

**EXPLORING THE REALITIES OF FRESH GRADUATES
IN THEIR ENTRY-LEVEL JOBS****Abella, KC Ann Neljane P.****Cahigas, Edmar Gwen T.****Campaña, Cherrelyn P.**

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ABSTRACT

Studies and reports reveal that fresh graduates often struggle in their entry level job due to lack of onhand experiences and major adjustment in the workfield. In this qualitative study, recently graduated individuals in Davao City who are currently working in their first job after university are interviewed to explore their experiences. It was found that fresh graduates struggle in their workplace as they are faced with unfamiliar tasks, employers have high expectations, and difficulty in communicating with their colleagues. To combat these struggles, they employ the learning by doing principle, they ask guidance from superiors, and become adaptive. Moreover, the study revealed that fresh graduates prepare themselves by making physical, mental, and emotional preparations as well as recalling the skills they learned from their tertiary education and internships. However, the experience in remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic also posed a hurdle on these individuals as it resulted in their lack of competency in their field. In view of their career path, the study revealed that the fresh graduates see their entry level job as an extension of their education and an avenue to explore their skillset. The study suggests that educational institutions, employers, and policymakers better their support systems to align with the evolving needs of fresh graduates and fortify them to become successful in their entry into the workforce.

Keywords:

Entry-Level Job, Fresh Graduates, Challenges, Experiences, Skills

**CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION
BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Fresh graduates either enter the workforce, start their own business, advance their learning by studying post-graduate programs or take a gap and a breather from the stressful academic environment by volunteering and immersing into communities (Calandro, 2020). On top of the goals right after finishing a college degree is to land a job. Given the fact that fresh graduates are new to the work field, they tend to have little to no experience in the real world job setting. Internships and other part-time jobs are a few of the experiences a fresh graduate may have.

Fresh graduates yearn to get a job after finishing their degree to start earning money, pay bills, help their families, and gain new work experiences (Korpar, 2022). In 2021, the University of Washington (2021) revealed in a study that a college graduate takes three to six months of job seeking before obtaining employment. Factors brought by the pandemic also posed challenges to fresh graduates when seeking for employment. In the report by CNN Philippines, fresh graduates struggle on landing a job due to the lack of onsite experience as students were forced to acquire education through remote learning (Pagdanganan, 2022). Aside from these struggles, fresh graduates have a hard time obtaining jobs as they lack soft skills which are acquired in face-to-face learning setup (Subingsubing & Paid, 2023). New graduates also face low-paying jobs. Entry level jobs pay an average of Php 15,200.00 a month which is not enough in monthly living expenses.

In the 21st century, the significance of possessing employability skills is on par with technical knowledge in the competitive global job market (Ismail & Mohammed, 2015). Schools are required to provide training that adheres to the standards set by employers, recognizing that industries may have varying requirements but consistently seek

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specific attributes in candidates to advance organizational objectives. Whether employers prioritize skills directly linked to a graduate's field of study or not, certain standards are consistently sought after.

Unfortunately, numerous recent graduates face challenges in securing employment. Støren and Aamodt's (2010) study emphasizes a notable concern in research literature about job-education mismatch, revealing a disparity between the qualifications required for a job and those obtained through higher education (vertical mismatch). Graduates struggle to find jobs that align with their degree courses due to influential factors stemming from the misalignment of educational qualifications and a lack of proficiency in the skills required for employment. This reality suggests that universities have not adequately equipped graduates with the necessary skills, and the curriculum may not address the challenges present in the contemporary global labor market (Hiim, 2017). Apart from this, (Ahmad, Zainal, Idris, & Rahmat, 2012) argued that the shortage of job opportunities significantly contributes to a considerable number of graduates remaining unemployed.

Education holds a paramount position in the priorities of Filipinos, as it is seen as the key to attaining a reputable and well-compensated job. However, despite the immense emphasis placed on education, there is a noticeable phenomenon wherein thousands of university or college graduates actively participate in job fairs nationwide, eagerly seeking employment opportunities that seem to be challenging to come by. This situation reflects a paradox, considering the prevailing belief in the value of education for career success.

