

# Addressing the Labor Market Barriers: A Roadmap toward Job Opportunities for Economics Graduates

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## ABSTRACT

The study examined the employment outcomes of Economics graduates within the Philippine labor market. It determined whether these graduates were employed by public sector organizations such as government agencies, state-owned corporations, and regulatory bodies, or by private institutions, including corporations, banks, consultancy firms, the education sector, and commercial businesses. Beyond sectoral distribution, the research examined the prevailing employment opportunities and specific workplace-related obstacles encountered by the participants. Employing a mixed-methods research design, the study utilized structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, with data analyzed through descriptive statistics such as frequency distributions, percentage counts, and rankings. Key findings revealed that the majority of Economics graduates have secured employment predominantly within the industry sector. A significant number of participants work within private employers rather than in government offices and hold permanent or regular positions. Despite this job stability, several obstacles to career progression emerged, most notably a lack of civil service eligibility, insufficient work experience, and technical skill gaps. Furthermore, the findings highlighted that deficits in advanced academic units and a mismatch between educational training and practical job demands remain significant hurdles. Consequently, these identified competency gaps provide the empirical foundation for a proposed curriculum redesign and educational activities intended to align higher education with contemporary industry requirements for sustainable career success and professional mobility.

**Keywords:** Economic sector, employment, higher education, Philippine labor market, skills-mismatch

## INTRODUCTION

Amid today's rapidly evolving, highly competitive labor market, both the availability and accessibility of job opportunities are crucial to facilitating graduates' successful transition from academic pursuits to professional careers. For recent graduates, this scene presents both challenges and possibilities, requiring not only academic credentials but also practical competencies, critical thinking, and a readiness to contribute meaningfully to diverse work environments. Understanding the scope and nature of these opportunities is essential for aligning educational outcomes with labor-market perspectives and fostering a workforce that is both resilient and future-ready.

Extensive research on the labor market outcomes of Economics graduates includes numerous international and domestic studies. Academic institutions, government labor agencies, and policy architects have rigorously examined the transition from tertiary education to professional integration. However, fewer studies pertaining to structural and individual obstacles experienced by the graduates are evident.

In the Philippine educational setting, an increasing number of tracer studies and labor market surveys have been conducted to evaluate the adaptability of graduates to local professional environments. The research of Tuthoo (2022) emphasizes the importance of these localized assessments in quantifying how effectively regional academic frameworks transition from the classroom to the regional workforce. While local data provides gritty insights into regional transitions, international scholarship offers a broader normative framework. Artess et al. (2017) utilize comparative global benchmarks to identify pedagogical best practices, shifting the focus from mere job placement to long-term career sustainability. The researchers further challenged the traditional metric

of employment rates, arguing instead for career sustainability, which implies the ability to steer multiple labor market shifts over time. This global discourse is further analyzed by Bridgstock and Jackson (2019), who posited that for graduates to remain viable in a digital economy, the curriculum must function as an anticipatory tool rather than a historical repository of skills.

Empirical evaluations by Luna (2022) and Tayco et al. (2021) delineate a multifaceted relationship between geographical distribution, academic output, and professional viability. Luna's (2022) analysis identifies a high spatial concentration of graduates within urban centers proximal to their originating institutions. This phenomenon suggests that geographic mobility serves as a dormant determinant of employment outcomes, potentially constraining the market reach of graduates fastened to specific location. Complementing this, Tayco et al. (2021) identify a requisite cluster of essential competencies, including advanced communication, interpersonal relations, and complex problem-solving. Despite the recognized criticality of these competencies for professional efficacy, a persistent systemic tension remains regarding the mastery and institutional delivery of such skills.

This tension is characterized by Clarke (2017) as the "skills gap" debate, wherein human capital readiness frequently fails to meet rigorous market expectations. This misalignment is substantiated by the McKinsey Global Institute (2019), which argues that traditional academic frameworks are being structurally outperformed by the accelerating volatility of the private sector. The inability of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to maintain parity with industry evolution suggests that incremental adjustments are insufficient. Consequently, Dayaratna-Banda and Dharmadasa (2022) theorize that mitigating the graduate employment crisis necessitates a radical strategic overhaul and moving beyond isolated curricular revisions toward a holistic, systemic alignment with the intricate demands of the contemporary global economy.

In the Philippine context, research often remains limited to quantitative metrics, such as employment rates and vertical alignment (matching degree titles to job titles). However, Toquero and Ulanday (2021) argue that these metrics overlook the qualitative mismatch between industry requirements and graduate capabilities. There is a notable scarcity of data that captures the lived experiences of Economics graduates or integrates the direct perspectives of employers. To add, existing literature frequently ignores the nuanced barriers to entry faced by Economics majors, focusing instead on broader STEM or business cohorts, thereby obscuring the unique professional path of the social sciences. This disparity highlights the urgent need for industry-driven input and longitudinal tracer studies to inform curriculum adjustments. Higher education institutions seem to have responded to this criticism over time, but improvements in students' acquisition of soft skills and other competencies still appear insufficient.

To address these systemic gaps, the present study investigates the labor market for Economics graduates through a multi-dimensional lens. Moving beyond descriptive statistics, this research evaluates the practical relevance of academic requirements and identifies the structural impediments to professional mobility. The ultimate objective is to formulate evidence-based strategic recommendations that foster an interdependent relationship between HEIs and the labor market, ensuring that institutional advancement translates into sustainable individual career success.

