

EMPLOYMENT ASPIRATIONS AND CHALLENGES OF GRADUATING STUDENTS FROM A STATE COLLEGE: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

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Abstract

This study investigated the employment aspirations and perceived employment challenges of graduating students from South Cotabato State College. A quantitative descriptive research design was employed, involving 203 graduating students from different academic programs. Data were collected through a structured survey questionnaire and analyzed using weighted mean and standard deviation. Results revealed that graduating students demonstrate strong employment aspirations, particularly in pursuing professional growth, leadership positions, and financial stability to support their families. Most respondents also expressed willingness to relocate and seek employment related to their academic program. Despite these aspirations, students identified several challenges that may hinder their employment opportunities, including lack of work experience, limited industry connections, financial constraints, and strong job competition. The findings highlight the need for higher education institutions to strengthen career guidance services, expand internship and industry partnership programs, and enhance employability development initiatives. These strategies may help bridge the gap between academic preparation and workforce requirements, improving graduates' readiness for employment.

Keywords: *Employment Aspirations, Employment Challenges, Graduating Students, Employability, Higher Education, Descriptive Analysis, Philippines*

1. Introduction

College plays a crucial role in promoting social mobility and fostering human capital development. In the Philippines, where many people see going to college as a way to lift their families out of poverty, it is vital to the economy and jobs. Even as more and more people are going to college and the number of graduates is rising (Philippine Statistical Authority [PSA], 2023), it is still hard for many Filipinos to find work, especially at regional and state universities and colleges.

Students at a state college like South Cotabato State College (SCSC), which offers a wide range of programs such as Tourism Management, Entrepreneurship, Agriculture, and Technical-Vocational Education, want to transition from student life to professional work. This is both a goal and a difficulty. Students want to find a job that makes them happy, but their transition to the workforce is often hindered by a lack of skills, limited opportunities, and financial constraints.

The study of job aspirations and challenges has become increasingly important in the post-pandemic era. (Ho, Nguyen, and Nguyen 2022) assert that structured career development learning (CDL) substantially improves students' perceptions of employability, hence directly impacting their goals. (Donald et al. 2025) Similarly, aspirations and employability are enhanced when higher education institutions provide adequate career

resources and experiential learning opportunities. Fish (2025) observed that student participation in employability programs is insufficient due to inadequate institutional promotion, resulting in unrealistic career aspirations. In the Philippines, employment remains a major problem nationwide. The (PSA 2023) says that 10.8% of people aged 20 to 24 are unemployed, indicating that there are still too few jobs and that some are not qualified for them. The Philippine News Agency (2023) also says that poor career advice, a lack of coordination among industries, and obsolete curricula are important reasons why graduates can't find jobs.

Employment ambitions are the aims and expectations that shape a person's professional choices after finishing school. They are affected by a mix of self-efficacy, personal drive, perceived opportunities, and institutional support (Ho et al., 2022). Recent research indicates that university students' employment expectations are evolving towards flexibility, creativity, and digital adaptability. (Rifat and Sony 2025) discovered a strong correlation between students' aspirations and their preparation and skill development, especially in digital literacy and problem-solving. (Xu et al. 2025) Similarly, higher education institutions that prioritize employability learning through internships and global exposure typically yield graduates with enhanced professional confidence.

At the global level, Donald et al. (2025) found that students who routinely reflect on their professional objectives and seek mentorship have more realistic goals and are better able to navigate problems when seeking employment. The ASEAN Secretariat (2022) noted that students' professional objectives in the ASEAN region often go beyond what local businesses can offer, leading more graduates to migrate to other countries. In the Philippines, Cruz (2023) found that students studying Tourism Management want to work in fast-paced fields like travel, hospitality, and airlines, but they struggle because jobs are seasonal and not always safe. Likewise, Guevarra and Par (2023) observed that technical-vocational graduates in Mindanao have significant career aspirations but face challenges with skill certification and alignment with industry requirements.

In general, these studies show that institutional support, exposure to the business, and personal drive all have a good effect on students' goals, but structural barriers in employability development hold them back. While dreams drive ambition, job problems make it hard for graduates to reach their ambitions. These problems are caused by structural impediments, institutional issues, and personal limitations. The Pathway2Employability Report (2024) found that graduates often struggle to connect what they learn in school with what they need to do in the real world, which leaves them less confident when they start working. The ASEAN Graduate Employability Report (2022) also noted that finding a job remains difficult in Southeast Asia, with employers often stating that fresh graduates lack sufficient soft skills and work experience.

