



From Graduation to Job Seeking: The Lived Experiences of Initao College BSBA Alumni

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Abstract. This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA) graduates from Initao College as they transitioned from graduation to job seeking. The study aimed to understand their journeys, the challenges and opportunities they encountered, and the coping strategies or support systems they relied on during their job search. A total of 16 newly graduated participants from the 2024–2025 batch were selected through purposive sampling. Data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Colaizzi's seven-step method to identify emerging themes from significant statements. Three major themes emerged from the study: The Emotional Landscape of Transition, which captured graduates' mixed feelings of hope, pressure, and uncertainty during the job search process; Barriers and Pathways in the Job Search, which highlighted issues such as lack of experience, financial limitations, and job location challenges, as well as proactive strategies like internships and resume-building; and Motivation Through Support, Faith, and Purpose, which emphasized the role of family, faith, and personal goals in helping graduates persist through difficulties. This study concludes that the journey from graduation to employment is both emotionally and practically demanding for graduates. This study recommends that Initao College may enhance career preparation through expanded exposure to practical industry experiences, mentorship

programs, and more seminars and training. The curriculum may be revised to focus more on practical skills rather than theoretical knowledge to better prepare students for the workforce. Local Government Units may provide job facilitation programs such as job fairs and employment seminars to support graduates in finding employment opportunities.

Keywords: *BSBA graduate, Initao College, job seeking, lived experiences, phenomenology*

Introduction

In today's highly competitive and rapidly evolving global labor market, graduate unemployment continues to be a persistent challenge despite formal education. Many degree-holders struggle to secure meaningful work aligned with their qualifications, creating a disconnect between educational attainment and employment readiness. Jaskari (2025) emphasizes the importance of industry-academia collaboration in enhancing graduate competencies, noting that a lack of practical and transferable skills is a major factor contributing to employability issues. Similarly, Decker-Lange, et al. (2024) assert that while academic knowledge remains important, experiential learning and entrepreneurship education have a stronger impact on employability outcomes. Supporting these views, Jamuludin et al. (2022) highlight the growing issue of educational mismatch, where graduates are often overqualified or underqualified for their roles—wasting both human capital and economic potential.

The gap between what higher education provides and what the labor market demands reflects a growing concern in employability research. Although academic success is a key indicator of student achievement, evidence shows that it does not necessarily lead to employment. Graduates often encounter challenges such as limited hands-on experience, weak professional networks, and emotional strain from job competition. These difficulties are even more pronounced in developing countries, rural settings, and among those seeking work abroad. To address this complex issue, it is essential to examine both educational shortcomings and evolving workforce needs. Braun et al. (2024) point to outdated curricula and rapid technological advancements as key contributors to skills mismatches, especially in sectors requiring digital expertise and adaptability. Similarly, Tandika & Ndijuye (2022) found that many university students are unaware of the specific skills and qualities employers prioritize, leading to a misalignment between graduate capabilities and job market expectations. These findings highlight the urgency for institutions to strengthen career preparation programs and build more collaborative relationships with industry leaders.

The evolving employment environment significantly influences the job-seeking experiences of college graduates. As economies shift and labor market demands continue to change, many graduates encounter a clear mismatch between their academic qualifications and the competencies employers prioritize. Practical experience, soft skills, and adaptability have become essential for securing meaningful employment. Furthermore, intensified job competition often results in psychological stress and uncertainty, particularly among recent graduates navigating a saturated market. Recent insights emphasize that higher education institutions must proactively respond to these challenges by enhancing curricula, integrating skill development opportunities, and fostering closer alignment with



industry expectations to improve graduate employability outcomes (Christiansen & Even, 2024).

