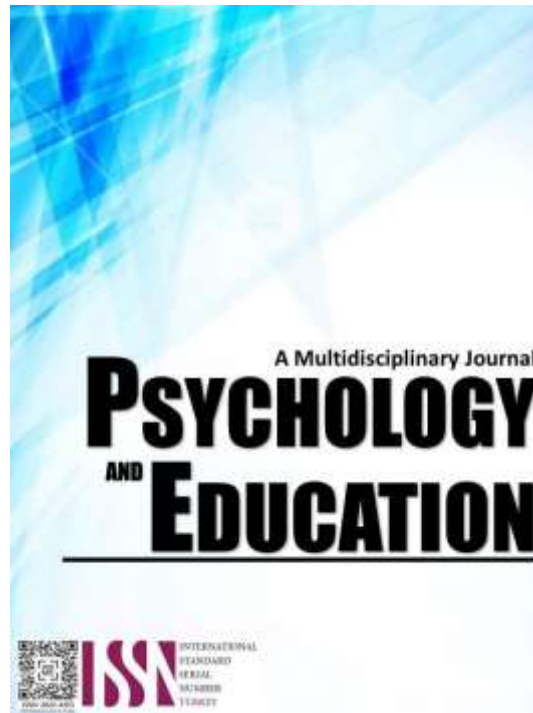


EFFECTIVENESS AND RELEVANCE OF THE DEGREE PROGRAMS OF AGUSAN COLLEGES INCORPORATED (ACI): A TRACER STUDY (2014-2018)



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Effectiveness and Relevance of the Degree Programs of Agusan Colleges Incorporated (ACI): A Tracer Study (2014-2018)

Fe M. Dela Cruz,* Hamilcar Steven B. Chanjueco
For affiliations and correspondence, see the last page.

Abstract

In assessing the efficacy of academic programs, tracer studies serve as indispensable tools, offering insights into graduates' whereabouts and performance in the workforce. This study focuses on tracing the trajectories of Agusan Colleges Incorporated (ACI) graduates from 2014-2015 to 2017-2018, shedding light on the relevance and effectiveness of the institution's degree programs. It determined the demographic profile, employment characteristics of the graduates, evaluated the curriculum's usefulness of the skills and the relevance of the courses to their professional lives. The study was anchored on Yorke and Knight's employability theory (2004) and applied the Input, Process, Output (IPO) model. A sample size of 146 participants was considered applied with convenient sampling. Descriptive survey method was used and adapted the CHED tracer study questionnaire with other tracer studies of higher educational institutions. Profile variables and employment characteristics were treated with frequency and percent distribution. Relevance and effectiveness were subjected to weighted mean. The study revealed that a majority of participants were young adult females, with almost equal numbers married and single. Currently, 84% are employed, primarily in teaching, government agencies, and business-related roles, with salaries ranging from 10,000 to 34,000 pesos per month, typically with one to six years of service. The findings highlighted the high utility of teaching, communication, entrepreneurial, and human relations skills in participants' workplaces. Core and professional courses were moderately relevant across most programs, while co-curricular courses showed slight relevance, and extracurricular courses were deemed irrelevant to their professional work. Hence, a curriculum evaluation is proposed and also, to future researchers may conduct another tracer study that would include assessment of employers and the live experiences of the employed graduates.

Keywords: *employment characteristics, effectiveness, relevance, degree programs, curriculum evaluation*

Introduction

The goal of every academic institution is to produce competent and highly qualified graduates who can eventually be competitive in the local and global arena. This can be determined using a very powerful tool, the tracer study which can provide valuable information for evaluating the whereabouts and performance of graduates in the workplace (Cuadra et al., 2019). Tracer study is a form of institutional assessment wherein it determines the relevance of the curriculum and the effectiveness of the skills developed within the years of completing the degrees sought by the students. However, it is known to many that after graduation, not many lands employment that matches the skills acquired during college education. At present, many lack the appropriate skills and attributes required for successful employment (The World Bank, 2017). Thus, this tracer study aimed to keep track of the graduates of Agusan Colleges Incorporated (ACI). This was conducted on graduates from SY 2014-2015 to 2017-2018 to investigate the relevance and effectiveness of the degree programs offered by this institution thereby reflecting the quality of education it has.

Tracking the location of graduates who have been away from school for the last five years is quite difficult since the Alumni Unit of ACI is not actively functional and there were interferences with internet connections for online surveys resulting in a low response rate. However, these limitations were challenged by the mandate of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). Thus, the pursuit of tracing these graduates is sought ardently. After all, the findings of this endeavor would be significant to the administrators, the teaching force, curriculum developers, policymakers, and the students as well. In totality, the result of this tracer study is the articulation of the institution's meaningful existence in the community as a producer of the human capital of the region or even across the country as stipulated in its VMGO. For so many years, the conduct of institutional assessment in this institution was not given much emphasis. But to stay in the academic world, the effectiveness and relevance of its degree programs must be evaluated for quality assurance. Hence, this tracer study is a must for ACI.

