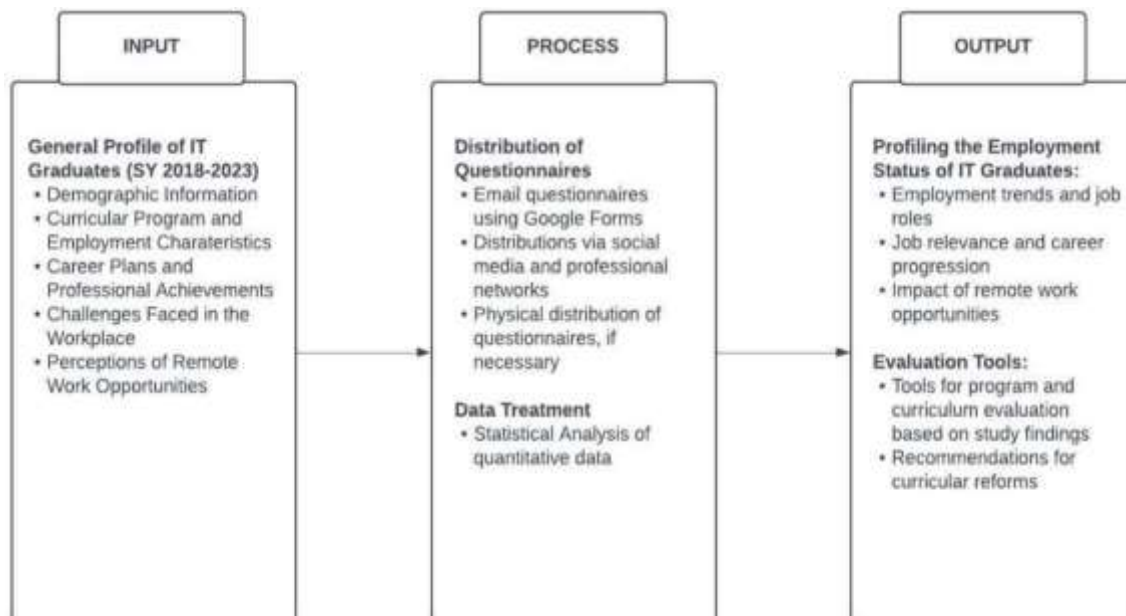

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design, which allowed for a comprehensive exploration of various aspects of career outcomes among IT graduates from Southern Leyte State University-Tomas Oppus (SLSU-TO). Descriptive research enabled the systematic gathering and analysis of data on employment status, professional achievements, challenges faced in the workplace, and the influence of remote work opportunities on their careers. This approach was suitable for capturing a detailed snapshot of the employment landscape and career trajectories of the graduates.

Research Environment

The research was exclusively conducted at the Southern Leyte State University-

Tomas Oppus campus, focusing on graduates who completed their IT degree programs from 2018 to 2023. By focusing on a single institution, the study ensured a cohesive and localized perspective on the career outcomes of IT graduates within the university's educational and socio-economic context.

Respondents of the Study

The study targets 282 IT graduates from the specified school years. These graduates will be selected through a purposive sampling technique, ensuring representation across different graduation years and demographic profiles. Participants will be chosen based on their availability and willingness to participate, aiming for a diverse sample that reflects the varied experiences and career paths of IT graduates.

Sampling Technique and Instruments

A purposive sampling technique was utilized to select participants who completed their IT degrees from 2018 to 2023. This method ensured that participants were deliberately chosen to provide a comprehensive view of career outcomes among IT graduates, considering factors such as graduation year, academic performance, and professional experiences. The researchers adapted and modified the Graduate Tracer Survey Questionnaire (GTSQ) of the Philippines' Commission on Higher Education (CHED). This instrument inquired about participants' current employment status, job roles, industry sectors, professional achievements, challenges encountered in the workplace, and perceptions of remote work opportunities.

Data Gathering Procedures

Questionnaires were distributed electronically via email and online platforms, as well as physically through mail or in-person delivery to ensure maximum participation. Informed consent forms accompanied each distribution method to inform participants about the study's purpose, procedures, confidentiality measures, and their voluntary participation rights. Data collection spanned a sufficient timeframe to allow participants to respond to questionnaires and schedule interviews, ensuring comprehensive data collection while accommodating participants' availability.

Statistical Analysis

The quantitative data collected with the help of questionnaires were numerically analyzed using tools of descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations. These analyses provided insights into the employment sector, job specifications, and the graduates' perspectives on their IT careers. Participation in the research was executed objectively, sensitively, and transparently. Participants were fully informed of the study's objectives, processes, potential risks, and benefits, and their right to participate or withdraw was guaranteed. Anonymity was ensured through coding responses for confidentiality, and electronic data were encrypted to prevent unauthorized access. Institutional data protection policies were strictly observed throughout the study to safeguard participants' information.