This concern is particularly evident among rural graduates. Arthur-Holmes, et al. (2022) found that in Ghana, university graduates often turn to artisanal and small-scale mining in rural areas due to a lack of formal employment opportunities. Their involvement in these informal sectors is not necessarily by choice, but a consequence of systemic underemployment, limited access to job information, and underdeveloped support infrastructure. This reflects how rural isolation and economic disparity constrain the career paths of educated youth. Likewise, Kang & Xiong (2021) examined how Chinese university graduates responded to rising unemployment brought about by the mass expansion of higher education by pursuing entrepreneurship. Their findings suggest that self-employment and launching startups have emerged as viable alternatives when conventional employment opportunities are limited or out of reach.

Studies also show that employability varies based on education tracks and cultural contexts. Ariansyah et al. (2024) compared vocational and general school graduates in Indonesia, finding that vocational graduates exhibit higher short-term employability, while general education graduates display greater resilience in economic crises. Pham et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of employability capitals—including social, cultural, and psychological assets—for international graduates navigating complex job markets. Furthermore, Llanos-Contreras et al. (2024) identified that students' perceptions of company type and size, such as family-owned firms, affect their willingness to apply for jobs, revealing the role of employer branding in recruitment.

The call for curriculum enhancement and stronger institutional responsibility is reinforced by Emmanuel & Olayinka (2024), who emphasize the importance of integrating relevant skills like digital literacy and collaboration into university programs. Jang & Lee (2025) further point out that graduates' personal beliefs and confidence significantly affect their job search behavior, particularly among those from the humanities. These findings illustrate how employability is influenced by both the content of educational programs and the psychological factors that shape graduates' approach to employment. The interaction between institutional training and individual mindset plays a central role in shaping job-seeking experiences.

Given these multidimensional challenges and insights, this study seeks to explore the lived experiences of college graduates as they navigate the job market after completing their academic journey. Specifically, it aims to understand the lived experiences of BSBA graduates of Initao College in their journey of finding employment after graduation, how they perceive the challenges and opportunities they encountered during their job search, and what coping strategies or support systems they rely on while seeking employment.

Methodology

Research Design

The researchers employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of Initao College BSBA alumni in their transition from graduation to job seeking. This design was selected to provide an in-depth

understanding of how participants make sense of their experiences during the job-seeking phase. Phenomenology focuses on the subjective meanings and common themes that emerge from individuals' first-hand accounts. Moustakas (1994) emphasized that phenomenological research seeks to describe the essence of human experiences by exploring participants' perspectives in a systematic and reflective manner, while the researcher brackets personal biases through the process of epoché.

Phenomenology offers a powerful approach for examining how individuals make sense of significant transitions. For example, a recent study explored the perceptions of first-generation college students in China regarding college success using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Through semi-structured interviews, the researchers uncovered five interrelated themes: academic achievement, personal development, personal well-being, personal fulfillment, and career success (Li, 2024). This study demonstrates the importance of phenomenology in capturing the lived experiences and subjective definitions of success among marginalized groups, providing nuanced insights that can inform institutional support and targeted interventions. In another study, O'Leary et al., (2023) used phenomenology to explore the first year of work for new doctors. They found that young doctors go through stages such as shock and coping, gaining confidence, facing stress and isolation, and finally reflecting on their growth. These studies show that phenomenology is valuable for revealing the emotional, social, and professional struggles people face during life changes, and it helps us better understand how to support them.

Research Participants

The participants of this study were 16 newly graduated BSBA students from Initao College, batch 2024–2025. They were purposefully selected based on their availability and willingness to share their experiences related to job seeking after graduation. These individuals were considered information-rich sources, able to provide valuable insights into the phenomenon under study.

Research Instrument

A semi-structured interview guide was developed to align with the research objectives. It included opening, core, and closing questions designed to explore the graduates' experiences and perceptions regarding their transition from college to employment. This flexible format encouraged participants to provide detailed, reflective, and personally meaningful responses.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through in-depth interviews with the 16 selected participants. Interviews were scheduled at the participants' convenience and conducted in settings that supported comfort and openness. With participants' consent, each session was recorded and later transcribed for analysis using phenomenological methods.

