A TRACER STUDY OF TERTIARY EDUCATION SUBSIDY (TES) GRANTEES OF SAINT MICHAEL COLLEGE OF CARAGA

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ABSTRACT

This study traced the graduates who were Tertiary Education Subsidy (TES) grantees of Saint Michael College of Caraga (SMCC) from School Year 2019 to 2024 to assess their demographic profile, employability outcomes, and experiences with institutional support services. Anchored on Human Capital Theory, the research examined whether investments in education through TES translated into employment, income generation, and skill development. A multi-method research design was employed, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. Survey data were collected from 306 TES graduates using a modified CHED Graduate Tracer Study (GTS) instrument, while 12 participants underwent semi-structured interviews. Descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) were used for quantitative analysis, and thematic analysis was applied to qualitative data. Findings revealed that most graduates were young (20–25 years old), single, and early in their careers. While 76.47% were employed, primarily in the education sector, the majority held entry-level positions and earned below ₱15,000 in their first job. A significant proportion secured employment within six months after graduation, indicating favorable employability outcomes. However, only 21.5% of total TES grantees during the period graduated, revealing retention concerns. Qualitative findings showed that both technical (IT/computer) and non-technical ./(communication, problem-solving, human relations) skills acquired during college positively contributed to workplace performance, though gaps in advanced digital competencies, particularly in Excel functions, were identified. The study affirms the contribution of TES and institutional support services to graduate employability while highlighting the need to strengthen retention mechanisms, industry linkages, digital skill integration, and graduate tracking systems. These findings provide empirical evidence for policy enhancement, curriculum responsiveness, and strategic improvement of student support services to ensure sustained alignment with labor market demands.

INTRODUCTION

Background

Conducting a tracer study is crucial for the institution to assess the long-term impact of its educational programs and the support services received by the graduates. It serves as a follow-up mechanism to track the graduates' progress and evaluate the effectiveness of the institution's support services. In addition, a tracer study helps the institution gather insights into how well the program prepares graduates for real-world challenges, especially employment. By understanding the graduates' experiences and challenges, institutions can refine their program offerings, including support services, to better serve current and future students. Institutions may refine their program offerings and improve student support services by conducting a tracer study. According to Cahyo Nugroho et al. (2018), every higher education institution is expected to have an alumni tracer program in the form of a tracer study to know the absorption and position of graduates in the world of work and industry. It is supported by Abdulloh et al. (2022), who stated that one of the things that need to be evaluated is the level of absorption of graduates into the working industry. In addition, a tracer study is required to assess the school's success in learning that has been applied to the curriculum. Senekal and Smith (2022) also agree that graduate tracer studies are recommended for exploring employment destinations and employability.

On the other hand, schools are expected to provide critical and essential features, not only the quality of the program and its delivery but also adequate school facilities, student support, and student services (Tadle et al., 2021). Ensuring that learners have access to education is insufficient to promote equality of educational opportunities unless sound student support is provided, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Shikulo & Lekhetho, 2020). Therefore, higher education institutions (HEIs) should provide effective support services that meet the needs of students to enhance their learning experience and academic success and empower them to be self-directed lifelong learners who may help them seek employment. Considering these facts, the researcher profiled the graduates, tracked their employability, and determined the support services they experienced while studying at Saint Michael College of Caraga to improve the student support services of the Admission and Scholarship Office for current and future TES grantees. Thus, the study's findings provide critical insights for SMCC to enhance its academic programs and student support services to better prepare students for the labor market.

Objectives of the Study/Statement of the problem

The study aimed to trace the graduates who were TES grantees of SMCC from School Year 2019 to 2024.

Specifically, it answered the following questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of:
    1.1 age
    1.2 civil status
    1.3 professional examination(s) passed
    1.4 reason(s) for taking the degree program, and
    1.5 training/activities attended during college?

2. What is the total number of TES grantees, and how many graduated from S.Y. 2019 to 2024 at SMCC?

3. What are the employment characteristics of the respondents in terms of:
    3.1 employment status
    3.2 nature of employment
    3.3 nature of current work
    3.4 location of current work
    3.5 duration of finding a job
    3.6 gross monthly income, and
    3.7 first job level position?

4. What employability skills or competencies were learned in college that the graduates were able to apply in their first job?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is founded on the theory of Human Capital, emphasizing the returns on educational investments, particularly employment, income, and career advancement. Accordingly, human capital theory assumes that education determines the marginal productivity of labor, and this determines earnings. It has become widely assumed that intellectual formation constitutes economic capital, higher education is preparation for work, and primarily education (not social background) determines graduate outcomes (Marginson, 2019). Hence, the study of Asombo et al. (2023) recommends that the government increase education expenditure and encourage and promote academic excellence with appropriate remunerations such as granting scholarships, employment, training, and re-training of excellent students.

Hence, this study benefits significantly from the framework of human capital theory. It provides a valuable framework for the study by emphasizing the transformative role of

educational programs and subsidies like TES in building the recipient's human capital. In the context of this study, this theory was used to highlight how investments in education contribute to the graduate's development of skills and knowledge; investigate whether TES grantees have transitioned to meaningful employment, reflecting their enhanced human capital; and explore whether the graduates' employability has resulted in higher incomes and better socio-economic well-being.