Research Questions

This study investigated the relevance and effectiveness of the degree programs of Agusan Colleges Incorporated (ACI). Specifically, it sought answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of the participants in terms of:
 - 1.1. sex;
 - 1.2. age;
 - 1.3. civil status; and
 - 1.4. presently employed?
2. What employment characteristics do the presently employed have and the not employed graduates but have been employed

- in the past in terms of:
- 2.1. how the job was acquired;
 - 2.2. occupation;
 - 2.3. agency;
 - 2.4. status;
 - 2.5. classification;
 - 2.6. monthly income; and
 - 2.7. length of service?
3. How effective are the following skills learned in college in the professional lives of the graduates?
 - 3.1. teaching skills;
 - 3.2. critical skills;
 - 3.3. technical skills;
 - 3.4. ethical skills;
 - 3.5. problem-solving skills;
 - 3.6. communication skills;
 - 3.7. leadership skills;
 - 3.8. analytical skills;
 - 3.9. entrepreneurial skills;
 - 3.10. HR skills; and
 - 3.11. IT skills?
 4. How relevant are the following courses to the professional works of the graduates?
 - 4.1. general courses;
 - 4.2. co-curricular; and
 - 4.3. extracurricular?
 5. Based on the findings of the study what curriculum evaluation may be proposed?

Literature Review

On Institutional assessment through tracer study

Institutional assessment involves an ongoing, systematic process of data collection and analysis. The purpose is to monitor and understand whether an institution is achieving its goals and mission and seeking improvements in student learning, programs, and services. In the academe, Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) are mandated by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to conduct tracer studies periodically to monitor the employability or success of their graduates which aims to ensure the quality assurance of an institution (QA: CMO # 46 s. 2012). This mandate is positively responded to by Agusan Colleges Incorporated (ACI) whereby graduates from 2014 to 2018 were subjected to a tracer study. It was done as a form of self-institutional assessment wherein it determines the relevance of the curriculum and the effectiveness of the skills developed within the years of completing the degrees sought by the students. It determined the curriculum's adaptability to gain employment (Schomburg, 2011).

Conducting a tracer study could meet several challenges. Tracing back graduates who are scattered throughout the different places in search of jobs is a workload. There were interferences with internet connections for online surveys resulting in a low response rate. Other higher institutions that conducted tracer studies similarly met this predicament wherein tracing the whereabouts of the alumni is very tasking (Ponte et al., n.d.). There were challenges encountered like travel restrictions, busy schedules, and inadequate internet connections (Balahan & Khadiguia, 2023). Graduates were out of control such that survey questionnaires were answered on behalf of the identified participants (Baladad et al., 2023) and difficulty in locating the graduates and retrieving data due to the failure of alumni networking (Cuadra et al., 2029) were experienced. However, these limitations were challenged by the mandate of the Commission on Higher Education (CMO #6, s.2023, sec.18B1.2c) in which tracer study is considered an institutional assessment of quality education. As such, ACI endeavors to undergo this tracer study not only to articulate the institution's meaningful existence in the community as a producer of the human capital of the region or even across the country as stipulated in its VMGO but also to undergo self-assessment

The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) implemented the policy-standard guidelines for Quality Assurance (QA) for both private and public HEIs (CHED memo 46 s.2012). One of the procedures undergone by these institutions was the use of the graduate tracer study, considered a powerful tool that can provide valuable information for evaluating the whereabouts and performance of graduates in the workplace (Cuadra et al., 2019). In addition, a general framework within which each institution should design and develop a curriculum that is suitable to its own peculiar needs, resources, and circumstances is intended to be flexible rather than restrictive (CMO no. 39, s. 2006). Anent to this, HEIs are mandated by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to conduct tracer studies (periodically to monitor the employability or success of their graduates which aims to ensure the quality assurance of an institution (QA: CMO # 46 s. 2012).

On Demographic Profile

The employability theory of Yorke and Knight pointed out that personal attributes are some of the variables that make graduates gain

employment and be successful in their chosen occupations. In this study, sex, age, civil status, and present employment were considered personal attributes.

The findings of the PNU tracer study, the San Carlos Science and Math Program tracer study, and the Rizal Technological University tracer study indicated females exceeding males in the employment pool. That is indicative of females seeking more educational advancement than males. Successful women are clear about their goals. They believe they have a right to dream and achieve their goals. This also gives them the inner strength to go through hurdles with an open mind and seek to learn and grow.

On the other hand, in terms of age, in the age bracket of 22-34 years old and considered to be at the stage of early adulthood is considered the prime years of an individual. This is also observed in tracer studies conducted by Gines (2014), Canizares (2015), Madrigal (2023), and Galang (2021) where graduates were in the age range between 20 – 34 years old. This can be inferred that maximum physical strength and stamina have been reached and women are in their most fertile field of advancement. In terms of civil status, findings in this study show that married participants are almost of similar number as singles. This is in contrast to the findings of the tracer study of Canizares (2015) where single individuals dominated the population (N=43) leaving one (1) married participant. The dominance of single participants in terms of civil status has also been the dominant status of the respondents in a tracer study conducted by Cempron and Palompon of Cebu Normal University AY 2006-2010. This can be deduced that even before, a single individual is more persistent in finishing the degree because of lesser responsibilities conventionally assigned to females.

The tracer study of Teacher Education Graduates of Western Philippines University - Puerto Princesa Campus: Basis for Curriculum Review and Revision, revealed that “graduates faced challenges due to employment standards and a large number of clerical jobs in the teaching profession and that more graduates pursued advanced studies for professional development rather than for promotion.” This was in contrast to their previous study wherein “graduates of mathematics education pursued advanced studies for promotion” (Pentang et al., 2022). On the other hand, the study by Cheng et al. (2022) entitled, *Employability in higher education: a review of key stakeholders' perspectives*, indicated that “responsibility for employability has been transferred by the UK government to higher education institutions, despite clear evidence that it needs to be shared by all the key stakeholders to be effective. In addition, there is a gap between employers' expectations for employability and the government's employability agenda “. The findings of the studies in local and international settings showed that the employability issue is a global concern that must be worked out collaboratively between the state and higher education institutions (HEIs).