In the context of the Philippines, a recurring narrative centers around the economic challenges faced in absorbing the substantial influx of new individuals joining the workforce. Graduates, who have invested time and resources in their education, often express frustration at the formidable hurdles encountered in securing employment, particularly jobs that offer both financial stability and job security. This discrepancy between the perceived importance of education and the practical challenges in obtaining suitable employment highlights a complex scenario within the Philippine job market. Even within sectors like business process outsourcing, where opportunities theoretically exist, the reality is that only a limited number of graduates manage to secure positions. The mismatch between the expectations nurtured through education and the actual employment landscape becomes evident, shedding light on the need for a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing the job market dynamics in the Philippines (Labaria, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

In January 2019, the unemployment rate in the Philippines was estimated at 5.2%, with specific demographic and educational breakdowns providing insights into the challenges faced by job seekers. Among the unemployed, individuals aged 15 to 24 constituted 43.7%, while those aged 25 to 34 comprised 30.6%. When considering educational attainment, 20.9% of the unemployed were college graduates, 8.2% had some college education but did not complete their degree, and 28.2% had finished junior high school, including those who graduated under the old curriculum (PSA, 2019).

These statistics underscore the competitive nature of both the local and international labor markets. Parents—tasked with the decision of choosing universities and colleges for their children, are confronted with the realization that the institution and degree pursued significantly influence future employment prospects. The data paints a picture of a job market where even college graduates face challenges in securing employment, emphasizing the need for a strategic approach to education and career planning to navigate the complexities of the contemporary job landscape in the Philippines (PSA, 2019).

With the growing number of aspiring applicants, fresh graduates today are undoubtedly facing severe competitions and obstacles to get a new job. In a recent study by Escoto et., al (2022), graduations have historically induced anxiety among certain students, serving as a symbolic entry into the 'corporate/real world.' However, the advent of COVID-19 has introduced new uncertainties, causing heightened concerns among students regarding job prospects (Sloat, 2020). In a recent discussion with college graduates about their transition from academia to the professional sphere, Molinsky (2019) discovered that despite the common advice to 'hit the ground running,' many young individuals expressed feelings of disorientation, confusion, dissatisfaction, and, in numerous cases, being overwhelmed by the challenges of the 'real world.' This profound and demanding experience has ripple effects on companies, which invest significant time and resources in recruiting and training young talents, expecting them to swiftly contribute to the organization."

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Transitioning into the workforce signifies a significant and transformative step for graduates, impacting both their professional and personal spheres. Moving from the academic realm to the practical work environment is more than just a transition; it entails assimilating into the corporate culture, harnessing individual talents, fostering career growth, building new social connections, and gaining independence. These moments serve as crucial milestones in the life journey of young individuals (Rok, 2013). Hence, in this study, the researcher will explore how the fresh graduate individuals journey their entry level jobs. More specifically, to:

- To explore the lived experiences of fresh graduates in their entry level job
- To know the challenges faced by the fresh graduates in the entry level jobs
- To know what are the coping strategies employed by fresh graduates in their entry level jobs

Significance of the Study

Exploring the Realities of Fresh Graduates in their Entry-level Jobs lies in its capacity to provide crucial insights into the challenges and experiences encountered by recent graduates as they enter the workforce. By delving into the multifaceted aspects of this transitional phase, the study offers valuable information that can reshape educational practices, inform career counseling services, enhance employer strategies, and guide policymaking. More so, understanding the nuances of fresh graduates' entry-level experiences is essential for educational institutions to adapt curricula, ensuring they align with the practical demands of the professional world.

Apart from these, career counselors can use this knowledge to offer more realistic guidance, fostering informed career decisions and heightened job satisfaction. Employers stand to benefit by tailoring recruitment and onboarding processes to address the specific needs of entry-level employees, ultimately improving retention rates and productivity. Policymakers can leverage these insights to create initiatives that support the successful integration of fresh graduates, contributing to a more resilient and well-prepared workforce. Overall, this study has the potential to positively impact the trajectory of young professionals, educational institutions, employers, and broader workforce dynamics.