Data Analysis

The data gathered in this study were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step method, a structured and widely accepted approach in descriptive phenomenological research. This method was chosen to ensure a thorough and meaningful interpretation of the participants' lived experiences. The process began with familiarization, in which the researcher read and reread all interview



transcripts to gain a deep understanding of the graduates' narratives. The second step involved extracting significant statements, phrases, and sentences directly related to the participants' transition from graduation to job seeking.

In the third step, these statements were used to formulate meanings, carefully analyzing each one to determine what it revealed about the experience. Next, in step four, the researcher organized the formulated meanings into theme clusters, grouping similar ideas to identify shared patterns across participants. These themes were then integrated into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon in step five, presenting a detailed and comprehensive account of the job-seeking experiences of the BSBA graduates. In step six, the researcher derived the fundamental structure of the experience by synthesizing the key themes into a concise statement that captured its core meaning. Finally, in step seven, the findings were returned to the participants for validation through member checking, ensuring the interpretations accurately represented their perspectives.

Limitations of the Study

This study acknowledges several methodological limitations that may affect the generalizability and scope of its findings. First, the research was conducted exclusively with 16 BSBA graduates from Initao College, a single institution and academic program, limiting the transferability of the results to graduates from other colleges, universities, or academic disciplines. The purposive sampling method, while appropriate for phenomenological inquiry, may have introduced selection bias, as participants were chosen based on their availability and willingness to participate, potentially excluding the voices of graduates who had different or more challenging experiences but were hesitant to share them. Additionally, the study's focus on newly graduated students from batch 2024-2025 provides a snapshot of experiences during a specific time period and economic context, which may not reflect the job-seeking challenges faced by graduates in different economic climates or labor market conditions.

Furthermore, the reliance on semi-structured interviews as the sole data collection method, while suitable for capturing lived experiences, may have been influenced by participants' ability to articulate their experiences and their comfort level in sharing personal struggles during the interview process. The phenomenological approach, though valuable for understanding subjective experiences, inherently limits the study's ability to establish causal relationships or provide quantitative measures of the challenges identified. The geographic limitation of graduates from a specific region may also limit the applicability of the findings to job-seeking experiences across different geographic contexts with varying economic opportunities, cultural norms, and labor market dynamics. Finally, the study's timeframe may not have captured the long-term outcomes of participants' job-seeking efforts, as some may have eventually secured employment shortly after the interviews were conducted, potentially altering their overall perception of the transition experience.

Results

Table 1. Participant's Profile

Participant Number	Gender	Age	Civil Status	Father's Employment	Mother's Employment
Participant 1	Male	22	Single	Private Employee	Unemployed
Participant 2	Female	22	Single	Government Employee	Government Employee
Participant 3	Male	26	Married	Private Employee	Unemployed
Participant 4	Female	23	Single	Private Employee	Private Employee
Participant 5	Female	23	Single	Government Employee	Private Employee
Participant 6	Female	22	Single	Private Employee	Private Employee
Participant 7	Female	22	Single	Private Employee	Private Employee
Participant 8	Female	25	Married	Unemployed	Unemployed
Participant 9	Female	24	Single	Deceased	Unemployed
Participant 10	Female	23	Single	Unemployed	Unemployed
Participant 11	Male	23	Single	Government Employee	Unemployed
Participant 12	Female	22	Single	Private Employee	Private Employee
Participant 13	Female	27	Married	Unemployed	Private Employee
Participant 14	Male	26	Married	Unemployed	Unemployed
Participant 15	Female	21	Single	Private Employee	Private Employee
Participant 16	Female	23	Single	Private Employee	Private Employee

Note: All participants had prior internship experience.

The interview data were thoroughly analyzed to uncover the perspectives and experiences conveyed by the participants. Using thematic analysis, significant patterns and interpretations emerged. The results were then grouped into three central themes:

Theme 1: The Emotional Landscape of Transition

Graduates expressed a mix of excitement, anxiety, and pressure as they entered the job market for the first time. Their stories reflect the personal struggles and emotional weight of navigating this significant life change.