On Effectiveness of the degree programs of the institute

There are several output measures maintained by the institution that can be used to evaluate the outcomes for HEIs. The CHED memorandum orders have specific guidelines for every degree programs crafted by the institution, What is being focused is the quality measured by students satisfaction, academic and personal development over and above these measures, one profound indicator for an effective degree program is manifested in the usefulness of the skills learned from college in the professional life of the graduate

Findings of the study entitled, “A Tracer Study of the Business Graduate Programs of the Catholic University of the Philippines “wherein ethical skills, entrepreneurial skills, and problem-solving skills to a very great extent have helped the graduates achieve business decisions and relevance in the workplace (Madrigal & Lopena, 2023). Looking at the undergraduate programs, the graduates of the education programs (BEED & BSED) of this institution reveal a rating of very useful on all identified skills learned in college. However, there are skills not maximized and fall short of the competencies to be highly effective in their profession. The findings of Canizares (2015) in his tracer study of San Carlos University education graduates where they were able to develop their students to have very good teaching process skills, not excellent ratings. As expected for * PNU graduates, the result of their tracer study revealed that most of the employed graduate respondents were able to use their acquired knowledge and skills to a great extent.

There were graduates who were not able to learn fully the skills they are supposed to be excellent in, thus feeling the less impact of its usefulness in their professional life. According to CHED, as a BSIT graduate, it is common to have IT skills as the most useful skills. This was revealed in the tracer study of BSIT at Bulacan State University where graduates found that having an IT skill as their top priority has been deemed helpful in their workplace and received the highest rating among all other skills (Galang & Del Rosa, 2021).

On the Relevance of the curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular programs

College electives are classes where students can elect to explore new interests and broaden areas of learning which can improve the overall quality of college education. These are courses that can lighten the course load less strenuous than core courses. Added to this, the on- the- job training is a component of the core courses that graduates of the different degree program must pass through. According to the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), OJTs are mandated by law to ensure the safety of students and their quality of learning. It shall establish strong linkages with the business industry (CMO #14, s. 2017).

Co-curricular activities are supplementary course materials. Students perform these activities without grades or academic credit but still learn new information or reinforce current knowledge. It provides students with additional experience in some form or another and relates to educational resources, and strengthens comprehension.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative descriptive research design. It described the demographic profile and the employment characteristics of the participants as well as determined how useful (effectiveness) the skills learned from college education to their professional lives. In addition, it narrated the applicability (relevance) of the curricular courses offered by the institution to the workplaces of the employed graduates.

Participants

Engaging Slovin's formula, a sample size of 213 was determined. This led the study to apply the convenient sample population of 459 and targeted as the participants of the study applied with stratified random sampling. However, low retrieval was obtained due to difficulty and shortage of time frame for data collection, interferences in online services, and incomplete data entry. Hence, the targeted sample size of 213 was reduced to 146 participants or 32% which is within the expected response rate of 30-60% as recommended by Schomburg cited by Gines in her Tracer Study of PNU graduates (2014). This led to utilize the convenient sampling technique.

Instruments

The participants were subjected to a structured research instrument patterned from CHED, PNU, RTU, and USC tracer studies. It has five (5) sections: (1) demographic profile in terms of sex, age, civil status, and if presently employed; (2) employment characteristics of the participants tracing their occupation, how the present job is taken, agency, status, classification, monthly income, and years in service. (3) employment characteristics of those who do not have present jobs but had been employed in the past with similar employment characteristics defined in section 2. Section 4 was on the usefulness (effectiveness) of the skills learned in college with 31 indicators summarized into 11 skills. Section 5 was on the relevance of the curricular programs to their professional works.

Procedure

Before the start of the data-gathering procedure, an application for the conduct of the tracer study with a research capstone was submitted to the office of the VPAARE for recommendation to the office of the President. Upon approval of the said scholarly work, the research instrument was constructed patterned from the different tracer studies integrating variables applicable to the conceptualized framework of the study. The modified research instrument was subjected to a reliability test using Cronbach's alpha resulting in an index of 97%.

The registrar's office supplied the data of graduates from SY 2014-2015 to SY 2017-2018. Distribution of the research instrument was done online in Google Forms and hard copies were available at the library and distributed in a house-to-house visitation. However, targeted data collection within 5-6 months resulted in a low response rate. Thus, this tracer study was able to gather data from selected 146 participants conveniently retrieved, tallied, coded, and analyzed.

Data Analysis

Data analyses were done based on the results of the frequency and percent distribution applied to profile variables and weighted mean for determining the relevance of the courses taken and the effectiveness of skills learned in college to their professional work.

