

Niña's Tri-prism Framework: A Trifocal Approach for Enhancing Graduates' Employability Outcomes in Local Universities and Colleges in Bulacan

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ABSTRACT

Burce (2024) introduced Niña's Tri-prism: Trifocal Approach, aiming to offer a comprehensive framework for enhancing graduates' employability among graduates in Local Universities and Colleges (LUCs) in Bulacan. This research utilized a qualitative study, engaging the target population from different stakeholders like Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Bulacan, hospitality management graduates from 2016-2020, and representatives from the hospitality industry where these graduates found employment. Employing a phenomenological approach, the study delved into understanding the employability of LUC graduates following the Colaizzi method for data analysis. A structured interview protocol guided the study's objectives, conducting focus-group and one-on-one interviews with twelve (12) participants. Data transcription and coding revealed recurring themes. The study was anchored by Urie Brofenbrenner's Ecological System Theory (1979), which highlights how individuals interact with their environment, emphasizing the importance of considering multiple levels of influence in human behavior. The findings led to the formulation a Trifocal Approach framework involving Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), graduates, and industry. It integrates strategies such as *competency awareness*, *personal attributes*, *comprehensive internship*, *skills acquisition*, *employment insights*, *employment-on-board training*, *career empowerment*, and *professional competency development*. The study concluded that collaboration among these stakeholders is vital for enhancing graduates' employability, emphasizing simultaneous interventions across all three components for optimal results. It is recommended for future researchers to find the Trifocal Approach's effectiveness in local settings.

Keywords: employability, framework in enhancing employability in the hospitality industry, Local Universities and Colleges, trifocal approach

INTRODUCTION

In today's swiftly changing job market, the employability of graduates stands as a crucial concern for educational institutions, policymakers, and students alike. The emphasis is on graduates from higher education making tangible contributions to the economy. This reframes higher education as a means to the end of securing worthwhile employment, shifting away from the traditional goal of nurturing well-rounded individuals intellectually. Tight (2023) mentions that this prioritization of employability has been embraced by national governments since this is the core purpose of higher education as seen in countries like the UK and the US. Within the context of local universities and colleges (LUCs) in the Philippines, understanding the dynamics of graduate employability is not merely an academic pursuit but a fundamental imperative in

shaping the future career opportunities of its students and contributing to regional and even national economic development.

In the Philippines, local government units manage higher education institutions known as local colleges and universities, or LCUs. Based on Sections 447(a)(5)(x) (Municipality), 458(a)(5)(x) (City), and 468(a)(4)(iii) (Province) of the Local Government Code of 1991, which state that “subject to availability of funds and to existing laws, rules and regulations the” LGU may establish a post-secondary institution in a barangay, municipality, city, or province (<https://dbpedia.org/>). There are sixteen (16) local colleges and universities in Region 3, with six (6) of them located in Bulacan. This indicates that local governments are investing efforts and resources to provide quality education within their communities, intending to ultimately benefit society.

A study by Abacan et al. (2020) highlighted a concerning gap in employability within a local college in Bulacan. The findings revealed a significant reality: only 15.6 % of individuals surveyed were employed in positions directly linked to the hospitality industry, while a staggering 67.2% were classified as underemployed six (6) months to a year after graduation. Furthermore, a considerable portion remained unemployed. These statistics underscore a critical issue in workforce readiness and job placement among LUC graduates. The disparity between industry demand and the skills possessed by LUC graduates suggests a systemic challenge in preparing students for relevant and fulfilling employment opportunities. Addressing this research gap is paramount to enhancing the effectiveness of LUC education and ensuring graduates are equipped with the skills needed to thrive in their chosen fields. Moreover, Ngoepe and Theron (2023) emphasized that a good understanding of the factors contributing to employability and HEI in the hospitality domain will be a positive factor in retaining graduates in the hospitality sector, advancing the industry, and obtaining more sustained graduate employment in the future.

As the demands of the industry undergo continuous transformations spiked by the industrial revolution, globalization, and shifting industry landscapes, it becomes imperative for educational institutions to adopt proactive measures to equip their graduates with the requisite skills, competencies, and experiences demanded by employers. This could be possible through a comprehensive examination of the current state of graduate employability within educational institutions, particularly focusing on how well graduates are prepared for the evolving demands of the industry. Therefore, the scope of this study encompasses the perception of employability as perceived by HEIs, graduates, and industry. Also identifying gaps and challenges in this regard, and proposing targeted interventions to address these issues. By delving into the intricacies of graduate employability within the context of educational institutions, this study sought to provide valuable insights and recommendations for optimizing graduates’ prospects in navigating the dynamic landscape of the modern job market. With this, a comprehensive framework for producing graduates who are fully prepared for the workforce, taking into account the essential elements identified through qualitative analysis was developed. This framework encompasses a holistic approach, integrating key aspects such as academic knowledge, practical skills, soft skills, and industry-specific competencies. By synthesizing the insights gathered from the qualitative approach from HEIs, employers, and LUC graduates, the “essence” of the study presented a framework for guidance on curriculum design, pedagogical methods, industry collaborations, and support services tailored to enhance graduates’ employability and career readiness.

Furthermore, this study scrutinized the outcomes of LUC efforts in fostering graduate employability. Through in-depth analysis through HR or employer’s feedback, and alumni success stories, this endeavor to gauge the impact of the institution’s interventions on the career trajectories and professional attainment of its graduates.

As industries change due to things like new technology and globalization, it’s essential for higher education institutions specifically the LUCs to make sure the graduates have the right skills and experiences that the industry wants. The rationale for this study lies in conducting a comprehensive assessment of the current

state of graduate employability within educational settings. This study examined how well LUCs were doing this, what problems they might have faced, and how they could improve things. Through such analysis, this study offered valuable insights and evidence-based recommendations for optimizing graduates' prospects in navigating the dynamic employment landscape.

Statement of the Problem

1. What is the respondents' perception of the "employability of graduates" from Local Colleges?
2. What are the current challenges and gaps in graduates' employability as perceived by HEIs, employers, and graduates themselves?
3. What strategies and initiatives can be recommended by stakeholders, including Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), employers, and graduates themselves, to address the gap between the skills possessed by graduates and the evolving needs of industries?