This disparity accentuates the urgent requirement for industry-driven input and longitudinal tracer studies to inform curricular reform. While HEIs have attempted to respond to these critiques, improvements in the acquisition of soft skills and core competencies remain marginal. To address these systemic gaps, the present study investigates the labor market for Economics graduates through a multi-dimensional lens, moving beyond descriptive statistics to evaluate the practical relevance of academic requirements and recognized employment barriers. By analyzing the alignment of academic frameworks with contemporary market demands, the research seeks to identify the structural obstacles that may deter professional mobility. The ultimate objective is to formulate evidence-based strategic recommendations that foster an interdependent relationship between HEIs and the labor market. Through this analytical approach, the study intends to ensure that institutional advancement translates directly into individual career success, effectively bridging the divide between academic preparation and professional success.

## Objectives

1. To examine the Economics graduates' employment in terms of economic sector, status, and types of employers.
2. To present the structural and individual Labor market barriers encountered by Economics graduates in terms of employment opportunities and in the workplace.
3. To offer recommendations for the obstacles encountered by Economics graduates in the Labor market.

## METHODOLOGY

The research evaluated multiple dimensions of professional engagement, encompassing specific economic sectors, job institutional affiliations (public versus private), and current employment status. The study further scrutinized several employment statuses- regular, casual, contractual, self-employed, and job-order arrangements to provide comprehensive insights into the stability and structural characteristics of graduate employment. In addition, the paper also identifies the market barriers to job opportunities. To achieve these, a mixed-methods analytical framework was employed to synthesize data derived from both structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. To ensure the rigor of the findings, the research instruments underwent a systematic validation process, establishing accuracy and reliability. Content and face validity were secured through expert review and participant feedback, certifying that all items were technically relevant and linguistically precise. Furthermore, internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with a target coefficient of  $\alpha \geq 0.70$ . These qualitative and statistical refinements were integrated to minimize measurement error before the full deployment of the instruments to the 180 participants.

Quantitative data is subjected to descriptive statistical analysis via specialized software to determine frequencies, central tendencies, and demographic distributions across the N=180 sample. Concurrently, qualitative interview data will be processed through thematic analysis, involving systematic transcription, iterative coding, and the refinement of emergent patterns into comprehensive themes. By triangulating these datasets, the study will reconcile numerical trends with nuanced narrative evidence, thereby enhancing the validity of the findings while contextualizing the limitations inherent in the exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling approach. Moreover, the exponential non-discriminative sampling technique is a non-probability sampling strategy used in the study, where each participant refers multiple future subjects from among their acquaintances, creating a chain-referral effect until the desired sample size (180) is reached. This method is particularly effective for accessing hard-to-access populations where no formal sampling frame exists. While it is cost-effective and builds trust through peer-to-peer recruitment, it inherently suffers from selection bias. Consequently, the researcher must strictly adhere to the established selection criteria to maintain the study's integrity.

Lastly, the methodological approach provided a clear framework for the findings, ensuring that the conclusions were supported by the empirical evidence and reinforcing the overall reliability of the study.

## Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to the ethical principles outlined by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (R.A. 10173). The following measures were implemented to protect the participants:

1. **Informed Consent:** Participants were fully briefed on the study's objective to evaluate labor market barriers. Participation was entirely voluntary, and written informed consent was obtained before the administration of questionnaires and interviews.
2. **Data Integrity:** To ensure the accuracy of the employment data, the researcher employed a "member-checking" process, allowing interviewees to validate the transcripts of their responses regarding workplace obstacles and competency gaps.
3. **Objectivity:** The researcher always maintained objectivity throughout the data collection and analysis process. Potential conflicts of interest were revealed, and the findings were reported accurately, reflecting the actual responses of the participants without fabrication.

4. **Anonymity and Confidentiality:** Given the sensitivity of professional data, all responses were anonymized. Identifying details regarding specific employers or current workplaces were coded to prevent any potential professional repercussions for the participants.
5. **Data Security:** In compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, all collected data was stored with password-protected. All digital data were encrypted and stored on a secure server. Hard copies of questionnaires and interview notes were kept in secured cabinets and will be destroyed following the prescribed retention period.

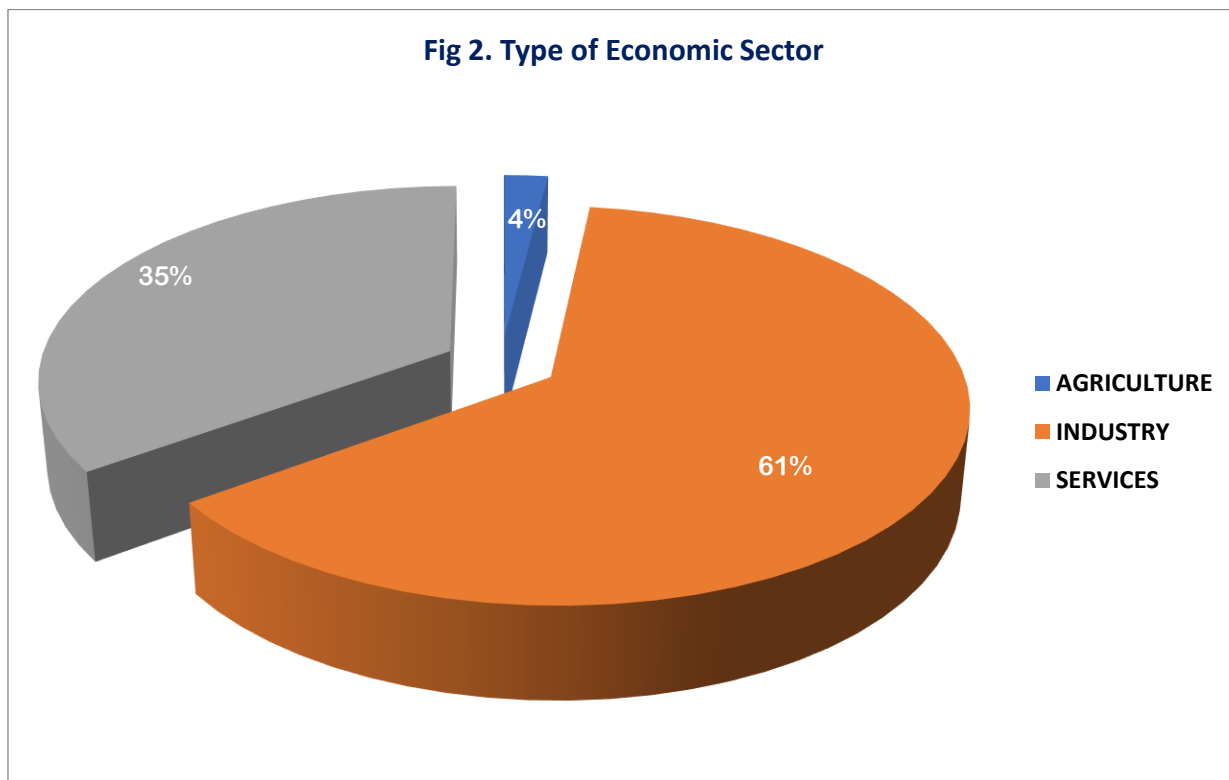
## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Employment Economics graduates

