

A Tracer Study of Graduates of Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education Program at Luangprabang Teacher Training College, Academic Year 2019 – 2020*

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Abstract

A Tracer Study is a study that can effectively evaluate the effectiveness of a higher education program in order to improve and ensure its quality. This tracer study aimed to assess the competency and skills that graduates of the Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education (B.Ed. in ECE) at Luangprabang Teacher Training College (TTC) acquired from the program and investigate the employment status of the graduates of the program as well as the satisfaction of the graduates' employers. This study employed a quantitative research approach with a survey research design. Participants were sixty-eight graduates from the 2019-2020 academic year and their thirty-three respective employers. Two questionnaires were developed to evaluate graduates' program-acquired competency and skills, discover graduates' employability, and examine graduates' and their employers' satisfaction. The findings indicate that the graduates acquired adequate skills and competencies offered by Luangprabang TTC, and they are able to apply the skills and knowledge acquired throughout the program to their present jobs. Their level of satisfaction with the program's learning environment, facilities, and TTC support is relatively high. The majority of graduates are currently employed as teachers in schools (61.76 percent), and 76.19 percent can find employment within three months. Current employment is relevant to the program's curriculum. Employers were extremely satisfied with the abilities and capabilities of the graduates. However, the suggestions provided by employers should be taken into account so that future graduates are more aware and competent in research skills, professional skills, communication skills, and classroom management in order to meet the needs of the institution and society.

Keywords: Tracer study, Early childhood Education Program, Graduates

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Introduction

The Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic is committed to providing outstanding early childhood education programs in response to the growing awareness of the significance of holistic early childhood development. The Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) are responsible for preparing early childhood teachers under the direction of the Department of Teacher Education (DTE), Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES).

Prior to 2012, Lao teacher training colleges only provided Diploma and Advanced Diploma level early childhood teacher education programs. With the assistance of UNESCO Bangkok, the first Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education (B.Ed. in ECE) degree program was developed in 2012 for a four-year duration (Department of Teacher Education, 2012). The program was originally implemented at Dongkhamxang TTC during the 2013/2014 academic year, followed by Luangnamtha and Salavan TTCs in 2014/2015, and Ban Keun, Luangprabang, Pakse, and Savanhnakhet TTCs in 2016/2017.

In November and December of 2017, upon conclusion of the first cycle of the B.Ed. in ECE program in Dongkhamxang, TTC and UNESCO Bangkok conducted an evaluation of the curriculum involving both graduates and current student teachers in order to achieve its goals and objectives of educating qualified and effective early childhood teachers, the evaluation's findings suggested areas for improvement. In accordance with the findings, the Ministry of Education appointed a task force to revise the curriculum for the Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education (B.Ed. in ECE) in aims to enhance the quality of the program and ensure that it aligns with the Research Institute of Educational Sciences (RIES)' 2012 national early childhood education curriculum (Department of Teacher Education, 2019).

Luangprabang Teacher Training College (TTC) is a teacher education institution administered under the Department of Teacher Education, Ministry of Education and Sports. Luangprabang TTC plays a significant role in the preparation of kindergarten, primary, and secondary teaching student teachers, both undergraduate and graduate. In 2016, Luangprabang TTC's B.Ed. in ECE program was initially implemented, and the first batch consisting of 68 graduates finished their degrees in 2020 while the second batch was expected to finish their degree in 2021. To provide Langprabang TTC, DTE and MoES with useful information regarding the employability of the first cohort of graduates, the relevance of the skills and competencies acquired throughout the program to their jobs, and the graduates' satisfaction with the program, the graduate tracer study is conducted.

A tracer study or graduation survey is a conventional (written or verbal) questionnaire administered to college or university graduates. Tracer studies are also recognized as graduate surveys, alumni surveys, or follow-up surveys. It is a study that contributes significantly to the evaluation of a specific institution of higher education in terms

of its graduates' employability and program outcomes (Schomburg, 2003). Typically, it occurs following graduation or completion of training. Academic progress, transitioning to the workforce, joining the workforce, job career, utilizing previously acquired skills, current employment, and linkages to the educational institution are often covered in the survey (Schomburg, 2016).

The term "graduate tracer study" is used to distinguish between the two target groups in this study: graduates and employers. Graduate tracer surveys are a sort of empirical study that can provide valuable data for evaluating the educational and training outcomes of a specific institution of higher education. Employer surveys typically concentrate on recruitment methods and criteria, graduate competencies and skills, and potential future requirements. The findings of tracer studies can be used to continuously improving curriculum, as Schomburg (2003) suggests that tracer studies should provide higher education institutions with data indicating apparent deficiencies in a given educational program and serve as a basis for future planning and implementation.