Literature Review

People live in a rapidly changing world with diverse demands and challenges (Del Rosario, 2019). Considering this, governments worldwide are increasingly challenging universities to produce human resources with the right skill sets and knowledge required to drive their economies in this twenty-first century. Thus, universities must produce graduates that bring tangible and meaningful contributions to the economy. Graduate tracer study (GTS) is hailed as one of the ways universities can respond and reposition themselves to the actual needs of the industry (Nyasulu et al., 2019). It represents one of the key approaches for enhancing study program effectiveness in contemporary higher education (Nudzor & Ansah, 2020). Additionally, GTS plays a key role in informing higher education institutions worldwide about the efficacy of their programs and preparing graduates for the job market (Chima et al., 2023).

Additionally, a tracer study can provide helpful information to evaluate higher education results and can be used to improve and guarantee the quality of higher education institutions (Shelly Andari et al., 2021). Significantly, a graduate is one of the essential supports in developing a university. Graduates have a role in helping universities develop into the community through collaboration in academic terms (Thomas & Wagiu, 2019). Hence, HEIs must prepare graduates for careers by monitoring their performance. They must also evaluate academic relevancy to practical needs (Lukman et al., 2023). Research by J. Senekal and Munro (2019) indicated that graduate tracer studies may be an appropriate research method for responding to various problems in a higher education context, including difficulties associated with higher education transformation and graduate employability. Besides the Malaysian context, the tracer study also drew insights from international perspectives on the employed theoretical framework, comprising the theories of job market signaling, human capital, and neoliberalism, to provide a comprehensive understanding of graduate employability (Dela Cruz, R. A., 2023).

Moreover, HEIs are responsible for ensuring the quality of education of their learners. GTS is one of the methods these institutions can use to monitor the quality of their programs (Tefera, 2018). It is an essential tool for educational planners, as they provide valuable information for evaluating the results of higher education and training institutions (Campiseno & Maratas, 2018). By conducting a tracer study, an institution can determine how effectively it has strengthened its students' abilities and prepared them for the workplace (Plaza et al., 2022). Furthermore, graduates' satisfaction encourages continual improvement towards engaging in open, mutually beneficial ways and spreading knowledge

to uplift others and positively use their influence to impact the community, the country, and the world (Gentova et al., 2023).

Martin et al. (2015) acknowledged that a tracer study is used to trace the graduates from their school of origin to their place of employment or self-employment to obtain the needed information. It also determined the extent to which factors affect the employment status of the graduates. Tracer studies, according to Santos et al. (2013), are essential sources of information to know what happens to graduates of academic programs in HEIs. GTS not only covers the employment history and profile, skills and competencies, and career advancement endeavors of the graduates of the HEI but also serves as an evaluation and monitoring instrument in which the effectiveness and relevance of the offered training and programs can be measured (Shrestha, 2021).

Individuals who have developed the competencies that firms feel to be most important are more likely to obtain a job. It requires the educational process to go beyond imparting knowledge and developing skills. It must be leveled to ensure and produce employable graduates (Albina & Sumagaysay, 2020). Every year, hundreds of thousands of fresh graduates join the labor force and compete for entry-level positions in the private and public sectors. They possess different levels of the acquired skills from their alma mater that are expected to be relevant and matched to the job requirements, like technical skills, information technology skills, communication skills, entrepreneurial skills, and the like (Dela Rosa & Galang, 2021). These data show the importance of HEIs in the graduate's career and job opportunities.

In support of generating a more skilled workforce, scholarships to deserving students allow them to pursue their studies and contribute to the country's development (Capistrano et al., 2020). It is universally accepted that human resources are the foundation of a country's economy. However, education is accessible to less privileged members of society. Hence, academic scholarship grants have been created to provide less fortunate yet deserving students with access to education and build a better future (Modales et al., 2022). Thus, to improve the production of high-level human resources that can spearhead efforts to attain national development, many countries, including the Philippines, have provided student scholarship grants (Cagasan et al., 2019).

Magno et al. (2023) acknowledged that one way to develop human resource potential is by enhancing higher-quality education through student scholarship programs. In connection, Ortiz et al. (2019) stated that ensuring equitable and inclusive access to quality higher education remains one of the primary agendas of many governments worldwide due to its crucial role in economic development and poverty reduction. Providing access to quality education to students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, not only helps raise their potential income but also benefits society in the long run. Further, according to Barr (2001), the quality and diversity of higher education are essential for their own sake and national competitiveness. Many students have had problems with their finances in the past years, especially their education expenses. They are affected by the crisis financially,

emotionally, and by their well-being (Capinig et al., 2023). That is why the government provides student assistance programs that will lessen the students' burden with their tuition and other school fees, such as the Tertiary education Subsidy (TES) program of the Unified Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education Act (UniFAST).

The TES is one of the four programs under Republic Act No. 10931, also known as the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act (UAQTEA). This act intends to provide all Filipinos with an equal opportunity to quality tertiary education to ensure the optimized utilization of government educational resources (Maga-Ao et al., 2019). TES is a form of financial assistance that plays a vital role in augmenting the financial incapacities of students enrolled in HEIs. Through R.A. No. 10931, which was passed into law on August 3, 2017, the citizens were allowed full access to quality education by providing adequate funding and increasing the participation rate in tertiary education. It further gives poor but deserving students chances to reach their goals and finish a degree. The Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of this law recognize the complementary roles of public and private HEIs and technical-vocational institutions in the tertiary education system and the invaluable contribution of private tertiary institutions to the education system. As embedded in our Philippine Constitution, quality education is an inalienable right of all Filipinos, and it is the state's policy to protect and promote the rights of students to quality education at all levels (Pacheco et al., 2022).

