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GRADUATE TRACER STUDY OF THE APAYAO STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (ASAP) GRANTEES

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Abstract

This correspondence article examines the outcomes of the Apayao Student Assistance Program (ASAP) through a graduate tracer study of beneficiaries from 2019 to 2024. Anchored in human capital and career development perspectives, the study evaluates the program's contribution to academic success and early career trajectories while reflecting on findings from prior tracer studies. A mixed-methods design was employed, combining survey data from 45 graduates and semi-structured interviews. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were utilized to interpret quantitative and qualitative data. Findings indicate that ASAP has a very high impact on academic success, particularly in reducing financial burden, improving academic focus, and increasing motivation to complete studies. Its impact on career development is moderate, contributing to workplace readiness, confidence, and career motivation. Despite high employment rates, graduates reported challenges such as limited job opportunities, lack of professional experience, and job mismatch. The study highlights the need to strengthen employment linkage mechanisms and career support services. Overall, ASAP demonstrates strong potential as a human capital investment strategy, though its long-term effectiveness depends on integrating career development interventions alongside financial assistance.

Keywords: *Graduate tracer study; student financial assistance; human capital development; career development; mixed-methods; Apayao Province, Philippines*

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Introduction

Education is a key tool for personal growth and national development. Governments and institutions around the world recognize the importance of making education accessible, especially for disadvantaged groups so many countries have established student assistance programs to help students overcome financial and social barriers, enabling them to pursue higher education and improve their career opportunities.

Graduate tracer studies have become important mechanisms in evaluating the effectiveness of scholarship and educational assistance programs. These studies provide information regarding the employability, career progression, and professional experiences of graduates after completing their education. Through tracer studies, institutions and policymakers can assess whether educational support programs contribute positively to workforce participation, socio-economic mobility, and human capital development.

In the United States, programs like the Pell Grant and TRIO helped low-income students by offering financial aid and support services, which enhanced their academic performance and post-graduation success [1]. In Europe, Erasmus+ provided financial aid and promoted mobility and intercultural learning, which helped students develop professionally [2]. In Asia, countries such as Japan, South Korea, and Singapore offer scholarships and financial assistance to students from lower-income backgrounds, giving them the skills needed for the workforce [3].

The Philippines has also implemented similar programs to address educational inequality, especially in rural areas. In Apayao, education is especially important for youth facing socio-economic challenges, particularly those from marginalized or low-income families. To support these students, the Provincial Government of Apayao launched the Apayao Student Assistance Program (ASAP) under Apayao Socio-Economic Efforts Necessary for Growth (ASENG) framework [4]. ASAP was designed to financially support students at different levels of tertiary education, including those preparing for board examinations. While ASAP's primary aim is to assist every yApayao family in coping with financial burdens of attaining education and provide motivation to the future workforce of the province, geared towards the holistic transformation of Apayao, its broader impact on the career development and professional growth of its beneficiaries remains largely unexplored. Investigating how the program affects graduates' job opportunities, career progression, and professional development will provide valuable insights into its effectiveness and help guide future improvements.

Additionally, following the career paths of ASAP graduates can highlight the program's role in developing human capital and promoting sustainable development in



Apayao, contributing to the expanding body of research on educational assistance and workforce development in rural and underserved areas.

Statement of the Problem

The primary objective of this study was to conduct a Graduate Tracer Study of the Apayao Student Assistance Program (ASAP) Grantees from 2019 to 2024.

Specifically, it aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What is the profile of ASAP graduates in terms of age, birth order, sex, civil status, year graduated, degree earned and employment status?
2. What is the perceived impact of the program on their academic success and career development?
3. What challenges did ASAP graduates face during their transition from education to employment?
4. What strategies may be recommended to address the challenges experienced by the ASAP grantees?

METHODOLOGY

A mixed-methods approach was used. Data were collected from 45 graduates through a questionnaire and interviews. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were applied. Ethical standards such as informed consent and confidentiality were observed.

RESEARCH PARADIGM

The study used the Input-Process-Output model as its research paradigm. It provided a clearer representation of how the study's components interact from data collection to the intended outcome.

