

Navigating Transitions: Challenges in the Employability of the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education Graduates

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to investigate the employability challenges faced by BECED graduates, with a particular emphasis on their job readiness and the connection between their academic training and workplace requirements. It looks into essential competencies, experiential learning, and systemic barrier, especially within the Philippine context to offer insights that can enhance curriculum development, support systems, and employment outcomes in early childhood education. This study investigates the challenges in employability of early childhood education (ECE) graduates is crucial for ensuring the quality of early childhood programs and fostering the development of young children. Research shows that ECE graduates encounter various challenges regarding their employability and perceived readiness, which affect their transition into the workforce. Studies investigate these challenges focusing on the alignment between academic training and workplace demands.

Keywords: Bachelor of early childhood education graduates Strengths and Weaknesses of graduates Teachers, Challenges of graduates and Employability of graduates

INTRODUCTION

"Navigating Transition: Challenges in the Employability of the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education Graduates" focuses on the employability of BECED graduates, with a specific look at the first batch from Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University's Mid La Union Campus (DMMMSU-MLUC) for the 2024–2025 academic year. Early Childhood Education (ECE) is an important field dedicated to the holistic development of children from birth to age eight, nurturing their cognitive, emotional, social, and physical growth through culturally responsive, play-based, and structured learning based on frameworks like the National Early Learning Curriculum in the Philippines. Graduates are prepared for roles such as preschool, kindergarten, and primary teachers, and must be licensed and well-trained to support children's development effectively.

According to Boyd and Lawley (2009), graduates globally view academic experiences as significant for developing employability attributes like communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability, with informal learning such as group projects, internships, and extracurricular activities having a more notable impact on confidence and job preparedness. Cesa, Dela Cruz, and Santiago (2025) emphasized that internship mentorship and real-time classroom interaction enhance teaching competencies and professional confidence.

In the Philippines, the quality of ECE programs and young children's development depends on BECED graduates' employability, with the Department of Education (DepEd) implementing measures to improve teacher preparedness and job satisfaction. While some studies suggest over 60% of ECE graduates are hired, not all enter the teaching field—some pursue alternative careers or remain unemployed (Garcia, 2020). Institutional tracking of employment outcomes helps evaluate curriculum alignment, as seen at Pangasinan State University - Alaminos City Campus (PSU-ACC). DMMMSU has three campuses, with MLUC offering the BECED program; its first cohort of 31 graduates (2 male, 29 female) has diverse employment experiences, with some working in preschools or childcare centers and others struggling to find stable, meaningful work.

BECED graduates often face gaps due to limited practical experience and the undervaluing of ECE in the labor market, along with issues like lower professional recognition, lower salaries, limited career advancement, and labor market saturation leading to intense competition. The study notes gaps in existing research, including lack of longitudinal data, absence of employer perspectives. The research aims to investigate whether graduates can apply their learning to real-world teaching, identify factors influencing hiring, and determine areas where the university can better support future graduates. Its purpose is to explore employability challenges, review key competencies, experiential learning outcomes, and systemic impediments, and offer suggestions for curriculum improvement, support services, and policy.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is an important field dedicated to the holistic development of children from birth to age eight, nurturing their cognitive, emotional, social, and physical growth through culturally responsive, play-based and structured learning based on frameworks like the National Early Learning Curriculum in the Philippines. According to (Boyd and Lawley, 2009), graduates in the global context view their academic experiences to have played a significant role in the acquisition of major employability attributes. Among these are communication skill, teamwork, problem solving, and adaptability, which are highly appreciated at the workplace. The study has emphasized that the formal curriculum contributed to the effect, but informal learning experiences that include group projects, internships, and extra-curricular activities had a more significant impact on developing the confidence and preparedness of graduates to land a job. Job readiness does not just limit to academic success but also encompasses cognitive ability, experience and context of the graduate. Silberfeld et al. (1996) state that informed decisions like the consent to treatment require one to have capacity to understand, appreciate, and to reason information. Even though the Aid to Capacity Evaluation (ACE) was in medical settings, the main ideas demonstrated by its development may help provide meaningful information on the preparedness of professions.

