

Career Mobility, Employability, and Program Relevance among ETEEAP Graduates of Pangasinan State University: A Graduate Tracer Study

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Abstract

This graduate tracer study examined the career mobility, employability, and perceived program relevance among graduates of the Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP) at Pangasinan State University. Using a descriptive-correlational research design, the study gathered data from 88 ETEEAP graduates through a structured tracer questionnaire. Descriptive statistics (weighted mean, standard deviation), reliability analysis, analysis of variance, and Pearson correlation were used to analyze the data. Results showed that the respondents were mostly adult learners and working professionals, with 96.6% economically active as employed, self-employed, or overseas-employed graduates. Employability was rated very high, with a composite mean of 4.74, while career mobility was also rated very high, with a composite mean of 4.40. Perceived program relevance obtained the highest composite mean of 4.76, indicating that graduates strongly valued the program's recognition of prior learning, curriculum relevance, assessment activities, faculty mentoring, learning modules, and support services. Significant differences in career mobility were found by employment sector and by residence or work assignment. Program relevance was significantly related to employability and career mobility. Findings suggest that ETEEAP contributes meaningfully to professional advancement, lifelong learning, and inclusive access to higher education.

Keywords: career mobility, employability, ETEEAP, graduate tracer study, recognition of prior learning

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions are increasingly expected to demonstrate the relevance and impact of their academic programs beyond graduation. One mechanism for evaluating such impact is the graduate tracer study, which provides evidence on graduates' employability, professional mobility, job-degree alignment, and satisfaction with academic preparation. Tracer studies are particularly useful for determining whether academic programs remain responsive to labor market needs, professional competencies, and institutional quality-assurance requirements (Nudzor & Ansah, 2020; Sarsale et al., 2024).

In the Philippine higher education context, the Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP) provides an alternative pathway for adult learners and working professionals to earn a tertiary degree by recognizing, validating, and accrediting prior learning. Unlike traditional undergraduate programs, ETEEAP recognizes knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and competencies gained from formal, non-formal, informal, and work-based learning. Republic Act No. 12124 institutionalizes ETEEAP as a comprehensive alternative learning program in tertiary education, while CHED Memorandum Order No. 11, series of 2025, provides its current implementing rules and regulations.

Recognition of prior learning is central to the ETEEAP framework. International literature suggests that prior learning recognition expands access to higher education, supports lifelong learning,

and strengthens transitions between education and employment (Meghnagi & Tuccio, 2022; Raciti et al., 2024). For working adults, the value of a degree extends beyond academic completion; it is also reflected in promotion, professional recognition, salary increases, job security, eligibility for further studies, and increased career confidence.

Employability is likewise a multidimensional construct. It refers not only to being employed but also to the capacity to maintain employment, improve work performance, access better opportunities, and develop professional capital (Cai, 2013; Tomlinson, 2017). In ETEEAP, employability must therefore be examined in relation to graduates' current employment status, job-degree alignment, income bracket, professional development opportunities, and use of the ETEEAP-acquired degree in the workplace. Career mobility, on the other hand, refers to graduates' movement toward improved professional status, responsibilities, compensation, recognition, and access to further advancement. For ETEEAP graduates who were already employed before admission, career mobility may be a more relevant outcome than initial employment. Existing ETEEAP studies have shown that the program may contribute to career success, professional confidence, improved job security, and opportunities for advancement (Dilla & Ibarra, 2022; Sayang, 2025).

Despite the growing policy importance of ETEEAP, there remains a need for institution-specific evidence on the outcomes of graduates from deputized higher education institutions. For Pangasinan State University, such evidence is necessary to determine whether the program contributes meaningfully to graduates' professional lives and whether its implementation remains responsive to the needs of adult learners, working professionals, and overseas Filipino workers. Thus, this study examined the career mobility, employability, and perceived program relevance among ETEEAP graduates of Pangasinan State University using graduate tracer data from 88 valid responses.

Methods

Research Design

The study employed a **descriptive-correlational research design** using a graduate tracer study approach. The descriptive component was used to determine the profile, employability status, career mobility, and perceived program relevance among ETEEAP graduates. The correlational component was used to examine the relationship between perceived program relevance and graduates' employability and career mobility outcomes.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at **Pangasinan State University**, particularly among graduates of its Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program. The University implements ETEEAP as an alternative tertiary education pathway for qualified adult learners and working professionals.

Participants of the Study

The respondents were **88 ETEEAP graduates** of Pangasinan State University. They included graduates from different degree programs, employment sectors, graduation years, and places of work or residence. The respondents were included based on completion of a degree through ETEEAP, availability in the official graduate records, accessibility through available communication channels, and willingness to participate in the study.

Sampling Technique

The study used **total enumeration sampling** for reachable ETEEAP graduates. Since tracer studies aim to generate comprehensive graduate outcome data, all identified and accessible graduates were invited to participate. Only valid and complete responses were included in the final analysis.

