

Employment Probability and Career Advancement of Graduates from Public and Private Higher Education Institutions in Tawi-Tawi

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ABSTRACT:

Research Gap: While national studies compare labor market outcomes of public and private higher education institution (HEI) graduates, there is limited evidence specific to the BARMM region, particularly Tawi-Tawi, where labor market dynamics, employer preferences, and economic structure differ significantly from mainland areas. **Objective:** This study compared the employment probability and career advancement of graduates from public and private HEIs in Tawi-Tawi. **Methodology:** Using a descriptive-comparative and predictive design, data were collected from 320 graduates (160 public, 160 private) selected through stratified random sampling. The survey instrument was adapted from the CHED Graduate Tracer Study, validated by experts, and tested for reliability ($\alpha = 0.84-0.89$). **Key Findings:** Public HEI graduates showed significantly higher employment probability (81.25% vs. 68.75%, $p < 0.01$) and faster job placement (2.1 vs. 3.4 months), with 62.3% employed in the government sector. In contrast, private HEI graduates reported higher starting salaries (52.3% vs. 38.5% earning $\geq \text{₱}18,000$), faster promotions, and greater access to professional training. **Logistic regression** confirmed that institutional type and licensure status were significant predictors of outcomes. **Practical Importance:** The study provides region-specific data to guide students, parents, and policymakers in choosing and improving educational pathways, highlighting that both sectors serve distinct but complementary roles in the local economy.

Keywords: Employment probability, Career advancement, Public vs. Private HEIs, Labor market outcomes, Graduates, Tawi-Tawi, Philippines

Introduction

Higher education is widely recognized as a key driver of economic mobility, employability, and career success (Altbach et al., 2023). In the Philippines, both public and private HEIs play critical roles in producing a skilled workforce, yet their graduates' labor market performance

remains a subject of ongoing analysis. Public HEIs are subsidized by the government, offer lower tuition, and often enjoy strong social recognition and prestige, while private HEIs operate on tuition revenues, frequently emphasize industry-specific skills, and maintain

closer ties with the corporate and service sectors (CHED, 2024; Dela Cruz & Santos, 2022).

Tawi-Tawi, a province in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), has unique socioeconomic and geographic characteristics: limited large-scale industries, high dependence on government employment, and distinct cultural and labor dynamics. Major HEIs here include the public Tawi-Tawi Regional Agricultural College (TRAC) and Mindanao State University–Tawi-Tawi College of Technology and Oceanography (MSU-TCTO), as well as several accredited private colleges.

Research Gap and Significance

Most existing comparative studies are conducted in highly urbanized regions or at the national level, which may not reflect conditions in island provinces like Tawi-Tawi. There is a scarcity of recent research analyzing how institutional type influences career trajectories in this specific context, where government employment is the primary source of stable work and the private sector is still developing.

This study is important and unique because it provides localized, up-to-date evidence on the labor market performance of graduates from both sectors. It explains why differences exist and offers new insights into how institutional characteristics interact with local economic conditions. Unlike previous studies that focus only on employment rates, this research also examines career advancement—salary growth, promotions, and professional development—giving a more complete picture of long-term success. The findings will help students make informed choices, assist institutions in improving their programs, and guide policymakers in aligning education with regional development needs.

Literature Review

Recent Studies and Comparative Analysis

Studies from 2023–2025 show consistent patterns but also regional variations. Abdullah and Ali (2023) found that in BARMM, public HEI credentials are often preferred in

government hiring due to established accreditation standards and public trust, resulting in 12–15% higher employment rates compared to private institutions—a pattern similar to the national findings of Dela Cruz et al. (2023). However, Garcia and Lee (2024) observed that while public graduates have an advantage in initial placement, private HEI graduates in the Philippines tend to earn 8–12% higher salaries over time, especially in business, IT, and service industries.

Ramos (2025) noted that in developing regional economies, private institutions often adapt their curricula faster to meet emerging market demands, leading to better long-term career mobility. In contrast, Alvarez (2022) explained that government positions offer stability but have structured salary scales and slower promotion timelines, which may limit rapid income growth. Rahman (2024) added that the reputation of the institution matters less than the relevance of skills and professional certification in determining career progression, a factor this study also explores.

Objectives of the Study

1. Describe the profile of respondents in terms of institutional type, program completed, and year graduated.
2. Compare the employment probability of graduates from public and private HEIs.
3. Compare career advancement outcomes between the two groups in terms of salary, promotion, and professional development.
4. Determine the extent to which institutional type, licensure status, and other factors predict employment and career success.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-comparative and predictive design (Creswell & Creswell, 2024). It describes current conditions, compares outcomes between groups, and identifies factors that influence results, making it suitable for analyzing graduate labor market performance.

Research Locale

The study covered graduates residing and working in Tawi-Tawi, including those from public higher education institutions namely TRAC and MSU-TCTO, as well as private higher education institutions such as Mahardika Institute of Technology (MIT), Abubakar Computer Learning Center Foundation Inc. (ACLCFI), and other accredited private colleges.

Population and Sampling

The population of the study consists of all graduates from 2021 to 2025. The sample size is 320 respondents, determined using Yamane's Formula at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. Stratified random sampling was employed, with 160 respondents selected from each sector to ensure equal representation. To be included in the study, participants must have completed their degree requirements, reside or work in Tawi-Tawi, and provide informed consent.

Research Instrument

The questionnaire was adapted from the standard CHED Graduate Tracer Study Tool and modified based on feedback from a pilot test. Changes included simplifying language for local understanding and adding questions specific to career progression in the regional context. For validation, the instrument was reviewed by three experts—a labor economist, a guidance counselor, and a statistician—resulting in a Content Validity Index (CVI) of 0.90. For

reliability, it was pilot tested with 30 graduates, yielding Cronbach's Alpha values ranging from 0.84 to 0.89, which confirmed good internal consistency.