Ethical Considerations

A call for voluntary participation to the announcement of ACI inviting graduates from SY 2014-2018 to be a part of this tracer study was posted online and availing of the research questionnaire in Google forms and hardcopies were made available to voluntary participants ready at the Library and at the office of the Research Center. For ethical considerations, the retrieved questionnaires were withheld and other pertinent information were secured and confidentially stored at the Research Center of ACI. It is understood that the manuscript went through a plagiarism check and passed. Moreover, the researchers are aware that the data gathered are considered the property of ACI, and any use of any kind without the approval of the researchers will be dealt with accordingly. The registrar's office provided data on graduates from SY 2014-2015 to SY 2017-2018 by degree programs. Engaging Slovin's formula, a sample size of 213 was determined from a population of 459 and targeted as the participants of the study applied with stratified random sampling. However, low retrieval was obtained due to difficulty and shortage of time frame for data collection, interferences in online services, and incomplete data entry. Hence, the targeted sample size of 213 was reduced to 146 participants or a 32% response rate applied with convenient sampling technique. Table 1 presents the population, targeted sample size, and the participants of the study by degree programs.

Table 1 presents the population and participants of the study by programs. As can be seen, data show that the study utilized only 146 participants based on the retrieved and completely answered research instrument. The utilization of the said number of participants ($f=146$) resulted in a response rate of 32% ($146/459$) which is within the expected response rate of 30-60% as recommended by Schomburg cited by Gines in her Tracer Study of PNU graduates (2014). 'Although it is near the lower limit, the findings of this study gave an overview of the profile of the participants, employment characteristics, relevance, and effectiveness of the degree programs of ACI implying its contribution to the manpower in the marketplace. The participants were subjected to a structured research instrument

patterned from CHED, PNU, RTU, and USC tracer studies. It has five (5) sections: (1) demographic profile in terms of sex, age, civil status, and if presently employed; (2) employment characteristics of the participants tracing their occupation, how the present job is taken, agency, status, classification, monthly income, and years in service. (3) employment characteristics of those who do not have present jobs but had been employed in the past with similar employment characteristics defined in section 2. Section 4 was on the usefulness (effectiveness) of the skills learned in college with 31 indicators summarized into 11 skills. Section 5 was on the relevance of the curricular programs to their professional works.

Table 1. *The frequency distribution of the population, sample size, and participants in the study by degree programs*

Program	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	Total	n	Participants
MAED	29	11	20	27	87	40	22
MSBA	3	5	7	4	19	9	6
BEED	33	23	31	53	140	65	56
BSED	0	0	21	30	51	24	24
BSIT	4	3	1	5	13	6	4
BSBA	24	21	13	40	98	45	13
BSAT	13	13	6	19	51	24	21
Total	106	76	99	178	459	n=213	146

Before the start of the data-gathering procedure, an application for the conduct of the tracer study with a research capstone was submitted to the office of the VPAARE for recommendation to the office of the President. Upon approval of the said scholarly work, the research instrument was constructed patterned from the different tracer studies integrating variables applicable to the conceptualized framework of the study. The modified research instrument was subjected to a reliability test using Cronbach's alpha resulting in an index of 97%. The registrar's office supplied the data of graduates from SY 2014-2015 to SY 2017-2018. Distribution of the research instrument was done online in Google Forms and hard copies were available at the library and distributed in a house-to-house visitation. However, targeted data collection within 5-6 months resulted in a low response rate. Thus, this tracer study was able to gather data from selected 146 participants conveniently retrieved, tallied, coded, and analyzed. Data analyses were done based on the results of the frequency and percent distribution applied to profile variables and weighted mean for determining the relevance of the courses taken and the effectiveness of skills learned in college to their professional work. For ethical considerations, names were withheld, and other pertinent information were secured and confidentially stored at the Research Center of ACI.

Results and Discussion

This part starts with the demographic profile and employment characteristics of the participants in answer sections 1,2, and 3 of the research instruments. Sections 4 and 5 results were continuously presented in the subsequent Tables.

On the demographic profile of the participants

Table 2. *The frequency and percentage distribution of the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of sex, age, civil status, and presently employed variable*

Profile	BEED	BSED	BSIT	BSAT	MAED	MSBA	BSBA	Frequency	Percent
sex									
Male	3	3	2	6	6	2	2	24	16.44
female	53	21	2	15	16	4	11	122	83.56
Total	56	24	4	21	22	6	13	146	100.00
age									
22-34	31	19	2	19	12	4	9	96	65.75
35-44	13	4	2	1	6	1	2	29	19.87
45-64	12	1		1	4	1	2	21	14.38
Total	56	24	4	21	22	6	13	146	100.00
Civil status									
single	25	16	1	14	4	4	8	72	49.31
married	28	8	3	7	18	2	4	70	47.95
preferred not to	3						1	4	2.74
Total	56	24	4	21	22	6	13	146	100.00
presently employed?									
yes	84.93	50	17	4	17	20	5	11	124
no, but have been	15.06	6	7		4	2	1	2	22
never								0	0
Total	56	24	4	21	22	6	13	146	100.00

Data of Table 2 show that there are more females ($f=122$) than males indicating 83.56% out of the 146 participants. This is like the findings of the PNU tracer study, the San Carlos Science and Math Program tracer study, and the Rizal Technological University tracer study where females exceed more in numbers than males.