#### A. Employment of Economics Graduates in the Economic Sector

The national economy is structurally categorized into three primary sectors—agriculture, industry, and services—which collectively delineate a nation’s developmental trajectory. The agricultural (primary) sector focuses on natural resource extraction and underpins rural stability, while the industrial (secondary) sector catalyzes growth through value-added manufacturing and infrastructural expansion. Complementing these is the services (tertiary) sector, which provides the essential intangible infrastructure, such as finance and healthcare, requisite for modern consumption. These sectors are inherently interdependent; their interaction not only propels macroeconomic progress but also serves as a critical analytical indicator of a nation’s evolving economic capacities.

The data presented in Figure 1 illustrates a significant sectoral disparity in graduate employment, reflecting a decisive preference for the industrial and service sectors over agriculture. The data reveal that the Industrial sector serves as the primary engine for graduate absorption, accounting for 61% of the total employment rate. This indicates that this sector caters more to Economics graduates than the other sectors of the economy. The results are closely followed by the Services sector at 35%, while the Agricultural sector demonstrates a marginal presence with only 4%.



The dominance of the Industry (61%) and Services (35%) sectors, totaling a combined 96%, implies a modern economic reorientation. This trend suggests that the Philippine labor market for degree-holders in Economics is

almost entirely urban-centric and geared toward manufacturing, financial operations, and administrative governance. The domination of the industrial sector likely stems from the high demand for specialized expertise in urban hubs, where graduates perceive greater professional security and higher income potential. As noted by Climent (2024), the industrial sector remains the primary employer for recent graduates, driven by high market demand for administrative and financial expertise within accessible urban hubs. This means that graduates are enticed to work strongly in this sector, where their skills are aligned toward environments that offer advanced professional security and income potential; however, the concentration of industrial and financial roles in urban hubs creates a magnetic outcome that drains talent from rural regions. In addition, heavy leaning toward the industrial sector reinforces the efficacy of multidisciplinary academic frameworks, such as those found in Economics programs.

The negligible 4% employment rate in Agriculture highlights a critical systemic labor drain. Despite the sector's fundamental role in natural resource extraction and rural stability, it fails to attract or retain academic talent. This disparity indicates a structural downfall of the primary sector to provide competitive compensation or professional status. From a human capital perspective, graduates act as rational agents by bypassing the agricultural sector in favor of sectors that offer a higher marginal return on their academic investments. As highlighted by Toquero and Ulanday (2021), this trend is a strategic response to the sector's failure to offer competitive compensation or professional status, effectively compelling graduates to seek higher marginal returns on their academic investments within more robust economic spheres. This high degree of professional mobility is supported by the USEM Model of Employability (Knight & Yorke, 2025), which posits that a holistic, multidisciplinary education provides the necessary efficacy for seamless career transitions. Furthermore, Zhang (2025) argues that industry-aligned curricula enhance this adaptability by equipping Economics graduates with the reflective abilities essential for thriving in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Ultimately, this labor path, as observed by Pascual and Paqueo (2020), signals a decisive national reorientation away from agrarian-based employment toward specialized industrial and service domains that more effectively recognize and reward high-level human capital.