Objectives of the Study

1. To determine the perception of the "employability of graduates" from Local Colleges
2. To identify the current challenges and gaps in graduates' employability as perceived by HEIs, employers, and graduates themselves
3. To cite strategies and initiatives can be recommended by stakeholders, including Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), employers, and graduates themselves, to address the gap between the skills possessed by graduates and the evolving needs of industries

Purpose of the Study

The study is aimed to construct a Tri-focal approach framework in enhancing employability outcomes in local colleges and universities in Bulacan through the qualitative analysis of the perspectives and lived experiences of selected HEIs in Bulacan selected Human Resource Managers, and selected Alumni of local colleges in Bulacan in terms of employability, challenges, and gaps encountered, and strategies and initiatives for enhancing the employability of graduates.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored in Ecological Systems Theory by Urie Bronfenbrenner in 1979. This theory emphasizes the interactions between individuals and their environments, highlighting the importance of considering multiple levels of influence (such as individual, interpersonal, institutional, and community) in understanding human behavior (Guy-Evans, 2024, January 17).

By adopting this trifocal approach that considers the interactions between graduates, HEIs, and employers within the framework of Ecological Systems Theory, the study can offer a holistic understanding of the factors influencing graduates' employability outcomes in LUCs. This approach facilitates the identification of multi-level interventions, strategies, and initiatives that are aimed at enhancing graduates' preparedness for the workforce ensuring and maintaining employment, and eventually creating a trifocal framework.

Conceptual Framework

In the current study, the qualitative analysis towards unraveling answers to the research questions by employing a phenomenological approach. It provides a structured lens through which to interpret participants' lived experiences, facilitating a deep exploration of the essence of their perspectives within the context of employability, challenges, and strategies. The figure shows the flow of the study.

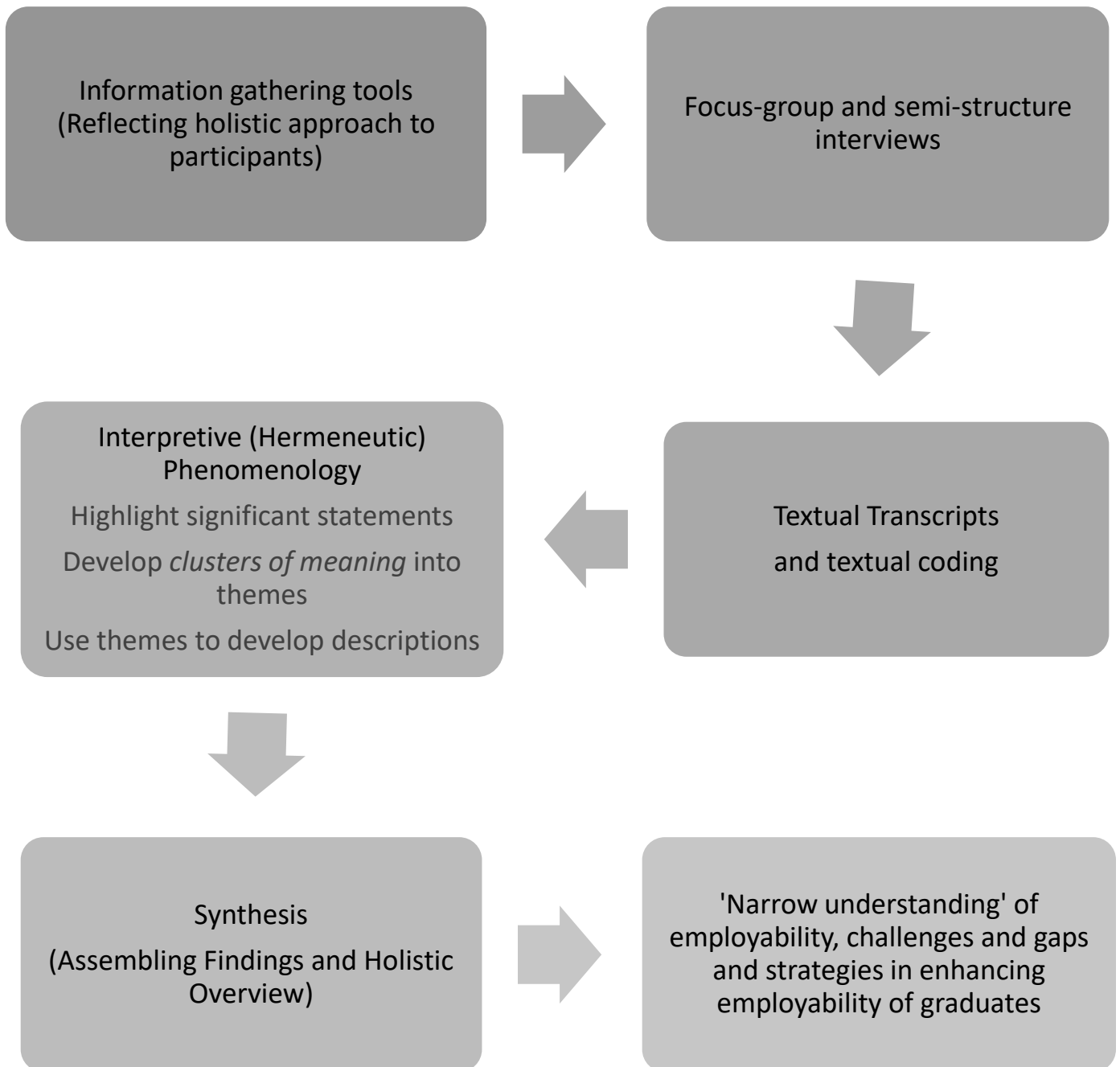


Figure 1. Research Paradigm of the Study (adapted from Creely (2016); modified by the author)

The first phase is information-gathering tools. The researcher develops comprehensive surveys or questionnaires that cover various aspects of employability, challenges, and strategies. Ensure that the questions reflect a holistic understanding of the “what and how” of the participants’ experiences and perspectives.

Next, is Focus-Group and Semi-structured Interviews. The researcher conducts focus-group discussions and semi-structured interviews with representatives from HEIs, LUC graduates, and HR personnel. These qualitative methods allow for a deeper exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions.

Thirdly, Textual Transcripts and Textual Coding. Transcription of the audio recordings of interviews and focus-group discussions verbatim will follow. Utilize textual coding techniques to systematically analyze the transcripts, identifying significant statements related to employability, challenges, and strategies. During this process, employ phenomenological reduction by setting aside any preconceived ideas or biases, and focusing solely on the participants' lived experiences as described in the transcripts.