The result implies that females seek more educational advancement than males. On the other hand, results show that in terms of age, the participants are mostly (f=96; 65.76%) in the age bracket of 22-34 years old and considered to be at the stage of early adulthood. This is also observed in tracer studies conducted by Gines (2014), Canizares (2015), Madrigal (2023), and Galang (2021) where graduates were in the age range between 20 – 34 years old. This can be inferred that maximum physical strength and stamina have been reached and women are in their most fertile field of advancement. In terms of civil status, findings in this study show that married participants (f =70) are almost of similar number as singles (f=72). This is in contrast to the findings of the tracer study of Canizares (2015) where single individuals dominated the population (N=43) leaving one (1) married participant. The dominance of single participants in terms of civil status has also been the dominant status of the respondents in a tracer study conducted by Cempron and Palompon of Cebu Normal University AY 2006-2010. This can be deduced that even before, a single individual is more persistent in finishing the degree because of lesser responsibilities conventionally assigned to females. Further findings of the study indicate that 84.93% of the participants (f=124) are presently employed while 22 are not employed presently but have had previous jobs. In this scenario, it can be seen that an 85% employment rate is achieved within the total number of participants in this evaluation period as evidenced by this institutional tracer study.

On the employment characteristics of the participants who are presently employed

Table 3. *The frequency and percent distribution of the employment characteristics of the participants who are presently employed in terms of how the present job was applied and the nature of the occupation*

How Present Job Was Applied	BEED	BSED	BSIT	BSAT	MAED	MSBA	BSBA	Frequency	Percent
job fair	2	1		1	1		1	6	4.84
alumni placement	2	1		2	2			5	4.03
referrals	16	9	3	5	8	2	2	45	36.29
online	3	5	1	1	1		1	12	9.68
personal appointment		25		8	8	2	6	51	41.13
walk-in	3					1	1	5	4.03
	50	17	4	17	20	5	11	124	100.00
Occupation									
ALS volunteer	2	1	0	1	1	0		8	6.45
teaching		4	2	0	19	1	1	64	51.61
Com services	4	1	1	1	0	0	2	9	7.26
Admservices	5	2	1	1	0	2	2	13	10.48
Actg/bsness		1	0	13	0	2	5	27	21.77
Health related	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	2.42
Superv/mngr	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	2.42
	50	17	4	17	20	5	11	124	100.00

The first two (2) employment characteristics of the participants who are presently employed as presented in Table 3 describe how the participants applied their present job. With the advent of networking, online, and social media, it can be seen that personal appointments (f=51) and referrals (45) are still the two most utilized manner of getting them into a job. This conforms to the statement, “They were able to find a job through someone they knew “, (Cuadra, 2019). Results also reveal that most of the participants (f=64) or 51.61 % are into teaching and the rest of the graduates occupied varied jobs not matching their field of specialization. This mismatching problem, which results in underemployment, has been explosively growing and has been a problem for many decades (Cuadra et al., 2019).

Table 4. *The frequency and percent distribution of the employment characteristics of the participants who are presently employed in terms of agency, status, and classification*

Variable	BEED	BSED	BSIT	BSAT	MAED	MSBA	BSBA	Frequency	Percent
Agency									
DepEd	36	8	2	1	18	1	4	70	56.45
Private	10	8	1	15	1	1	7	43	34.68
LGU	4	1	1	1	1	3	0	11	8.87
Total	50	17	4	17	20	5	11	124	100.00
Status									
Per/reg	34	7	4	8	18	4	5	80	64.52
Cont/cas	16	9	0	9	2		6	42	33.87
Volunteer	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	1.61
Total	50	17	4	17	20	5	11	124	100.00
Classification									
government	34	11	3	8	20	2	3	81	65.32
NGO	16	6	1	9	0	3	8	43	34.68
Self-employ	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	00
total	50	17	4	17	20		11	124	100.00

Table 4 presents the employment characteristics of the presently employed participants in terms of agency, status and classification of



the job. Data reveal that majority of them (f=70; 56.45%) are employed under the Department of Education (DepEd) and most of them (f=80;64.52%) are permanent or regular employees. However, it can be seen that a noticeable number (f=43) of participants are privately employed and can be deduced that they are in the contractual or casual status and classified as non-government. The other employment characteristics of those who are presently employed are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. *The frequency and percent distribution of the employment characteristics of the participants who are presently employed in terms of monthly income and length of service*

Monthly Income	BEED	BSED	BSIT	BSAT	MAED	MSBA	BSBA	Frequency	Percent
below 5k	5	1		1	1			8	6.45
5000 - 9999	8	14		2	4		4	32	25.81
10000-14999	7	1	1	7	4	2	1	23	18.55
15000-19999	12		1	1	1		2	17	13.71
20000-24999	4	1		3	1	2	1	12	9.68
25000-29999	11			1	5		2	19	15.32
30000-34999	2		2	1	4		1	10	8.06
35 and more	1			1		1		3	2.42
total	50	17	4	17	20	5	11	124	100.00
length of service (present job)									
less than 1 yr.	10	7		1	4		2	24	19.35
1-3 yrs.	18	7		7	5	1	3	41	33.06
3.1—6 yrs.	16	3	4	9	5	3	3	43	34.68
6.1-9 yrs.	6			6	6	1	3	16	12.90
total	50	17	4	17	20	5	11	124	100.00

Data from Table 5 show that a great number (f= 32) are receiving a monthly income of less than 10 thousand pesos and few (f= 23) are receiving in the bracket of PHP 10,000 – 14,999 pesos .It can also be observed that a bulk of the participants are receiving within the salary range of php 15,000 to almost php 30,000 and few others in the range of php 30,000 – almost php 35,000. Government agency like DepEd follows a national teachers’ grading of salary. Other government agencies follow the national standard salary mandated by the Department of Budget and Management (DBM, [https://www.dbm.gov.ph > uploads > 2012/03](https://www.dbm.gov.ph/uploads/2012/03)). It can be deduced that many (f =84) have served the agency in the span of one-(1) to six (6) years.