In addition, Schomburg (2003) asserts that tracer studies can provide administrators, educators, and students with a wider perspective of the labor market through the collection of substantial data. Furthermore, tracking and monitoring of graduates could facilitate cooperation and engagement between educational institutions and their alumni. Information about the nature of the occupation and its responsibilities is a more important source for improving curriculum than labor market statistics alone. This type of content may prompt reflection on the advantages and disadvantages of the teaching of specific skills, the emphasis on general knowledge, socializing, and personality development. Numerous graduate tracer studies have been conducted in the field of teacher education in recent years to ensure the quality of teacher education programs and track the employability of graduates (Almejas et al., 2017; Cornillez Jr. et al., 2021; Pentang et al., 2022)

In order to evaluate the effectiveness and quality of the teaching and learning of the B.Ed in ECE program, the research team of Luangprabang TTC, in collaboration with DTE and UNESCO Bangkok, conducted a tracer study of graduates to assess their acquired and developing skills and competencies, as well as their postgraduate employment situation and their employer's satisfaction with the skills and competencies the graduates gained from the program.

Objectives

The primary objectives of this study were to assess the adequacy, quality, and relevance of the Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education program offered at Luangprabang Teacher Training College (Luangprabang TTC) in Lao PDR, and the employment

status of graduates from this program as well employers' satisfaction. Specifically, the following objectives were established:

- 1) To assess the graduates' acquired and developed skills and competencies obtained from the program at Luangprabang TTC, the academic year 2019/2020;
- 2) To investigate the employment status of the graduates from the program at Luangprabang Teacher Training College, the academic year 2019/2020; and
- 3) To evaluate employers' satisfaction regarding the graduates' skills and competencies obtained from the program at Luangprabang Teacher Training College, the academic year 2019/2020.

Research questions

The following questions were addressed to guide the study:

- 1) To what extent the graduates' acquired and developed skills and competencies from the program align the requirements of their jobs? What are the skills and competencies the graduates acquired during studies?
- 2) What are the graduates' retrospective assessments of the program? (e.g. satisfaction with learning experience, learning facilities and curriculum)
- 3) To what extent training and experience provided by teacher training colleges enable the graduates to address the demands of their workplaces and communities?
- 4) What is the employment situation and status of the graduates? Do they work in their field of study?
- 5) How did the graduates transfer into employment? What are the relationships between studies and current employment?
- 6) To what extent are the graduates satisfied with their jobs?
- 7) To What extent are the employers satisfied with the graduates' performance?

Research Methodology

Research design

This study utilized quantitative approach employing the descriptive survey research design through questionnaires. The survey research was conducted in response to the objectives of the study, which was to trace graduates' associated employment characteristics and evaluate the significance of the graduates' acquired ability and competence, as well as employers' views of graduates.

Research participants

There were two target population of the participants: 1) graduates of the B.Ed. in ECE program and 2) employers of the graduates. The first target group comprised of sixty-eight graduates from the academic year 2019/2020 which were purposively selected. The second target group comprised of thirty-three previously indicated employers of graduates. The employers included owners of a workplace, administrators, directors, supervisors, or people in different positions who has the authority to make decisions concerning the work of the graduate of the B.Ed. in ECE program from Luangprabang TTC, in the academic year 2019/2020

As of recently, Luangprabang TTC had only one graduating class of B.Ed. in ECE program students, hence the entire participant population was the target respondents. It should be noted that there were no male students enrolled in this program, hence all graduates are female.

Research Instrument and Data Collection Procedure

Two questionnaires utilized in this study were adapted from a theme proposed by Schomburg (2003), with certain items modified to correspond with the study's objectives and the B.Ed. in ECE curriculum. Two target groups of respondents were considered when developing the questionnaires: graduates and employers. Each questionnaire had both closed- and open-ended questions. A five-point Likert scale was utilized to assess the degree of opinion, consistency, satisfaction, adequacy, and requirement.