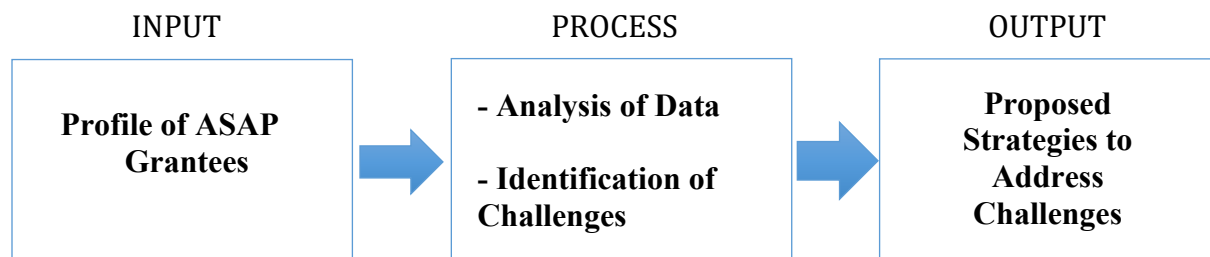


Figure 1: Research Paradigm



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research methods and procedures utilized in conducting the study. It includes the research design, locale of the study, respondents of the study, research instrument, data gathering procedure, statistical treatment, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods to provide a comprehensive analysis of ASAP graduates' career pathways. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of both the statistical outcomes and the personal experiences of the graduates.

- Quantitative: Survey-based data collection from ASAP graduates to gather information on career status, income levels, job satisfaction, and career progression.
- Qualitative: In-depth interviews with a sample of ASAP graduates to explore how the program influenced their career decisions, challenges they faced, and their overall professional growth.

Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in the Apayao province in the Philippines, where ASAP has been implemented. Apayao is a rural province characterized by limited access to educational resources and professional opportunities, making it a significant site for studying the impact of educational assistance programs on career development.

Data collection was carried out in key municipalities within Apayao, focusing on areas where ASAP has had the most significant impact. This includes communities where ASAP graduates are concentrated, such as those from local universities, technical institutes, or vocational schools supported by the program.

The locale is significant because it provides context for understanding the unique challenges and opportunities faced by ASAP undergraduates, particularly in rural areas with limited infrastructure and economic opportunities.

Respondents of the Study



The respondents for this study were graduates of the Apayao Student Assistance Program (ASAP) who have completed the program at various points in the past and have moved on to pursue careers or further education. These participants were selected based on their graduation from ASAP and current professional status, with a focus on those employed or actively developing their careers. A mix of respondents from different career fields, socio-economic backgrounds, and geographic locations were included to ensure diversity in the data. The study also considered graduates from various years to understand both short- and long-term career outcomes. Ethical guidelines, including confidentiality and informed consent, were strictly followed throughout the research process.

The target number of respondents was 100 ASAP graduate-beneficiaries. However, only 45 completed questionnaires were retrieved and considered valid for analysis, resulting in a response rate of 45%. The study therefore interpreted the findings based on the actual number of valid responses.

Data Gathering Procedure

To collect the needed information for this study, the researcher began by getting permission from the registrar of Apayao State College and other schools. A list of graduates was requested to help identify the graduates who will take part in the research. Two tools were used to gather data: a questionnaire and interview guide.

The target number of respondents was 100 ASAP graduate-beneficiaries. However, only 45 completed questionnaires were retrieved and considered valid for analysis, resulting in a response rate of 45%. The study therefore interpreted the findings based on the actual number of valid responses. The respondents were contacted through social media. There was a privacy and confidentiality notice in the google form, if they proceeded, it means they agreed to be part of the study. The questionnaire through google form was given online using Messenger. Reminders were sent to encourage participants but there were still who opted not to participate. Aside from the survey, 5 participants were selected for interview. The interview was done in person and through online video calls.

The survey was distributed online through platforms such as social media, email, and online forums to reach ASAP graduates efficiently. Interviews were conducted via video calls and in-person, depending on the availability and preference of the participants. This dual approach ensures both breadth and depth in data collection.

Once the data were collected, it was checked for completeness. The answers from the questionnaire were analyzed using simple statistics in programs like Excel or SPSS. The interview results were grouped and studied based on common themes. Throughout the



study, the privacy and confidentiality of all respondents were protected. All information collected were only used for academic purposes and were kept secured.

Research Instruments

The primary instruments for data collection in this study are a semi-structured interview guide and a standardized questionnaire. These tools are designed to capture both qualitative and quantitative data relevant to the career outcomes and experiences of ASAP beneficiaries.