Next, Interpretive (Hermeneutic) Phenomenology. Apply an interpretive phenomenological approach to analyze the data further. Engage in the process of phenomenological reduction to delve deeper into the essence of participants' experiences. Highlight significant statements that capture the essence of these experiences, stripping away interpretations or assumptions to focus on the essential aspects of the lived experience.

Then, Synthesis. Synthesize the findings from the textual coding and interpretive analysis. Assemble the identified themes and subthemes to provide a holistic overview of the participants' perspectives on employability, challenges, and strategies.

Finally, Narrow Understanding. This aims for a nuanced understanding of employability by delving deeply into the identified themes and subthemes. Explore the nuances and complexities of challenges and gaps faced by graduates, as well as the effectiveness of various strategies in enhancing employability. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

Van Manen (2016) argues that phenomenology in education surpasses being merely an "approach" to studying pedagogy; it goes beyond offering mere "alternative" descriptions or explanations of educational phenomena. Instead, it delves into reflexively uncovering the foundational aspects that fundamentally enable our pedagogical concerns with students (p.189). The experiences, captured through hermeneutic phenomenology and translated into descriptions, prove valuable for analyzing pedagogical aspects that educators must deeply engage with in classroom events, thus enhancing pedagogical practice. In essence, phenomenology emerges from the reality of education, elucidating what is essential from both external and internal experiences, including the analysis of consciousness.

The hermeneutic phenomenology of research is conducted through empirical (collection of experiences) and reflective (analysis of their meanings) activities. In this sense, according to Van Manen, the methods are descriptions of personal experiences, conversational interviews, and close observation.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The following review of related literature and studies will delve comprehensive understanding of the strategies for enhancing the employability of graduates necessitates a thorough examination of existing scholarly works and research findings.

Employability of Graduates

Higher education institutions play a crucial role in enhancing the skills and knowledge of their graduates, as these attributes significantly contribute to individuals' success. This emphasis on skill development has led to increased attention from academia, industry, and administrations regarding higher education programs. Quality education in higher institutions is vital for national development, as it ensures that graduates acquire

the necessary competencies to excel and compete effectively. University curricula are designed to prepare graduates for success in various fields, with a focus on program-specific competencies essential for employment, research, and societal contribution. While previous research, exemplified by Dakhil & Ozkil (2020), has emphasized the importance of curriculum enhancement in improving graduates' readiness for employment, there remains a need to identify specific competencies and skills essential for industry alignment. Moreover, studies such as Huang et al. (2022) have shed light on factors influencing employability, yet gaps persist in comprehensively understanding the multifaceted aspects of this phenomenon, including the role of educational practices, student engagement, and family background. Additionally, while research like Tayco et al. (2022) has examined employability within localized contexts, further investigation is warranted to explore the nuanced impact of local economic dynamics and educational policies on graduates' career outcomes. Furthermore, despite recognition of the importance of integrating Graduate Attributes (GAs) into higher education programs, as emphasized by Rook and Sloan (2021), gaps remain in understanding the effectiveness of this integration and its implications for employability. Lastly, while Caingoy et al. (2022) have highlighted the impact of external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic on employability, further research is needed to assess the long-term implications of such disruptions and develop strategies to mitigate their effects. Addressing these gaps will be instrumental in informing evidence-based interventions and policies aimed at enhancing graduates' preparedness for success in the evolving job market.

Tracer studies in local colleges track graduates' journeys, offering insights into their employability. Thereby informing educational institutions, policymakers, and employers alike on strategies to enhance employability and bridge the gap between education and employment. Mendoza et al. (2020) tracked the employment status of 104 out of 127 BSHRM graduates from Norzagaray College between 2016 and 2020. Their study revealed that 75% of respondents were employed, with 38% working in the hotel and restaurant industry. Additionally, 94% were locally employed, with 52% in rank and clerical positions and 23% in professional roles. The COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase in self-employment and underemployment rates. The hospitality sector, particularly affected by the pandemic, showed sluggish progress in graduates' employment. Despite this, the employability of BSHRM graduates was comparable to other courses in the College and the region, with potential for improvement through curriculum revisiting and recalibration to meet post-pandemic industry demands.

The rise in global competition has posed challenges to the labor market, including heightened competition for jobs and the need for adaptable employees. Employers seek workers who can respond to evolving work environments but often face a skills mismatch between graduate qualifications and job expectations. The study of Arada et.al (2015) investigated factors contributing to this mismatch and proposed alignment strategies to facilitate smoother transitions from school to work. Using the USEM Model of Employability (understanding (U), skilled practice (S), personal qualities and efficacy beliefs (E), and metacognition (M)), the research explores employability attributes across selected fields of specialization. Both students and employers perceive these attributes as relevant, though with varying degrees of importance. Recommendations include prioritizing these attributes to bridge the gap between student and employer perceptions and aiding decision-making in education, government, and business sectors.

Challenges and Gaps in Employability of Graduates

Once the employability status of the graduates has been identified, it becomes advantageous to ascertain the methods for enhancing their employability.

highlights significant challenges and gaps in the employability of graduates, paving the way for a deeper understanding of strategies to enhance their readiness for the job market.

Leonard (2019) underscores the disconnect between university course content and employer needs,

particularly in Information Systems (IS) curricula. By analyzing course descriptions from 221 IS programs in AACSB-accredited schools, the study reveals notable gaps between the skills covered in the curriculum and those desired by employers.

Dutta (2022) addresses the pressing issue of the “Employability Skill Gap” faced by professional students during job recruitment. Through feedback from job providers and business leaders, the study examines the relevance of job-fit criteria for fresh graduates in today’s competitive business environment. It aims to map competency gaps and guide educational programs in preparing graduates to meet industry expectations, ultimately impacting business education curricula across various programs.

Aljhohani et al. (2022) present a pioneering analysis of “curriculum alignment” in interdisciplinary literature, conducted between 2010 and 2021. Utilizing data-driven insights from Scopus-indexed literature, the study offers a comprehensive understanding of key issues, contributors, and themes shaping the field. It advocates for enhanced bibliometric analyses to bridge gaps between scholarly research and promote dialogue between academia and policymakers, thereby fostering connections among previously segregated research communities.

These studies collectively shed light on the challenges and gaps in aligning educational programs with industry demands, emphasizing the importance of bridging these divides to enhance graduates’ employability and ensure their competitiveness in the evolving job market.