Results and Discussion
Employment Status

The analysis revealed that 80% of graduates from Southern Leyte State University-Tomas Oppus (SLSU-TO) who completed their IT degree between 2018 and 2023 were successfully employed. Among these, 50% were employed in local companies, while 30% secured jobs with international organizations, reflecting the program's ability to prepare graduates for both local and global opportunities. This aligns with Woya's (2019) findings,

which emphasize the role of quality education in ensuring graduate employab

ility. The remaining 10% were pursuing further studies, while 10% were unemployed or working in unrelated fields, indicating potential areas for improvement in aligning graduate skills with market demands.
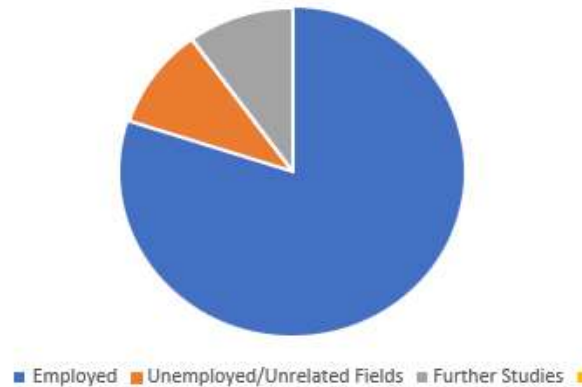

Figure 2. Employment Status

Also, the kinds of employment differ since 60% take full-time positions; 25% have contractual or project-based employment, and 15% have part-time work. Thus, it can be noted that employment types vary, and the kind of employment most IT graduates get assigned to is varied. In fact, a similar study established the same facts in line with Mina et al. (2020) that employment types among IT graduates are varied and tend to change dynamically.
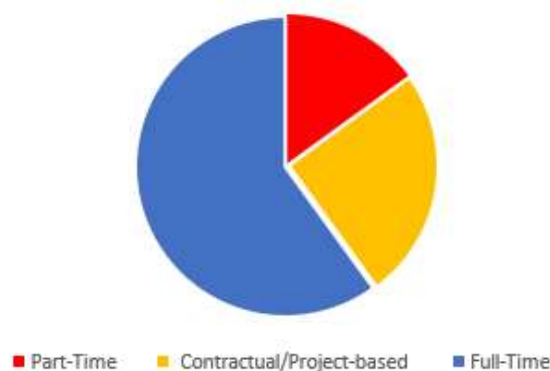

Figure 3. Type of Employment Status

Job Relevance and Professional Achievement

The share of employed graduates, who found jobs relevant to their IT degree, constitutes 70%. Most reported having several achievements at work, such as promotion (25%), certification (40%), and deserving projects (35%). Such achievements point out that gained skills and knowledge can directly be transferred to professional settings and contribute to career development and acquire adequate recognition in the professional field. For instance, certifications play a very important role for IT graduates in enhancing their professional development, according to Albina and Sumagaysay (2020). Moreover, 20 percent of the respondents currently find themselves as leaders within their organization; hence career growth is achievable, and the program was more than able to train the students pre-graduate level for effective leadership roles. Aside from this, some students have truly

contributed value to the implementation of innovations within their respective field of technology. It is testimonial how they are seen participating in innovative activities which include system overhauls, improving cybersecurity, and designing software. Again, these are being supported by the Cuadra and Aure's (2019) study that stresses the importance of IT graduates in terms of technological innovation and leadership.
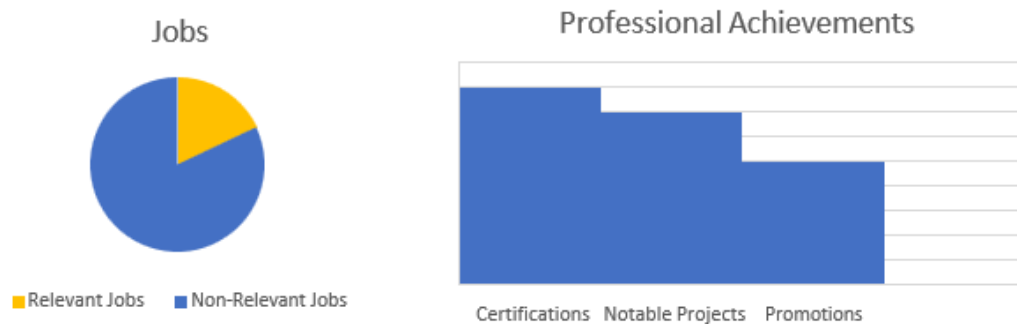