On the employment characteristics of the participants who are not presently employed but have been employed in the past

Table 6. *The frequency and percent distribution of the employment characteristics of the participants not presently employed but have been employed in the past*

How Present Job Was Applied	BEED	BSED	BSIT	BSAT	MAED	MSBA	BSBA	Frequency	Percent
job fair	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0
alumni placement	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0
referrals	3	3		1	2	1	1	11	50.00
online	1	1		0	0	0	0	2	9.09
personal appointment	0	2		3	0	0	1	6	27.27
walk-in	2			0	0	0	0	3	13.64
	6	7	0	4	2	1	2	22	100.00
Occupation									
ALS volunteer	1	3	0	1	0	1	1	7	31.82
teaching	2	4	0	1	2	0	0	9	45.45
Com services	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	13.64
Admservices	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	9.09
Actg/bsness				1				1	4.55
Health related									
Superv/mngr									
	6	7	0	4	2	1	2	22	100.00

Table 6 presents the employment characteristics of the participants who do not presently have a job but have had one in the past. Results indicate that referrals (f=11) led them to land a job in the past and personal appointment in the form of an application. Teaching still ranks first in terms of occupation seconded by being a volunteer in ALS which is an Alternative Learning System under the Department of Education. It can be deduced that more graduates of this institution are geared in the teaching profession and less nurturing in the other degree programs that are related to business and technology.

Data from Table 7 indicate that some graduates of ACI have taken jobs from varied agencies. With the skills learned from college, a graduate can generally be employed. It is already a known fact that there is always a first time for one to undergo experience before being given a stable job. Others may go into volunteering to gain experience but are not able to sustain themselves into more years in service knowing that the monthly income is not sufficiently sustainable. Still, others gave in and stayed out of employment for other



reasons that need to be researched. Suffice it to note that, these 22 graduates who are not presently employed had experiences in being employed in the past. They were in varied employment under DepEd (f=8), in private agencies (f=6), and manpower agencies (f=8). In addition, jobs taken are in contractual or casual (f=16) status which is classified to be in non-government offices (f=14). Generally, the number of this group of graduates is not an alarming drawback of unemployment in this institution in this evaluation period.

Table 7. *The frequency and percent distribution of the employment characteristics of the participants who are not presently employed but have been employed in the past in terms of agency, status, and classification*

Variable	BEED	BSED	BSIT	BSAT	MAED	MSBA	BSBA	Frequency	Percent
Agency									
DepEd	2	1		2	2		1	8	36.36
Private	1	2		1		1	1	6	27.28
Manpower	3	4		1				8	36.36
Total	6	7	0	4	2	1	2	22	100.00
Status									
Per/reg	1	3	0	1	0	1		6	27.27
Cont/cas	5	4	0	3	2	0	2	16	72.73
Volunteer									
Total	6	7	0	4	2	1	2	22	100.00
Classification									
government	3	2	0	2	0	0	1	8	36.36
NGO	3	5	0	2	2	1	1	14	63.64
Self-employ									
total	6	7	0	4	2	1	3	22	100.00

On the other hand, it can be seen in Table 8 that a great number of the participants (f=10) or 45 % have received a salary range between php 5000 to php 9,999 pesos only. This finding is like the result of the tracer study at Bulacan State University: AY 2015-2017 to AY 2018-2019 (Galang et al., 2021), wherein they also have graduates (f=69) receiving a monthly rate on their first job, which was below php 10,000.00. In terms of the length of service of this group of graduates, the majority of them (f=13) or 59 % served 1-3 years only and few (f=6) for less than a year, and others (f=3) served onward to 6 years. This implies that a college degree is already an investment where one can choose to go into employment or go enterprising and stay a year or two to gain experience for better employment.

Table 8. *The frequency and percent distribution of the employment characteristics of the participants who are not presently employed but have been employed in the past in terms of monthly income and length of service*

Monthly Income	BEED	BSED	BSIT	BSAT	MAED	MSBA	BSBA	Frequency	Percent
below 5k	1			2				3	13.64
5000 – 9999	4	4		1			1	10	45.45
10000-14999	1	2		1		1	1	6	27.27
15000-19999		1			2			3	13.64
20000-24999									
25000-29999									
Total	6	7		4	2	1	2	22	100.00
Length Of Service (Present Job)									
less than 1 yr.	1	1		1	2		1	6	27.27
1-3 yrs.	5	3		3		1	1	13	59.09
3.1—6 yrs.		3						3	13.64
6.1-9 yrs.									
Total	6	7		4	2	1	2	22	100.00

In summary, these graduates were still able to make use of the skills learned in college for them to be able to gain employment even for a shorter time. For one or many other reasons, the graduate may not be able to continue seeking posts in the marketplace for now but the skills learned in their college education are deemed useful in their daily endeavors in life.