Scope and Limitations

This study only focused on the lived realities of fresh graduates who are currently working on their entry level jobs. With this, the participants are the individuals who finished their tertiary education in the Academic Year 2022-2023. The participants are also limited to entry level workers employed in Davao City.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Literature reveals a comprehensive landscape of the challenges and dynamics faced by recent graduates entering the workforce. Scholarly works by Adams et al. (2019) and Johnson and Smith (2020) underscore the common hurdles of a skills gap, unrealistic expectations, and the need to acclimate to new workplace cultures. Anderson's (2018) exploration of the dissonance between graduates' expectations and actual job realities contributes to the understanding of the impact on job satisfaction and overall well-being. Smith and Brown's (2021) advocacy for skill development and ongoing training programs highlights potential solutions to address the challenges faced by entry-level employees. The significance of mentorship and support systems is evident in the studies of Williams and Chang (2017), shedding light on the positive influence of mentorship on professional development. Additionally, Carter et al.'s (2020) research delves into the coping mechanisms and resilience strategies employed by fresh graduates, providing insights into the psychological aspects of their adaptation process. Collectively, this body of literature not only identifies the hurdles faced by fresh graduates but also suggests avenues for intervention and improvement, offering a nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding the entry into the professional sphere.

Theoretical Framework

To provide the theoretical foundation for this research, the study utilized Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981) which posits that there is a transition in every event or non-event that results in changes towards relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles.

Transition Theory, often associated with the work of Schlossberg (1981) and later expanded upon by other scholars, provides a conceptual framework for understanding individuals' experiences and adjustments during significant life

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transitions, such as the transition from academia to the workforce. In the context of fresh graduates entering the workforce, antecedent factors could include the individual's academic background, personal characteristics, and expectations. These factors shape the graduate's perception of the upcoming transition and influence their readiness for the challenges of entry-level positions.

In applying this framework, researchers conducted in-depth qualitative interviews, and observations to explore the nuances of the transition experienced by fresh graduates. Questions revolved around the graduates' initial expectations, the challenges encountered, coping mechanisms employed, and the role of mentorship and support in their adjustment process. Additionally, the framework allows for the examination of how the transition process evolves over time and how it may differ among individuals based on various antecedent factors.

By utilizing the Transition Theory as a guiding framework, the study gained a structured approach to explore the complexities of fresh graduates' entry into the workforce, providing a theoretical lens to interpret and analyze their experiences, challenges, and the factors influencing successful adaptation.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter set out the methodology used in the conduct of this study. The chapter is divided into parts that specifically detail the research design, the locale and the participants, the sampling technique and procedures, the data gathering process, the data analysis, and the ethical considerations to be abided by the researcher in the pursuit of this study.

Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological qualitative research approach. This approach was used to explore the realities of fresh graduates in their entry level jobs. In the data collection process, we, as researchers, considered the concept of saturation. The term "saturation" is frequently used to describe the stage of data collecting where no new problems or insights are found, indicating that an acceptable sample size has been attained. Saturation is an essential indicator that a sample is suitable for the phenomenon under inquiry, that the data obtained have adequately represented the variety, depth, and nuance of the topics under consideration, and that the content validity of the study has been established (Francisetal., 2010). Dworkin (2012) noted that having 25 to 30 participants is a minimum to obtain saturation, hence in the case of this study, a number of 30 individuals were planned to be interviewed in order to provide reliable and robust data gathering for qualitative research, reaching saturation has become an essential component (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021). However, due to the short amount of time, the researchers only gathered data from ten individuals. Regardless, it is ensured that the data collected adequately represents the phenomenon investigated.

Research Locale and Participants

This study was conducted in Davao City, Philippines. The respondents were the fresh graduates who finished their college degrees in the Academic Year 2022-2023 and are currently employed and working on their first job after graduation.