Nowadays, finding employment is as challenging as finding a needle in a haystack. Moreover, many graduates are noted to have work that is not related to their course in college. Hence, GTS is essential for understanding the relevance and quality of programs offered by universities and the labor market (Sanchez et al., 2017). Scholar graduates also provide relevant information to not only provide a better understanding of the relevance and quality of programs offered but also improve the administration of the scholarship program using tracer studies (Capistrano et al., 2020).

Taking this into account, the researcher aimed to provide not only a better understanding of the relevance and quality of programs offered by the institution but also to improve the support services of the Admission and Scholarship Office on the management of the TES program using this tracer study. The office offers various support services to the grantees, such as students' TES application, orientation, TES updates, monitoring of grades, staff assistance for grant-related concerns, and the disbursement of funds. According to Banayo et al. (2023), scholars are managed by providing services such as scholarship updates, which are about disseminating relevant information and announcements from the department. Meanwhile, scholarship staff assistance is given as they oversee meeting the needs of the scholars from the time they submit their scholarship applications until they complete their degrees, among other duties. Support for scholarship-related problems is also extended to the students to further the academic and personal growth of the scholars. Lastly, scholarship benefits are also given to the scholars, including tuition and other school fees.

To effectively facilitate the management of the TES program and provide improved support services to the current grantees of SMCC, the researcher proposed a recommendation for improving student support services as an output based on the study's findings. It will help the Admission and Scholarship Office better support grantees in earning a degree, potentially leading to better employment. As a result, a higher level of satisfaction among the graduates will be attained, leading to an increase in the admission of college students, which will also lead to an increased number of TES grantees at SMCC. It is supported by Estacio et al. (2022) by stating that student support offices enhance students' educational experience through the services and programs that meet student needs. Additionally, Blacer-Bacolod & S. Bacolod (2021) indicated that student support services assist students in different aspects while they are in school. Furthermore, financial aid, as one of the institution's support services, has critical importance as a factor in college enrollments (Wilcox, 1991).

SMCC, through the Office of Admission and Scholarship, provides support services to the grantees. These support services for the grantees are vital in increasing their chances of continuing in college and meeting their academic needs, leading to degree completion and success. Considering this, the study will help the office improve its support services strategies, especially in managing and facilitating the TES program, leading to strengthening alumni relations and improved admission strategies. Therefore, the researcher aimed to conduct this tracer study not only for curriculum enhancement but also to improve the support services for the current and future TES grantees of SMCC.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a **multi-method research design** integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to conduct a tracer study of TES grantees of Saint Michael College of Caraga (SMCC). Multi-method research involves the systematic use of more than one form of data collection to enhance analytical depth and validity (Mik-Meyer, 2020).

In the quantitative phase, a descriptive survey design was utilized to gather data on graduates' demographic profiles, degree programs, and employment characteristics. The modified CHED Graduate Tracer Study (GTS) instrument served as the primary tool. Frequency and percentage distributions were computed to describe employment trends, program representation, and graduate outcomes.

The qualitative phase addressed Problems 4 and 5 through semi-structured interviews with selected TES graduates. A thematic analysis approach was employed to identify recurring patterns related to employability skills acquired in college and experiences with institutional support services (Dawadi, 2020). Integrating quantitative

profiling with qualitative insights strengthened interpretive rigor and enhanced the reliability of findings (Blacer-Bacolod & Bacolod, 2021).

Context and Participants

The study was conducted at Saint Michael College of Caraga (SMCC), a private Roman Catholic higher education institution in Nasipit, Agusan del Norte, Philippines. Established in 1948 by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, SMCC offers 19 CHED-recognized degree programs eligible for TES grants. For SY 2023–2024, total enrollment reached 5,028 students across basic and higher education levels (SMCC Registrar, 2024).

The respondents were TES grantee graduates from SY 2018–2019 to SY 2023–2024. Using convenience sampling, 306 respondents were selected from a population of 1,662 graduates. The largest proportion came from SY 2023–2024 due to accessibility. Degree distribution showed 64.71% from board programs (e.g., Criminology, Education) and 35.29% from non-board programs (e.g., Business Administration, IT, Hospitality).

Additionally, 12 graduates participated in in-depth interviews to provide qualitative insights regarding employability skills and support service experiences. Combining survey respondents and interview participants ensured comprehensive representation.

Ethical Standards

Ethical compliance was strictly observed. Institutional permission was secured from the Registrar, Student Affairs and Services, and the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Research. Participants received informed consent forms detailing the study's purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature.

Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured. Data were used solely for research purposes and stored securely. Participation proceeded only upon documented consent.

Data Collection and Tools

The study utilized a modified CHED Graduate Tracer Study (GTS) instrument. Selected items were removed to align with study objectives, while additional questions on age and college training participation were included. The survey collected demographic data, employment characteristics, employability competencies, and perceptions of Admission and Scholarship Office support services.

Quantitative data were gathered via online surveys and printed questionnaires over a one-month period. Qualitative data were collected through individual interviews guided by open-ended questions. Descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) analyzed quantitative responses. Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis to identify major themes and sub-themes, supported by direct participant quotations. Findings from both

strands were integrated to generate comprehensive conclusions and inform institutional recommendations for improving TES support services.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of:
  1.1 age
  1.2 civil status
  1.3 professional examination(s) passed
  1.4 reason(s) for taking the degree program, and
  1.5 training/activities attended during college?