On the usefulness of skills learned from college in the professional life of the graduate (Effectiveness of the degree programs of the institute)

Table 9 presents the skills learned by the graduates in their college education. Data revealed that the Master of Arts in Education (MAED) graduates are highly skilled in most of the identified skills learned in college. However, results indicate lesser competencies in information skills (wtdmean=4.27) and leadership skills (wtdmean=4.27) compared with the other identified skills. In a Tracer study of Graduate Programs in Education (Sumande et al., 2023), findings reveal that information skills were also on the lower rank as compared with teaching skills, communication skills, and critical and problem-solving skills. On the other hand, the graduates of Master of Science in Business Administration (MSBA) reveal that all the learned skills identified in this study are rated very useful in their professional lives. This is in parallel to the findings of the study entitled, “A Tracer Study of the Business Graduate Programs of the Catholic University of the Philippines “wherein ethical skills, entrepreneurial skills, and problem-solving skills to a very great extent

have helped the graduates achieve business decisions and relevance in the workplace (Madrigal & Lopena, 2023). Looking at the undergraduate programs, it can be seen that the graduates of the education programs (BEED & BSED) of this institution reveal a rating of very useful on all identified skills learned in college. However, a weighted mean of 4.16 and 4.38 respectively denote a very useful verbal description, not the highest rating expected of being in the education program. This implies that the teaching skills of the education graduates fall short of the competencies to be highly effective in their profession. This is similar to the findings of Canizares (2015) in his tracer study of San Carlos University education graduates where they were able to develop their students to have very good teaching process skills, not excellent ratings. As expected for * PNU graduates, the result of their tracer study revealed that most of the employed graduate respondents were able to use their acquired knowledge and skills to a great extent.

Table 9. *Weighted mean distribution of the usefulness of the skills/competencies learned from college education to the professional life of the graduate*

Skills	MAED	MSBA	BEED	BSED	BSIT	BSAT	BSBA	Wtd mean	VD	interpretation
teaching skills	4.55	3.83	4.16	4.38	4.50	3.90	4.08	4.20	VU	Very effective
Crit tk skills	4.68	3.83	4.13	4.38	4.50	3.38	3.92	4.12	VU	Very effective
technical skills	4.68	4.00	4.18	4.21	4.00	4.00	4.23	4.19	VU	Very effective
ethical skills	4.50	3.83	4.09	4.25	4.50	4.1	4.31	4.23	VU	Very effective
Prob-S skills	4.55	4.00	4.20	4.5	4.50	4.19	3.15	4.16	VU	Very effective
comm skills	4.32	4.17	4.25	4.42	4.50	4.19	4.15	4.29	VU	Very effective
Leadr skills	4.27	4.00	4.18	4.25	4.50	4.00	4.08	4.18	VU	Very effective
analytical skills	4.45	3.67	4.14	4.33	4.50	4.00	4.00	4.16	VU	Very effective
Entrep skills	4.32	4.17	4.11	4.33	4.50	4.00	4.38	4.26	VU	Very effective
HR skills	4.59	4.00	4.14	4.5	4.50	4.05	4.00	4.25	VU	Very effective
IT skills	4.27	4.00	4.11	4.5	4.00	4.14	3.92	4.13	VU	Very effective
N=	22	6	56	24	4	21	13			
Average wtd mean 4.20 VU Very effective										

Legend: 1.0- 1.49 not useful/not effective, 1.50-2.49 slightly useful/slightly effective, 2.50 -3.49 moderately useful / moderately effective, 3.50-4.49 very useful / very effective, 4.50-5.00 highly useful

Generally, the graduates of Bachelor of Science in Information Technology (BSIT), Bachelor of Science in Accounting Technology (BSAT), and Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA) rated the identified skills to be very useful in their professional lives. It is to be reckoned that the BSIT graduates expected to be on top with information technology, only rated this skill to be very useful undermined by other identified skills. This implies that the graduates were not able to learn fully the skills they are supposed to be excellent in, thus feeling the less impact of its usefulness in their professional life. According to CHED, as a BSIT graduate, it is common to have IT skills as the most useful skills. This was revealed in the tracer study of BSIT at Bulacan State University where graduates found that having an IT skill as their top priority has been deemed helpful in their workplace and received the highest rating among all other skills (Galang & Del Rosa, 2021). For the graduates in the BSAT program, critical thinking skills are rated moderately useful (wtd. mean=3.38) while BSBA graduates rated problem-solving skills to be moderately useful (wtd mean= 3.15) as well. This implies that these skills have not been developed much in themselves while in their college education.

In summary, communication skills, (wtdmean=4.29); entrepreneurial skills (wtd. mean=4.26), and human relations skills (wtd.mean=4.25) are the top three skills learned from college which the graduates of ACI have found very effective in their professional lives.

On how applicable are the curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular programs to the professional work of the graduates (Relevance of the degree programs)

The curriculum of the degree programs included in this tracer study are composed of core courses, co-curricular courses and extra-curricular courses. Participants rated these variables using the Likert 5-point scale as to its applicability (relevance) to their workplace.

Table 10 presents the rating of the graduates in terms of the applicability of the courses in their degree programs to their professional work. Data show that generally, general courses (wtd. mean =3.74), major courses (wtd mean=3.68), and professional courses (wtd mean=3.73) are rated very applicable and interpreted as very relevant. All other courses are rated within the weighted mean range of 2.71 to 3.41 verbally described as moderately applicable and interpreted as moderately relevant. Taking the results by degree programs, it can be seen that only graduates of BSIT rated their courses very applicable and interpreted as very relevant to their professional work. This is also true with graduates from BEED and BSED programs. In contrast, graduates of BSBA (wtd mean=2.02) , BSAT (wtdmean=2.05) and the graduate programs (MAED: wtd mean= 1.77 ; MBA (wtd mean= 2.17) rated their elective courses to be slightly applicable and interpreted as slightly relevant to their professional work College electives are classes where students can elect to explore new interests and broaden areas of learning which can improve the overall quality of college education. These are courses that can lighten the course load less strenuous than core courses.