Participant 2 shared, *“Finding a job as a fresh graduate was quite hard, yet exciting. I really felt the pressure throughout the process.”* This shows the dual nature of the transition—while graduates are hopeful and motivated, the difficulty of securing employment can be highly stressful.

Participant 11 added, *“It was pressure for me, especially being the first degree holder in the family.”* This highlights how family expectations intensify the emotional burden, as being the first in the family to earn a degree comes with the responsibility to succeed and set an example.

Participant 14 explained, *“The process was longer than I hoped, requiring patience and persistence.”* Here, the graduate points out the gap between expectations and reality, where the job search often takes more time than anticipated, testing their endurance and determination.

Similarly, Participant 10 noted, *“The transition from school to the job market was more competitive than I anticipated.”* This reflects the surprise many graduates feel when confronted with a crowded job market, where their academic qualifications must compete with others' skills and experience.

Participant 7 stated, *“I was optimistic but anxious. It took months before I got my first interview.”* This captures the emotional rollercoaster—while holding on to hope, the waiting period and lack of immediate opportunities caused frustration and uncertainty.

Mueller et al. (2021) explored the complexity of job seekers' perceptions of their employment prospects, particularly during prolonged unemployment. Their study in the American Economic Review highlighted that job seekers often carry an optimistic bias, expecting to secure work faster than reality allows. This tendency, while initially motivating, often leads to frustration and psychological stress as the search extends beyond what was anticipated. Such findings resonate deeply with the experiences of the fresh graduates in the present study, who described the process as “longer than hoped” and “more competitive than anticipated.” The mismatch between expectations and actual opportunities can result in disillusionment and increased pressure, especially for first-generation degree holders who face additional familial expectations. Mueller et al. emphasized that this heterogeneity in perceptions and duration dependence can influence how persistently or strategically individuals continue their job search, mirroring the patience and persistence described by the participants.

Similarly, Zhang et al. (2024) investigated the transition shock experienced by newly graduated nurses entering the workforce, using a qualitative phenomenological approach. Their findings identified multiple dimensions of stress, including psychological anxiety, physical fatigue, and the demand for workplace adaptation, all of which collectively contributed to feelings of uncertainty and pressure. Although their research focused on healthcare professionals, the essence of “transition shock” is broadly applicable to graduates from other fields, including business and management. Participants in the present study echoed similar sentiments, stating that they felt “optimistic but anxious” and under “pressure throughout the process.” This reinforces Zhang et al.'s assertion that the early transition from school to professional environments is rarely smooth and requires both emotional resilience and external support systems. By highlighting

these struggles, the study underscores that anxiety and delayed job-market progress are not isolated phenomena but part of a broader, recognized pattern in graduate transitions across industries.

Building on this, Zhao et al. (2024) introduced the lens of self-depletion theory to explain the psychological toll of employment transition. Their research revealed that fresh graduates often experience depletion of mental and emotional resources, which can manifest in impulsive decision-making, burnout, and lowered self-efficacy during the job search process. This aligns with participant accounts of being “optimistic but anxious” and feeling immense pressure in their early applications. The theory suggests that when individuals expend too much psychological energy coping with uncertainty, rejection, and delays, they enter a cycle of reduced motivation and impaired decision-making. For instance, graduates may rush into unsuitable roles out of desperation or remain inactive due to exhaustion. Zhao et al.’s findings highlight the critical role of persistence, patience, and psychological well-being in navigating the transition phase effectively, aligning with the narratives of graduates who emphasized the long, competitive, and pressure-filled process of securing their first job.

Theme 2: Barriers and Pathways in the Job Search

This theme captures both the obstacles graduates encountered and the actions they took to overcome them. Participants cited lack of experience, financial limitations, geographic distance from job centers, scams, and even political favoritism as major challenges in securing employment.