The graduate questionnaire consisted of 32 items which were divided into the following sections: Part I concerned with the profile of the graduates, which included their gender and marital status; Part II focused on the graduates' acquired skills and competencies, which included the skills and competencies acquired from the program, the relevance of the acquired competencies with the job requirements, the graduates' satisfaction with the learning experience, facilities, curriculum, and TTC's support; Part III involved the graduates' employability status, including employment status and working status; and Part IV emphasized the graduates' job application and work (for unemployed graduates).

The questionnaire for graduate employers consisted of 16 items divided into three sections: Part I focused on the demographic characteristics of the employers, including their age, level of education, work experience, and workplace; Part II emphasized on the employers' satisfaction with graduates; and Part III concerned with the employers' satisfaction with graduates' skills and competencies.

Both questions were originally developed in Thai and then translated into Lao to avoid misunderstanding of the language. They were piloted with a non-target group to verify the clarity and comprehensibility of the language. After collecting responses from non-target groups, the questionnaires were revised and sent to experts in curriculum and instruction and

early childhood education as well as the Department of Teacher Education (DTE), the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), and UNESCO Bangkok for validation. After validating the questionnaires, they were revised again and transferred to Google Forms for ease of use and delivered online to both sets of the participants. The purposes of the study were communicated through the questionnaires and the respondents' personal information (e.g., telephone number, address) was preserved to ensure their anonymity. The data collecting began from July to September of 2021.

Following the data collection process, descriptive statistics (Frequency, percentages, mean, and standard deviations) were used to analyze the quantitative data. The following evaluation criteria were used to interpret the level of the opinion, consistency, satisfaction, appropriateness, requirement

Average	4.51 - 5.00	refers to extremely high
Average	3.51 - 4.50	refers to high
Average	2.51 - 3.50	refers to medium
Average	1.51 - 2.50	refers to low
Average	1.00 - 1.50	refers to extremely low

Research Results

The results of the data analysis are presented in four parts: 1) Demographic information; 2) Graduates' acquired skills and competencies from the program; 3) Graduates' employability and working status; and 4) Employers' perception towards the graduates' skills and competencies

Part 1 Demographic information

The demographic information of the respondents is presented in two sub-headings, namely the demographic information of the graduates, and the demographic information of the employers, with the following details:

1.1 Demographic information of graduates

Table 1: Demographic information of the graduates

Graduates Profile		Frequency (n = 68)	Percentage
Gender	Male	-	-
	Female	68	100.00
Marital status	Single	46	67.65
	Married	22	32.35
	Divorced	-	-
	Widowed	-	-

Table 1 illustrates that a total of sixty-eight graduates responded to the survey, and that all of them are female, as no male students participated in this program. In terms of marital status, 67.65 percent of respondents are single. In addition, according to the statistics about the ages of the respondents, the average age of the graduates who responded to the survey is less than thirty years old.

1.2 Demographic information of employers

Table 2: Demographic information of the employers

Information of Employers		Frequency (n=33)	Percentage
Gender	Male	4	12.12
	Female	29	87.88
Age	Below 30 years-old	15	45.45
	30 - 40 years-old	8	24.24
	41 - 50 years-old	8	24.24
	Over 50 years-old	2	6.06
Educational level	Doctorate degree	6	18.18
	Master's degree or equivalent	8	24.24
	Bachelor's degree or equivalent	15	45.45
	Diploma level	4	12.12
	Lower than diploma level	-	-
Working experience	5 years and below	13	39.39
	6 - 10 years	6	18.18
	11 - 15 years	5	15.15
	16 - 20 years	4	12.12
	Over 20 years	5	15.15
Type of institution	Public school	2	6.06
	Private school	30	90.91
	Others	1	3.03

Thirty-three employers responded to the questionnaire, as shown in Table 2. This includes four male (12.12 percent) and twenty-nine female respondents (87.88 percent). Those under thirty constitute 45.45% of the overall population. The majority of the population holds a Bachelor's degree, which accounts for 45.45% of the population. In addition, the significant number of them have less than five years of work experience (39.39 percent). Two are employed by public schools (6.06 percent) and thirty are employed by private schools (90.91 percent). In addition, the majority of employers have director positions.

Part 2 Graduates' Acquired Skills and Competencies of the Program

The data regarding the graduates' competencies and skills acquired from the program was divided into two subtopics: 1) skills and competencies acquired from the program and the relevance of the acquired competencies with the job requirements; 2) satisfaction towards learning experience, facilities, and curriculum; and the support from TTC.