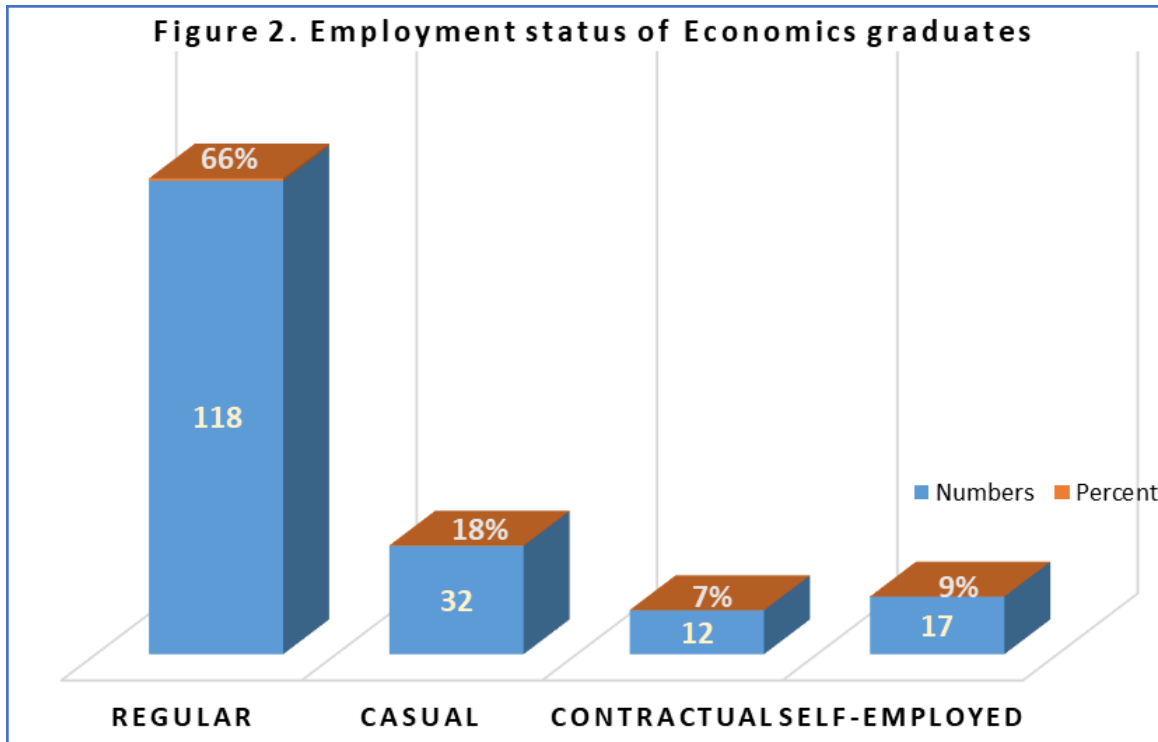
The findings further signify a decisive structural migration toward high-value sectors, reflecting a broader macroeconomic pivot within the Philippine developmental track. This transition is characterized by a magnetic effect, where urban areas and industrial hubs attract recent graduates by offering higher salary potential and professional security. Consequently, the industrial sector has become the primary conduit for graduates seeking to maximize the return on their academic investment, particularly in roles demanding financial expertise and administrative governance. However, this trend facilitates a systematic labor drain from rural regions, creating a spatial imbalance where specialized human capital is concentrated in metropolitan centers at the expense of regional development. Thus, the data suggests that for the Philippine economy to achieve holistic growth, there must be a strategic effort to professionalize and modernize the agricultural sector, ensuring it can compete for the adaptable, industry-aligned talent currently being absorbed by the urban financial backbone.

## **B. Employment Status**

The employment status of Economics graduates is fundamentally determined by the interplay among academic success, labor market conditions, and proactive skill acquisition. The global trends show favorable employment outcomes; however, the specific nature and quality of these roles are subject to regional and contextual variations. Professional employment status is typically classified into regular (permanent), contractual, casual, and self-employed.

The data depicted in Figure 2 regarding the employment status of Economics graduates provides a compelling narrative of professional stability and labor market integration. With a total sample of 179 participants, the distribution highlights the prevailing employment modalities within this cohort. As reflected in the data, a significant majority of the participants (66%, or 118 individuals) are engaged in Regular employment. This high percentage of permanent employment suggests that Economics graduates possess high "market signals" that appeal to employers seeking long-term human capital. This further explains that Economics graduates are applying human capital efficiency, where the analytical competencies acquired during undergraduate training align seamlessly with the functional demands of the industrial and service sectors. This stability aligns with the career sustainability framework proposed by Artess et al. (2017), indicating that the skills acquired during their

undergraduate matriculation are sufficiently aligned with industry needs to warrant permanent, tenured positions. Consequently, this early attainment of job stability provides a vital foundation for longitudinal professional growth, shifting the graduate's focus from immediate economic survival to long-term career maturation and financial security. Ultimately, these findings suggest that this kind of professional attainment facilitates robust institutional integration and provides access to comprehensive benefit packages, both of which are essential for sustained professional development and long-term financial stability (Bautista et al., 2023).



Tan and Reyes (2024) speculate further that the early acquisition of permanent status reflects an efficient utilization of human capital, indicating a successful alignment between pedagogical frameworks and the evolving demands of the industrial and service sectors. This perspective is corroborated by Tuthoo (2022), who claims that regular employment status serves as a critical proxy for skill-job match efficiency, suggesting that employers are inherently more inclined to offer permanent tenure to graduates who demonstrate superior analytical competencies and adaptive potential.

Another empirical information reveals that the combined data of Casual (18%), Self-Employed (9%), and Contractual (7%) modalities constitute a significant minority share (34%) of the graduates operating outside traditional permanent structures. These non-permanent arrangements may function as stepping-stone roles or reflect the project-based nature of consultancy and data analysis prevalent within Economics-oriented fields. Notably, the disproportionately low percentage of contractual and casual workers relative to those in regular positions suggests that the “skills gap” identified by Clarke (2017) may be less pronounced for Economics majors than for those in other disciplines. The labor market appears to absorb these graduates into administrative governance and financial operations with a discernible preference for long-term retention.

Concurrently, the 9% self-employment rate represents the least frequent employment status among participants, highlighting that the majority of the participants has secured regularized positions. This modest level of self-employment indicates a degree of entrepreneurial agency, likely bolstered by the multidisciplinary reflective abilities described by Zhang (2025), which empower graduates to leverage analytical competencies in independent ventures or freelance consultancy.