"Across Borders: Opportunities and Challenges of Filipino College Graduates" (2024) found that Filipino college graduates are mostly having trouble finding jobs that match their skills and are underemployed. (Santos 2023) noted that Filipino graduates typically feel unprepared for job applications and professional interviews because they don't receive enough hands-on training. (Arowana Impact Capital 2023) also found that vocational and technical graduates face ongoing challenges, including outdated training facilities, low social recognition, and a lack of mentoring at work. Rise Education Magazine (2025) also reported that the gap between education and the workforce is widening in the Philippines. Employers say college graduates lack the technical skills and real-world experience needed for the job.

The College of Technology Tracer Study (2023) also showed that graduates in technical and applied subjects experience less job stability and slower career advancement because there aren't many internship opportunities, and employers don't have strong connections with them. These data collectively demonstrate that impediments to employability are multifaceted, encompassing individual preparedness, institutional capability, and broader economic circumstances. The connection between job goals and problems is two-way.

Students with high hopes frequently know more about the labor market than others who face more problems, who may change or lessen their hopes. (Donald et al. 2025) and (Ho et al. 2022) both discovered that career support systems facilitate the moderation of this relationship by enabling students to surmount obstacles.

The ASEAN Secretariat (2022) said that in Southeast Asia, colleges with strong employability programs tend to produce graduates whose goals are more aligned with available jobs. In the local context, research by Guevarra and Par (2023) demonstrated that institutional collaborations and skills training markedly reduce the gap between desire and achievement. Consequently, the simultaneous analysis of both variables yields an evidence-based comprehension of how students at regional state universities manage their transition from academia to professional work.

The literature examined shows that graduates want steady, meaningful jobs, but they struggle to find them. Research indicates that persistent problems include skill gaps, inadequate career services, and insufficient job prospects. Nonetheless, the majority of this research concentrates exclusively on objectives or challenges in isolation. There is a lack of research investigating both constructs within a state college environment, particularly across fields such as tourism, agriculture, communication, entrepreneurship, and technical-vocational education.

This study fills that gap by giving a quantitative descriptive examination of the link between graduating students' job hopes and problems at South Cotabato State College. The results of this study will enhance the discourse on employability development, providing guidance for institutional policy, curriculum improvement, and strategic partnerships between the education and industry sectors.

This study seeks to ascertain the career objectives and problems faced by graduating students from a state college, and to investigate how their academic experiences influence their preparedness for the labor market. The results of this study may inform curriculum development, industry partnership initiatives, and employability strategies across diverse fields.

It seeks to answer these questions in particular:

1. What are the employment aspirations of graduating students in terms of:
 - a. Preferred job position or career path;
 - b. Preferred work location (local, national, or international);
 - c. Motivation for employment?
2. What are the perceived employment challenges of graduating students in terms of:
 - a. Job opportunities and competition;
 - b. Required skills and competencies;
 - c. Work experience and exposure; and
3. Based on the findings, what recommendations may be proposed to enhance employability readiness across programs in the state college?

To examine the job ambitions and obstacles faced by graduating students from South Cotabato State College, encompassing several academic subjects.

1. To identify the employment aspirations of graduating students in terms of their desired career path, work setting, expected salary, and employment motivation.
2. To determine the perceived challenges that may hinder their employment prospects.
3. To propose strategies and recommendations that will improve employability development and workforce readiness across programs.

This study is anchored on the premise that employment aspirations, their expectations, motivations, and preferences are linked to their perceived employment challenges and barriers that influence their readiness to enter the workforce.

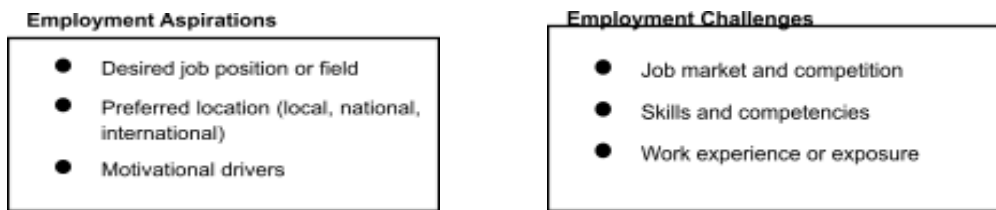


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the study

The conceptual framework you've provided illustrates a causal or correlational relationship between a person's Employment Aspirations and the Employment Challenges they face. In research terms, it suggests that what a person wants (IV) directly influences or relates to the obstacles they encounter (DV).