2.1) Skills and competencies acquired from the program and the relevance of the acquired competencies with the job requirements

Table 3: Graduates' acquired and developed skills and competencies from the program, the relevance of the acquired skills with the job requirements, and skills and competencies required by the employers

Items	Acquired skills and competencies		Relevance of the acquired skills with the job requirements		Skills and competencies required by the employers	
	n = 68		n = 42		n = 33	
	μ	σ	μ	σ	μ	σ
1. Knowledge in managing early childhood education	4.21	0.56	4.38	0.58	4.48	0.57
2. The ability to manage the learning-teaching according to the 3 characteristics and 5 core principles of education, in line with the National Kindergarten Curriculum of the Ministry of Education and Sports	4.22	0.69	4.36	0.69	4.30	0.59
3. The ability to manage plays and learning-teaching activities in nurseries, kindergartens, multi-grade classrooms and pre-primary classrooms in a creative manner	4.10	0.72	4.31	0.60	4.36	0.70
4. The ability to create an enabling environment for children to play and learn, regardless of their race, language, religion, gender, age, disability and socio-economic hardship	4.16	0.75	4.31	0.64	4.36	0.60
5. Knowledge and capacities to create knowledge through action research	3.91	0.73	4.17	0.79	4.27	0.63
6. Code of professional ethics for teachers; and love towards the teaching profession and children	4.56	0.66	4.57	0.59	4.61	0.50
7. The ability to work with others and preserve the Lao culture and traditions	4.37	0.64	4.48	0.63	4.45	0.56
Summary	4.22	0.68	4.37	0.65	4.40	0.59

Regarding Graduates' acquired and developed skills and competencies from the program, the graduates addressed that they acquired a code of professional ethics for teachers the most from the program ($\mu = 4.22$, $\sigma = 0.68$). The program also enabled them to collaborate with others and expose them to Lao culture and tradition ($\mu = 4.37$, $\sigma = 0.64$), and they are competent to manage the learning and teaching process according to the National Kindergarten Curriculum of the Ministry of Education and Sports ($\mu = 4.22$, $\sigma = 0.69$). However, knowledge and capacities to generate knowledge through action research obtained the lowest average rating ($\mu = 3.91$, $\sigma = 0.73$).

In terms of the relevance of their acquired skills and competencies to their job requirements, forty-two employed graduates rated the code of professional ethics for teachers and their love for the teaching profession and children as having the highest average rating ($\mu = 4.57$, $\sigma = 0.59$). The graduates stated that the program enhanced their capacity to collaborate with others, preserved the Lao culture and customs, and equipped them with the skills necessary to manage early childhood education. While knowledge and capabilities for knowledge creation through action research received the lowest average rating ($\mu = 4.17$, $\sigma = 0.79$).

Considering the skills and competencies required by employers, 33 employers responded to the required skills and competencies of the graduates, and the results indicate that the most important skills and competencies of the graduates are a code of professional ethics for teachers and a love for the teaching profession and children ($\mu = 4.61$, $\sigma = 0.50$). The employer believes that the graduates have understanding of managing early childhood education ($\mu = 4.48$, $\sigma = 0.57$) as well as the ability to collaborate with others and preserve Lao culture and traditions ($\mu = 4.45$, $\sigma = 0.56$). In contrast, knowledge and the ability to generate knowledge through action research received the lowest rating.

2.2) Satisfaction towards learning experience, facilities, and curriculum and the satisfaction towards support from TTC to enable the graduates to address the demands of their workplaces and communities

Table 4 Graduates' satisfaction towards learning experience, facilities, and curriculum

	Items	N = 68	
		μ	σ
Learning experience	1. The teaching and learning management complies with and covers the curriculum content.	4.29	0.71
	2. The teaching and learning management is in line with the nature and purpose of each subject of the program.	4.22	0.69
	3. Activities/programs for development and enhancement of skills and capacities, such as promoting teamwork, are provided.	4.35	0.64
	4. The learning assessment is in line with the curriculum.	4.24	0.65
	5. Teacher educators are knowledgeable and experienced.	4.31	0.63
	6. Teacher educators are a good role model for behaviors and practices.	4.38	0.62
Learning facilities	1. Library facilities and resources are adequate for learning.	4.12	0.82
	2. Materials and documents are suitable and can be used to facilitate learning.	4.01	0.76
	3. The practice/training rooms have sufficient and suitable equipment.	3.81	0.83
	4. The ICT system can facilitate self-directed research.	3.79	0.86
Curriculum	1. The curriculum is up-to-date and relevant to the current situation.	4.15	0.68
	2. The subjects offered in the curriculum	4.00	0.71
	3. The subject contents covered in the curriculum	3.93	0.76
application of the knowledge acquired from the program	1. The application of the acquired knowledge from the program to perform the current responsibilities at work.	4.33	0.61
	2. The acquired knowledge and skills from the program benefit the current task.	4.43	0.59
	3. The program match with the requirements of the current work.	4.40	0.67
	4. The adequacy of the acquired knowledge and skills from the program to perform the current work	4.24	0.62
	5. The acquired knowledge and skills from the program match with the current work.	4.36	0.62