This phenomenon is most prevalent among recent graduates with fewer than two years of experience, a timeframe categorized by Lee and Villanueva (2022) as a professional gestation period. During this temporary phase, entry-level professionals often navigate frictional underemployment, accepting temporary roles while pursuing licensure or the postgraduate credentials necessary for permanent tenure (Mendoza, 2025). Ultimately, while the data depicts a robust professional outlook characterized by employment stability and security, the

presence of non-permanent workers necessitates longitudinal inquiry to ensure that the qualitative dimensions of employment align with quantitative placement rates.

The data portrays a robust professional outlook for Economics graduates, characterized by a strong lean toward permanent employment. While the majority enjoy professional security, the presence of casual and contractual workers suggests a need for longitudinal studies to ensure that the quality of employment matches the rate of employment.

### C. Types of Employers

The Philippine labor market operates through a dual structure, where the public sector provides institutional stability and standardized civil service roles, while the private sector serves as the primary engine aimed at rapid economic expansion and diverse employment. The data distribution of Economics graduates across various institutional sectors, as delineated in Table 1, highlights a significant market preference for private sector engagement. Comprising nearly half of the total participants, the Private sector (49.7%) serves as the primary engine for graduate absorption, a trend that reflects high market elasticity and demand for analytical agility within the corporate world. This demonstrates that the participants opt to

Table 1

#### *Frequency Counts of Economics Graduates in Terms of Types of Employers*

Types of Employers	Frequency of Graduates					
	2017	2018	2019	2021	2022	TOTAL
Public	12	10	22	1	6	51
Private	15	18	39	1	16	89
Rest Of The World (RoW)	5	4	2		2	13
Self-employed	3	8	6		9	26
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>179</b>

*Table 1 reveals graduates' views on public and private sector work.*

work in private companies rather than in government agencies. This aligns with the observations of the McKinsey Global Institute (2019) regarding the necessity for academic frameworks to maintain parity with the accelerating volatility of the private sector. Furthermore, the substantial presence within the Public sector (28.5%) highlights the vertical alignment of the Economics degree with roles in administrative governance and fiscal policy, where graduates leverage their specialized training to support state-led economic planning.

Accordingly, this phenomenon highlights a profound bureaucratic Push-Pull Factor framework, where the perceived structural rigidity and stagnant promotional paths of public offices systematically redirect high-caliber analytical talent toward more dynamic corporate environments, potentially creating a capability gap in public governance. As Suhi et al. (2021) noted, the private sector exerts a powerful "pull" by offering professional diversity and more career prospects, which are highly attractive to graduates seeking rapid advancement. Conversely, the public sector often generates a significant "bureaucratic push" effect, as Woo and Teng (2019) observe, the perception of rigid hierarchical structures and stagnant promotional pathways serves to redirect top-tier talent toward more dynamic corporate spheres. This market-driven reallocation of labor indicates a critical sectoral mismatch, where the government's inability to modernize its career frameworks leads to a systematic loss of analytical expertise, ultimately resulting in a capability gap within the very institutions responsible for national economic governance.

While the private sector dominates the employment of Economics graduates, the data also reveals a rising trend in Self-employment (14.5%), which reached its peak in 2022. This shift is an indicator of escalating entrepreneurial agency among graduates, likely facilitated by the reflective abilities and multidisciplinary skill sets emphasized by Zhang (2025). This capacity for independent professional viability allows graduates to navigate fluctuating economic landscapes through freelance consultancy or personal ventures. Conversely, the "Rest of the World" (7.3%) segment, though the smallest, represents the international tradability of the degree and the graduates' capacity to meet global employability benchmarks, as discussed by Artess et al. (2017). This signifies that few economics graduates are finding domestic placement, a trend that highlights a necessary shift toward overseas employment as an alternative to a saturated local job market. This movement suggests that limited opportunities within the domestic sector are actively driving graduates to seek work abroad, where there is clear global demand for their specific skill sets. Furthermore, these individuals often leverage the competitive advantages gained through international education and global exposure to secure these positions (Farrugia & Sanger, 2017; OECD, 2023). This evolution points toward an increasing trend of entrepreneurial ventures among graduates as they navigate shifting economic landscapes (International Labour Organization, 2022), even though pursuing international opportunities remains the least-utilized path overall.

Table 2 summarizes the employment data of Economics graduates over five years, revealing a pronounced concentration within the industrial sector, which absorbs 61% of the participants, followed by the services sector at 35%. The data further indicate a significant inclination for employment within private institutions, a demographic trend that substantially outweighs the public sector's engagement. This distribution corroborates the findings of Cañizares (2021), who posits that the private sector serves as the primary gateway for entry-level professionals. This preference is likely attributable to the structural flexibility of private-sector recruitment, which lacks the rigid bureaucratic prerequisites—such as mandatory civil service eligibility and the characteristic of government appointments.

Table 2 Summary Table of the Employment Data of Economics Graduates (n = 179)

<b>EMPLOYMENT PROFILE</b>	<b>f*</b>	<b>%*</b>	<b>RANK</b>
1.Economic Sector			
Agriculture	7	4	3
Industry	110	61	1
Services	62	35	2
2. Employment Status			
a.Regular	118	66	1
b.Casual	32	18	2
c.Contractual	12	7	4
d.Self- Employed	17	9	3
3.Types of Employers			
a. Public	32	18	2
b. Private	121	68	1
c. Rest of the World	16	9	3
d.Self-employed	10	5	4

Legend: f\*= Frequency

%\*= Percentage

Furthermore, the data reveal a high degree of professional stability, with a majority of participants securing regular or permanent tenure, followed by casual, self-employed, and contractual arrangements. Through the lens of Tuthoo (2022), this high rate of regularization serves as a substitution for academic efficacy; it implies a successful alignment between the analytical competencies cultivated within the university and the specific operational requirements of the labor market. Such stability suggests that the human capital developed during the undergraduate program possesses sufficient market signaling value to warrant long-term institutional commitment from employers.