2. METHODS

The study employs a quantitative-descriptive design, appropriate for discerning patterns in measurable variables. The design facilitates the statistical characterization of job aspirations and challenges. The descriptive approach is employed to delineate the features of the respondents, including their work ambitions and obstacles, whilst the quantitative method facilitates statistical analysis of data collected using a standardized questionnaire. The study was conducted at South Cotabato State College (SCSC) in Surallah, South Cotabato. The institution serves as a training ground for aspiring professionals and is located in Surallah, South Cotabato.

The participants in this study will primarily be drawn from the following programs: Bachelor of Science in Tourism Management (BSTM), Bachelor of Science in Entrepreneurship (BSEntrep), Bachelor of Technical Education with a major in Food and Service Management, Bachelor of Science in Agriculture (BSA), and Bachelor of Science in Developmental Communication (BSDC). They are chosen because they are at the final stage of their program and ready to transition from school to work.

The study will utilize a total population (consensus) sampling method due to the limited sample size. The researcher created a structured survey questionnaire that was checked/validated by professionals (Tourism, Research, Development, and Education) to make sure it was accurate.

The instrument will have three parts: Part I: The respondents' profile (age, gender, planned workplace preference, etc.) Part II—Employment Aspirations (Preferred job, career goals, desired remuneration) Rated on a 5-point Likert scale Part III – Employment Challenges (Job availability, skills required, lack of experience, financial or personal limits). Also assessed on a 5-point Likert scale to show how hard they seem to be. A pilot test will be conducted to verify the instrument's reliability (Cronbach's Alpha > 0.70) and validity.

Data Gathering Procedures

1. A formal request letter for permission was sent to the Director for instructions and to the research director to conduct a survey among 4th-year BSTM students.
2. Upon approval, the researcher personally administered the questionnaires.
3. Respondents were informed about the purpose, confidentiality, and voluntary nature of their participation.
4. After data collection, the responses were tabulated, encoded, and analyzed using appropriate

statistical tools.

Statistical Treatment of Data

1. To describe the employment aspirations of respondents, Weighted Mean & Standard Deviation, To measure the level and consistency of aspirations
2. To identify the challenges encountered by respondents, Weighted Mean & Rank, To determine the most and least perceived challenges

All statistical computations will be performed using SPSS.

The scale used for interpreting the mean scores is as follows: a mean range of 1.00 to 1.80 indicates Strongly Disagree, 1.81 to 2.60 indicates Disagree, 2.61 to 3.40 indicates Neutral, 3.41 to 4.20 indicates Agree, and 4.21 to 5.00 indicates Strongly Agree. This scale serves as the basis for determining the respondents' level of agreement or disagreement with each statement in the study.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed ethical research guidelines by ensuring that participants were chosen to take part. Before collecting data, get informed consent. Keeping participant information private and secret. Integrity in academia and precise data reporting.

3. PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

This chapter presents, analyzes, and explains the information collected from students who graduated from South Cotabato State College. The results are arranged in accordance with the issue description and substantiated through statistical analysis using frequencies and percentages.

I. The Respondents' Profile

This section discusses the respondents' demographic information. The data are displayed in Table 1, which shows the frequency and percentage distribution.

TABLE 1
Demographic Profile

		Frequency	Percent
Age	18-20	1	.5%
	21-23	166	81.8%
	24-26	35	17.2%
	30-up	1	.5%
Sex	Male	109	53.7%
	Female	94	46.3%
Program	BS Tourism Management	14	6.9%
	BS Agriculture	155	76.4%
	BS Developmental Communication	10	4.9%
	BS Entrepreneurship	13	6.4%
	Bachelor of Technical Education-FSM	11	5.4%
Residents	Within South Cotabato	193	95.1%
	Outside South Cotabato	10	4.9%
Employment Preference	Private	25	12.3%
	Government	156	76.8%
	Self-Employed	20	9.9%
	Further Studies	2	1.0%
	Total	203	100.0%

Table 1 reveals that the majority of the 203 people who answered (81.8%) are between the ages of 21 and 23, which means they are in their early adulthood. There are slightly more males than females, and most (76.4%) are BS Agriculture students. Most of the people who answered live in South Cotabato (95.1%). Most of them

want to work for the government (76.8%), indicating that graduates have a strong desire to serve the public.