Strategies for enhancing graduates’ employability

The employment landscape has become more competitive, globalized, and demanding specific skills and competencies from graduates. Mishra and Braun (2021) argue that traditional indicators like degrees and certificates are no longer sufficient; instead, employers prioritize a combination of extracurricular activities and discipline-specific skills.

Drawing from Succi and Canovi’s (2020) study, which highlights the increasing importance of soft skills in the job market, it’s evident that employers value these skills more than students perceive. This gap in perception underscores the crucial role of higher education institutions in aligning their curriculum with industry demands to enhance graduate employability. Efforts to bridge this gap can include educational initiatives and training programs aimed at developing sought-after skills.

In alignment with this perspective, Underdahl et al. (2023) stress the importance of curriculum alignment with industry needs to enhance graduate employability. Their findings emphasize collaborative partnerships between educators and employers, fostering adaptability and continuous learning among students. Recommendations include providing skilling opportunities through internships and job shadowing, ultimately benefiting individuals, educational institutions, employers, and the economy.

Contrastingly, Reid (2015) explores the establishment of an employability framework at the University of Queensland, aiming to cultivate graduates who are workforce-ready and capable of contributing meaningfully to society. This framework evolved from a pilot initiative involving self-reflection, underscoring the value students place on recognizing and articulating their employability, thus informing the university’s overarching strategy.

Additionally, Peeters et al. (2019) propose the concept of employability capital, refining the notion of movement capital to encompass both obtaining and retaining employment. This framework emphasizes personal resources like knowledge, skills, and attitudes, assisting individuals in navigating challenges in the labor market.

These studies collectively emphasize the importance of aligning educational offerings with industry demands, fostering collaboration between higher education institutions and industry, and empowering graduates with the necessary skills and resources for enhancing employability.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Several groups stand to benefit from the findings of the study:

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). HEIs can benefit from insights into how they can better prepare their graduates for the workforce within Local Urban Contexts (LUCs). Understanding the skills and experiences valued by employers in these contexts can inform curriculum development, career services, and internship programs. HEIs can also use the findings to strengthen partnerships with employers and community organizations, enhancing the relevance and impact of their educational programs.

Hospitality Industry. They can benefit from a deeper understanding of the factors influencing graduates' employability outcomes in LUCs. By learning about graduates' skills, experiences, and career aspirations, employers can refine their recruitment strategies, tailor training programs to meet specific needs, and create more supportive work environments. Employers may also identify opportunities to collaborate with HEIs and other stakeholders to address skill gaps and workforce needs within their industries.

Graduates. Graduates can benefit from insights into the factors that contribute to successful transitions from education to employment in LUCs. By understanding the skills, experiences, and strategies associated with positive employability outcomes, graduates can make more informed decisions about their education and career paths. They may also gain access to resources and support services aimed at enhancing their job readiness and professional development.

Policymakers. Policymakers can benefit from evidence-based recommendations for addressing youth unemployment, promoting economic development, and enhancing social mobility within LUCs. The study's findings may inform the development of policies and programs aimed at strengthening education-to-employment pathways, supporting entrepreneurship, and fostering collaboration between education, industry, and government stakeholders.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Through employing qualitative research design, a phenomenological approach was employed to determine the lived experience of the stakeholders based on their perspectives on the employability of graduates.

Study Locale

The study was conducted within the Philippines, with a specific focus on local colleges in Bulacan. The research encompassed various stakeholders, including graduates from a local college in Bulacan, residents of Bulacan, three hospitality industries in Metro Manila, and two local universities and colleges (LUCs) in Bulacan. This diverse array of stakeholders provided insights into the dynamics of graduate employability within the context of both Bulacan and the broader Philippine educational landscape.

Participants of the Study

As data gathering remains a challenge in the new normal, the researcher employed the purposive sampling

technique. According to Business Research Methodology (n.d), purposive sampling (also known as judgment, selective, or subjective sampling) is a sampling technique in which the researcher relies on his or her judgment when choosing members of the population to participate in the study. It is a given fact that the schedules of graduates, HEIs, and HR directors are hectic and most often erratic as they are expected to have different work shift schedules and need to attend to emergent school issues. The initial plan was to involve twenty (20) participants, but this was reduced to five (5) LUC graduates three (3) Human Resource Personnel, and four (4) from the HEIs as they were the only ones who consented and agreed to be interviewed at least twice and to participate in a focus group discussion. All twelve participants are personal acquaintances of the researcher, and some are acquaintances of each other.

The key informants of this study were graduates of a local college in Bulacan, HR personnel connected to Hospitality Industries who hired graduates from local colleges, and current Program Directors and faculty members of selected local Colleges and Universities in Bulacan. The inclusion criteria for HR Management Personnel considered were:

1. Participants from Human Resource Management must be currently employed in organizations to ensure they have relevant experience and insights into Hospitality Management practices. This could include full-time, part-time, or contract employees. Participants may need to hold specific job positions or roles within the organization, such as HR managers, supervisors, team leaders, or employees with HR-related responsibilities and who have experience hiring graduates from LUCs.
2. For graduate participants, participants must have completed their degree programs from local colleges or universities (2016-2021) in Hospitality Management Course to ensure the experiences and challenges they face are current and relevant. This also limits the study since two (2) tracers' studies from LUCs in Bulacan were collected that focused on this program within this timeframe.
3. Participants who hold key positions within HEIs, such as faculty members, department heads, or members of the student welfare and development involved in decision-making related to employability, curriculum development, and internship. This is to capture a range of perspectives and experiences. These individuals should have authority or expertise in the areas under investigation.

Mira Crouch and Heather McKenzie (2006) noted that using fewer than 20 participants in a qualitative research study will result in better data. With a smaller group, it was easier for the researchers to build strong close relationships with the participants, which in turn, led to more natural conversations and rich data. Although the key informants were limited, utmost rigor was observed.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents

Stakeholders	Total	Qualified
LCU Graduates	10	5
HR Personnel	5	3
HEI Representatives	5	4
	20	12

Research Instrument

A semi-structured interview protocol guide was designed by the researcher which was then validated by a research expert, a representative from HR, and one from an LUC graduate. This is to ensure that terms of alignment with the research questions and approach used. Testing the validity and reliability of a semi-

structured interview involves ensuring that questions accurately measure the intended constructs and produce consistent results. Validity testing includes assessing content validity, which ensures questions cover all relevant aspects of the research question and construct validity, examining if questions measure the intended objective and concept. This was done Reliability testing involves inter-rater reliability and consistency of response across different interviewers. Pilot testing, feedback, and revision help refine the interview protocol, while data analysis assesses response consistency and coherence.