Sampling and Sampling Procedures

To identify the respondents of this study, the researcher utilized a purposive and snowball sampling technique. This technique is a method where the researchers will select a respondent that fits the criteria of the study and then refer someone to become a potential respondent of the study and the referral will continue increasing the number of respondents (Davis & Lachlan, 2017). The snowball sampling technique was employed so that fresh graduates can refer peers in their networks that are also fresh graduates. A semi-structured interview guide was drawn to help the researcher delve into the parameters that are important to the formative research. However, the formative research maintains its exploratory nature and its valuing of the lived experiences of the newly employed fresh graduate individuals.

Data Analysis

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In the process of scrutinizing the collected data, the designated analytical approach is content analysis, specifically aimed at theme identification. It entails a meticulous examination of the content to discern recurring patterns, topics, or themes within the data set. The emphasis on theme identification underscores the intention to uncover and categorize prevalent and meaningful themes, providing researchers with a structured means of understanding the inherent patterns and nuances present in the collected information. Overall, the utilization of content analysis for theme identification reflects a deliberate and systematic effort to distill significant insights from the data, contributing to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research subject.

Ethical Considerations

To conduct this study without jeopardizing the safety of the participants, the researcher ensured that the study abides the following ethical considerations:

- a. Informed Consent - In the collection of the qualitative data, the researcher sought permission to individuals who wish to participate in the study by providing them informed consent that contains the relevant information about the study, its purpose, the respondent's role in the study, the risks and benefits in participating the study, and the utilization of the data gathered for this study.
- b. Anonymity and Confidentiality - The participants of this study had the right to decide whether they can participate and provide personal information such as their names, age, employer, etc. The researchers assured that the information shared will be kept confidential and will only be used for the purpose of this study.
- c. Sensitivity - The participants of this study had a choice to finish or terminate their participation in answering the interview questions. The participants were also allowed to not answer any questions they find uncomfortable answering. Furthermore, the participants were allowed to stop or withdraw from participating at any time during the conduct of the study.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected for the analysis of this study was gathered from ten respondents who currently work in their entry level job after their graduation. The researchers transcribed the responses and using thematic analysis, the researchers came up with the following themes encompassing the realities of the fresh graduates while working in their entry level job.

Theme 1: Struggles in the workplace

From the responses in the interview, the fresh graduates experienced various struggles when it comes to working, especially in their first ever job after finishing their college education. Three sub-themes were drawn out from their responses:

Unfamiliar tasks. Based on the data gathered, the respondents struggled in their entry level job because they are faced with unfamiliar tasks. The respondents shared that since they are new to the work setting, they do not have ideas about the tasks and projects assigned to them.

I have an idea but not like I really know what to do because unlike other jobs their tasks are in a routine. In my case, it differs almost every day.

- Respondent 4

My greatest struggle is that this is not my niche. Although I have an idea about it, I am not a total expert on where I am assigned.

- Respondent 1

Being new in the workplace is a challenge especially when you enter a job without anyone telling you what your job to be and how things are to be done.

- Respondent 6

This result coincides with the findings of Chan (2021) that fresh graduates often face problems in their new workplace mainly because they are unfamiliar with the tasks. These unfamiliarities range from vocabulary, technical terms, field of work, and practices.

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High expectations. Aside from the unfamiliar tasks, the data also revealed that the respondents experience high expectations from their superiors and coworkers because they are fresh from education and new to the workplace. These high expectations revolve around the respondents being knowledgeable about the tasks and able to perform duties without prior instructions. Most of the respondents also experience high expectations from their supervisors because of their educational background and their previous institutions.

They feel like I know everything because I had this educational background. They will tell me that I should know everything already.

- Respondent 5

I was once asked if I knew how to do the current projects in my job which are degree-related tasks because I came from this institution. They would ask me if I tried doing this before, if I knew how to use those particular software. There is a part of me that is humiliated because I do not know all of those so it is quite overwhelming.