Regarding the graduates' perceptions of the learning experience and facilities of the program and curriculum, the graduates were, overall, highly impressed with the learning experience and facilities provided by the program and curriculum. Addressing learning experience, graduates significantly believed that teacher educators are great role models for behaviors and practices ($\mu = 4.38$, $\sigma = 0.624$), and they were satisfied with the program's activities for the development and enhancement of skills and capabilities, such as promoting teamwork. Despite receiving the lowest rating score ($\mu = 4.22$, $\sigma = 0.69$) for teaching and learning management that corresponds with the nature and objective of each subject in the curriculum, students were substantially satisfied with the teaching and learning.

The level of satisfaction with the learning facilities offered throughout the program may not be remarkable ($\mu = 3.93$, $\sigma = 0.82$). However, the graduates expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the library's facilities and resources, which are appropriate for studying; they were also satisfied with the ICT system, which facilitates independent research. Considering the B.Ed. in ECE curriculum, the graduates were indeed satisfied. They valued the curriculum's relevance to the current situation ($\mu = 4.15$, $\sigma = 0.68$) and the curriculum's subject offerings ($\mu = 4.00$, $\sigma = 0.70$).

The results of an analysis of the support offered by the Teacher Training College that enables graduates to meet the expectations of their employers and communities. Overall, the graduates successfully apply the program's acquired knowledge and abilities to their current positions. They acknowledged that the acquired knowledge and abilities greatly benefit their tasks and coincide with their current workplace's expectations. In addition, the curriculum equips graduates with the necessary knowledge and abilities to accomplish their current duties.

Part 3 The graduates' employment situation and working status

The data analysis of the graduates' employment and working status is divided into four sub-topics. 1) the graduates' employment situation and employment status, 2) the graduates' job search strategies, 3) the graduates' study and employment relationships, and 4) the graduates' job satisfaction. The following are the findings of the data analysis:

3.1) The graduates' employment situation and working status

Table 5: Current employment status and types of work and employment of the graduates

	Items	Frequency	Percentage
Current employment status (n=68)	Employed	42	61.76
	Unemployed	26	38.24
Type of work (n=42)	Teacher civil servant	-	-
	Private school teacher	40	95.24
	Volunteer teacher	1	2.38
	Others	1	2.38
Type of employment (n=42)	Full-time	39	92.86
	Part-time/casual	1	2.38
	Freelance	2	4.76
	Others	-	-
Duration of job search (n=42)	Less than 3 months	32	76.19
	3 - 6 months	6	14.29
	7 - 11 months	3	7.14
	1 - 2 years	-	-

	Items	Frequency	Percentage
	More than 2 years	1	2.38
	From job advertisements in the newspapers, internet, etc.	24	50.00
Methods of job search (n=42)	Directly contact educational institutes	23	47.92
	Via recruitment agencies	-	-
	Via quota systems	-	-
	Others	1	2.08
Working period after graduation (n=42)	1 - 6 months	20	47.62
	7 - 12 months	16	38.10
	More than 1 year	6	14.29
Number of times participated in employment examination (n=42)	Once	20	47.62
	Twice	3	7.14
	3 times or more	1	2.38
	None	18	42.86
The relevance between the graduates' qualification and current employment (n=42)	The current employment matches with their qualifications.	39	92.86
	The current employment partially matches with their qualifications.	2	4.76
	The current employment does not match with their qualifications.	1	2.38

Currently, 42 graduates (61.76 percent) of Langprabang TTC's B.Ed. in ECE program are employed, while twenty-six are unemployed. The majority of graduates who are currently employed are private school teachers (n=40), with the remaining two serving as volunteer instructors in different contexts. The majority of graduates (n=39) are full-time employees, while one works part-time and two are self-employed. The majority of graduates who are currently employed (76.19 percent) looked for work for less than three months. Job advertisements in newspapers and on the internet are the most prevalent approach for finding work (50.00 percent). This is followed by making direct contact with educational institutions (47.92 percent). The significant proportion of employed graduates, 47.62 percent, have been working for one to six months following graduation, according to the survey. Furthermore, it was discovered that the majority of employed graduates have taken an employment examination at least once (47.62 percent). The majority of graduates (92.86 percent) believe that their current employment corresponds to their qualifications, with 4.76 percent of employed graduates believing that their current employment partially meets their qualifications.