The content of the interview protocol guide is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Interview Protocol Guide

<i>Research Questions</i>	<i>Interview Protocol Guide</i>
<p>1. What is the respondents' perception of the "employability of graduates?"</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">For HEIs</p> <p>a. How do you see the employability of graduates from Local Colleges?</p> <p>b. What efforts does your institution make to prepare graduates for the workforce?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">For Human Resource Management</p> <p>a. What are the key attributes or skills you typically look for when hiring graduates from Local Colleges?</p> <p>b. What can say about the overall preparedness and suitability of graduates from these colleges for employment in your industry?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">For LUCs Graduates</p> <p>a. Can you share your experiences and perceptions regarding your employability after graduating from a Local College?</p> <p>b. What skills or competencies did you find most valuable in securing employment?</p>

<p>2. What are the current challenges and gaps in graduates' employability as perceived by HEIs, employers, and graduates themselves?</p>	<p>For HEIs</p> <p>a. What are the perceived challenges and gaps in graduates' employability from the perspective of your institution?</p> <p>b. What feedback or insights have you received from employers regarding the employability of your graduates?</p> <p>For Human Resource Management</p> <p>a. What challenges and gaps do you perceive in the employability of recent graduates?</p> <p>b. What examples of specific skills or competencies that you find lacking in some graduates?</p> <p>For Graduates</p> <p>a. From your experience, what challenges did you encounter in securing employment after graduation?</p> <p>b. What are the specific gaps in your skills or knowledge that you believe hindered your employability?</p>
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<p>3. What strategies and initiatives can be recommended by stakeholders, including Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), employers, and graduates themselves, to address the gap between the skills possessed by graduates and the evolving needs of industries?"</p>	<p>For HEIs</p> <p>a. What strategies or initiatives do you believe HEIs should implement to align graduates' skills with industry needs better?</p> <p>b. How can curriculum design and teaching methodologies be adapted to address the evolving demands of industries?</p> <p>c. What role do internships, experiential learning, and industry collaborations play in enhancing graduates' readiness for employment?</p> <p>For Human Resource Management</p> <p>a. What strategies or initiatives do you recommend for employers to actively participate in bridging the gap between graduates' skills and industry needs?</p> <p>b. What are your suggestions for mentorship programs, on-the-job training, or professional development opportunities to enhance graduates' employability?</p> <p>For Graduates</p> <p>a. From your perspective, what initiatives or support systems would you recommend to enhance graduates' readiness for employment?</p> <p>b. What are your suggestions for HEIs and employers to bridge the gap or improve the transition from education to employment for graduates?</p>
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Data Gathering Procedure

Before dealing with the analytical process, the creation of transcripts is summed up as follows:

Semi-structured interviews were carried out utilizing a pre-made interview guide. It encouraged participants to speak freely and share their personal stories phrases. Every interview was conducted and lasted between forty-five and an hour. After every interview, the investigator reminded the subjects regarding her requirement for a follow-up conversation (via Messenger or Google Meet) to talk about the study results and to confirm that the study's conclusions accurately represent their personal experiences. The level of data saturation was determined by the researcher. Twelve (12) participants engaged in the study. Four (4) from the Human resource management side, three (3) from the Higher Education Institutions, and five (5) from the LUCs graduate. Eventually, the transcripts were double-checked by an independent researcher who has

experience in qualitative research.

The Colaizzi approach for phenomenological data analysis looks like this:

(referenced in Speziale & Carpenter, 2007; Sanders, 2003).

1. It is recommended to go over each transcript multiple times to gain a general understanding of the entire text.
2. Important remarks related to each transcript that concern the occurrence under study ought to be taken out. The statements have to be written down on an additional sheet with their page and line numbers noted.
3. Meanings should be formulated from these significant statements.
4. The formulated meanings should be sorted into categories, clusters of themes, and themes.
5. The findings of the study should be integrated into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon under study.
6. The fundamental structure of the phenomenon should be described.
7. Finally, validation of the findings should be sought from the research participants to compare the researcher's descriptive results with their experiences.

Focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, and follow-up interviews were also conducted to clarify and validate the truthfulness of the significant statements, initially coded data, and identified themes. Coding is a process where concepts and relations between words are analyzed (Gibbs, 2007). Data saturation is reached when there are no more emerging themes identified.

The researcher transfers the recorded audio into textual data. Raw text data must be accurately transcribed first for it to be correctly interpreted. It also eliminated bias as a threat to the validity of the data gathered. The Filipino language was translated into English. An independent researcher helps validate the transcription.

The eight (8) participants were interviewed via Google Meet, while in-person meetings were at the request of the other four (4). Two focus group discussions were conducted via Google Meet, and due to conflict schedules, one-on-one interviews were also conducted for some participants. Cross-validating the responses was also made during the follow-up. The interview protocol guide and letter of request were sent to the participants in advance of the scheduled interviews and focus group discussion.

Ethical Consideration

All participants must have consent and willingness to participate. Ethical considerations require that participants provide informed consent to participate voluntarily in the research. Therefore, willingness to participate and ability to provide consent are essential inclusion criteria.

All the necessary protocols in the completion of this study were treated with utmost confidentiality and honesty following the Data Privacy Act of the Philippines and the ethical standards and procedures for research with human beings, as set by the World Health Organization (WHO Website, n.d.)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 3. Perception of "Employability of Graduates"

<i>Stakeholders</i>	<i>Significant Meaning</i>
	· Eemployability for hospitality management graduates is determined by their practical experience from internships, skills acquired in school, and active industry involvement.

HEI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Employers place significant value on the adaptable skills that graduates have acquired through their education. · Employers like practicumers who perform well during on-the-job training, often offer them jobs right after they finish school
Industry (through Human Resource Personnel)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · During hiring, candidates' interpersonal and communication skills, along with work experiences, are assessed, with a tendency to hire after On-the-Job Training (OJT). · Communication skills and understanding of required skills are prioritized, and behavior is very important, while training is provided for all
LUC Graduates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Improving communication, decision-making, and confidence skills, as well as developing one's personality, is crucial for employability. · Being adaptable, taking initiative, and having knowledge in subjects like costing are also important for success in the workplace. · Self-confidence is key to overcoming challenges and succeeding in your career.

