

Why Graduates Aren't Ready for Work

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Graduating from college in the Philippines is supposed to be a moment of celebration. Families proudly display diplomas and take photos of new graduates, but behind these smiles is a growing frustration. Many fresh graduates find that despite their hard-earned degrees, they are not ready for the jobs they thought they would land. This gap is not just about individual effort, it's about systems that don't prepare students for what the real world demands. For many Filipinos, education has always been seen as the key to rising above one's circumstances—a stepping stone toward a more promising future. It's deeply rooted in the belief that academic achievement can open doors to better opportunities and a more stable life (Santos, 2024).

One major challenge graduates face is the intense pressure to find work immediately after graduation. Parents often remind them, “Hindi pwedeng walang trabaho,” while neighbors and relatives ask, “Anong balak mo?” This push to find any job, even those that don't match their studies, can lead to graduates taking low-paying roles just to say they're employed. Melchor (2022) highlighted that the rush to meet expectations overshadows the need for real preparation and skills development. Another struggle is the limited number of quality jobs available. While thousands graduate every year, the economy isn't growing fast enough to offer positions that truly use their skills. Lifelong learning for all is gradually becoming a reality, as new skills and technologies are now emerging at a much faster pace than in the past decade (Li, 2022). However, many companies also prefer experienced workers, leaving fresh graduates stuck in unpaid internships or waiting for a “backer” to recommend them. With this reality, the system ends up favoring connections over qualifications, leaving those without family ties or powerful connections out in the cold.

Graduates also face the silent burden of stereotypes and expectations. Parents and communities still see certain jobs like engineering or nursing as more “sikat” or worthy, pushing students to chase those paths even if they don't fit. Many feel they must become doctors or lawyers to earn respect, even if their real talents lie elsewhere. The shame of admitting they work in call centers or jobs “hindi pang-

college” adds to their burden, even if those roles are stable and important. But the biggest unseen struggle is the mismatch between what schools teach and what employers actually need (Consunji, 2024). Many graduates leave with strong grades but without practical skills or confidence. Schools still focus too much on memorization and too little on real-world tasks like teamwork, problem-solving, or communication. This gap leaves graduates feeling unprepared and employers saying, “Marunong nga siya, pero di siya handa.”

Cordero (2024) emphasized the reality in July 2024 wherein the Philippines’ unemployment rate rose to 4.7%, up from 3.1% in June, with the increase largely attributed to fresh graduates entering the labor force without securing jobs. Of the 6.89 million young individuals who joined the labor force that month, 14.8% (1.02 million) were unemployed, contributing to a total of 2.38 million unemployed Filipinos. Youth unemployment accounted for 43% of the total jobless population during this period.

It’s time to face these truths. The solution is not just more degrees, it’s rethinking how we teach and how we support graduates as they move to the “Tunay na laban” a workplace. Schools must connect with industries and make sure their lessons reflect what jobs actually require. We must also break the bias that says only certain careers have dignity. Every honest job matters, and every graduate deserves a fair chance to succeed.

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