Table 1. *Frequency Distribution of the Respondents' Age*

Age	Frequency	Percentage
20 – 25	191	62.42
26 – 30	83	27.12
31 – 35	22	7.19
36 – 40	7	2.29
Above 40	3	0.98
Total	306	100

   The table reveals that most respondents are 20 to 25 years old, comprising 62.42% of the total respondents. The 26 to 30 age group follows, accounting for 27.12%. A smaller proportion of respondents belong to the 31 to 35 and 36 to 40 age brackets, comprising 7.19% and 2.29%, respectively. Lastly, those above 40 years old make up the smallest group, with only 0.98% representation. This result indicates a youthful respondent base, which reflects the nature of the respondents being studied, such as young professionals or early-career individuals, given that they are graduates of A.Y. 2019–2024. The study by Tutor et al. (2019) supports this result, indicating that 73.4% of surveyed graduates were aged 24–27, with an additional 9.3% aged 21–23, suggesting that many graduates are in their early to mid-20s, reflecting the typical age range for recent graduates in the Philippines.

Table 2. *Frequency Distribution of the Respondents' Civil Status*

Civil Status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	267	87.25
Married	38	12.42
Widow	1	0.33
Separated	0	0

Total	306	100

This indicates that most respondents (87.25%) are single. It supports Table 3 results that most respondents belong to a younger age group (20–25 years old), mostly in their early career opportunities. Only 12.42% of the respondents are married, further reflecting the youthful demographic of the study's respondents. Dela Rosa and Galang (2021) support this result, revealing that most of the graduates are single, with a percentage of 97.98%, since most of them are between the ages of 20 and 30. Similarly, a tracer study conducted by Gerada (2011) revealed that most respondents were single and aged between 25 and 26, highlighting the prevalence of single status among young professionals.

Table 3. Frequency Distribution of the Respondents' Professional Examination(s) Passed

Professional Examination(s) Passed	Frequency	Percentage
Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET)	51	16.67
Criminologist Licensure Examination (CLE)	33	10.78
Librarians Licensure Examination (LLE)	3	0.98
Civil Service Examination	2	0.65
PNP Entrance Examination	2	0.65
None	215	70.26
Total	306	100

The table clearly shows that most respondents, specifically 215 (70.26%) graduates, have not passed any professional examination because most graduates of education and criminology programs have not yet taken a licensure examination or are still waiting for examination results. Additionally, some were enrolled in programs that do not require a professional license to engage in lawful employment or practice within their respective fields, such as business administration, hospitality management, tourism management, information technology, and similar courses where licensure is not required for employment.

Among those who have taken and passed professional examinations, the LET has the highest percentage at 16.67%, followed by the CLE with 10.78%, reflecting the presence of graduates from programs that mandate licensure for professional practice as shown in Table 2. A few respondents passed other professional exams, including the LLE (0.98%), PNP Entrance Examination (0.65%), and Civil Service Examination (0.65%). Tutor et al. (2019) support this finding by emphasizing that licensure examinations are essential for

regulated professions such as education and criminology. Francisco (2024) further reveals that many respondents passed the LET, highlighting the high licensure rate among education graduates.

Table 4. Frequency Distribution of the Respondents' Reasons for Taking the Degree Program

Reasons for taking the Degree Program	Frequency	Percentage
High Grades in the course/subject area(s) related to the course	29	3.75
Good grades in high school	29	3.75
Influence of parents or relatives	89	11.48
Peer Influence	48	6.19
Inspired by a role model	72	9.29
Strong passion for the profession	99	12.77
Prospect for immediate employment	66	8.52
Status or prestige of the profession	29	3.75
Availability of course offerings in the chosen institution	78	10.06
Prospect of career advancement	47	6.06
Affordable for the family	124	16.00
Prospect of attractive compensation	16	2.06
Opportunity for employment abroad	32	4.13
No particular choice or no better idea	17	2.19
Total	775	100

Table 4 indicates that the most cited reason for taking a degree program among graduates is affordability for the family (16.00%), suggesting that economic considerations significantly influence educational choices. It is followed by a strong passion for the profession (12.77%), indicating that some graduates pursued their degrees out of genuine interest. The influence of parents or relatives (11.48%) and the availability of course offerings (10.06%) highlight the impact of family and institutional accessibility, especially in less urbanized areas such as Nasipit, Agusan del Norte. Gines (2014) supports these findings, revealing affordable tuition fees as rank 1, followed by prestige and prospects for employment and career advancement.

Table 5. Frequency Distribution of the Respondents' Training/Activities Attended during College

Training/Activities Attended	Frequency	Percentage
On the Job Training	25	7.53
Seminars/Workshops/Symposiums	44	13.25

Job Fair	8	2.41
Leadership Training	9	2.71
Pre-Employment Training	1	0.30
Pre-Service Teacher Training	5	1.51
Feasibility Study Subject Culmination Event	1	0.30
Work Ethics and Employment Orientation	7	2.11
Financial Literacy	8	2.41
Digital Literacy/IT Training	2	0.60
Research Conference	1	0.30
Practice Teaching	6	1.81
Students' Congress	1	0.30
Criminology Trainings	5	1.51
Community Extension Services	4	1.20
School-related Competitions	4	1.20
None	201	60.54
Total	332	100

Table 5 shows that a significant majority (60.54%) indicated that they did not participate in any training or activities during college. Among those who engaged, Seminars, Workshops, and Symposiums (13.25%) and On-the-Job Training (7.53%) were most attended. Participation in professional trainings such as practice teaching and criminology training helped bridge theoretical knowledge and real-world application. Tutor et al. (2019) emphasize that participation in seminars and workshops positively influenced graduates' engagement and life satisfaction. Francisco (2024) further indicates that activities like practice teaching significantly contributed to graduates' preparedness for the workforce.