Participant 2 noted, *“Most job opportunities asked for at least 2 years of experience.”* This reflects the common frustration of fresh graduates caught in the paradox of needing experience to gain employment, yet needing employment to gain experience. The mismatch between employers’ requirements and graduates’ actual qualifications highlights a structural barrier in the labor market.

In another account, the same participant shared, *“It was hard because some jobs required political connections to get in.”* This statement points to issues of inequity and nepotism, where social networks or political ties sometimes overshadow merit. Such practices can discourage deserving candidates and perpetuate systemic unfairness in the hiring process.

Participant 6 explained, *“The main challenge was that most of the opportunities were far from my hometown.”* Geographic barriers restrict access to employment, particularly for graduates from rural or provincial areas. While cities often provide more opportunities, relocating may not always be feasible due to cost or personal responsibilities.

Financial struggles were also evident, as Participant 11 stated, *“I couldn’t process some of the documents because I didn’t have money.”* This shows how hidden costs of job searching—such as fees for clearances, transportation, and application requirements—become a significant burden for fresh graduates who rely on limited family support.

Participant 4 expressed another obstacle: *“Scammers were offering fake jobs disguised as work-from-home opportunities.”* This highlights the vulnerability of



young job seekers in the digital era, where fraudulent recruitment schemes prey on their desperation and lack of experience. Such scams not only waste time and resources but also undermine trust in the job search process.

Despite these barriers, graduates also demonstrated resilience. As Participant 14 shared, *"I emphasized my skills gained during OJT to strengthen my applications."* This illustrates how practical experience, such as internships and on-the-job training, gives graduates a competitive edge, enabling them to present themselves as capable despite limited work history.

The challenges participants face in their job searches resonate with Mueller et al.'s (2021) description of the paradox of labor market entry, in which graduates are often required to demonstrate prior work experience for entry-level positions, despite being at the very beginning of their careers. This paradox creates a cycle of disadvantage, because job seekers cannot easily access opportunities without experience, yet they cannot gain experience without first being given the chance. Such an imbalance between employer expectations and graduate qualifications prolongs the transition from school to work and can demotivate new entrants.

In the context of this study, Participant 2's statement about the "at least 2 years of experience" requirement exemplifies how this structural condition is not an isolated frustration but a reflection of a widely acknowledged mismatch between higher education outcomes and labor market demands. This disconnect further perpetuates what is termed "credentialism," in which educational qualifications are increasingly devalued while experiential requirements continue to escalate. The resulting employment gap not only affects individual career trajectories but also represents a systemic inefficiency in the utilization of human capital, as educated individuals remain underemployed or unemployed despite possessing relevant academic credentials. Moreover, this phenomenon contributes to the broader issue of skills misalignment, where the theoretical knowledge acquired in academic settings fails to translate into immediate workplace readiness, leaving graduates in a precarious position of needing to bridge this gap through alternative means such as internships, volunteer work, or additional training programs.

Geographic and financial constraints also surfaced prominently in participants' accounts, particularly when Participant 6 mentioned the challenge of opportunities being "far from my hometown," and Participant 11 cited financial struggles in processing job documents. This aligns with the findings of Zhang et al. (2025), who identified what they termed "transition shocks" in the experiences of newly graduated professionals. Their study emphasized that hidden costs, such as relocation expenses, application fees, and bureaucratic processing requirements, are not only financial burdens but also psychological stressors that exacerbate the difficulties of entering the workforce. These barriers create unequal opportunities between graduates from resource-rich families and those from modest backgrounds, thereby widening the gap in employment readiness and access. Thus, the testimonies of participants reflect a deeper systemic issue wherein geography and financial capacity shape career trajectories in ways that extend

The influence of nepotism, favoritism, and even fraudulent recruitment practices further complicates the employment landscape for graduates. Bolton (2022) argued that young job seekers often experience "reality shock" when they transition into the workforce, as their expectations of fair, merit-based hiring processes clash with the realities of political favoritism, unequal networks, and the

rise of online job scams. Such inequities diminish graduates' trust in institutions and can lead to disillusionment about their career prospects, which parallels Participant 2's statement about the necessity of political connections for employment and Participant 4's experience with fraudulent job offers masquerading as work-from-home opportunities. However, many young workers eventually adapt by reframing their strategies, emphasizing transferable skills, and relying on practical training experiences to gain credibility in the labor market. This adaptive response suggests that while structural barriers persist, graduates demonstrate resilience by leveraging practical skills, networking, and strategic approaches to navigate the job market and improve their chances of securing meaningful employment.