Research Instrument

A researcher-made graduate tracer questionnaire was used as the primary data-gathering instrument. The instrument contained sections on graduate profile, employability status, career mobility, perceived program relevance, and suggestions for program enhancement. The scaled items used a five-point Likert scale interpreted as follows: 4.21–5.00, Very High; 3.41–4.20, High; 2.61–3.40, Moderate; 1.81–2.60, Low; and 1.00–1.80, Very Low.

Reliability analysis showed excellent internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha was 0.938 for employability, 0.936 for career mobility, 0.982 for program relevance, and 0.978 for the overall scale.

Data Gathering Procedure

Permission was secured from appropriate institutional authorities before data collection. The questionnaire was distributed through online platforms and communication channels appropriate for graduates who were locally based, nationally dispersed, or working overseas. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the confidentiality of responses, and their right to withdraw from the study.

Statistical Treatment of Data

Frequency count and percentage were used to describe the profile and employment characteristics of the respondents. The weighted mean and standard deviation were used to determine the levels of employability, career mobility, and perceived program relevance. Analysis of variance was used to test for significant differences when respondents were grouped by profile variables. Pearson product-moment correlation was used to determine the relationship among program relevance, employability, and career mobility. Open-ended responses were analyzed thematically.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Respondents

The study involved 88 ETEEAP graduates. Most respondents were aged 30–39 years old (47.7%), followed by those aged 40–49 years old (31.8%). In terms of sex, 60.2% were male, 38.6% were female, and 1.1% preferred not to say. The respondents were mostly graduates of Bachelor of Industrial Technology programs, particularly Food Service Management (30.7%), Electronics Technology (15.9%), and Mechanical Technology (12.5%). Half of the respondents graduated in 2026, indicating that the sample was composed largely of recent graduates.

In terms of employment, 33.0% were employed in the private sector, 28.4% were in overseas employment, 26.1% were in government service, 5.7% were self-employed or business owners, 4.5% were connected with non-government organizations, and 2.3% were not currently employed. Most respondents had 6–10 years of work experience before ETEEAP admission. These findings confirm that ETEEAP primarily serves working adults and non-traditional learners who have substantial professional experience prior to degree completion.

The respondents' work locations were also diverse. Nearly half were assigned in other regions of the Philippines, while 34.1% were working overseas. This shows that PSU's ETEEAP serves not only local learners but also geographically dispersed professionals, including overseas Filipino workers.

Employability Status of ETEEAP Graduates

The findings revealed that ETEEAP graduates had a strong employability profile. Of the 88 respondents, 71 (80.7%) were employed, 8 (9.1%) were working overseas, and 6 (6.8%) were self-employed. When employed, self-employed, and overseas-employed respondents were combined, **96.6%** of the graduates were economically active.

Most respondents also reported favorable employment conditions. A total of 45.5% were permanent or regular employees, while 22.7% were employed overseas. In terms of job-degree alignment, 67.0% reported that their current work was highly aligned with the degree they completed through ETEEAP, while 21.6% reported moderate alignment. Furthermore, 94.3% stated that their ETEEAP-acquired degree helped them in their current employment.

These findings suggest that ETEEAP contributes positively to employability, particularly by strengthening graduates' formal qualifications and improving their professional credibility. The high job-degree alignment also indicates that the degrees completed through ETEEAP were generally relevant to the graduates' fields of work.

Level of Employability

The overall level of employability was rated **Very High**, with a composite mean of **4.74**. The highest-rated indicator was the statement that the ETEEAP degree increased graduates' confidence in applying for better employment opportunities, with a mean of 4.86. This was followed by overall improvement in employability, professional credibility, access to professional development opportunities, and contribution to better job performance.

These findings support Tomlinson's (2017) view that employability includes not only technical qualifications but also psychological and identity capital. The ETEEAP degree appeared to strengthen the graduates' professional self-confidence, helping them perceive themselves as more qualified, credible, and competitive in the labor market. The results also align with Succi and Canovi's (2020) assertion that employability is shaped by both formal credentials and workplace-relevant competencies.

Level of Career Mobility

Career mobility was also rated **Very High**, with a composite mean of **4.40**. The highest-rated items were overall contribution to career mobility, increased competitiveness, improved career confidence, access to further studies, and eligibility for licensure or professional certification.

However, promotion after completing ETEEAP and salary or compensation improvement obtained relatively lower means of 3.91 and 3.95, respectively, although both remained within the **High** range. This suggests that while ETEEAP strongly contributes to professional confidence, eligibility, recognition, and qualification-based mobility, actual promotion and salary increase may depend on workplace-specific factors such as plantilla availability, employer policies, civil service regulations, overseas employment contracts, or institutional promotion systems.

This finding is important because ETEEAP graduates are usually already employed before completing their degrees. Their career gains may therefore be expressed not only through immediate promotion but also through improved eligibility, job security, competitiveness, professional recognition, and access to further education. This confirms Sayang's (2025) finding that ETEEAP may support career success by enhancing professional confidence, skills, job security, and prospects for advancement.