- Respondent 4

In correspondence with the results of Zaharim, Yusoff, Omar, Mohamed, & Muhamad (2009), there is a gap between how the employers expect their employees to be performing in the workplace. Employers found out that their fresh graduate employees do not have the competency and the skills they want to satisfy their demand. Although their employees do not lack technical skills relevant to their jobs, they fall short on their soft skills such as teamwork, communication, and problem solving skills. In a more recent study, Rahman, Mohamed, Nasir, Saidin (2019) also found out that most of their fresh graduates' employees lacked negotiation skills and communication skills, which causes them issues in their presentation and diplomatic tasks.

Communication with the coworkers and leadership. More so, the respondents also struggled with communicating with their coworkers, especially that most of them are older than them and are more experienced than them. They feel intimidated with the age gaps. In connection to that, the respondent also struggles in leadership as they are assigned with tasks that involve handling of people and managing them. These communication dynamics that the respondents experience poses a struggle in terms of working in their entry level job.

At first, I was intimidated by my co-workers.

- Respondent 6

I feel like I am a kid trying to fit myself in the adult world because most of my coworkers are in their thirties and forties. Firstly, I do not know how to interact with them because we have different generations.

- Respondent 5

If we talk about my relationship with my workmates, it was a struggle because we have different age brackets, different generations that is why I struggled in adjusting. As time goes by, I can understand the dynamics but at first it was really hard because we have different views and different priorities. We come from different backgrounds, so it was hard to identify our frame of references.

- Respondent 4

My greatest struggle was that I was new to the workplace and I was straightforwardly given a responsibility to become a team leader where I handle people even if I do not know what to do yet since I was new. The leadership was in an instant like a snap, I was responsible for the people working under my team, my supervision.

- Respondent 1

These realities experienced by the participants aligned with the findings of Dietz & Fasbender (2022) where they stated that the diverse ages in the workplace can develop interpersonal tensions between workers. It is reflected in the differences between individuals' social perceptions.

Theme 2: Combatting the struggles and challenges

Given their current struggles in their entry level job, the fresh graduates employed various coping mechanisms in order to address their challenges. The respondents constantly learned, practiced, inquired, and adapted to perform well at work in spite of the challenges. In this theme, three sub-themes emerged:

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Learning by doing. Participants revealed that in order to address the ongoing struggles they are facing, they constantly learn their tasks every day by doing it and becoming familiar with the tasks. In this way, they get used to their job and perform better.

Of course, it is a constant learning process. It is learning by doing. As the days go by, I learn eventually and I do not become ignorant with the tasks handed to me.

- Respondent 1

We will just continue to learn and most importantly you learn from your seniors so that you become one of them sooner.

- Respondent 2

For me, I really tried to get accustomed to the ways and the work of the office as well as finding my strengths and weaknesses as well. I try to be better in the things I lack.

- Respondent 7

Billett (2020) found that everyday work activities or what he coined 'just doing it' allowed workers to engage in an active and constructive process of learning in their workplace through participating in the tasks assigned to them. Through this, the individual can develop an ability to identify and test different ways of doing the job and further find a means that is effective and suitable for them.

Ask guidance from superiors and coworkers. The respondents also address their struggles by communicating to their superiors about their lack and asking for guidance. In this way, they can adjust with the workload and learn how to perform the assigned tasks.

What I do is I really ask for guidance and I would not tell them that I know the particulars where in fact I am not knowledgeable enough. I ask for guidance by asking questions and help so that I would find my tasks very hard.

- Respondent 4

I address this issue by communicating to my colleagues, asking for guidance from my superiors or those who worked longer here. Because if you ask them how to do things, you will get help and you can organize your tasks well. At the same time, you receive suggestions, comments, and tips which are all helpful in accomplishing the tasks.

- Respondent 3

You really have to approach other people who are knowledgeable on the tasks to learn.

- Respondent 7

I always ask questions to them [coworkers] because there are things that I do not know yet.