Theme 3: Motivation Through Support, Faith, and Purpose

This theme highlights how graduates navigated the uncertainties of entering the workforce, emphasizing the roles of personal resilience, family support, peer networks, and adaptive strategies. While the job search process was filled with obstacles, participants demonstrated that their ability to cope was strongly tied to both internal resourcefulness and external support systems.

Participant 7 explained, *"I leaned on my family during the hardest part of looking for work. They supported me financially and emotionally."* This illustrates the crucial role of family as a stabilizing force during transitional periods, where encouragement and material assistance enable graduates to persist despite repeated rejections. Such reliance resonates with existing studies on Filipino collectivist culture, which stresses the centrality of familial ties in navigating socioeconomic challenges.

Similarly, peers and mentors also provided a sense of solidarity. Participant 10 shared, *"My classmates and I would share job postings and practice interviews."* This reveals how collective efforts among graduates created informal support networks that alleviated feelings of isolation and fostered confidence. By pooling resources and experiences, they not only expanded their opportunities but also strengthened their readiness to face competitive hiring processes.

Faith and personal belief systems were also significant coping mechanisms. As Participant 12 expressed, *"I prayed a lot whenever I felt like giving up."* Such statements demonstrate how spiritual grounding offers emotional resilience, functioning as both a source of comfort and motivation. In this sense, faith acts as an intangible yet powerful resource that sustains graduates during prolonged or discouraging job searches.

Practical coping strategies further emerged as a theme. Participant 14 noted, *"I took short online courses to add to my skills while waiting for opportunities."* This reflects an adaptive mindset where graduates actively bridged the gap between their academic preparation and the demands of employers. By investing in continuous learning, they positioned themselves as more competitive, transforming periods of uncertainty into opportunities for growth.

In a recent study, Diao and Yao (2025) emphasized that family support is not merely an emotional anchor but also a significant predictor of career adaptability, because it builds resilience and enhances decision-making confidence in times of difficulty. Their findings suggest that when graduates feel supported by their families, they are more willing to persist in job applications and are better equipped

to cope with rejection or setbacks. This directly resonates with Participant 12, who found that the unwavering encouragement of their family was enough to sustain their determination to move forward regardless of the challenges encountered.

The role of faith and spirituality in sustaining perseverance cannot be overstated. Jocson & Garcia (2021) highlighted that religious faith functions as a coping mechanism that allows individuals to endure difficulties with a sense of purpose and hope, especially in contexts where family and spirituality are deeply intertwined. Their research underscores that faith does not only provide comfort but also creates a framework for interpreting struggles as meaningful experiences rather than mere obstacles. This clearly parallels Participant 2's testimony, who explicitly recognized that faith combined with familial love became the central source of motivation that allowed them to push through times of discouragement.

Equally important is the motivational drive stemming from personal goals and aspirations. Affum-Osei and Chan (2024) stressed that intrinsic goal orientation—such as the desire to grow, learn, or fulfill deeply personal objectives—is strongly associated with sustained persistence, even when external circumstances are unfavorable. Their study shows that individuals who anchor their job search to intrinsic values are more likely to endure hardships and achieve better employment outcomes. This provides a scholarly backdrop to Participant 3's and Participant 1's reflections, where the commitment to repay parental sacrifices and the reminder of why their degree was pursued initially served as daily reminders to remain steadfast in their journey.