2. What is the total number of TES grantees, and how many graduated from S.Y. 2019 to 2024 at SMCC?
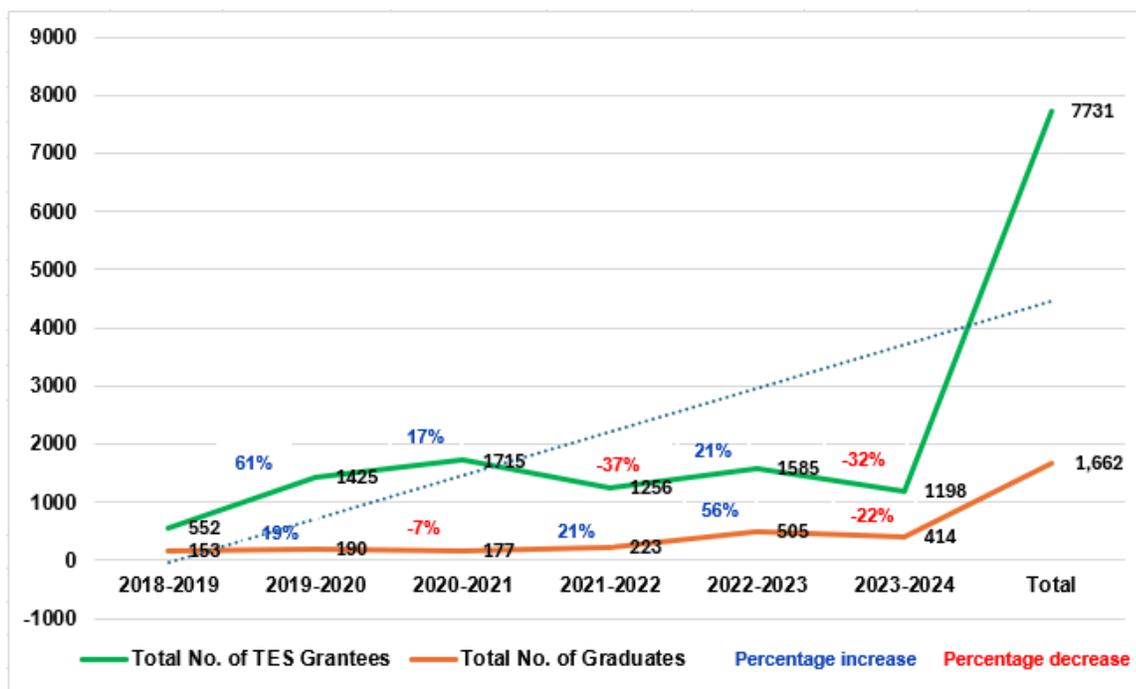
Figure 1. Number of TES Grantees and Graduates at SMCC

Figure 1 shows the total number of TES grantees and the corresponding number of graduates at SMCC from S.Y. 2019-2024. It also illustrates the trend or the percentage changes between consecutive years. The green line represents the total number of TES grantees, which shows fluctuations throughout the covered period. From S.Y. 2018–2019 to 2019–2020, there was a significant 61% increase. This growth continued modestly by 17% in S.Y. 2020–2021, reaching 1,715 grantees — the peak before experiencing a 37% decline in S.Y. 2021–2022, dropping to 1,256. The numbers slightly recovered in S.Y. 2022–2023 with a 21% increase but again declined by 32% in S.Y. 2023–2024. The total number of TES grantees for six years reached 7,731.

On the other hand, the brown line shows the number of TES grantees who graduated. There was a 19% increase in graduates in S.Y. 2019–2020, followed by a minor 7% decrease in S.Y. 2020–2021. A steady increase resumed in the succeeding years: 21% (2021–2022), 56% (2022–2023), the highest growth rate among graduates, before declining again by 22% in S.Y. 2023–2024. In total, 1,662 TES grantees graduated during this period, approximately 21.5% of the total grantees. However, included in 1,715 grantees were first-year to third-year students. There were 1,945 fourth-year TES grantees during S.Y. 2019-2024. Thus, out of 1,945 fourth-year TES grantees, only 1,662 graduated during the period, with 283 grantees who did not graduate.

3. What are the employment characteristics of the respondents?

Table 8 reveals that the majority (76.47%) of the respondents are currently employed, indicating that most graduates were able to find work opportunities after completing their degree programs. However, 19.93% of respondents reported being unemployed, meaning

they have worked previously but are currently unemployed due to family concerns, taking advance or further study, and health-related reasons. The remaining 3.60% have never been employed because of limited job opportunities and personal reasons. This result is supported by Abana et al. (2021), showing that graduates are competent because most of them are employed with regular or permanent status.

Table 6. Frequency Distribution of the Respondents' Current Employment Status

Current Employment Status	Frequency	Percentage
Employed	234	76.47
Not Employed	61	19.93
Never been Employed	11	3.60
Total	**306**	**100**

Moreover, Gallera (2023) reveals that most graduates were employed, with some experiencing underemployment and unemployment. Factors contributing to underemployment included a mismatch between graduates' chosen programs and job opportunities. At the same time, unemployment was influenced by a lack of job-seeking motivation, financial dependence on parents, and limited job prospects.