Perceived Relevance of the ETEEAP

The perceived relevance of ETEEAP was rated **Very High**, with a composite mean of **4.76**. The highest-rated dimension was the program's overall contribution to professional growth, with a mean of 4.82. This was followed by the effectiveness of learning modules and instructional delivery, the usefulness of assessment activities, the adequacy of faculty guidance and mentoring, administrative and student support services, recognition of prior learning and work experience, and the relevance of curriculum to professional practice.

These results indicate that graduates viewed the program as highly responsive to their academic and professional needs. The high rating for recognition of prior learning confirms that graduates perceived the program as successful in validating workplace-based competencies. This finding is consistent with Dilla and Ibarra (2022), who emphasized the importance of sound prior learning assessment in ETEEAP implementation.

The high rating for program relevance also supports Sarsale et al.'s (2024) argument that it is an important dimension of employment success. In this study, the relevance of ETEEAP was reflected not only in curriculum content but also in assessment processes, mentoring, modular delivery, and student support.

Significant Differences in Employability, Career Mobility, and Program Relevance

The analysis showed that most profile variables did not produce significant differences in employability, career mobility, or program relevance. Age, sex, degree program, year of graduation, and length of work experience before ETEEAP admission did not significantly differentiate the major outcomes.

However, the employment sector significantly differed in terms of career mobility, with a p-value of 0.019. Residence or work assignment also differed significantly in career mobility and program relevance, with p-values of 0.006 and 0.041, respectively. These results suggest that graduates' career advancement may be influenced by labor market conditions, organizational policies, employment sector, and geographic work context.

This finding implies that ETEEAP outcomes cannot be understood only as academic outcomes. They are also shaped by external conditions such as government promotion systems, private-sector mobility, overseas employment contracts, and regional or international labor market opportunities. Thus, future enhancement plans should consider differentiated support for government employees, private-sector workers, self-employed graduates, and overseas Filipino workers.

Relationship among Program Relevance, Employability, and Career Mobility

Correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships among the major variables. Program relevance was strongly and significantly related to employability, $r = 0.683$, $p < .001$, and moderately but significantly related to career mobility, $r = 0.579$, $p < .001$. Employability was also strongly and significantly related to career mobility, $r = 0.694$, $p < .001$.

These findings indicate that graduates who perceived ETEEAP as more relevant also tended to report stronger employability and career mobility outcomes. The significant relationship between program relevance and employability suggests that curriculum relevance, recognition of prior learning, faculty guidance, assessment quality, learning modules, and support services contribute to graduates' employment outcomes.

The strong relationship between employability and career mobility further suggests that graduates who become more employable are also more likely to experience career advancement, increased confidence, professional recognition, job security, and access to further studies. This supports the view that employability and career mobility are interconnected outcomes of quality higher education and recognition of prior learning.

Qualitative Findings for Program Enhancement

Thematic analysis of open-ended responses identified several areas for improvement. First, graduates emphasized the need to maintain flexible learning arrangements, especially because many ETEEAP students are working adults or overseas-based professionals. Second, respondents recommended strengthening communication and responsiveness by providing clearer instructions, faster feedback, and more official communication channels. Third, graduates suggested updating and simplifying modules to make them more current, concise, and aligned with industry trends.

Other themes included improving assessment clarity, providing sample portfolios and rubrics, increasing manpower and administrative support, and strengthening graduate tracking and alumni engagement. These qualitative findings support the quantitative results by showing that, although graduates rated the program very highly, operational improvements are still needed to sustain high-quality implementation.

Integrated Discussion

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the ETEEAP at Pangasinan State University has contributed meaningfully to graduate employability, career mobility, and professional growth. The high percentage of economically active graduates shows that the program serves a population already engaged in the labor market and helps them formalize, validate, and strengthen competencies gained through work experience.

The very high employability rating suggests that the ETEEAP-acquired degree improved graduates' qualifications, credibility, confidence, and access to professional development. The very high career mobility rating indicates that the program supported professional advancement, although promotion and salary improvement may still be influenced by external workplace systems. The very high perceived program relevance confirms that graduates valued the program's recognition of prior learning, modular delivery, assessment activities, mentoring, and support services.

The significant relationships among program relevance, employability, and career mobility provide important evidence for institutional quality assurance. They suggest that the quality and relevance of ETEEAP implementation are directly associated with graduates' professional outcomes. Therefore, sustaining and improving the program requires continued attention to curriculum review, prior learning assessment, communication systems, faculty mentoring, administrative support, and graduate tracking.

From a policy perspective, the findings affirm the importance of ETEEAP as an inclusive higher education pathway for adult learners, working professionals, and overseas Filipino workers. The program does not merely provide academic credentials; it also supports lifelong learning, workforce development, professional recognition, and career advancement. For Pangasinan State University, the results provide empirical justification for strengthening ETEEAP implementation as part of its commitment to accessible, relevant, and outcomes-based higher education.

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