- Respondent 6

In the same manner, Billett (2020) also noted that the guidance provided by their coworkers and the different support they get in the workplace contribute to their process of learning how to perform their tasks. The direct guidance from their supervisors and colleagues assist them in accomplishing their individual tasks.

Being flexible and adaptive. Based on the results, the respondents address their struggles in the workplace by becoming flexible and able to adapt quickly to the number of tasks given to them.

You have to adapt and be flexible so you can become adept and your skills get honed, which is helpful in doing your tasks.

- Respondent 1

One of my solutions is that I have to be flexible when it comes to my work while being cautious at the same time since I am dealing with lives.

- Respondent 2

This mechanism employed by the fresh graduates abide to the study of Beltran-Martin & Roca-Puig (2013) which stated that the employees need to become flexible in using their skills, changing the perception of their job roles, and can quickly adapt to the changing working environment to meet the demands of the workplace.

Theme 3: Preparations made before entering the entry level job

In order to comprehensively explore the realities of the fresh graduates in their entry level jobs, the researchers delved into the experiences of the fresh graduates in preparing themselves for their job after their tertiary education. The fresh graduates treated their tertiary education and internship as preparation for their job and at the same time the preparations of their well-being. From their responses, the following themes emerged:

Preparing the self. The respondents shared their experiences in preparing themselves for the job and the preparations included making themselves physically, mentally, and emotionally fit to enter the job. They also prepared the necessary requirements such as a resume and looked for tips on how to perform well in job interviews.

I prepared myself by being physically and emotionally available or emotionally fit.

- Respondent 2

I prepared myself mentally like foreseeing what would be the possible things that could happen once I start my job.

- Respondent 3

I do self-talk. I settled and conditioned my mind that I can do the job. I also prepared my resume, application letters, and watched interview tips on how to ace the job interview.

- Respondent 4

I gave effort on my Curriculum Vitae and did mental preparations beforehand.

- Respondent 7

The result follows the findings of a study in Indonesia where it revealed that one of the preparations of the fresh graduates for their entry level job is by looking after their physical state (Prastika et., al., 2022). Maintaining their wellbeing helps them become more ready for work.

Remembering the learnings and skills from tertiary education and internships. Based on the data gathered, the researchers also found out that the fresh graduates prepare themselves by recalling their learnings from their courses in their tertiary education. Their experiences during their internships and organizational affiliations prepared them for their current job as those tasks are somehow related to what they do now.

My tertiary education helped me when it comes to my practices and work ethics because during my college days I was trained to always give my 100% and do my best.

- Respondent 4

Of course, my previous courses in undergraduate helped me a lot since it made me adept on social media content creation and it made me technology-savvy. It was a big factor since I work in a digital marketing agency.

- Respondent 1

The internship really helped me to easily adapt in my workplace, especially that I was able to gain experience and the fundamentals of my job.

- Respondent 2

I apply in my current work now what I have learned before. For example, now that we craft sustainability plans and in my course in college I made a crisis plan, with that I recall and revisit those topics. Also, what I did during my internship was related to what I am doing now in my entry level job.

- Respondent 5

This result coincides with the results of Handoko (2021) where it was proved that fresh graduates with active participation during their tertiary education such as organizational affiliations had better skills in communication, wider knowledge and critical thinkers, possess good camaraderie, responsible and mature, and can easily adapt to the new environment. With these experiences, they are more ready to the workforce. Burayk & Kaur (2023) stated that internships are significant in helping the students become successful in working at their job after graduation. Not only do they become masters of the topic they study, but also learn practical skills, techniques, methods, and tools helpful for them to become equipped in working at their respective jobs.

Theme 4: The pandemic effect.

It is important to note that these fresh graduates experienced remote learning due to the pandemic. The drastic change in the learning acquisition and environment affected them in terms of their knowledge, skills, and capabilities to perform their tasks in their entry level job. Based on the data gathered, the following theme emerged:

Lack of competency. The data gathered from the respondents revealed that due to the pandemic, they miss or lack the competencies and skills needed for their current job. There were some parts in their curriculum that were skipped or not focused on because it was hard to learn on a remote learning setup. Internships that had to be done remotely too affected skills acquisition of the fresh graduates.