Table 7. Frequency Distribution of the Respondents' Nature of Current Employment

Nature of Current Employment	Frequency	Percentage
Regular or Permanent	125	40.85
Casual	16	5.23
Contractual	68	22.22
Temporary	25	8.17
None	72	23.53
Total	306	100

Table 7 reveals that most respondents (40.85%) are currently employed with regular or permanent status, indicating that many graduates have secured stable and long-term employment. It is followed by contractual (22.22%), temporary (8.17%), and casual (5.23%), reflecting that some graduates are engaged in time-bound or project-based employment arrangements, which may offer less job security compared to regular employment. Some graduates (23.53%) are not currently employed or have never been employed, as indicated in Table 8. Cagasan et al. (2019) support this result, revealing that more than four-fifths of

the respondents (84%) reported having a regular or permanent appointment status in their current jobs. The remaining few either had contractual, temporary, or casual appointments. Prospero, M. (2019) confirms that most graduates hold a regular or permanent employment status. Dela Rosa and Galang (2023) also agree, stating that most employed graduates are regular/permanent.

Table 8. Frequency Distribution of the Respondents' Nature of Current Work

Nature of Current Work	Frequency	Percentage
Education	80	26.14
Agriculture, Hunting and Forestry	3	0.98
Manufacturing	10	3.27
Electricity, Gas and Water Supply	1	0.33
Construction	6	1.96
Wholesale and Retail Trade, repair of motor vehicles, motorcycles, and personal and household goods	27	8.82
Hotels and Restaurants	16	5.23
Transport Storage and Communication	5	1.63
Financial Intermediation	11	3.59
Real Estate, Renting and Business Activities	8	2.61
Public Administration and Defense; Compulsory Social Security	10	3.27
Health and Social Work	10	3.27
Other community, Social, and Personal Service Activities	6	1.96
Private Households with Employed Persons	1	0.33
Transportation	4	1.31
Business Process Outsourcing	5	1.63
Others	31	10.13
None	72	23.53
Total	306	100

Table 8 shows that *Education* is the most common field of employment, and 26.14% of the respondents work in this sector, showing a significant number of graduates pursued degrees aligned with teaching or academic roles, particularly those who passed the LET, as reflected in Table 5. A notable 8.82% are employed in *Wholesale and Retail Trade and Repair Services,* which often offer accessible opportunities for new graduates. Other represented fields include *Hotels and Restaurants* (5.23%), *Financial Intermediation* (3.59%), *Health and Social Work* (3.27%), and *Public Administration and Defense* (3.27%). Moreover, 10.13% identified "Others" as their field of work, such as virtual assistance, graphic design, and business development, that were not specifically categorized in the survey. Furthermore,

23.53% of the respondents reported "None," which is consistent with Table 8 on employment status. These graduates are still seeking employment, pursuing further studies, or have not looked for a job due to family or personal reasons.

The CHED (2021) supports these results, indicating that most graduates from teacher education programs are typically absorbed by the education sector, especially those who have passed the LET, reflecting a high employment rate in this field. Tun's study (2020) also demonstrated that most graduates were engaged in a service business, followed by trading, which is aligned with the nature of management accounting and marketing management academic programs. Additionally, some newly graduated are employed in sectors outside their field of specialization due to limited job opportunities, contributing to job mismatch and underemployment (Seameo Innotech, 2020).

Table 9. Frequency Distribution of the Respondents' Location of Current Work

Location of Current Work	Frequency	Percentage
Local	224	73.20
Abroad	10	3.27
None	72	23.53
Total	306	100

Table 11 reveals that most employed respondents (73.20%) work locally, indicating that they primarily find job opportunities within the country. A small portion (3.27%) are employed abroad, suggesting that while there are opportunities for overseas employment, only a limited number of graduates have pursued or secured jobs abroad. Meanwhile, 23.53% indicated "None" as their work location, which aligns with the earlier data from Table 8, showing that these respondents are either unemployed or have never been employed. This is supported by Andaya et al. (2024), indicating that most respondents secured employment from local and international competitive companies within less than three months after graduation.

Table 10. Frequency Distribution of the Respondents' Duration of Finding their First Job after Graduation

Duration of Finding a Job after Graduation	Frequency	Percentage
Less than a month	126	41.18
1 to 6 months	123	40.20
7 to 11 months	14	4.58
1 year to less than 2 years	23	7.52

2 years to less than 3 years	3	0.98
3 years to less than 4 years	6	1.96
None	11	3.59
Total	306	100

Table 10 indicates that the majority of respondents (81.38%) found their first employment within six months after graduation, 41.18% in less than a month, and 40.20% within one to six months, showing that the institution's graduates are generally competitive and readily employable upon graduation. However, while most of them found a job in less than six months, a smaller portion of respondents experienced more extended search periods—4.58% found jobs within 7 to 11 months, 7.52% within 1 to 2 years, and 2.94% took 2 to 4 years to secure employment, indicating challenges such as limited job opportunities or personal reasons. Notably, 3.59% of respondents indicated "None," meaning they have not yet experienced employment since graduation. It aligns with the data presented in Table 8.