The quality of Early Childhood program in the Philippines and the development of young children depend on the employability of BECED graduates. The Department of Education (DepEd) has also put in place measures to improve the teacher preparedness and job satisfaction. Statistics are what lead us to believe that a good number of graduates in early childhood education are actually getting hired with some of the studies suggesting higher than 60% of graduates are working. Employability is even more acute in the sphere of teacher training because the quality of the required teacher is high, and competent and qualified professionals are needed (CHED, 2017). Nevertheless, an entire education graduate does not necessarily enter the teaching field; some choose alternative careers, do other unrelated work, or end up jobless (Garcia, 2020). Institutional-level, such as Pangasinan State University - Alaminos City Campus (PSU-ACC), tracking the 2018-2020 employment outcomes at the institutional level will inform the evaluation of curriculum alignment and other readiness criteria (Teijeiro et al., 2013).

At DMMMSU Mid-La Union Campus, the researcher were conducting their study to investigate the of employability among BECED graduates in the Philippines with specific focus on job preparation and fit between academic education and labor requirements. It reviews key competencies, experiential learning outcomes, and systemic impediments on employment outcomes to offer suggestions on curriculum improvement, support services, and policy. The relevance of the study is that it helped to make the process of graduates being absorbed into the job market easier as they are now provided with the necessary skills and professional awareness that would enable them to provide high-quality early childhood education. The idea is to make the BECED graduates more confident, competent and employment-ready in the early childhood

education field.

Framework Of The Study

To understand the challenges in the employability of Bachelor of Early Childhood Education Graduates this study draws on theoretical perspectives related to graduate readiness, these theories are: Knight and Yorke's (2004) Model of Graduate Employability, Bandura's (1977) Theory of Self-efficacy, and Pool and Sewell's (2007) Career EDGE Model of Employability.

Graduate Employability Theory (Knight and Yorke, 2004), employability does not only concern the ability to get a job, but it is a blend of skills and understandings as well as individual strengths and resources that allow graduates to be useful in the work environment. It is very applicable to the graduates of the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education since their moves to the workforce require an extra factor than the bookish knowledge, but they must be able to communicate effectively with children and families, adapt to different learning styles, and resilient in situations that may arise in the classroom. Using this theory, teachers and institutions can gain a better insight into the complex needs of ECE graduates and develop the support system that will optimize their preparedness and self-assurance regarding the process of becoming a teacher.

Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1977), which centers on the belief of an individual that he or she can do the tasks and handle the situation. It brings out the power of confidence in motivating people, perseverance, and flexibility in the workplace. Applying this theory to the context of employability, it implies that graduates who see themselves as competent would be more motivated to seek employment opportunities, persist in case of misfortunes and cope with changes in the professional environment. This applies to graduates of Bachelor of Early Childhood Education since their entry into the workforce tends to be accompanied by the need to cope with emotionally charged positions, deal with various classroom situations, and deal with high demands of institutions and families. Low self-efficacy graduates might be reluctant to pursue teaching careers, feel intimidated at an interview or may lack confidence in their ability to work in an early learning environment. Combining the theory of Bandura, your research can examine how the level of confidence impacts the job-seeking behavior and find out ways to raise the level of trust in the graduates regarding their professional abilities.

Career EDGE Model of Employability (Pool and Sewell ,2007) and consists of five crucial elements of employability such as career development learning, experience, degree subject knowledge, generic skills, and emotional intelligence. It offers a practical model of grading and improving graduate preparedness to work in the employment sector, particularly the graduates of Bachelor of Early Childhood Education because their discipline requires, in addition to academic understanding of child development and pedagogy, high-quality emotional intelligence, flexibility, and communication abilities to handle various scenarios in the classroom. In addition, most of the ECE graduates experience difficulties in acquiring adequate work experience in the course of their studies, a factor that could deter their confidence and competitiveness in the labor market. Using the Career EDGE model, your research may examine how any deficiencies in these factors lead to the transitional challenges that ECE graduates face and how specific interventions like better practicum experiences or career advice can enhance their employability rates.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, as proposed by Vibert, Dunlop, and Pung (2021). The research process began with the collection and analysis of quantitative data, followed by a qualitative phase intended to further interpret and elaborate on the initial results. This methodological approach was appropriate for investigating the employability challenges experienced by Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (BECED) graduates during the academic years 2024–2025. The quantitative phase involved the administration of structured questionnaires to gather numerical data on graduates' perceived job readiness, self-assessed competencies in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and the challenges encountered throughout the job search process. Data were collected through online and in-person surveys, allowing for a comprehensive statistical overview of the participants' employment-related conditions. Findings from this

phase informed the selection of participants for the qualitative component, ensuring that the subsequent inquiry addressed relevant and significant issues identified in the initial analysis.