Table 3 results indicate that employability centers on a combination of practical experience gained from internships, skills acquired in school, and active involvement in the industry. Employers highly value adaptable skills cultivated through education and often prioritize candidates who excel during on-the-job training, frequently offering them jobs upon graduation. Human resource personnel emphasize the importance of interpersonal and communication skills during hiring, with a preference for candidates with relevant work experience. LUC graduates recognize the significance of improving communication, decision-making, and confidence skills, as well as the importance of adaptability and initiative-taking in the workplace. Overall, self-confidence emerges as a crucial factor for overcoming challenges and achieving success in one's career. Contrary to Rook and Sloan (2021), a marked lack of understanding of General Attributes (GAs) and employability was found in the student stakeholder group. However, with these results, graduates from LUCs fully understand their perspective on employability and its importance for their future.

Table 4. Themes on the Perception of “Employability of Graduates”

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Subthemes</i>
<i>Career Readiness</i>	Employability through Experience and Skills Skills Acquisition Employment Opportunities from Practical Training

<i>Qualification</i>	Competency Awareness
	Personal Attributes

Theme 1. Career Readiness. Graduates’ readiness for the workforce is perceived to be closely tied to their ability to acquire relevant skills, demonstrate adaptability, and possess the necessary interpersonal and communication skills demanded by employers. The subthemes include employability through the experience and skills possessed by graduates, acquired skills (soft and technical), and employment opportunities from OJT. It was emphasized in the study of Tayco et al. (2022) that the relevance of acquired skills to jobs, especially in communication, human relations, critical thinking, problem-solving, and alignment with employer expectations.

Theme 2. Qualification. There is a consensus among HEIs, graduates, and HR personnel regarding qualifications specifically their competency (a) basic skills (communication skills); (b) an understanding of the required skills necessary for the job, and (c) graduate attributes especially the value of discipline among graduates who wish to be employed. These three (3) qualifications are needed for the graduates for employability., Moolman (2018) stated that graduates have an appropriate set of generic and discipline-specific knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that will make them more likely to gain employment and succeed in their chosen careers. Similarly, Nakimuli et.al (2023) graduates should possess job-inevitable skills such as computer literacy and knowledge transfer. Employers value these skills and consider them crucial for workplace success. The study recommends prioritizing these skills in the curriculum and fostering partnerships with industry leaders to enhance graduates’ employability and future success.

Table 5. Challenges and Gaps in the Employability of Graduates

<i>Stakeholders</i>	<i>Significant Meanings</i>
<i>HEI</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The graduating students lack exposure... beforehand, they are unaware of the inner workings of the industry. When they’re in OJT, they are surprised by the real world of Hospitality. · Graduates/students lack confidence, and this is... hindrance to their employability. · they are surprised by how strict other companies are. · Some skills are missing from the curriculum
<i>Industry (through Human Resource Personnel)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Graduates may not have the skills needed for available jobs. · Graduates are often too impatient. · Graduates prioritize their convenience when working. · Graduates need better emotional and professional skills. · Graduates lack some technical skills required for their field. · Graduates need more computer literacy, especially with programs like Opera and Excel.

<i>LUC Graduates</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Graduates express the need for more comprehensive exposure during On-the-Job Training (OJT) to familiarize themselves with various departments within organizations, aiming to reduce culture shock upon entering the industry and gain a deeper understanding of job roles. · Graduates acknowledge their lack of proficiency in computer skills, particularly in programs like Excel, highlighting the importance of enhancing technical competencies to meet industry demands.
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It is important to focus on the “Employability Skill Gap” faced by professional students during job recruitment. By gathering feedback from job providers and business leaders, the study aims to map competency gaps and guide educational programs in preparing graduates to be more competitive and confident (Dutta, 2022). Table 5, presents the challenges and gaps identified by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), graduates, and Human Resources (HR) in the employability of graduates revolve around several key issues. Graduating students lack exposure to the inner workings of the industry, leading to surprise and culture shock during On-the-Job Training (OJT). A notable gap lies in graduates’ confidence levels, hindering their employability, along with a lack of certain technical and professional skills required for available jobs. Graduates express the need for more comprehensive exposure during OJT to reduce culture shock and gain a deeper understanding of job roles, while also acknowledging the importance of enhancing computer literacy skills to meet industry demands effectively.

Table 6. Themes of the Challenges and Gaps in Employability of Graduates

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Subthemes</i>
<i>Competency</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Skills Mismatch · Lack of Professional Skills · Deficiency in Technical Skills · Limited Computer Literacy
<i>Convenient-Oriented Work Ethics</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Impatience among Graduates · Low level of Resiliency

Theme 1. Competency. These pertain to the skills gap observed among graduates, characterized by deficiencies in professional skills, technical skills, and computer literacy. The competency-skills mismatch reflects a disparity between the skills possessed by graduates and those required by employers, leading to challenges in securing employment. Graduates often lack essential professional skills such as communication, problem-solving, and teamwork, which are crucial for success in the workplace. Moreover, deficiencies in technical skills, including specific industry-related knowledge and expertise, further hinder graduates’ employability, it was also highlighted by the study of Leonard (2019) which discussed the discrepancy between university course content and employer expectations, suggesting that universities may not adequately address desired skills. This underscores the need to align curricula with industry demands to bridge the gap.

Theme 2. Convenient-oriented work ethic. It reflects that some graduates prioritize personal convenience over professional responsibilities, leading to issues such as absenteeism, lack of punctuality, and reluctance

to take on challenging tasks. This attitude can negatively impact maintaining their employment. Additionally, impatience among graduates manifests as a desire for immediate results and career advancement, often leading to frustration and dissatisfaction when faced with the realities of career progression.

Table 7. Strategies and Initiatives in Enhancing Employability of Graduates

<i>Stakeholders</i>	<i>Significant Statement</i>
<i>HEI</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · ...secure companies or businesses that can offer half-price or minimal fees to provide more exposure to our students or free seminars. · Providing more facilities to upgrade the skills needed and sought after in the industry would be beneficial. · OJT is very helpful, so students need a lot of exposure here because it's an eye-opener for our graduating students. This way, they'll be familiar with the industry practices. · It would also be great if they could work part-time at their OJT locations so they could eventually be hired. · It would be nice if short courses or seminars were offered on subjects that are not currently available, such as baking. · The activities of organizations or clubs during club week and ALCU that provide seminars related to the industry are also beneficial. · The support of Guidance in providing career opportunities or job hunt activities within Bulacan or Marilao is also valuable.
<i>Industry (through Human Resource Personnel)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Emphasizes the need for schools to align curriculum with industry demands to enhance graduates' readiness for employment. · Highlights the importance of improving technical competencies, especially in computer-related areas like Excel and Opera. · Advocates for internships in large companies or restaurants to provide graduates with a competitive edge in the job market. · Stresses the significance of diverse practice or job rotation during internships to equip interns with versatile skills. · Recognizes the value of on-board training in assessing the preparedness of employees or graduates for workplace roles. · the importance of fostering crucial skills such as communication, reading, and writing, especially in multinational company settings. · the essential role of character and behavior in securing and maintaining employment opportunities.

