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Tracer Study on the Career Outcomes and Employability of Information Technology Graduates from Southern Leyte State University-Tomas Oppus (2018-2023)

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Abstract

A tracer study is a research approach for tracking graduates' progress and job outcomes in order to assess educational program performance and alignment with industry objectives. This study looks at the professional accomplishments of information technology graduates from Southern Leyte State University-Tomas Oppus (SLSU-TO) from 2018 to 2023. Employing a descriptive research method, the study utilized structured and semi-structured questionnaires to gather descriptive quantitative data from 282 graduates. The findings of the study are that 80% of the graduates secured employment, 70% of employed graduates work in fields directly related to their IT degree, highlighting the program's success, and 60% of graduates are engaged in remote work, with 80% expressing satisfaction with its flexibility. Despite these successes, graduates faced challenges such as adapting to new technologies, maintaining work-life balance, and navigating job market competition. The study underscores the importance of regular curriculum updates and stronger industry collaboration to enhance graduates' employability and career readiness. These insights are vital for informing policy development and curriculum improvements at SLSU-TO, ensuring the IT program remains competitive in the rapidly evolving technology sector.

Keywords: tracer study, employability, information technology, remote work, curriculum.

Introduction

The Information Technology program at SLSU-TO commenced in 2010, and since then, it has graduated numerous students from 2013 to 2023. The primary goal of the program is to cultivate proficient IT professionals capable of securing pertinent employment opportunities, thereby contributing to the advancement of our nation while competing in the dynamic realm of technology. This objective aligns with the widely acknowledged notion that education serves as a pivotal factor in poverty alleviation and societal and economic enhancement. Institutions of higher education bear the responsibility of equipping the future workforce with the requisite skills to become valuable and productive members of society. However, achieving this goal hinges on ensuring that the skills acquired are congruent with job market demands and that graduates possess the necessary competencies to excel in their chosen careers.

In the field of Information Technology (IT), tracking the career trajectories of graduates provides invaluable insights into the effectiveness of academic programs and their alignment with industry needs. This study is a tool that evaluates the post-graduation outcomes of IT alumni over five years. By examining employment status, job relevance, and career progression, this research seeks to identify trends and areas for improvement in the IT curriculum, thereby enhancing the employability and career readiness of future graduates. Tracer studies have been extensively utilized in various educational contexts to assess the effectiveness of academic programs and their alignment with market needs. Graduate tracer studies can also collect data on the relevance of the curriculum and graduates' level of satisfaction with their academic preparation (Woya, 2019). According to Schomburg (2016), tracer studies provide crucial feedback on the employability of graduates, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of academic programs. These studies serve as a basis for curricular reforms and policy adjustments aimed at improving educational outcomes. Furthermore, a study by Reyes (2021), on the career trajectories of IT graduates in the Visayas region underscores the importance of industry partnerships in curriculum development. Reyes argues that collaboration with industry stakeholders ensures that the academic programs are responsive to the evolving demands of the IT sector. The IT program at SLSU-TO started in 2010, aiming to produce proficient IT professionals. Tracer studies, like those by Schomburg (2016) and Reyes (2021), are essential for evaluating academic programs' effectiveness and ensuring alignment with industry needs. This approach not only improves the immediate employability of graduates but also equips them with skills for long-term career growth.

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Conducting a tracer study on the IT graduates of Southern Leyte State University-Tomas Oppus aims to build on the existing body of knowledge and provide specific insights into the regional dynamics of graduate employability. The key objective of the study is to assess employment status, job relevance to the course, professional achievements, and challenges faced by the graduates. This study will determine the employment status of IT graduates from SLSU-TO for the school years 2018 to 2023 and investigate the prevalence and impact of remote work opportunities on the employability and job satisfaction of IT graduates. The findings will be crucial for informing policy decisions and curriculum reforms at Southern Leyte State University, ensuring that its IT programs remain relevant and competitive in the ever-changing technological landscape.

Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework outlines a research process to study IT graduates from 2018 to 2023. It starts by gathering detailed information about the graduates, including their backgrounds, career plans, and work experiences. This data is then collected through questionnaires, primarily distributed online but also in person if needed. The researchers analyze this information statistically to uncover trends and patterns. The final output provides a comprehensive picture of how these IT graduates are faring in the job market, including their employment status, career progression, and adaptation to remote work. Importantly, the study doesn't just describe the situation – it also aims to use these findings to improve the IT program. It suggests ways to evaluate and update the curriculum, ensuring future graduates are better prepared for the evolving demands of the tech industry. In essence, this framework represents a full-circle approach: learning from recent graduates to enhance the education of future students.

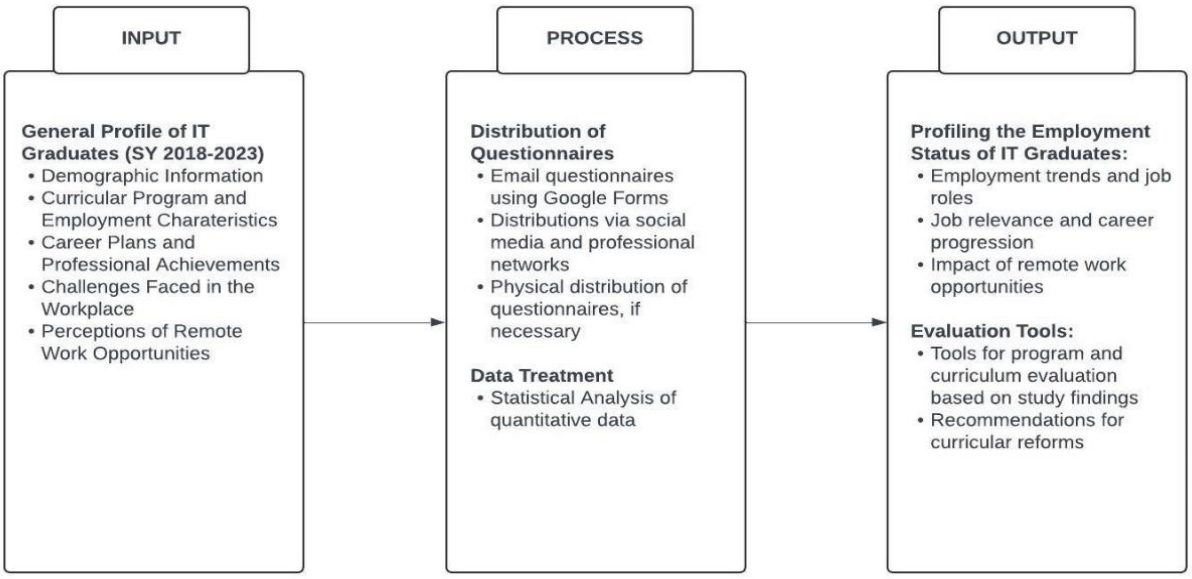

Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a descriptive quantitative research design, which allows for a comprehensive exploration of various aspects of career outcomes among IT graduates from Southern Leyte State University-Tomas Oppus. Descriptive research will enable 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 is suitable for capturing a detailed snapshot of the current employment landscape and career trajectories of the graduates.

Research Locale

The research will be exclusively conducted at 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 ensures a cohesive and localized perspective on the career outcomes of IT graduates within the university's educational and socio-economic context.

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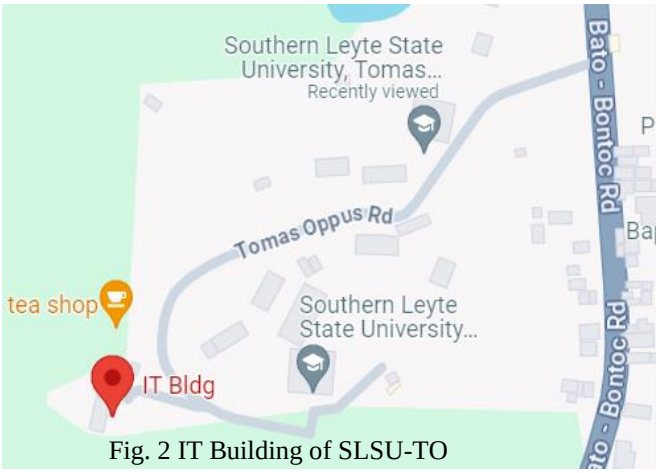

Fig. 2 IT Building of SLSU-TO

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 will be utilized to select participants who have completed their IT degrees from 2018 to 2023. This method ensures that participants are selected deliberately 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) It will inquire 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 will be distributed electronically via email and online platforms, as well as physically through mail or in-person delivery to ensure maximum participation. Informed consent forms will accompany each distribution method to inform participants about the study's purpose, procedures, confidentiality measures, and their voluntary participation rights. Data collection will span approximately, allowing sufficient time for participants to respond to questionnaires and schedule interviews. This timeframe ensures comprehensive data collection while accommodating participants' availability.