TABLE 2

Employment Aspirations

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
I aspire to become a manager, supervisor, or entrepreneur within 5 years.	4.640	4.17011	Strongly Agree
I am motivated to work to help my family financially.	4.556	.66786	Strongly Agree
I am determined to pursue continuous learning and professional growth.	4.433	.72389	Strongly Agree
I believe my chosen program has prepared me to be employable.	4.369	.74226	Strongly Agree
I expect a fair and competitive salary that matches my qualifications.	4.320	.70426	Strongly Agree
I prefer to work in a job related to my course or major.	4.295	.76516	Agree
I am willing to relocate to other regions for better employment opportunities.	4.266	.65866	Agree
I have a clear career path I plan to follow after graduation.	4.266	.61995	Agree
I aspire to work abroad to gain international exposure.	4.231	.71101	Strongly Agree
I plan to find a full-time job immediately after graduation.	4.142	.68527	Agree
Valid N (listwise)	203		

Table 2 shows the employment aspirations of the 203 respondents. The overall responses reveal that students exhibit a high level of career motivation and ambition, as reflected in the majority of items interpreted as *Strongly Agree*. The highest mean is for the statement “*I aspire to become a manager, supervisor, or entrepreneur within 5 years*” ($M = 4.64$), indicating that most respondents have strong leadership and entrepreneurial goals. Similarly, they strongly agree that they are motivated to work to help their family financially ($M = 4.56$) and are determined to pursue continuous learning and professional growth ($M = 4.43$). Respondents also strongly agree that their chosen program has prepared them to be employable ($M = 4.37$) and that they expect a fair and competitive salary ($M = 4.32$). Meanwhile, items such as preferring to work in a job related to their course ($M = 4.30$), willingness to relocate for better opportunities ($M = 4.27$), having a clear career path ($M = 4.27$), and planning to find a full-time job after graduation ($M = 4.14$) were rated “*Agree*,” showing practical and realistic employment expectations.

Overall, the findings show that the people who answered the survey are quite eager to work, demonstrating drive, optimism, and a willingness to engage with the professional world, especially in leadership roles and in continuing to advance their careers.

TABLE 3

Employment Challenges

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
I lack sufficient work experience required by employers.	4.3645	.74137	Strongly Agree
I find it difficult to identify companies offering jobs suited to my skills.	4.2512	.76491	Strongly Agree
The college should provide stronger career guidance and industry linkages.	4.2512	.72504	Strongly Agree
Financial constraints may affect my ability to apply for jobs or relocate.	4.2315	3.00175	Strongly Agree
The competition among applicants makes it difficult to get hired.	4.2315	.86779	Strongly Agree
I have limited connections or professional networks for job opportunities.	4.1675	.80931	Agree
Job opportunities related to my course are limited in my area.	4.0788	2.40743	Agree
I am anxious or nervous about job interviews and rejections.	4.0690	.89839	Agree
I lack sufficient work experience required by employers.	4.0690	.82364	Agree
I am not yet confident with my technical or practical skills.	3.9754	.82916	Agree
Valid N (listwise)	203		

Table 3 presents the employment challenges faced by the 203 respondents. The data reveal that the most significant issue among students is the lack of sufficient work experience required by employers ($M = 4.36$), which was strongly agreed upon. Respondents also strongly agree that they find it difficult to identify companies offering jobs suited to their skills ($M = 4.25$) and that the college should provide stronger career guidance and industry linkages ($M = 4.25$). Likewise, financial constraints ($M = 4.23$) and competition among applicants ($M = 4.23$) were major challenges perceived by the respondents.

Meanwhile, factors such as limited professional connections ($M = 4.17$), limited job opportunities in their area ($M = 4.08$), anxiety about interviews and rejections ($M = 4.07$), and lack of confidence in technical or practical skills ($M = 3.98$) were rated "Agree". These findings indicate that, aside from external barriers such as financial limitations and lack of experience, internal factors, such as confidence and preparedness, also affect students' employment readiness.

Overall, the respondents firmly agree that their biggest problems in finding work are a lack of experience, a lack of strong connections, and a lack of job openings. This shows how important it is to improve internship programs, strengthen partnerships with businesses, and keep learning new skills.