<i>LUC Graduates</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · the importance of building self-confidence to prevent culture shock in the workplace. · Suggests that students need to be confident in their abilities to adapt to real-world work environments. · Advocates for the integration of theoretical knowledge with practical application. · Highlights the need for students to understand how theoretical concepts apply in real-world scenarios to enhance preparedness. · Calls for more extensive and immersive practical training experiences. · Recommends longer periods of On-the-Job Training (OJT) and exposure to actual industry settings such as kitchen, service, and housekeeping. · Stresses the importance of developing technical skills, particularly in computer literacy. · Identifies the need for additional training in computer programs like Excel to meet industry demands.
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Table 7 emphasizes the importance of enhancing students’ exposure to industry practices through various means such as discounted programs, practical training, and part-time work opportunities during internships. Additionally, there is a call for aligning curriculum with industry demands to better prepare graduates for employment, highlighting the significance of improving technical competencies and fostering essential skills such as communication and adaptability.

HEIs (LUCs) can address curriculum gaps by aligning them with industry demands, a process exemplified in the study by Dakhil & Ozkil (2020), which utilized importance-performance analysis (IPA) to enhance program curricula. IPA, pioneered by Martilla and James, is highly regarded for evaluating educational service quality effectively.

Furthermore, recommendations are made for longer On-the-Job Training (OJT) periods and additional computer literacy training to meet evolving industry needs. Overall, the integration of theoretical knowledge with practical application and the development of versatile skills through immersive training experiences are crucial for enhancing graduates’ readiness and success in the workforce.

Table 8. Themes Regarding Strategies and Initiatives in Enhancing Employability of Graduates

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Subthemes</i>
Career Empowerment	Comprehensive Internship Practice On-board Training for Employee

	Personal Attributes
	Curriculum Alignment
Professional Competency Development	Technical Skills Improvement
	Practical Training through Internships
	Cultivation of Essential Skills

Theme 1. Career Empowerment. These initiatives and strategies are aimed at enhancing graduates' employability and success in the workplace. First, comprehensive internship practice plays a pivotal role in providing hands-on experience and exposure to real-world job scenarios, equipping graduates with practical skills and industry insights. Second, On-board training for employee evaluation further reinforces this by allowing employers to assess graduates' readiness and suitability for specific roles, facilitating smoother transitions into the workforce. Then, the personal attributes or character and behavior in employment are emphasized as crucial determinants of professional success, with attributes such as integrity, adaptability, and teamwork being highly valued by employers. Lastly, curriculum alignment from current employment trends and expectations. Underdahl et. al (2023) also highlight the importance of aligning curriculum content with industry needs to enhance graduate employability. They also emphasize the role of collaborative partnerships between educators and employers in bridging the skills gap and preparing students for the workforce. Recommendations include fostering adaptability and continuous learning among students and providing skilling opportunities by employers through job shadowing and internships. These results coincide with the results of Ngoepe and Theron (2023) that suggest that the employability of hospitality management is contingent on (i) the work environment; (ii) hospitality educational institutions; (iii) employability attributes required by hotel managers; (iv) hospitality management graduates; (v) future readiness of hospitality management graduates; and (vi) human resource management (HRM) in the hotel industry.

Theme 2. Professional Competency Development. The essential components of professional competency development, focus on technical skills and soft skills improvement, practical training through internships, and cultivation of essential skills. Technical skills improvement entails enhancing graduates' proficiency in specific tools, software, or industry-related knowledge necessary for their chosen field. This is often achieved through specialized training programs, workshops, or coursework aimed at bridging any skills gaps and ensuring graduates are equipped to meet industry demands. On the other hand, communication skills should also be empowered, with this, the graduates can be advantageous especially when entering multinational companies. Practical training through internships provides invaluable hands-on experience in real-world work environments, allowing graduates to apply theoretical knowledge and develop practical skills under supervision. Additionally, the cultivation of essential skills such as communication, problem-solving, and teamwork are emphasized to complement technical competencies and enhance graduates' overall effectiveness in the workplace. Incorporating these elements into professional competency development programs enables institutions to more effectively equip graduates for securing and maintaining employment. Research conducted by Huang et al. (2022) indicates that educational initiatives have significantly improved graduates' soft and basic skills, with heightened motivation for learning correlating with enhanced soft skills and increased internships or club involvement bolstering professional skills. Additionally, Aljohani et al. (2022) undertake a thorough examination of discussions surrounding "curriculum alignment" in interdisciplinary literature, aiming to bridge the gap between academic curricula and industry demands.