The twenty-six graduates who responded as employed were asked to identify the problems and issues that led to their unemployment status. The primary reason that 42.31 percent of the graduates are unemployed is because they were not actively seeking employment. This is followed by the 30.77 percent who reported being unemployed due to inability to find jobs. Regarding difficulties with job searches following graduation, the survey results indicated that the majority of graduates (76.92 percent) did not have problems, while 23.08 percent reported having some difficulties.

Table 6: The main reasons for unemployment and job search problems

Items		Frequency (n=26)	Percentage
Main reasons for unemployment	Not looking for employment	11	42.31
	Waiting for responses from relevant institutions/organizations	4	15.38
	Unable to find jobs	8	30.77
	Others	3	11.54
Problems with job search	I have no problems.	20	76.92
	I have problems.	6	23.08

3.2) The satisfaction of the graduates with their work

The average degree of satisfaction among graduates with their work is high ($\mu = 4.36$, $\sigma = 0.63$). They were strongly motivated to fulfill the duties assigned. In addition to their primary responsibility, they were totally satisfied with participating in all other assigned tasks. Additionally, they were very pleased with the responsibility and proud of their work. However, graduates were not really content with their remuneration.

Table 7: The satisfaction of the graduates with their work

Items	N = 42	
	μ	σ
1. The responsible task	4.43	0.63
2. Pride of the current responsible task	4.43	0.55
3. Motivation to complete the assigned work	4.55	0.59
4. Participation in other assigned activities in addition to the primary responsibility	4.50	0.60
5. The salary/ remuneration	3.88	0.80
Summary	4.36	0.63

Part 4: Evaluation results of the employers' satisfaction with the graduates' skills and competencies.

The employers' perception of the graduates' knowledge and capacities

Table 8: The employers' perception and satisfaction of the graduates' knowledge and capacities

	Items	N = 33	
		μ	σ
Perceptions	1. The graduates can apply knowledge and experiences to complete the assigned tasks.	4.27	0.57
	2. The graduates can complete the tasks as required by the institution.	4.09	0.58
	3. The graduates can complete the tasks as required by the community.	4.00	0.66
	4. The graduates have the knowledge, skills and competencies necessary for the assigned tasks.	4.00	0.83
	5. The graduates are essential to your institution.	4.33	0.60
Satisfaction	1. Knowledge in managing early childhood education	4.39	0.61
	2. The ability to manage the learning-teaching according to the 3 characteristics and 5 core principles of education, in line with the National Kindergarten Curriculum of the Ministry of Education and Sports	4.21	0.65
	3. The ability to manage plays and learning-teaching activities in nurseries, kindergartens, multi-grade classrooms and pre-primary classrooms in a creative manner	4.27	0.72
	4. The ability to create an enabling environment for children to play and learn, regardless of their race, language, religion, gender, age, disability and socio-economic hardship	4.27	0.63
	5. Knowledge and capacities to create knowledge through action research	4.00	0.75
	6. Code of professional ethics for teachers; and love towards the teaching profession and children	4.39	0.61
	7. The ability to work with others and preserve the Lao culture and traditions	4.33	0.65

From the perspective of employers, their perceptions on the graduates' knowledge and capacities were high ($\mu = 4.14$, $\sigma = 0.65$). The graduates generally have adequate knowledge and skills to complete duties ($\mu = 4.27$, $\sigma = 0.57$). Employers also noted that graduates are essential to their workplace because they are able to effectively utilize knowledge and expertise to perform assigned institution and community-based duties.

Overall, employers were satisfied with the skills and competencies of graduates ($\mu = 4.27$, $\sigma = 0.66$). Employers appreciated the graduates' expertise in managing early

childhood education, as well as their adherence to the Code of Professional Ethics for Teachers and their passion for the teaching profession and children. Employers placed a high value on teamwork and the capacity to preserve Lao culture and traditions. However, employers were least satisfied with knowledge and the ability to produce knowledge through action research yet again.