Furthermore, external pressures or negative social expectations can sometimes be reframed as motivational energy. For example, Fong et al. (2021) found that receiving negative feedback in one context—rather than suppressing motivation—increased participants' intrinsic motivation to excel in subsequent, competence-sustaining tasks. Their study suggests that setbacks or criticisms do not always hinder performance; instead, they can trigger a psychological process of competence restoration, whereby individuals become more driven to prove themselves in new, rewarding ways. This dynamic is strikingly evident in Participant 9's response: despite discouraging comments from neighbors, they harnessed those remarks as fuel to reinforce their resolve and continue striving toward success.

Table 2. *Results Summary Table*

Main Theme	Sub-themes	Significant Statements	General description of the Theme
1. The Emotional Landscape of Transition	Mixed emotions: excitement, pressure, and uncertainty Expectations vs. reality	<i>"Finding a job as a fresh graduate was quite hard, yet exciting. I felt the pressure throughout the process." (P2)</i>	Graduates shared that their job-seeking journey after college involved emotional highs and lows. While many felt hopeful and excited, others

	Variation based on opportunities and support	<p><i>"The experience is smooth because of the job fair." (P3)</i></p> <p><i>"Many opportunities were located far from my city, which added stress." (P4)</i></p> <p><i>"It was really pressure for me especially being the first degree holder of the family." (P11)</i></p> <p><i>"My job search was a rollercoaster." (P14)</i></p> <p><i>"The process was more competitive and time-consuming than I expected." (P7)</i></p> <p><i>"I was eager to start my career... but I quickly realized it wasn't as straightforward as I had hoped." (P15)</i></p> <p><i>"The transition from academia to the professional world proved more competitive than anticipated." (P10)</i></p> <p><i>"Finding a job after graduating... is pressure and challenging." (P12)</i></p>	experienced pressure, uncertainty, or exhaustion depending on personal, financial, and other factors.
2. Barriers and Pathways in the Job Search	Lack of work experience Financial constraints Location and	<p><i>"Most job opportunities ask for at least 2 years of experience." (P2)</i></p> <p><i>"It was hard because some jobs required political</i></p>	Graduates encountered barriers like limited work experience, tight budgets, and distant job locations.



	<p>accessibility issues</p> <p>Strategic approaches: resume building, internships, networking</p>	<p><i>connections to get in.</i> (P12)</p> <p><i>"The main challenge... most of them were far from my hometown."</i> (P6)</p> <p><i>"I couldn't process some of the documents because of having no money."</i> (P11)</p> <p><i>"There were scammers offering fake jobs."</i> (P4)</p> <p><i>"I emphasized my skills gained during OJT."</i> (P14)</p> <p><i>"I applied to multiple job openings and followed up with employers."</i> (P9)</p> <p><i>"I submitted so many resumes... but no company has called."</i> (P13)</p> <p><i>"I emphasized my skills gained during OJT."</i> (P14)</p> <p><i>"I refined my resume and interview skills."</i> (P10)</p> <p><i>"I highlighted my coursework, projects, and internships."</i> (P5, P8)</p> <p><i>"Job fair at Initao College helped me land a role."</i> (P16)</p>	<p>Despite these, they showed resilience through resume customization, leveraging school-based job fairs, and strategic applications. A few also faced scam-related job offers.</p>
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<p>3. Motivation Through Support, Faith, and Purpose</p>	<p>Family and peer support Faith and belief in timing Self-motivation, positivity, and life goals</p>	<p><i>“My family and friends encouraged me to keep pushing forward.” (P1)</i> <i>“My faith and my family motivate me to keep going.” (P2)</i> <i>“My family helps me to keep going despite the challenges.” (P12)</i> <i>“I want to repay all their sacrifices.” (P3)</i> <i>“I won’t stop looking for work... I’ll stand strong.” (P4)</i> <i>“Everything happens in its own time.” (P6)</i> <i>“Support from former classmates... we shared job leads.” (P7)</i> <i>“Negative comments from neighbors actually fueled my motivation.” (P9)</i> <i>“Self-belief and long-term aspirations helped me.” (P10)</i> <i>“I told myself, ‘I can do this.’” (P12)</i> <i>“My family always reminded me not to lose hope.” (P13)</i></p>	<p>To endure the difficulties of job searching, graduates leaned on strong emotional and spiritual support systems. Faith, self-belief, family encouragement, and a focus on long-term career goals gave them the strength to persist. Many used optimism, self-care, and peer support to stay motivated despite setbacks.</p>
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		<p><i>"Self-care... helped me to persevere through difficult times." (P14)</i></p> <p><i>"Focusing on my career goals and believing in my abilities." (P16)</i></p>	
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Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a multifaceted picture of the job-seeking experiences of BSBA graduates from Initao College. Graduates expressed a mixture of anticipation, anxiety, and pressure as they transitioned from school to the labor market. This emotional tension was especially intense among first-generation degree holders, who bore the weight of family expectations. These emotions reflect the broader phenomenon of "graduate reality shock" reported in various employment studies, emphasizing the gap between academic preparation and market realities.