Following the qualitative is involving semi-structured interviews with selected survey participants. This phase sought to gain deeper understanding of the quantitative results by examining graduates' practicum experiences, employer expectations, levels of satisfaction with academic preparation, and perceived competency development, as well as the barriers faced in securing employment. The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and shared perspectives. The primary participants were BECED graduates from 2024–2025, as they were most likely to be actively seeking employment. Additional insights were optionally obtained from employers, practicum supervisors, and faculty members to enrich the analysis and provide perspectives on workforce demands and the alignment between academic preparation and professional expectations.

Settings And Participants

For this study, the participant is the 29 Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (BECED) graduates who had graduated from 2024 to 2025 and had experienced the challenges in employment or unemployment. Out of the 29 respondents who have answered the survey questionnaire, the researchers chose at least ten (10) participants employed and unemployed to answer the follow-up interview guide on research question 3 (enhancement program can be developed for the BECED employability) for validating the result of survey questionnaire. The researchers used criterion sampling, a purposive method that focused on individuals who met specific criteria relevant to this study (Teflpedia, 2024) This selection strategy enabled the researchers to gain insights into the diverse experiences and challenges. The criteria for participant selection include: (1) participant had graduates in Bachelor of Early Childhood education (2) graduates in 2024-2025 (3) participant had employed and the participant were also required to give informed consent and good communicators in order to present their experiences well during interviews.

Instrument

This study will utilized a survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews as the primary instrument for data collection in this study, which employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach. This methodology aimed to gather comprehensive data from Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (BECED) graduates who had graduated from 2024 to 2025. This study was conducted in San Fernando, La Union, located in Region I. The area was purposefully selected because it is near our schools DMMMSU-MLUC and it is also where our respondents are currently teaching.

The quantitative component of the study employed survey questionnaires to address Research Question 1, which examined the effectiveness of educational training in preparing graduates for real-world teaching environments, and Research Question 2, which focused on graduates' access to professional development opportunities that may enhance employability. The survey questionnaire served as a standardized research instrument designed to systematically capture respondents' perceptions and experiences (Bhattacharjee, 2024).

To address Research Question 3, a semi-structured interview guide was utilized during the qualitative phase of the study. Following the analysis of data obtained from Research Questions 1 and 2, as well as the qualitative responses from Research Question 3, the findings were integrated to inform the development of an enhancement program aimed at improving the employability of BECED graduates. The combined quantitative and qualitative data provided in-depth insights into graduates' experiences, competencies, and areas requiring improvement. Analysis of mean scores and overall response patterns enabled the researchers to identify specific needs and design a program that strengthens the professional preparation of future educators.

With regards to the validity of the survey questionnaires, this was validated by five (5) experts: (1) the Dean of the College of Education, (1) the Chairperson of Bachelor of Elementary Education and Early Childhood Education, (2) Supervising Teachers of fourth-year Bachelor of Elementary Education and Early Childhood Education students, and (1) a Principal of an Elementary School. The researcher tool was able to measure what is set to measure because the questions were computed and gained a result of high validity with a mean of 4.

Data Analysis

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to analyze the employability challenges encountered by Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (BECEd) graduates from 2024 to 2025. For Research Questions 1 and 2, quantitative data obtained from the survey questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. Specifically, the mean score for each survey item was computed to determine the average responses of the participants. Each questionnaire item was measured using a five-point Likert scale, with numerical values ranging from 1 to 5. The frequency of each response was multiplied by its corresponding numerical value to obtain weighted scores. These scores were then summed and divided by the total number of respondents for each item to derive the mean value, which represented the central tendency of participants' perceptions and attitudes.

Ethical Consideration

This study was submitted to the DMMMSU Research Ethics Committee for ethical clearance. The researchers were given a certificate from the DMMMSU Research Ethics Committee as well as a code was given that serves as a proof that the study has undergone ethical review. The researchers assured all participants that data collection was done with respect for privacy and confidentiality, and that the information gathered was used only for research purposes. Confidentiality was a priority throughout the research process. The identities and responses of participants were protected and kept strictly confidential.