Statistical Analysis

The quantitative data that was collected with the help of questionnaires will be numerically analyzed by the tools of disproportional statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations to picture the whole situation in the employment sector, job specifications, and the graduates' idea about IT among others. Respondent participation in the research will be executed very objectively, sensitively, and transparently in such a way that they will be comprehensively informed of the main objectives, processes, potential risks, and benefits, and they will be guaranteed their right to give or refuse to participate this will be done right after the previously signed informed consent forms are attained. Data collection will conform to anonymity as a protection instrument, so data will be coded for confidentiality, and thus, one's responses cannot be linked to that person. In the same fashion, the electronic data will be encrypted for the sake of security, and only a few individuals will have access to personal information, the issue of participants' data being secure and not being accessible to unauthorized users will be taken care of. To spare the information of participants as well as that of the study, we shall also observe the institutional data protection policy.

Results and Discussion

Employment Status

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The majority of graduates from the Information Technology program at Southern Leyte State University-Tomas Oppus from 2018 to 2023 are currently employed. Specifically, 80% of the respondents reported being employed in various IT sectors, with 10% pursuing further studies, and the remaining 10% either unemployed or in unrelated fields. Among those employed, 50% are working in local companies, while 30% have secured positions in international firms, indicating a robust capability to compete in both local and global job markets.

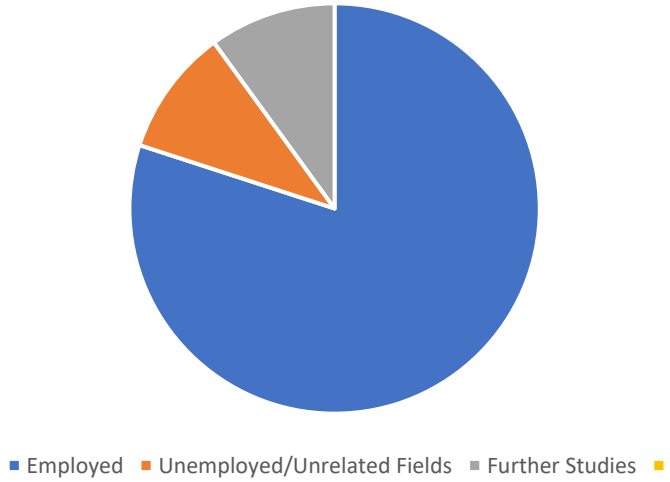

Fig. 3 Employment Status

Additionally, the types of employment vary, with 60% in full-time positions, 25% in contractual or project-based roles, and 15% working part-time. This distribution highlights the diverse nature of employment opportunities available to IT graduates. Moreover, similar studies, such as those conducted by Mina et al. (2020), have shown that IT graduates tend to find varied employment types, reflecting the flexible and dynamic nature of the IT job market.