Macatangay (2013) supports these results, revealing that most participants were gainfully employed and obtained their first jobs in less than 1 year. Additionally, 84% of the graduates were able to get their first job within 6 months after graduation (Tun, 2020). The results are further supported by Ramirez et al. (2014), indicating that most graduates land course-related jobs within a short period after graduation. However, the programs must be studied carefully for continuous improvement to give better chances for students to be hired immediately after or even before graduation (Cabrini et al., 2020).

Table 13 shows that most respondents (71.24%) earn below ₱15,000.00 monthly income on their first jobs after college, showing that they are employed in entry-level positions or sectors that offer relatively modest compensation, as reflected in Table 14, where most of them are in rank or clerical positions. About 13.07% earn between ₱15,000.00 to less than ₱20,000.00, while only 12.09% earn ₱20,000.00 and above. Those with higher income levels are employed in specialized fields, hold supervisory or managerial positions, or work abroad where salaries are relatively higher.

Table 11. Frequency Distribution of the Respondents' Gross Monthly Income

Gross Monthly Income	Frequency	Percentage
Below ₱5,000.00	38	12.42
₱5,000.00 to less than 10,000.00	106	34.64
₱10,000.00 to less than 15,000.00	74	24.18
₱15,000.00 to less than 20,000.00	40	13.07
₱20,000.00 to less than 25,000.00	16	5.23
₱25,000.00 and above	21	6.86

None	11	3.59
Total	306	100

Meanwhile, 3.29% of respondents reported no monthly income due to unemployment, further supporting earlier findings on employment status. This result is supported by Santos et al. (2013), revealing that in the year 2013-2014, the majority (53.57%) of the graduates earned about 5,000 to less than 10,000 (10 or 50%), followed by 10,000 to less than 15,000 in a month (eight or 40%). Additionally, Dela Rosa & Galang (2023) revealed that most of the employed graduates earn 10,000.00 to ₱20,000.00 a month. Moreover, Prospero (2019) states that most graduates have monthly incomes of ₱18,500 to less than ₱23,000 in their first jobs.

Table 14 reveals that most respondents (67.65%) started their careers in *rank or clerical* positions, indicating that most graduates enter the workforce through entry-level roles. It is typical for fresh graduates, especially those without work experience or professional licenses. Notably, 24.18% secured *professional, technical, or supervisory* roles. Only a small percentage (4.58%) of graduates reported being employed in *managerial or executive* positions, which is expected given their recent graduation dates. Lastly, 3.59% indicated "None," meaning they have not yet experienced any form of employment, aligning with earlier findings from Table 8.

Table 12. Frequency Distribution of the Respondents' First Job Level Position

First Job Level Position	Frequency	Percentage
Rank or Clerical	207	67.65
Professional, Technical, or Supervisory	74	24.18
Managerial or Executive	14	4.58
None	11	3.59
Total	306	100

This result is supported by Tun's study (2020), stating that 43% of the graduates are still in rank-and-file positions, and only 10% hold middle-level positions. Though the results are favorable, the institution should continue improving its program curriculum, meeting international standards, and continually satisfying the students regarding the quality of its education (Dela Rosa & Galang, 2023).

4. What employability skills or competencies were learned in college that the graduates were able to apply in their first job?

Table 13 clearly illustrates the connection between the graduates' skills developed during college and their practical application in their first jobs. Technical (IT/computer skills) and non-technical (soft skills) emerged as themes.

Table 13. Employability Skills or Competencies Learned in College

Actual Responses from the Participants	Sub-Themes	Major Themes
P1: "I was able to use what I have learned in BSIT course, like hardware troubleshooting (computer, printer, laptop), and network maintenance." *P2: "The specific skills that I have learned in college, which I was able to use in my first job, is regarding computer hardware and computer systems, which I able to handle technical problems."* *P5: "I am competent in handling Microsoft Offices and other software-related applications. In my first job, I handled Microsoft Office works and other software applications such as Quickenroll, Learning Management System (LMS), turnstile, and the server. I learned Microsoft Office and other software applications during my college years. Competent ko sa mga software applications."*	IT/Computer Skills	Technical Skills
P3: "I have learned communication skills, problem-solving, and accounting. And I was able to apply these skills in my first job." *P4: "The specific skills or competencies that I have learned in college which I used in my first job are communication skills, human relations, and stress management skills."* *P6: "Throughout my college years, I developed strong presentation skills through various academic projects, organizational activities, and competitions. I was able to carry this skill into my first job as a Sales Development Representative, where I regularly used it to communicate with prospects, deliver compelling sales pitches, and contribute to building strong client relationships."*	Soft Skills	Non-Technical Skills

P8: "In college, I learned skills that helped me a lot in my job now as an HR. I learned how to stay organized, which helps me keep employee records and do payroll properly. I also improved my communication skills, so I can talk clearly with job applicants and employees. Paying attention to details was important in school, and now it helps me make sure contracts and salaries are correct. Lastly, I learned how to solve problems, which is useful when handling employee concerns or hiring needs."

Five graduates emphasized the importance of technical skills or competencies *(e.g., troubleshooting, network maintenance, Microsoft Office applications, software applications)* in their first jobs. For example, Participant 2 shared that he handled technical problems in his first job because of the skills he learned in college. Another participant (P5) shared that he is competent in handling Microsoft Offices and other software-related applications because of what he learned in college. On the other hand, five participants mentioned that the soft skills *(e.g., presentation, organizational, communication, human relations, attention to detail, and problem-solving skills)* they gained during college helped them in their first jobs, especially in roles that required interacting with people, presenting ideas, or working with teams. For example, one graduate (P6) shared that her experience delivering presentations during college helped her perform better as a Sales Development Representative.