Findings also show that field study or on- the- job training is a component of the core courses that are rated slightly applicable and interpreted as slightly relevant by graduates in MAED, BSAT, and BSBA while graduates in MSBA rated not applicable (wtd mean=1.17) interpreted as not relevant. This implies that graduates of the different degree programs in ACI lack field exposure. According to the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), OJTs are mandated by law to ensure the safety of students and their

quality of learning. It shall establish strong linkages with the business industry (CMO #14, s. 2017).

Table 10. *Weighted mean distribution of the applicability of the curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular programs to the professional works of the graduates*

Courses	MAED	MSBA	BEED	BSED	BSIT	BSAT	BSBA	mean	Verbal Des	Interpretation
general courses	4.64	3.67	4.2	3.88	3.5	2.29	4	3.74	VA	VR
major courses	4.35	2.67	4.32	4	4	2.33	4.08	3.68	VA	VR
professional courses	4.14	3	4.25	3.92	4.5	2.33	4	3.73	VA	VR
elective courses	1.77	2.17	4.18	3.83	4	2.05	2.08	2.87	MA	MR
OJT/field study	1.59	1.17	4.29	3.92	4	2.48	1.54	2.71	MA	MR
Average wtd mean 3.35 MA MR										
co-curricular										
fieldtrips/benchmark	1.44	3.5	4.07	3.71	4.5	2.86	2.08	3.17	MA	MR
seminars/conferences	2.36	3.17	4.11	4.08	4	2.81	2.46	3.28	MA	MR
trainings/workshops	4.29	4.17	4.26	4.04	3.5	2.62	1	3.41	MA	MR
Average wtd mean 3.28 MA MR										
Extra-curricular										
intramurals/foundation	3.67	1	4.11	3.63	4.5	1.95	1	2.84	MA	MR
exit conferences	1.13	2.17	4.04	3.63	4	2.81	3.62	3.06	MA	MR
Average wtd mean 2.95 MA MR										

Legend: 1.0-1.49 not applicable/not relevant, 1.50-2.49 slightly applicable/slightly relevant, 2.50-3.49 moderately applicable/moderately relevant, 3.50-4.49 very applicable/very relevant, 4.50-5.00 highly applicable/highly relevant, VA=very applicable, MA=moderately applicable, VR=very relevant, MR=moderately relevant

Co-curricular activities at ACI are manifested in field trips, seminars or conferences, and training or workshops. They supplement course materials. Students perform these activities without grades or academic credit but still learn new information or reinforce current knowledge. It provides students with additional experience in some form or another and relates to educational resources, and strengthens comprehension.

As can be seen in Table 10, data reveal that the graduates of MAED rated field trips as not applicable (wtd. mean=1.44) interpreted as not relevant to their professional work but rated slightly applicable (wtd. mean=2.36) on seminars and conferences and rated very applicable (4.29) with training/workshop with is interpreted as very relevant to their line of work. In contrast to the rating of the graduates in BSBA which rated it as not applicable (wtd mean=1.0), therefore no relevance to their professional work. It

can also be gleaned that their rate on intramurals as not applicable (wtd. mean=1.0) is the same with graduates from MSBA. This implies that graduates in business-related courses think that intramurals as extracurricular activities are not relevant to their work. Another extracurricular activity which is an exit conference is rated not applicable by participants in the graduate programs (MAED & MSBA). This implies the non-relevance of extracurricular activities to their professional work.

These Off-campus activities are conducted by HEIs to supplement and facilitate a more meaningful experience for students in addition to the regular classroom instruction program (CMO # 63 s. 2017). In summary, the courses of the degree programs of ACI under study are moderately relevant to the professional works of the graduates implying a review of the courses of the different degree programs.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn: Teacher education degree program is dominantly a female zone filled with energetic and competitive graduates whose employment leads them to acquire permanent teaching positions and receive inspiring monthly income holding secured tenure of employment. ACI graduates undergo proper procedure in applying a job to agencies where their degree programs are most suited the employability characteristic is seen in a surge of graduates accepted to the teaching positions creating a mismatch with other non-teaching program getting a post in the teaching profession. Other occupation related to business and technology are filled in with other specialization. The acquired skills and competencies were not internalized fully. There is a need to match skills to be developed with the field of specialization taken. The core courses, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities in the different degree programs are not well designed to maximize the potential of the prospective graduate.

Based on the conclusions of the study, the following concerns and issues are recommended: To the administration, admission, policy makers, intensify the offering of incentives to male senior high schools to enter the teaching profession. The administration may assign guidance personnel to conduct sessions with students on career and employment seminar, personhood, or personality development. A retooling of faculty strategies and upgrading of instructional materials may be done periodically in an institutional framework. A curriculum evaluation maybe worked out by each department heads together with the deans, faculty, and VP for academic affairs. Periodic tracer studies may be conducted to establish the quality assurance of each degree programs of the institution and monitor the employability of the graduates. Future researchers may conduct another tracer study that would include assessment of employers and the live experiences of the employed graduates.

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Affiliations and Corresponding Information

Fe M. Dela Cruz, PhD

Agusan Colleges, Inc. - Philippines

Hamilcar Steven B. Chanjueco, DM

Agusan Colleges, Inc. - Philippines