## 2. Labor Market barriers encountered by an Economics graduates

### A. Labor market barriers encountered by Economics graduates in terms of employment opportunities

Despite the discipline of economics being marked by substantial theoretical rigor, a significant number of graduates faced challenges securing employment. The following pages discuss the labor market barriers encountered by the Economics graduates. The data in Table 3.1 identified several critical impediments to employment, categorized by the frequency and impact on graduates attempting to enter the workforce.

Table 3.1. Labor market barriers encountered by Economics graduates in terms of employment opportunities

Labor market barriers in Employment Opportunities	Frequency (n)	Rank
Not a Civil Service Passer	85	1
Lack of Job Experience	46	2
Low Computer Literacy (Employment Opportunities)	20	3
High Volume of Job Applicants in Urban Areas	19	4
Others <sup>a</sup> (e.g., geographic barriers, limited access to networks)	9	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>179</b>	

**Note:** The "Others" category includes miscellaneous challenges reported by graduates, such as geographic constraints, limited access to professional networks, or lack of career guidance

The transition of Economics graduates from academic environments to professional spheres is characterized by a dual layer of structural impediments, categorized into pre-employment barriers and internal workplace constraints. According to the empirical data, majority of the participants (85) believed that the most significant barrier to entry is the lack of Civil Service eligibility, which functions as a primary regulatory gatekeeper. This shows that the requirement of Civil Service eligibility, as the top barrier, highlights the role of state-mandated licensure as a major prerequisite for public office. This requirement creates a systemic bottleneck for the graduates aiming for public sector roles, necessitating what Lee and Villanueva (2022) describe as a professional gestation period. During this phase, graduates often navigate frictional underemployment, accepting temporary or casual positions while fulfilling licensure requirements to secure permanent tenure (Mendoza, 2025). The study of Tan and Reyes (2024) supported this claim, emphasizing that in the Labor market, academic degrees often fail to serve as sufficient signals for public-sector entry without secondary professional certifications. This is in parallel with the "Signaling Theory", where multi-layered credentialing is required to screen candidates in high-demand government roles.

The second most prevalent barrier is a lack of job experience (Rank 2), affecting 46 of the participants. This implies that employers exhibit a strong preference for job applicants with prior professional experience. This indicates that most contemporary firms and agencies prioritize "job-ready" applicants who have already navigated a professional environment. These findings align with de Guzman's (2020) research, which emphasized that personal competencies and experiential learning are critical to bolstering a graduate's market competitiveness. He further underlined the necessity of bridging the gap between academic theory and practical training to better equip graduates for the increasingly sophisticated and evolving demands of the modern labor market. This highlights the classic entry-level paradox where academic frameworks struggle to provide the practical human capital readiness demanded by rigorous market expectations (Clarke, 2017). Furthermore, the identification of low computer literacy (Rank 3) and a high volume of urban applicants (Rank 4) suggests a growing misalignment between traditional pedagogical outputs and the digital, competitive reality of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. As Bridgstock and Jackson (2019) argue, if the curriculum functions merely as a historical repository of skills rather than an anticipatory tool, graduates will remain ill-equipped for the technical proficiency required in modern financial and administrative roles. They further disclosed that the academic frameworks evolve into anticipatory tools that prioritize technical mastery. Graduates continue to face high competitive pressures in oversaturated urban labor markets, where the sheer volume of applicants further marginalizes entry-level candidates.

Finally, the geographical barriers and limited network access categorized under "Others" (Rank 5) complement Luna's (2022) analysis concerning the spatial concentration of employment. The high density of applicants in urban areas creates an oversaturated market that penalizes those with limited professional networks or those unable to navigate the high costs of urban relocation. Collectively, these barriers suggest that while Economics graduates possess a degree of professional agility, their mobility is significantly hampered by a combination of rigid bureaucratic requirements and a systemic gap in technical and experiential preparedness. This underscores the urgent need for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to integrate civil service preparation and industry-embedded experiences into the curriculum to mitigate these professional impediments. In line with this, the employment prospects for graduates are significantly hindered by the challenge of high applicant volume, geographic isolation, and restricted access to professional networks. As Lee and Villanueva (2022) disclosed, in saturated labor markets, social capital and professional connections often supersede individual merit, creating a networking gap that excessively affects first-generation graduates and those from rural areas. This systemic barrier necessitates a shift toward intentional professional branding and the cultivation of unique, niche skill sets to bypass traditional gatekeeping. Furthermore, Burgess et al. (2017) emphasize that leading these obstacles requires a redefined approach to job readiness, where success is no longer tied solely to academic degree attainment but to a specific set of adaptive competencies and attributes that allow a graduate to stand out in a crowded, hyper-competitive field.

Beyond the difficulties of securing employment, participants in the current study also reported various workplace challenges, as presented in Table 3.2.

### B. Labor Market Barriers Encountered by Economics Graduates in the Workplace

The labor market experiences of Economics graduates are defined by a complex interplay of structural, technical, and institutional challenges that impede both initial entry and subsequent professional upward mobility.