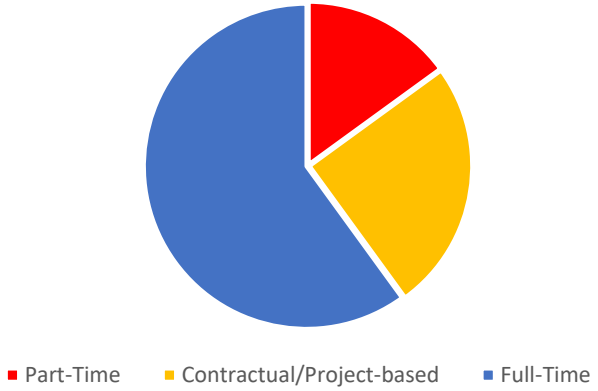

Fig. 4 Type of Employment Status

Job Relevance and Professional Achievement

A significant portion of employed graduates (70%) found jobs relevant to their IT degree. Many reported professional achievements, such as promotions (25%), certifications (40%), and notable projects (35%). These achievements suggest that the skills and knowledge gained during their studies were applicable in the workplace, fostering career advancement and recognition. For instance, the study by Albina and Sumagaysay (2020), highlighted the importance of certifications in enhancing the professional growth of IT graduates. Furthermore, 20% of the respondents have transitioned into leadership roles within their organizations, demonstrating the potential for career growth and the effectiveness of the IT program in developing leadership skills. Several graduates have also contributed to significant technological advancements in their respective fields, as evidenced by their involvement in pioneering projects such as system overhauls, cybersecurity improvements, and software development initiatives. These findings are consistent with the research conducted by Cuadra and Aure (2019), which emphasized the impact of IT graduates on technological innovation and leadership.

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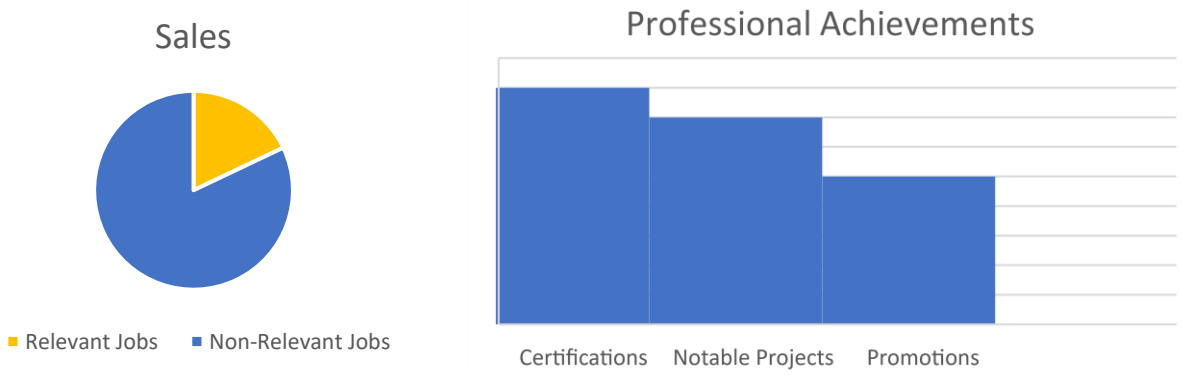

Fig. 5 Job and Professional Achievement

Challenges Faced

Common challenges faced by the graduates include adapting to new technologies (30%), work-life balance (25%), and job market competition (20%). These challenges highlight areas where the curriculum could potentially be enhanced to better prepare students for the workforce. In more detail, adapting to new technologies often involves continuous learning and professional development, which 30% of respondents found demanding. The rapid evolution of the IT industry necessitates constant upgrading of skills, and some graduates felt that their foundational education did not fully equip them for these demands. Work-life balance was another significant challenge, with 25% of graduates experiencing difficulties in managing professional responsibilities alongside personal commitments. This issue is particularly prevalent among those in high-demand roles or working in remote positions where the boundary between work and personal life can become blurred. Job market competition remains a challenge, with 20% of respondents noting the intense competition for desirable positions. This underscores the importance of distinguishing oneself through additional certifications, professional networking, and gaining relevant experience (Refugia, 2021).