RESULTS

1. Dwelling upon the degree of efficiency of educational training to equip BECEd graduates to teach real-life situations, the findings and results demonstrate the average weighted score of 3.93, which reveals that graduates assume that their training was very effective, on the whole. The core competencies were broken down into teaching strategies, which had the highest mean (4.03) when using educational tools and technology (Highly Effective) and when applying teaching strategies to real situations (Very Highly Effective) (4.34). The area of curriculum was also ranked high, with the mean scores of designing lesson plans and applying age-appropriate methods being 4.13 and 3.86, respectively (Highly Effective), and support provided by administration and training and seminars received the mean score of 4.27 to 4.10 (Highly and Very Highly Effective). Nevertheless, the management of disruptive behavior and the creation of routines (mean scores of 3.05 and 3.20, respectively, Moderately Effective) were identified as improving areas, and graduates suggested the lack of control over unexpected behavioral problems, the needs of learners with diverse learning abilities, and the ability to adapt to the new conditions introduced by the modern world (such as the integration of technologies and inclusive education).

2. The mean weighted average of the problems encountered is 3.89 in that, the respondents are generally of the same opinion that these are burning problems. The most severe barrier observed is the lack of alignment between academic training and industry requirements, which has a mean of 4.37 (Strongly Agree) since graduates say that they have not gained practical skills that are required by companies even though they feel prepared academically. The next professional licensing and development barriers are with a mean of 4.21 (Strongly Agree), which is a challenge in their credentialing requirements, high costs, lack of test centers, and unavailable special training. This has been put to the disadvantage of fresh graduates as employer preference towards candidates having prior work experience was 4.17 (Strongly Agree). Other difficulties are a lack of job opportunities (mean 3.77, Agree), whereby graduates cannot get employment locally, and job market competition (mean 3.88, Agree), whereby graduates have to compete with other graduates of general education programs, who are likely preferred due to their flexibility.

3. Relying on the survey and interview results, graduates singled out important areas that require improvement to enhance employability in the form of technological literacy, advanced classroom management of various learners, skills in communicating with parents and stakeholders, career planning. The researchers in turn came up with the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education Graduate Enhancement Program: Bridging Academic Learning to Professional Practice, which will take place on June 9-11, 2026, at DMMMSU-MLUC Laboratory Elementary School and has a budget of Php 2,720. The program is designed out of three pillars Foundations and Professional Identity (Day 1), which involves classroom management and professional advocacy; Career

Readiness and Workplace Adaptability (Day 2), which consists of resume writing, portfolio building, and conflict resolution; and Resilience and Lifelong Learning (Day 3), which includes stress management, demonstration teaching, and career roadmap planning. Lectures, practical workshops, role-plays, peer reviews, industry guest sharing, and site visits are a part of methodology. The anticipated results are higher levels of applied competence, improved professional identity, greater career readiness, greater workplace flexibility, increase in emotional resilience, and adherence to lifelong learning.

DISCUSSION

The findings support Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1977), this theory focuses on an individual's belief in their ability to perform tasks and manage situations. It highlights how confidence influences motivation, persistence, and adaptability in professional settings. In the context of employability, this theory suggests that graduates who perceive themselves as capable are more likely to actively pursue job opportunities, persist through setbacks, and adapt to new professional environments. This is relevant to Bachelor of Early Childhood Education graduates because their transition into the workforce often involves navigating emotionally demanding roles, managing diverse classroom dynamics, and meeting high expectations from both institutions and families. Graduates with low self-efficacy may hesitate to apply for teaching positions, feel overwhelmed during interviews, or struggle to assert their competence in early learning settings.

According to Ancheta et al. (2024), providing positive and developmental feedback, combined with such strategies as role-play, can help to reinforce the confidence and self-esteem of individuals. With these strategies used within an inclusive and participatory learning setting, individuals will retain the motivation and engagement essential qualities to overcome the hurdles of long-term joblessness. Thus, the support programs should create the environments where people can become empowered to act, develop resilience, and become engaged in their development, even in the face of losses.