Table 3.2 identifies a distinct set of structural and institutional barriers that impede the career path of Economics graduates once integrated into the workforce. Collectively, these impediments suggest that while Economics graduates possess inherent professional agility, their long-term success is curtailed by a combination of bureaucratic mandates, technical skill gaps, and a lack of clear institutional pathways for postgraduate advancement. As depicted in the data, the primary obstacle cited is the absence of Master of Arts (M.A.) units (Rank 1), affecting 43.6% of the participants. This finding highlights a rigid institutional reliance on advanced academic credentials as a prerequisite for upward mobility, particularly in the Philippine public sector and academic spheres. The ensuing slow promotion suggests a climate of credential inflation where a baccalaureate degree is insufficient for long-term career sustainability. Moreover, the findings indicate a high level of credential inflation within the Philippine professional landscape, where an undergraduate degree is perceived as insufficient for advanced administrative or managerial governance. As Artess et al. (2017) posit, continuous academic advancement is essential for navigating hierarchical labor market shifts, yet the structural requirement for postgraduate units often functions as a professional ceiling for entry-level practitioners.

Table 3.2 Labor Market Barriers Encountered by Economics Graduates in the Workplace

Labor market barriers in the workplace	Frequency (n)	Rank
Absence of M.A. Units (resulting in slow promotion)	78	1
Job assignments not aligned with specialization	34	2
Low Computer Literacy	32	3
Low Salary Rate	26	4
Others <sup>a</sup> (e.g., lack of mentorship, unclear career paths, lack of subjects in law & public policy)	10	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>179</b>	

Note: The "Others" category includes miscellaneous concerns such as limited professional development opportunities, lack of mentorship, and unclear career progression pathways.

The findings further divulge the application of Signaling Theory within the Philippine context. While a baccalaureate degree facilitates initial labor market entry, it no longer possesses sufficient signaling power to secure vertical mobility (Mendoza, 2025). Mendoza (2025) characterizes this as the academic-professional gap, where advanced credentials act as an exclusive gate-keeping mechanism for leadership roles in both the public and private sectors. This is corroborated by Tan and Reyes (2024), who elucidated that in contemporary labor studies, the initial investment in a baccalaureate degree must often be supplemented by additional investments, such as professional licensure or specialized technical certifications, to maintain a competitive advantage in urban economies. Consequently, the employability of an Economics graduate is a direct function of the alignment between their acquired skill set and the life skills requirements of the modern industrial and services sectors.

Another significant barrier presented in the data is the misalignment of job assignments with specialization (Rank 2), reported by 34 of the participants. This signals a recurring observation among graduates concerning a temporal mismatch between their undergraduate academic preparation and the specific technocratic demands of their initial job assignments. Basically, this phenomenon emphasizes the qualitative mismatch identified by Toquero and Ulanday (2021), wherein graduates are absorbed into the workforce but occupy roles that fail to leverage their specific training in economic modeling or policy analysis. They further narrated that while discrepancies between theoretical frameworks and workplace requirements are prevalent, these are fundamentally rectifiable through curriculum revision and the institutionalization of industry-academe collaboration.

This underutilization of human capital is further exacerbated by low computer literacy (Rank 3), reinforcing the argument by Bridgstock and Jackson (2019) that curricula must transition from historical skill repositories into anticipatory tools. Without high-level technical proficiency, Economics graduates are often relegated to widespread administrative tasks rather than the data-driven, specialized assignments their degree ostensibly prepares them for. This spectacle is largely perceived as a transitory phase of professional adjustment rather than a permanent systemic failure. As Toquero and Ulanday (2021) suggest, to mitigate these systemic hurdles, the findings suggest that graduates must pivot from passive credential-holding toward active intentional differentiation. In a saturated labor market, the degree functions merely as a baseline qualification rather than a distinct competitive advantage. Therefore, success is increasingly contingent upon the cultivation of niche, adaptive competencies, and a deliberate professional brand that offers measurable proof of value. As Burgess et al. (2027) posit, job readiness must be redefined to include a precise set of attributes that allow individuals to direct and penetrate entrenched institutional barriers. Ultimately, for those lacking established social capital, personal analytical agency and the acquisition of industry-aligned, specialized skills serve as the primary instruments for surmounting structural inequities within the national economy. This transition stresses that in the absence of systemic reform, the burden of professional survival shifts toward the individual's ability to proactively realign their skill set with the evolving demands of the global market.

Furthermore, one prominent issue within professional settings is that graduates reported difficulty in adapting to computerized systems for data transmission and management, attributing this to limited exposure to ICT-related coursework during their undergraduate education. The mismatch is especially prevalent in economics, where digital literacy has been identified as the single most influential factor affecting graduate work readiness (Mansour et al., 2024). This is expounded in the findings of Tee et al (2024), that technical skills are required to manage professional data transmission and management systems effectively. Subsequently, the participants advocated including more technology-focused subjects in the Economics curriculum to better align academic preparation with workplace demands.

Lastly, the prevalence of low salary rates (Rank 4) and miscellaneous concerns such as a lack of mentorship or specialized subjects in law and public policy (Rank 5) indicates a systemic gap in professional support structures. However, the participants acknowledged that low salary was statistically considered a lesser concern compared to the lack of growth opportunities. This signaled a strategic willingness among graduates to remain employed despite modest compensation, prioritizing long-term institutional tenure over immediate financial gain. Bautista et al. (2023) characterized this behavior as strategic endurance, in which entry-level employees accept lower-paying jobs in exchange for the experience needed to eventually bypass the entry-level trap. The dissatisfaction with compensation suggests that the market fails to provide the higher professional security that Climent (2024)

identifies as a primary motivator for graduates. Collectively, these findings reveal that while Economics graduates possess inherent professional agility, their advancement is stifled by a combination of credential-based gatekeeping, technical skill gaps, and a lack of institutionalized career pathways. This emphasizes the necessity for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to foster not only undergraduate competence but also to facilitate clear transitions into postgraduate specialization and industry-specific training.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The analysis of the employment data and professional barriers of Economics graduates revealed several key trends regarding their transition into the workforce.