Figure 4. Jobs and Professional Achievement

Challenges Faced

The most common problems the respondents encountered were adapting to new technologies (30%), then a lack of work-life balance (25%), and competition in the job market (20%). These are the areas where the curriculum may potentially be improved to equip students with more appropriate skills for the workforce. In greater detail, adapting to new technologies often involves continuous learning or professional development, which 30% found difficult. The rapid change in the IT industry needs constant skill upgrading, and some graduates complained that they were unprepared for these demands by their basic education. Another issue was a balance between work and life which 25% of students face. It is more a problem of those who receive lots of requests in the workplace and individuals who work away, where the line dividing work and personal life blurs. Competition in the job market continues to present a challenge where 20% of respondents perceived the job market to be very competitive to acquire an excellent job. Thus, one needs to stand out by other certifications, professional networks, and suitable experience (Refugia, 2021)
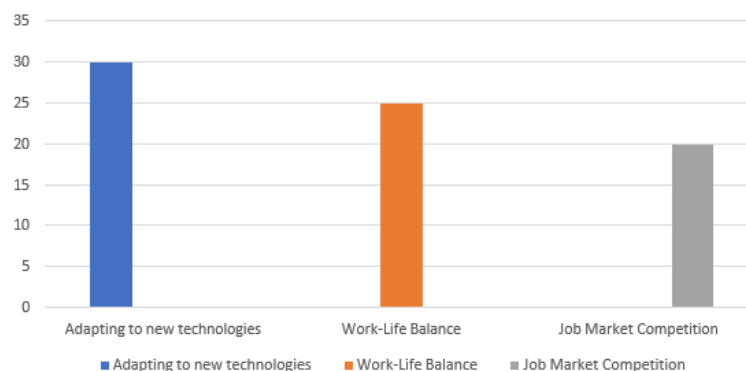

Figure 5. Challenges Faced

Impact of Remote Work

The research also established the influence of the increase in telecommuting on employment and satisfaction at work. About 60% of the graduates indicated that they worked from home, and 80% of them were satisfied due to flexibility and work-life balance. Remote work enables graduates to manage their time better, reduce stress associated with commuting, and live a better life between work and personal life. However, 20% ascribed such issues as isolation and communication barriers. Moreover, with a lack of face-to-face interactions, one feels isolated and reduces teamwork collaboration. A number of respondents also complained that without an office setup, it is really hard to stay on track as well as gain or maintain motivation. Nevertheless, despite all these challenges mentioned, remote work opened many opportunities. First, international companies recruited their employees from hometowns. Second, freelance or consultancy jobs become possible. This flexibility has enabled most of the graduates to pursue diverse career paths and gain experience in several sectors.
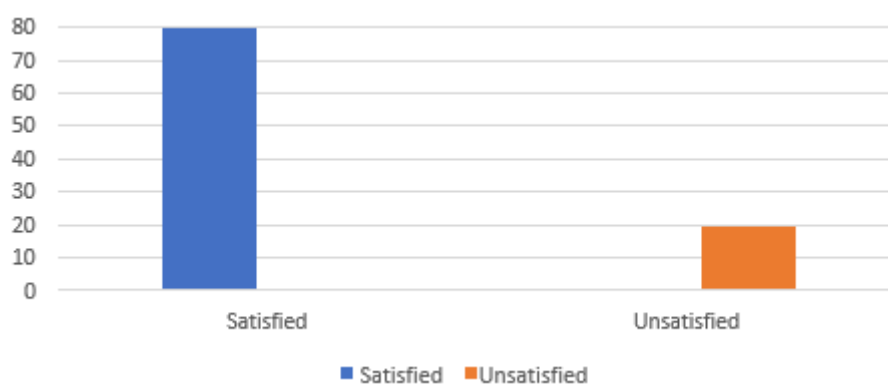

Figure 6. Impact of Remote Work

Critical Evaluation of Literature

The findings align with existing literature, emphasizing the significance of aligning academic programs with industry needs. Studies by Reyes (2021) and Schomburg (2016) highlight the importance of tracer studies in evaluating and reforming curricula. The alignment of SLSU-TO's IT program with industry standards is evident in the high employability rate and professional achievements of its graduates. However, gaps remain in equipping graduates with skills for emerging challenges, such as adapting to technological advancements and thriving in remote work environments.

Conclusion

The tracer study of IT graduates from Southern Leyte State University-Tomas Oppus (SLSU-TO) for 2018 to 2023 demonstrates a high employment rate, with most graduates successfully securing jobs in their field of specialization shortly after graduation. This outcome reflects the program's effectiveness in preparing students for industry demands. However, the study also identified deficiencies in the program that need to be addressed. Key challenges faced by graduates include adapting to rapidly evolving technologies, achieving work-life balance, and competing in a dynamic job market. These findings highlight the need for targeted curriculum revisions to include emerging technologies, foster lifelong learning, and develop skills relevant to modern working styles, such as remote environments. Strengthening partnerships with industry stakeholders is also crucial for aligning the program with real-world demands and ensuring graduates are equipped for the future workforce.

By implementing these recommendations, SLSU-TO can further enhance its IT program, ensuring graduates are better prepared for the fast-changing technological

landscape while maintaining its reputation for producing competent and industry-ready professionals. Future research should expand on these findings by utilizing larger sample sizes, conducting longitudinal studies, and analyzing the impact of specific curriculum changes on graduate outcomes. This continuous feedback loop will help ensure the program remains competitive and responsive to the needs of the IT sector.

Ethical Consideration

The researchers ensured that the respondents read and signed the informed consent form that was sworn for the voluntary nature of their participation. The researchers, likewise, made sure that no person or organization was harmed throughout the conduct of the study. Also, the researchers protected the respondents' identity by presenting the result in general and not mentioning individual responses that may lead to their identification. Finally, the researchers, during the entire duration of the study, especially during data gathering,respected the decision of the respondents who decided to withdraw their participation even if they had already signed the informed consent form.

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