The pandemic affected me because I should be possessing a competency as a teacher but I was not able to practice the competency during those times because we missed it due to remote learning. I could have learned better and know how to handle some situations better. (Respondent 3)

Knowledge-wise, the pandemic affected me in such a way that there are so many topics that we did not tap on. Thus there are parts in my work now that I find hard because I have not tried it at school because of the pandemic. (Respondent 4)

I was not able to experience on-site internship because of the pandemic. We only did online simulation so no on-hand experience. (Respondent 9)

Because of the pandemic, I had so many what ifs. I could have enhanced my skills better, I could have learned more skills related to what I do now, I could have become confident at work.. The pandemic made me lacking in skills enhancement experience. If pandemic did not happen, I could have applied what I should have learned at school to my current job. (Respondent 5)

Indeed, various extreme changes have occurred since the pandemic has rapidly entered various countries in the last two years. Specifically, in the academic landscape of our country which directly affects the learning and development of skills of the students especially those who are graduating. Some of them lack confidence in their skills as they did not have the privilege to experience hands-on job internship during the pandemic. This holds true to the study conducted by Qomariyah and Febriyanti (2021), wherein it underscores the nuanced dynamics of fresh graduates' work readiness, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, revealing complexities not present in pre-pandemic scenarios. A crucial finding is the indispensable role of social support—emanating from family, peers, and the educational environment—in shaping new graduates' job readiness. Moreover, the study highlights the imperative for fresh graduates to possess self-motivation and resilience as they navigate the transition from the educational realm to the professional world, a transition marked by notable differences.

More so, it revealed that to effectively prepare for the professional landscape, new graduates must actively cultivate their work readiness. This involves seizing opportunities for gaining experience and pursuing both formal and informal education. Notably, competence, a cornerstone of work readiness, is a quality that cannot be instantly acquired. It evolves over time through deliberate efforts and a commitment to continuous development. Essential components of this evolving competence include work attitude and a digital mindset—qualities currently in high demand by employers seeking optimal performance from new graduates in the contemporary work environment.

Theme 5: The purpose of entry level job

Because of the lack of onsite experiences during the pandemic, the respondents treated their current entry level job as an extension of their tertiary education. Their entry level job served as a training ground to explore more skills needed in the workforce. Based on the data gathered, the following themes emerged:

Entry level job as an extension of education. The current entry level job of the fresh graduates served as an instrument to fill in the learning and skill acquisition gaps during the pandemic.

What I think about my entry level job is that this will fill in those things that I did not learn in college. I treat this as an extension of my college years. (Respondent 4)

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This is just my beginning. So it feels like I am still on my internship because I kept on being taught by my colleagues and superiors. (Respondent 5)

I think my current job gives me a lot of opportunity to discover more about my capabilities and get out of my comfort zone. It is a good avenue to learn the ways of the workplace as well. (Respondent 7)

This perspective aligns with Toquero and Ulanday (2021) findings, indicating that graduates often encounter challenges in securing jobs aligned with their degree courses. The incongruence between educational qualifications and the skills demanded by the job market suggests a gap in university preparation, revealing a need for enhanced skills training and a more relevant curriculum in response to the evolving demands of the global labor market.

In essence, the fresh graduates' outlook on their entry-level positions as an extension of education not only captures their individual growth trajectories but also underscores the broader structural challenges in aligning academic qualifications with the dynamic requirements of the contemporary workforce. This narrative calls for a reevaluation of educational approaches to ensure graduates are better equipped to navigate the complexities of the professional landscape.

Entry level job as a stepping stone and exploration of skill set. Based on the data gathered, the fresh graduates see their current entry level job as an opportunity to explore and widen their skill set as well as treat it as a foundation in pursuing career growth in the future.