### Employment of Economics graduates

The employment of Economics graduates in the labor market exhibits a pronounced structural shift toward industrialization, characterized by high absorptive capacity within the industrial sector. This trend reflects a broader macroeconomic transition toward technical and manufacturing-centric economies, positioning the sector as a primary driver of regional productivity. The majority of the graduates indicate that the private sector serves as the predominant employer, emphasizing its role as the principal engine of job creation and capital expansion. In contrast, the public sector maintains a secondary position, followed by self-employment and international labor markets (Rest of the World). In terms of employment status, the statistical majority of the participants occupy regular positions, while contractual roles represent a marginal segment of the employment distribution. This prevalence of indefinite-term employment signifies a robust degree of occupational stability and suggests a strategic preference within the regional labor market for long-term human capital integration.

### Labor market barriers

The analysis of labor market barriers to employment opportunities revealed that the most significant obstacle to employment is a lack of Civil Service eligibility, which ranks first. This means that a substantial portion of the workforce is effectively excluded from public sector opportunities due to credentialing requirements. The second most prevalent barrier is a lack of professional experience, emphasizing a persistent gap between academic preparation and the practical demands of entry-level roles. Additionally, low computer literacy and the high volume of applicants in urban centers posed another hindrance, creating a competitive, technologically demanding environment. Finally, a minority of graduates faced geographic barriers and limited network access, indicating that while structural and skill-based deficits are the primary obstacles, physical and social isolation also contribute to the difficulty of securing employment.

In terms of barriers in the workplace, Economics graduates considered the most pervasive barrier to professional advancement is the lack of Master of Arts (M.A.) units, which is cited as a primary cause of stagnant career mobility and slow promotions. This hindered upward career mobility as it became a significant prerequisite for employment. Furthermore, low computer literacy and low salary rates were also considered barriers, further lessening workplace efficacy and job satisfaction. Finally, a few participants identified a lack of mentorship, an unclear career path, and a curriculum gap regarding law and public policy, suggesting that while academic credentials are the primary requirement, professional support and curricular relevance remain critical areas for improvement.

## CONCLUSION

The research emphasized that the Economics graduates benefited from high job security and a strong demand within the private and industry sectors. These sectors offer reliable entry points for economics graduates, but upward career progression is often stifled by structural policy, particularly the lack of Civil Service eligibility and job experience. Moreover, a deficit in specialized advanced academic units, a mismatch between academic training, and a significant lack of competencies in modern digital and data processing prevent graduates from accessing high-tier analytical roles. To bridge the widening gap between academic output and industry demand, educational institutions must urgently move beyond traditional, theory-heavy instruction. By integrating licensure-examination support and pursuing aggressive curricular innovation aligned with current transnational

industry standards, universities can effectively transform graduates from mere participants in the workforce into resilient, high-level professionals. This shift is essential for directing an increasingly competitive and volatile economic scenario, ensuring that the years spent studying supply and demand actually translate into a sustainable career path. Only through a deliberate fusion of technical proficiency and formal certification can the next generation of economists transcend entry-level positions. Strengthening these institutional frameworks will eventually allow graduates to evade systemic barriers, turning potential failure into a dynamic path of continuous growth and effective contribution to the economy. Ultimately, the aim is to equip every student with the strong academic foundation necessary to facilitate entry to the labor market, thereby satisfying the true potential of an Economics degree in the twenty-first century.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In line with the findings of this study, the following recommendations are respectfully offered for consideration by academic institutions, curriculum planners, and relevant government agencies.

### **For Economics Graduates**

Graduates should sit for the Civil Service Examination immediately upon completion of their degree to secure the primary credential necessary for public sector entry. Furthermore, graduates should pursue advanced academic degrees to augment their technical qualifications and unlock senior-level opportunities in both governmental and private spheres. This proactive engagement with professional credentialing and postgraduate training ensures long-term competitiveness within a volatile labor market.

### **For the Academic Council and Department of Economics**

The Academic Council must initiate a comprehensive curricular review to integrate emerging digital technologies and address the documented deficit in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) competencies. By realigning the curriculum, the Department will equip graduates with the differentiated technical skill sets essential for high-level data interpretation and institutional integration.

### **For the Office of Student Affairs**

The administration should institutionalize a Civil Service Eligibility Bridge Program to streamline graduate entry into the public sector. Specifically, the University should provide structured review sessions and preparatory modules for graduating seniors to surmount the administrative gatekeeping of government employment.

### **For the Office of Academic Affairs**

The Office of Academic Affairs should develop accelerated pathways for Master of Arts (M.A.) completion, including the formal offering of an M.A./M.S. in Economics. By providing these advanced academic tracks, the Office directly removes the primary impediment to professional mobility and encourages an immediate transition into specialized studies for Economics alumni.

### **For the University Research and Alumni Relations Unit**

The Research Office, in collaboration with the Alumni Relations Unit (ARU), should establish a longitudinal Labor Market Monitoring System to maintain program responsiveness. This formalized feedback loop will allow the institution to proactively recalibrate educational frameworks based on direct input from industry stakeholders.

### **For the Commission on Higher Education (CHED)**

The Commission should modernize current internship frameworks by adopting comprehensive work-integrated learning (WIL) models. This strategic shift will ensure that graduates acquire the immediate practical competencies required to bridge the existing workforce-readiness gap.

## For Future Researchers

Subsequent researchers should prioritize systematic, multi-sectoral analyses of employer feedback to pinpoint discrepancies between academic outcomes and market demands. Future studies should employ mixed-methods approaches to capture both quantitative skill gaps and the qualitative expectations of industry leaders, thereby establishing a robust empirical foundation for targeted curricular reform.

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