Besides, the employers were invited to identify the graduates' strengths and areas for improvement, as well as to provide suggestions for curricular revisions to the B.Ed. in ECE program. In terms of strengths, the graduates are capable of managing the learning-teaching process. They can handle plays and learning-teaching activities creatively in nurseries, kindergartens, multi-grade classrooms, and pre-primary classes. Moreover, the graduates are patient, proactive, and responsible at work as well as they are trustworthy in their work. They are also well-versed in early childhood education administration and child care. Finally, the graduates are capable of problem-solving. However, urgent improvements are required in the areas of research skills, professional skills, communication skills, and classroom management, as well as the ability to exchange experiences with coworkers and classroom management.

Six recommendations for future curricular improvements includes: 1) increasing the amount of practice sessions and utilization of instructional materials; 2) incorporating creative activities into the curriculum; 3) Increasing the number of possibilities for students to exchange information and experiences with other college students; 4) upgrading lessons by incorporating ICT into the classroom; 5) providing more in-depth guidance on creating effective lesson plans; and 6) providing more semesters under the curriculum. Some students, for instance, must study throughout the summer semester or on weekends.

Discussion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions and discussions are drawn:

1) The graduates acquired adequate skills and competences provided by Luangprabang TTC. The course they took equipped them with the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for their development as early childhood education teachers. They can apply the skills and knowledge acquired throughout the program to their current positions. The result of this study could be implied that graduates are able to manage learning-teaching according to the 3 characteristics and 5 core principles of education, in accordance with the National Kindergarten Curriculum of the Ministry of Education and Sports; code of professional ethics for teachers; and love for the teaching profession and children; the ability to work with others and preserve the Lao culture and traditions; and the ability to manage playtime and

learning-teaching. In terms of the graduates' satisfaction towards the curriculum, they are highly satisfied with the program's learning experience, facilities, and TTC support. The courses and activities provided within the curriculum are claimed to adequately equip graduates with the skills and competencies required to be successful in the labor market. However, some skills, such as knowledge creation through action research and experience sharing with coworkers, required further development. This might be considered when revising the curriculum to enhance its effectiveness and be responsive to the requirements of learners, other stakeholders, and communities.

2) The majority of the graduates (61.76%) are currently working as teachers in schools and 76.19 percent can find a job within three months. This can be interpreted that the quality of the graduates matches the qualifications required by the school and that the graduates are competitive in the workforce. Furthermore, their current employment matches their program-acquired skills. However, the TTC should explore assisting unemployed individuals to enter the workforce;

3) Employers were highly satisfied with the graduates' abilities and competencies. This may result from the graduates' knowledge and skills in managing early childhood education and teaching and learning, they are able to perform the institution's and community's required tasks. The graduate can collaborate effectively with both employers and coworkers. However, the suggestions made by employers should be properly considered so that future graduates are more knowledgeable and competent in the aforementioned areas and therefore can meet the requirements of the institution and society.

The result of this tracer study can be contributed to curriculum development, accreditation, and the creation of student extracurricular activities in to enhance the quality of higher education in the future. The acquired information can demonstrate the gap between the competences of graduates and the actual needs of their users (Andari et al., 2021; Odame et al, 2021). This information is crucial as a contribution to the betterment of the educational system since it offers an awareness of the condition of graduates, their status, and the activities they are currently involved in (Sharma, 2014). In addition, tracer studies indirectly support universities' ongoing, routinely carried out initiatives for continual improvement.

Recommendations

According to this research finding, the recommendations are made as follows;

1. The TTC should expand learning facilities, including practice rooms, opportunities for hands-on practical training, and adequate equipment, and foster the development of graduates' knowledge and skills through an action research approach. Furthermore, the TTC

should strengthen academic cooperation and practicum teaching with the private sector, as well as provide assistance in finding employment in both public and private schools.

2. The Department of Teacher Education/Ministry of Education and Sports should revise the curriculum or courses that emphasize the acquisition of knowledge through the research method and provide sufficient assistance.

3. A graduate tracer study should be undertaken every three or five years, and the results should be utilized to improve the B.Ed in ECE curriculum in order to enhance graduates' learning outcomes.

4. As the primary participants in this study were graduates and their employers, additional target groups, such as community members and parents should be included to collect more pertinent data. Moreover, it is necessary to consider additional data collection methods to increase the validity of research findings.

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