The Tri-focal Approach

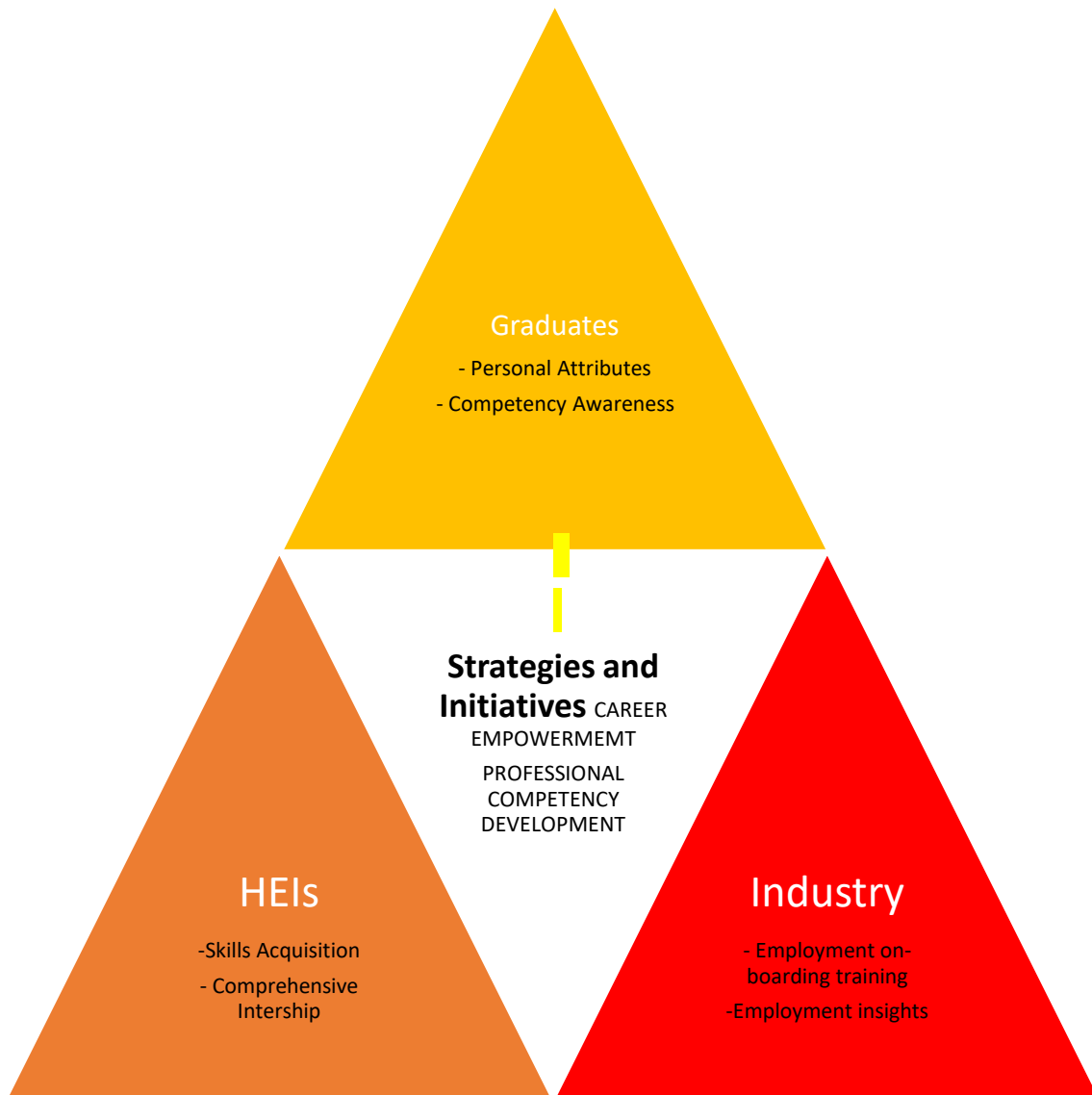


Figure 2. Niña’s Tri-prism Framework: A Trifocal Approach for Enhancing the Employability of Graduates in LUCs in Bulacan

Figure 2 illustrates Niña’s Tri-prism: A Trifocal Approach for Enhancing the Employability of Graduates in LUCs, derived from qualitative analyses of the interviews with three key stakeholders: Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), graduates, and industry representatives. In answering the research questions, the framework or approach was formulated by the author. It incorporates three key elements indicating the triangle “prism”. It is named after the researcher’s first name, Niña Burce. At its core, the Trifocal approach recognizes that graduates, HEIs, and industry are important components in enhancing employability. This approach offers practical solutions tailored to each stakeholder’s unique perspective and needs. This framework aims to achieve a harmonious balance between these three elements. It acknowledges that none of these components can function effectively in isolation. Instead, they need to work together to achieve a common goal. The base of the triangle should be the strong foundation (HEI and industry) of the graduates which is found at the top of the triangle to ensure and enhance employability. Industry stakeholders prioritize employment opportunities through experiential learning and skills development initiatives gleaned from qualitative data, such as training and practical experiences and employment insights what are the employment trends and expectations. HEIs concentrate on equipping graduates with fundamental skills

bolstering employment prospects through practical training opportunities, and aligning curricula based on the current employment trends and expectations drawn by qualitative findings. For graduates, the focus lies on competency awareness through understanding skill requirements and the importance of personal attributes cultivating favorable behavior and character traits, as identified through qualitative insights. Each stakeholder's role in the initiative is grounded in qualitative analyses, ensuring that strategies to enhance graduates' employability are informed by rich, context-specific insights. Through this collaborative approach, the Trifocal Approach aims to bridge the gap between academia and industry, ensuring graduates are well-prepared for success in the workforce.

CONCLUSION

Drawing from ecological systems theory, the Trifocal Approach for Enhancing the Employability Outcomes of Graduates in LUCs illustrates the interconnectedness and interdependence of various stakeholders within the educational and employment ecosystems. The qualitative analyses conducted with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), graduates, and industry representatives highlight the dynamic interactions between these stakeholders and their respective environments. By addressing the needs and perspectives of each stakeholder group, the Trifocal Approach acknowledges the multi-level influences shaping graduates' employability outcomes. Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of collaboration and mutual support among HEIs, graduates, and industry partners to facilitate successful transitions from education to employment. As a result, the employability of graduates hinges on the collaboration and synergy among the LUC graduates, higher education institutions (HEIs), and the partnering industry, forming a trifocal approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are hereby forwarded:

1. For HEIs, they may consider collaboration with industry partners to ensure that curricula are aligned with current and future industry demands. This could involve regular consultation with industry representatives to identify emerging trends and skills requirements. Additionally, HEIs should enhance practical training opportunities, such as internships and industry projects, to provide students with hands-on experience and bridge the gap between academic learning and real-world applications.
2. For Graduates, it is recommended to actively engage in opportunities for skill development and practical experience offered by HEIs and industry partners. They may also seek out mentorship and networking opportunities to enhance their employability and gain insights into industry expectations. Furthermore, graduates can consider continuous learning and adaptability to stay abreast of evolving industry trends and technologies.
3. For industry partners, actively collaborate with HEIs to provide input on curriculum design, offer internships and apprenticeships, and participate in mentorship programs. They can provide feedback to HEIs on the relevance of graduates' skills and competencies to ensure that educational programs meet industry needs.
4. Future researchers can use the findings of this study by conducting further research to explore the effectiveness of the Trifocal Approach on graduates' employability outcomes. They may also investigate additional factors influencing employability, such as socio-economic background, geographical location, and industry-specific dynamics, to develop more comprehensive frameworks for enhancing graduates' employability or expound other stakeholders' experiences and perspectives on employability.

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