This entry level job is like an exploration of opportunities or exploring and building my skill set. Maybe this will be helpful in the long run. (Respondent 1)

What I run after in this entry level job is exposure and the experiences that hopeful will give me growth. Hopefully, this will help me fill myself with the skills needed for the job I want to pursue in the future. (Respondent 4)

I see it as a stepping stone wherein I can learn on how to be an effective and successful worker. (Respondent 8)

I do not know if I will continue working in this job right now because I want to explore other job opportunities too. This is just a stepping stone for me, where I can learn here how to govern and to plan. (Respondent 5)

Building on the insights shared by the participants, a noteworthy aspect involves the intentional development of their skill sets, with many perceiving their current positions as stepping stones in their career journey. According to Casanova et al. (2016, p. 9), the Philippines faces two significant challenges: effectively preparing students for the workforce by enhancing their skills, knowledge, and abilities to boost employability, and creating conditions conducive to job creation. This sheds light on the struggles fresh graduates encounter, grappling with an insufficient skill set as they enter the workforce. In response, they actively seek to adapt and explore skills pertinent to their respective roles.

In alignment with these efforts, the Philippine Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) advocates for youth awareness of the job market dynamics. They encourage an understanding of job vacancies categorized as "easy-to-fill," "hard-to-fill," and those falling within high-demand sectors as cited in Budhrani, D'Amico et.al. (2018). This strategic approach aims to equip young professionals with insights into the evolving employment landscape, fostering a proactive mindset as they navigate and contribute to key sectors driving job creation.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Fresh graduates face many challenges in their workplace such as unfamiliarity with the tasks, employer-employee expectation gaps, and diverse-age induced communication problems. However, these problems can be addressed through persistent learning, asking for help and support from coworkers, and also having the ability to adapt to different circumstances. Moreover, the skills acquired in tertiary education, internship, and organizational affiliations play a huge role in the fresh graduates' preparation for their first job after graduation. This study has served as a way in shedding light on the intricate and diverse experiences of fresh graduates as they step into the realm of entry-level employment. The identified struggles, ranging from task unfamiliarity to age-induced communication dynamics, have

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been identified, providing valuable insights into the nuanced nature of the challenges faced by these individuals. Amidst the struggles, the study uncovered the profound impact of personal and educational preparations on the participants' ability to navigate the demands of their entry-level positions. The multifaceted nature of these preparations, encompassing mental, emotional, and physical aspects, underscores their pivotal role in shaping the readiness of fresh graduates for the professional arena. The findings highlight the symbiotic relationship between the skills acquired during tertiary education, internships, and organizational affiliations and the successful transition into the workforce.

More importantly, this study underscores the dynamic nature of entry-level jobs, transcending their conventional perception as a mere transitional phase. Instead, they emerge as dynamic arenas for skill exploration and career development. The insights gleaned from the participants' experiences contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the trajectory from academia to the professional realm. These nuanced insights carry profound implications for educational institutions, employers, and policymakers, urging them to adapt their support systems to better align with the evolving needs of fresh graduates. By doing so, a more robust and responsive framework can be established, nurturing the potential of these individuals and fortifying them for a successful entry into the workforce.

Recommendations

As researchers, we wholeheartedly acknowledge the realities that unfolded during this study. We firmly believe that this research lays a foundation for future studies, offering valuable insights that can be expanded and refined in various facets.

Firstly, it's imperative to recognize that our data collection was constrained by time limitations, involving only 10 participants. To achieve a more comprehensive and expansive understanding, future researchers should consider a larger participant pool. Additionally, a more enriched perspective can be attained by extending the study beyond Davao to encompass diverse regions with distinct work environments.

Moreover, we recommend broadening the scope of future investigations by incorporating the viewpoints of not only employees but also employers and individuals from academic institutions. Including these stakeholders will provide a more nuanced and holistic set of results, allowing for a comprehensive examination of the experiences from multiple vantage points. This collaborative approach will contribute to a more robust understanding of the dynamics at play in entry-level employment. Lastly, this study will contribute in packaging the skillset of the fresh graduates, along with the initiatives of the appropriate agencies such as the academe, the labor and employment and also the policymakers.

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