TABLE 4
Employment Preference

		Frequency	Percent
Preferred Industry/Sector	Tourism & Hospitality	23	11.3%
	Agriculture	146	71.9%
	Media/Communication	10	4.9%
	Business/Entrepreneurship	13	6.4%
	Education/Technical	11	5.4%
Expected Starting Salary	Below 12,000	8	3.9%
	12,000–18,000	40	19.7%
	18,001–25,000	62	30.5%
	25,001–35,000	66	32.5%
	Above 35,000	27	13.3%
Willingness to Relocate	Yes	171	84.2%
	No	2	1.0%
	Maybe	30	14.8%
Planned Status 3 Months After Graduation	Employed	131	64.5%
	Job Hunting	30	14.8%
	Self-Employed	35	17.2%
	Studying Further	7	3.4%
	Total	203	100.0%

Table 4 presents the employment preferences of the 203 respondents. The majority prefer to work in the agriculture sector (71.9%), followed by tourism and hospitality (11.3%), which reflects the dominant enrollment of BS Agriculture students. In terms of expected starting salary, most respondents anticipate earning between ₱ 25,001–₱35,000 (32.5%) or ₱ 18,001–₱25,000 (30.5%), suggesting practical yet optimistic salary expectations.

A large proportion of respondents (84.2%) expressed a willingness to relocate for better job opportunities, demonstrating flexibility and openness to broader employment prospects. As for their planned status three months after graduation, most expect to be employed (64.5%), while others foresee job hunting (14.8%), self-employment (17.2%), or pursuing further studies (3.4%).

Overall, the data show that most graduates want to work in agriculture, are hopeful about good pay, and are quite willing to move, indicating they are eager and ready to start working.

4. RESULTS

The study sought to evaluate the job aspirations, challenges, and preferences of graduating students from South Cotabato State College. A total of 203 respondents participated, predominantly aged 21–23 years, with a slight male majority, and most enrolled in the BS Agriculture program. The findings indicated that respondents exhibited significant employment aspirations, expressing a desire for professional advancement and leadership positions. They wanted to make money for their families and advance in their careers over time. However, they also found major problems in finding work, including insufficient work experience, lack of industry connections, insufficient funds, and competition for jobs. Most of the people who answered said they would rather work in agriculture, with moderate salary expectations, and they were willing to move for better opportunities. In general, the results show that students are motivated and hopeful, but they also face real-world and institutional challenges that make it harder for them to transition from college to work.

5. DISCUSSIONS

The study's findings indicate that students' robust aspirations arise from their confidence in academic preparedness and family-oriented motivations, validating Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Career Theory, which emphasizes the impact of self-efficacy and goal orientation on career decisions. This is also in line with what Manalo and Villanueva (2023) found: Filipino graduates from public schools are highly motivated to advance in their careers and support their families. However, the respondents' concerns about insufficient work experience and job opportunities indicate that stronger partnerships with businesses are needed. Lopez and Aquino (2021) and UNESCO (2022) said that graduates from rural schools typically don't receive sufficient hands-on training or job networks. So, universities should improve their internship programs, on-the-job training, and career placement offices to help close the gap between academia and the workplace. Another important point is that they need to do more to help students find jobs.

The fact that people seek career advice supports Tupas and Dela Cruz's (2023) suggestion that public colleges establish comprehensive career-preparation programs, such as job fairs, résumé workshops, and mock interviews. These programs can help students prepare for the challenges of working in the real world. The fact that the respondents were willing to move and were open to jobs in agriculture or government shows that they are flexible and have realistic expectations. This tendency aligns with Garcia and Panganiban (2020), who stated that being able to move between jobs is a significant factor in how employable regional graduates are. De Guzman and Cabudoy (2022) stressed that regional institutions need to do more to help students become graduates who are both locally grounded and globally competitive.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Make career counseling and job readiness programs better. The institution should offer career counseling, practice interviews, and workshops on the job market to help students prepare for the job market.
2. Make more connections between industries and offer more internships. Partnerships with both government and commercial groups should be strengthened to provide students with real-world experience and help them find jobs.
3. Combine learning about business and learning about skills. Students can learn about self-employment and innovation-driven professions by including entrepreneurship and technical skills in the curriculum.
4. Offer programs to help people with money and moving. Financial problems remain a major obstacle for those seeking work; therefore, scholarships or support with job changes may help graduates find work outside their field.
5. Do tracer studies and research on the job market regularly. Keeping an eye on what graduates do can help

schools adjust their course offerings to meet changing industry needs and improve their planning.

The findings support Becker's 1993) Human Capital Theory, which says that education makes you more likely to get a job when you have experience and exposure. Graduates from regional state colleges show promise and drive, but to make the most of this, schools need to do more than just teach in the classroom. They need to include hands-on programs, partnerships with businesses, and support for careers that last a lifetime. This all-encompassing method ensures that graduates are not only good at school but also flexible, competitive, and ready to be professionals who can make a real difference in the development of their region and country.

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