As Paris and Winn (2021) stress, the effective knowledge of developmental theories and age-specific strategies of teaching helps an educator to create significant learning experiences in young children. Similarly, the author observed that the teacher education programs in the Philippines focus on developmental psychology, curriculum design, and instruction strategies- and this is consistent with the areas of strength observed by the respondents (Castillo, 2020). Although the curriculum effectively develops the necessary abilities, the increase of practice training and the response to new classroom needs would reinforce the graduates even more in their preparation to work in reality.

Overall, the BECED(Bachelor of Early Childhood Education) Curriculum effectively works with young learners as it is able to shift the focus in the traditional and passive approach of learning to active, interactive and play-based learning. According to the respondents, the participation is made fun, relevant and participatory to bring about engagement. According to Tobias bahr, since the skills of the future are becoming increasingly more important, i.e. problem-solving, communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking, these abilities are gradually becoming part of the early childhood education process through numerous programs across the globe.

CONCLUSION

After conducting the study, the following conclusions were drawn;

- 1.Although the educational training proves to be mostly effective in preparing BECED graduates to become teachers, its advantages are instructional strategies, curriculum implementation, support of the administration, and access to professional development. The core program offers a well-done theoretical base, yet the distance between the academic study and the actual reality is the most evident in the practical classroom management and adjusting to the contemporary realities of the classroom. This indicates that although graduates have the knowledge of how to teach effectively, they require additional time to be exposed to such concepts in a dynamic and real life scenario to develop the confidence and expertise which is required to handle complicated situations in the classroom.

- 2.Some of the challenges encountered by BECED graduates also indicate systemic flaws as well as practical

obstacles in the early childhood education sector. Misalignment on curriculum implies that academic preparation is not always preparing people to be ready to work in the workplace, and constraining the processes of licensing and minimal access to professional development also serve as obstacles to career advancement. Unfair treatment of the experienced candidates by the employers and the competition with graduates of the general education create further hurdles despite the qualifications of the graduates. These aspects not only restrict the entry to the work in the area of their specialization, but also may result in underemployment, career changes, and the gradual degradation of their skills over time as a cause of frustration and devaluation of specialized training in ECE.

3. The program will specifically deal with the employability gaps identified, equipping graduates with employment skills, resilience and career tools to perform in early childhood education and professional development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusion of the study, the following recommended;

1. In meeting these, useful training on the classroom management practices in practical training can be increased to include hands-on training, real case studies, and longer practice teaching placements which expose the students to a variety of needs and behavioral situations of the learners. The curriculum must be revised to incorporate more technology, differentiated instruction as well as inclusive teaching methods that would be up to the current standards in the industry. Also, there should be more interactive learning models, simulated classroom learning, and peer instruction by more experienced teachers, as well as, problem solving activities, to enhance the relationship between theory and teaching practice.

2. In order to solve these problems, various governmental bodies, educational institutions, and employers should work together. Industry stakeholders should collaborate with institutions to establish organized and structured internship that allow students to gain practical experience in the course of study where the employers should be encouraged to adopt skills-based employment policies that focus on competence rather than previous experience when hiring employees into the entry level positions. The procedures of licensing should be made more efficient in order to minimize expenses, increase the number of testing centers in low-served regions, and provide subsidized and professional development that targets the needs of educating children at an early age. Universities must intensify collaborations with schools and ECE organizations to make their curricula more relevant to the real world and encourage digital job platforms, distance work and non-discriminatory hiring to support more people to access opportunities and create a more fairly competitive labor market to BECEd graduates.

3. Introduce the program with non-restrictive access; get more funding to expand access and modules; introduce feedback systems to improve the content; collaborate with local organizations to provide placements/mentoring; and rely on program outcomes to revise the undergraduate BECEd curriculum.

4. Longitudinals: Have Longitudinal Studies done in order to fully assess the long-term consequence of a program in the future. This will entail following program participants in a long term i.e. 1 to 3 years time to understand the impact of the program to their employment status, career progression and professional practice. These aspects observed with time can be measured by the researchers to ascertain the sustainability of the benefits of the program. Moreover, since this is necessary to have a stronger indicator of the program effectiveness, the results of such participants will be contrasted with the results of these graduates who did not attend the program. This comparative study assists in isolating the individual contribution that the program made to the success of the participants.

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