Another graduate (P8) mentioned that her improved communication skills supported her tasks in HR, such as speaking with applicants and resolving employee concerns. They emphasized the importance of communication skills developed in college through presentations, organizational activities, and class participation. Chico, A. (2021) supports this result by stating that most of the respondents' competencies in terms of communication skills, critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, and human relations skills are helpful in their first job. Ramirez et al. (2014) also agree, revealing that the graduates claimed that their knowledge, academically acquired skills, and competencies contributed significantly to their job performance. Likewise, the academic-acquired abilities and competencies of the graduates are relevant to their chosen occupations. The study also indicates that the graduates possess the skills and competencies necessary to succeed in this competitive world. Furthermore, Tun (2020) revealed that most respondents were employed in a field related to their degree through the help of what they have learned from the institution. Abana et al. (2021) also emphasize that graduates must acquire innovative skills such as information and communication technology.

Table 16 reveals insights into the skills or competencies that graduates wished they had developed more during college to better prepare for their first job. The thematic analysis points to one significant area of concern: technical skills. Most participants agreed with stronger technical competencies, particularly in complex Microsoft Excel functions and other software applications. Three participants emphasized the practical relevance of

Excel, particularly in performing tasks that required formulas, data organization, and analysis functions beyond basic computer literacy.

Participant 4 shared that the technical skills (IT/computer skills), especially Excel function and formula, were not well developed in college, only the basics were taught. Participant 3 agreed, stating that they did not focus much on Excel, like its complex functions and formulas. Participant 7 further agreed, emphasizing that many tasks in the workplace required more advanced skills, such as using complex formulas in Excel. The graduates emphasized the practical relevance of Excel, particularly in performing tasks that required formulas, data organization, and analysis functions beyond basic computer literacy.

Table 14. *Skills or Competencies that Need to be Developed*

Actual Responses from the Participants	Sub-Themes	Major Theme
P2: *"Yes, ma'am, there are specific skills or competencies that I wish I have developed more, specifically in terms of the field of programming and the fundamentals of computer networks. At the same time, being a full stack developer. So, these are the specific skills that I wish I had developed more during college."* P3 "Yes, ma'am. In my college, we did not focus much on Excel. But I cannot say that my Excel skills are low because when it comes to computer literacy, I am knowledgeable. It is just that my weakness is the Excel formulas and functions."	IT/Computer Skills	**Technical Skills**
P4: "The technical skills, like IT skills, were not developed in college — for example, only the basics of Excel were taught. As a teller, when I started the work, there was already DCPR. That's why technical skills are needed to perform the task efficiently."		

Abana et al. (2021) support this result, emphasizing that graduates must acquire innovative skills such as information and communication technology. The program must continue to provide adequate and relevant competencies by integrating the 21st century and lifelong learning skills to help graduates succeed professionally and personally (Olegario & Argonza, n.d.).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **CHED & UniFAST.** Utilize the findings to evaluate alignment between TES-supported programs and labor market demands. Strengthen curriculum development to ensure employability relevance and assess the overall effectiveness and sustainability of the TES program. Continue financial support initiatives that reduce economic barriers and improve tertiary education access for disadvantaged students.
- **SMCC Administrators.** Use the results for institutional planning and enhancement of student support services beyond financial assistance, particularly in career readiness and employment facilitation. Expand industry linkages and alumni networking for job placement support. Integrate advanced ICT competencies (e.g., Excel functions) and relevant trainings into curricular or graduation requirements. Establish a graduate tracking system and alumni database for continuous engagement and institutional improvement.
- **Office of Admission and Scholarship.** Improve monitoring of TES grantees through a tracking system to support retention and completion. Strengthen communication through a centralized TES portal, SMS/email updates, and accessible information channels. Conduct regular financial literacy seminars for all grantees. Highlight TES success stories to motivate students and promote the program.
- **Guidance Office.** Enhance counseling, mental health, and career development services. Strengthen visibility and impact of job fairs and career seminars to ensure graduates recognize and benefit from these initiatives.
- **SMCC Alumni Association.** Support graduates' transition to employment through mentorship, job referrals, and industry linkages. Provide career guidance grounded in real-world industry expectations to strengthen alumni engagement and institutional credibility.
- **Future Researchers.** Conduct longitudinal tracer studies to monitor career trajectories and emerging skill demands. Replicate the study with larger samples and additional variables to validate findings and assess the long-term impact of the TES program.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that TES grantees of SMCC are predominantly young, single, and in the early stages of their professional careers. Affordability significantly influenced program choice, although personal passion and career aspirations were also relevant factors. While many graduates transitioned successfully into the workforce—particularly in education and other aligned sectors—a gap remains between the number of TES grantees and those who completed their degrees, suggesting retention challenges that require institutional attention. Although employability skills acquired during college contributed positively to workplace performance, limited participation in co-curricular trainings and identified gaps in advanced digital competencies highlight areas for enhancement. The Office of Admission and Scholarship demonstrated a meaningful role in supporting TES grantees through financial management and academic monitoring, contributing to

successful degree completion and employment outcomes. Overall, the study affirms the institutional contribution to graduate employability while identifying strategic areas for strengthening support systems, curriculum responsiveness, and graduate tracking mechanisms to ensure sustained program effectiveness and alignment with labor market demands.

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