Data Collection Procedure

Graduates were located through institutional alumni records, social media groups, and referrals from department heads. Data collection was conducted from January to March 2026 using two methods: online Google Forms for those with internet access, and face-to-face interviews for those in remote areas to ensure inclusivity. To reduce non-response bias, reminders were sent three times over a four-week period. Response bias was addressed by ensuring anonymity, explaining the study's purpose clearly, and confirming data accuracy through cross-checking with institutional records where possible. Throughout the process, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and all collected data were kept strictly confidential.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were computed. Inferential statistical tools such as the Chi-square test, independent samples t-test, and Binary Logistic Regression were applied to identify significant predictors. All statistical computations were performed using IBM SPSS Version 28, with the level of significance set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

Results and Discussion

Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 Profile of Respondents (n = 320)

Category	Classification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Institutional Type	Public HEIs	160	50.0
	Private HEIs	160	50.0
Program Enrolled	Education	102	32.0
	Business/Management	80	25.0
	Engineering/Technology	58	18.0

	Agriculture/Fisheries	48	15.0
	Others	32	10.0
Year Graduated	2021	58	18.0
	2022	70	22.0
	2023	80	25.0
	2024	64	20.0
	2025	48	15.0

Note: Values are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Interpretation

The balanced distribution ensures fair comparison. The dominance of Education, Business, and Agriculture reflects the region’s key

employment sectors, while the range of graduation years captures recent trends.

Employment Probability

Table 2 Employment Status by Institutional Type

Indicator	Public HEI (n=160)	Private HEI (n=160)	p-value	Practical Meaning
Employed	130 (81.25%)	110 (68.75%)	0.008*	12.5% higher employment rate for public graduates
Mean time to first job	2.1 months	3.4 months	<0.001*	Public graduates find work 1.3 months faster
Job relevant to degree	78.5%	62.7%	0.002*	Better match for public graduates
Government sector	62.3%	28.2%	<0.001*	Main employer for public graduates
Private sector	25.4%	58.1%	<0.001*	Main employer for private graduates

Discussion

The higher employment rate for public graduates is not surprising, as noted by Abdullah and Ali (2023). In BARMM, government hiring policies often prioritize degrees from recognized public

institutions, and many civil service positions have specific eligibility requirements that align with public curricula. CHED (2024) confirms that public institutions generally have stronger alignment with regulatory standards required for public service.

Career Advancement

Table 3 Career Advancement Indicators

Indicator	Public HEI	Private HEI	p-value	Practical Meaning
Starting salary $\geq$ ₱18,000	38.5%	52.3%	0.011*	Private graduates start 36% higher
Current salary $\geq$ ₱25,000	29.2%	44.6%	0.004*	Faster income growth for private graduates
Received promotion in 3 years	22.3%	35.7%	0.007*	60% higher promotion rate
Attended professional training	48.5%	65.2%	<0.001*	More skill development opportunities
Supervisory/managerial role	18.1%	29.4%	0.013*	More leadership roles in private sector

Discussion

Why this difference? As explained by Garcia and Lee (2024), the private sector operates on performance-based compensation and faster career ladders, whereas government positions have fixed salary grades and longer tenure requirements for promotion. Sulaiman (2023) adds that private HEIs often design programs in partnership with businesses, making their graduates more adaptable to corporate work cultures and more likely to advance quickly.

Other Influencing Factors: Beyond institutional type, licensure status was the strongest predictor (OR = 3.21). Work experience, specific technical skills, and industry demand also play major roles. For example, graduates in IT and business, regardless of school, reported higher salaries than those in general fields, confirming Rahman's (2024) observation that skills matter as much as credentials.

Predictors of Success

Table 4 Logistic Regression Results

Predictor	Employment Probability		Career Advancement	
	Odds Ratio	p-value	Odds Ratio	p-value
Institutional Type	2.14	< 0.01	1.78	< 0.01
Licensure Exam Passing	3.21	< 0.001	3.21	< 0.001

Interpretation

Public graduates are 2.14 times more likely to get employed, likely due to institutional reputation and government hiring preferences. Private graduates are 1.78 times more likely to advance, due to sector dynamics and skill orientation. Passing the licensure exam triples the chances of both employment and advancement, regardless of school type.

Conclusions

Public HEIs provide better access to stable, government-related employment and faster initial placement. Private HEIs offer pathways to higher salaries, faster promotions, and greater flexibility in the private sector. Licensure and professional skills are the most critical factors for long-term success, surpassing institutional type alone.

Study Limitations

This study has several constraints. In terms of geographic scope, it is limited only to graduates residing and working within Tawi-Tawi; results may not apply to those working in other regions or countries. Regarding timeframe, it covers only graduates from 2021–2025, so long-term career trajectories beyond five years are not observed. The data relies on self-reported responses, which depend on the honesty and recall of participants, though steps were taken to minimize this concern. Additionally, the findings reflect the current labor market structure, which may change as the regional economy develops.

Practical Recommendations

For public HEIs, it is recommended to strengthen industry linkages and offer more

specialized, market-driven courses to improve competitiveness in the private sector, as well as enhance career guidance to prepare students for non-government employment opportunities. For private HEIs, efforts should focus on increasing support for licensure examinations and professional certification to improve eligibility for government and formal sector jobs, and strengthening accreditation to build wider recognition and trust. For students and parents, programs should be chosen based on personal interests, career goals, and labor market demand, not just institutional reputation; it is also critical to prioritize acquiring professional licenses and work experience, as these are the strongest predictors of success. For policymakers, it is advised to support both sectors with funding and infrastructure, ensuring a balanced education system that meets the needs of all parts of the economy.

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