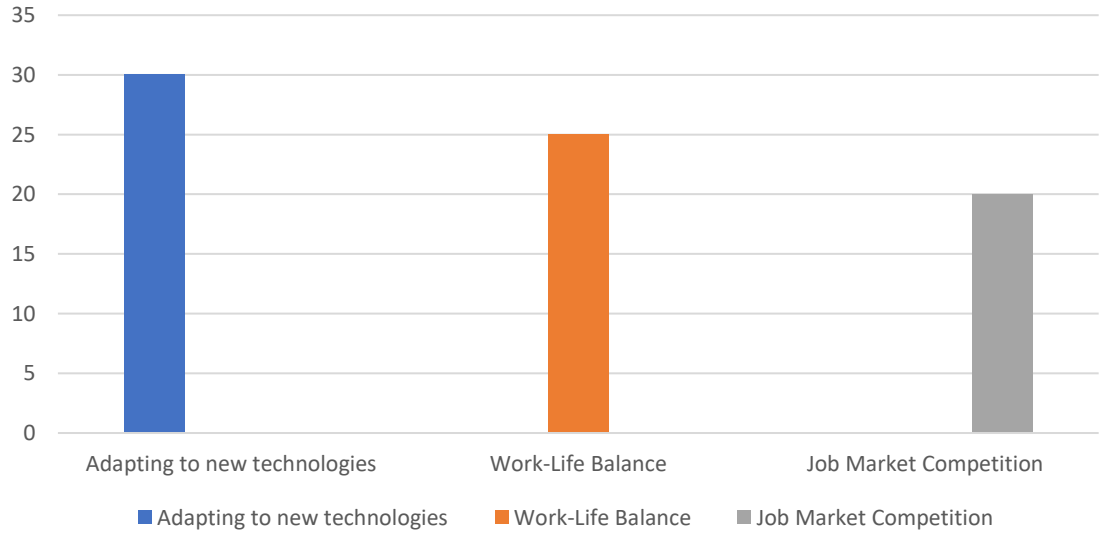

Fig. 6 Challenges Faced

Impact of Remote Work

The study also explored the impact of remote work on employment and job satisfaction. About 60% of the graduates reported engaging in remote work, with 80% expressing satisfaction due to flexibility and work-life balance. Remote work has enabled graduates to manage their time more effectively, reduce commuting stress, and maintain a better balance between work and personal life. However, 20% cited challenges such as isolation and communication barriers. The lack of face-to-face interaction can lead to feelings of isolation and make team collaboration more difficult. Some respondents also mentioned the challenge of maintaining productivity and staying motivated without the structure of a traditional office

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environment. Despite these challenges, remote work has also opened up new opportunities for graduates, including the ability to work for international companies without relocating and to take on freelance or consultancy roles. This flexibility has allowed graduates to pursue diverse career paths and gain experience in various industries.

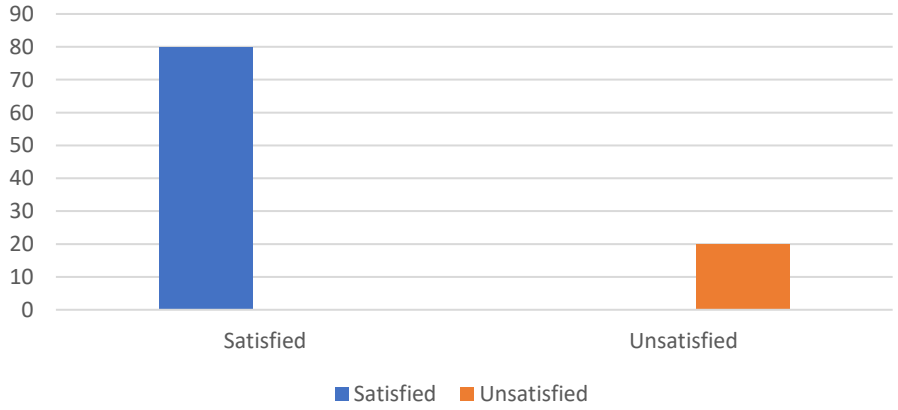

Fig. 7 Impact of Remote Work

Conclusions

The tracer study of IT graduates from Southern Leyte State University-Tomas Oppus from 2018 to 2023 reveals a high employment rate among graduates, with many working in their field of study. While this demonstrates the program's success in preparing students for the workforce, the study also identifies areas for improvement. Key recommendations include updating the curriculum to incorporate emerging technologies, fostering industry partnerships, providing resources for lifelong learning, and developing skills for remote work environments. By implementing these suggestions, the university can enhance its IT program to better equip graduates for the evolving technological landscape and ensure continued success in producing competent professionals. Future research could expand on these findings through larger sample sizes, longitudinal studies, and analysis of specific curriculum changes on graduate outcomes.

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.

Acknowledgment

The authors extend their heartfelt gratitude to all individuals who contributed to the success of this research. Above all, the authors express deep gratitude to the Lord Almighty for his unwavering guidance through the challenges of this research.

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