Barriers such as the lack of work experience, financial constraints, geographic distance from job centers, and exposure to employment scams significantly hindered participants' ability to secure early employment. These challenges highlight structural issues within the job market, particularly for rural graduates who often lack access to resources available in urban centers. Despite this, many participants demonstrated agency by tailoring their resumes, leveraging internships or on-the-job training experiences, and proactively seeking job opportunities through networks and referrals.

Family support and personal motivation emerged as strong protective factors. Many graduates cited the encouragement of family members, their spiritual beliefs, and a desire to repay their parents' sacrifices as primary motivators for perseverance. These findings resonate with the culturally rooted Filipino values of *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) and *pakikipagkapwa* (shared humanity). Overall, the graduates' coping strategies—anchored in emotional, spiritual, and social support—provided resilience in the face of repeated challenges. This suggests that employability should not be viewed solely through the lens of skills, but also through the context of social capital, psychological well-being, and community ties.

This study concludes that the lived experiences of BSBA graduates during their job search are shaped by both internal and external dynamics. Internally, graduates grappled with emotional pressure, identity transitions, and the uncertainty of career outcomes. Externally, they encountered a job market that was often unreceptive to fresh graduates, primarily due to the experience requirement, financial burdens, and inaccessible job locations.

Despite these significant challenges, graduates displayed resilience by adopting practical strategies such as enhancing their application materials, participating in job fairs, and maintaining a positive outlook. Their persistence was largely fueled by social support systems, particularly families and friends, which served as a

consistent source of encouragement and guidance throughout the job-seeking journey.

This study recommends that Initao College and similar institutions may enhance their pre-graduation programs by integrating career readiness components such as resume-building workshops, job interview simulations, and targeted job fairs for rural jobseekers. Emotional readiness may also be addressed through seminars that cover stress management, resilience, and purpose-driven goal setting to better prepare students for the uncertainties of the job market.

Furthermore, the government, through relevant agencies like the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), is urged to develop programs that provide incentives for companies to hire fresh graduates and eliminate the experience barrier for entry-level positions. Support for jobseekers in rural areas may also include transportation assistance and digital job access platforms to bridge geographic gaps. Higher education institutions may mobilize alumni networks and local stakeholders as mentors, helping new graduates build connections and increase their visibility in the employment landscape. Faith-based and values-based support structures may also be integrated into career guidance programs to reinforce graduates' intrinsic motivation. Moreover, this study recommends sustained collaboration between schools, government, and communities to build a more inclusive, supportive ecosystem for graduate employment.

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Conflict of Interest

There were no conflicts of interest associated with the conduct of this study. The researchers affirm that the study was carried out independently and without any financial, personal, or professional interests that could have influenced the outcomes.

Ethical Statement

All participants were fully informed about the purpose and process of the study and voluntarily provided their consent before taking part. The Initao College Research Office approved the research protocol, and the study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the 1975 Declaration of Helsinki.