Interview Guide

The interviews were semi-structured, allowing participants to provide detailed, open-ended responses while focusing on key themes such as:

- “How did ASAP help you in your career development?”
- “How has ASAP influenced your job satisfaction and growth?”

These questions aim to explore the graduates' personal experiences and perceptions of the program's impact on their professional journey.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire will collect structured data on Personal and Academic Profile, Employment Profile, Transition to Employment, Perceived academic impact, Perceived Career impact and Challenges and recommendations. This instrument was adapted from the Graduate Tracer Study conducted by Ocampo et al. (2020), titled Graduate tracer study of the Master of Arts in Education and Master in Public Administration, Apayao State College - Luna Campus, 2016–2020 [8], ensuring contextual relevance and methodological consistency.

Statistical Analysis

The data gathered from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools appropriate to the objectives of the study. Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques were employed.

For the quantitative data, the following statistical tools were used:

1. Frequency Count



Frequency count was used to determine the number of responses for each category. It was utilized in describing the profile of the respondents in terms of age, birth order, sex, civil status, year graduated, degree earned, employment status, income distribution, time to first job, type of employer, place of work, and job relevance to degree.

It was also used to identify the respondents' perceived impact of the Apayao Student Assistance Program (ASAP) on academic success and career development, the challenges encountered during the transition from education to employment, and the recommended strategies for program improvement.

2. Percentage

Percentage was used to describe and compare the proportion of respondents in each category.

The formula used was:

$$\text{Percentage} = \frac{f}{N} \times 100$$

Where:

f = frequency of responses

N = total number of respondents

This statistical tool helped explain the distribution of respondents according to their profile and employment-related characteristics.

3. Ranking

Ranking was used to determine the order or level of importance of the responses based on their frequency.

The indicator with the highest frequency was assigned Rank 1, followed by the next highest frequency, and so on. This statistical tool was used in analyzing the perceived impact of ASAP on academic success, the perceived impact of ASAP on career development, the challenges encountered by graduates, and the recommended strategies for program improvement.

4. Thematic Analysis



Qualitative responses gathered from the semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions were analyzed using thematic analysis. Responses were grouped according to common themes and recurring ideas related to the graduates' experiences, challenges, and suggestions regarding the ASAP program.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents the findings of the study on the Graduate Tracer Study of the Apayao Student Assistance Program (ASAP) grantees from 2019 to 2024. The discussion is organized according to the specific research questions of the study, beginning with the profile of the respondents, followed by their perceived impact of the ASAP program on academic success and career development, the challenges they encountered during their transition from education to employment, and the recommended strategies for program improvement. Quantitative data are presented using frequency counts, percentages, and ranking, while qualitative responses from interviews are used to provide deeper insights into the experiences of the graduates. The presentation of results is supported by relevant literature to contextualize and interpret the findings.

Table 1. Profile of Respondents

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage
20–24 years old	14	31.11
25–29 years old	26	57.78
30 years old and above	5	11.11
Total	45	100.00
Birth Order	Frequency	Percentage
First Born	18	40.00
Middle Child	15	33.33
Youngest	12	26.67
Total	45	100.00
Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Female	31	68.89
Male	14	31.11
Total	45	100.00
Civil Status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	36	80.00
Married	9	20.00
Total	45	100.00
Year Graduated	Frequency	Percentage



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2019	2	4.44
2020	4	8.89
2021	2	4.44
2022	12	26.67
2023	13	28.89
2024	12	26.67
Total	45	100.00
Degree Earned by Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
ABM (Accountancy, Business and Management)	15	33.33
Education	8	17.78
Allied Health	3	6.67
AANR (Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources)	8	17.78
Other Courses	11	24.44
Total	45	100.00
Employment Status	Frequency	Percentage
Employed	37	82.22
Unemployed	5	11.11
Self-employed	3	6.67
Total	45	100.00
Income Distribution	Frequency	Percentage
Below ₱10,000	10	25.00
₱10,001–₱20,000	18	45.00
₱20,001–₱30,000	6	15.00
Above ₱30,000	6	15.00
Total	40	100.00
Time to First Job		
Less than 1 year	30	66.67
1 year to 2 years	6	13.33
More than 2 years	4	8.89
Not yet employed	5	11.11
Type of Employer		
Government	26	57.78
Private	12	26.67
Place of Work		
Within Apayao	31	68.89
Outside Apayao	9	20.00



Job Related to Degree		
Yes	25	55.56
No	15	33.33

The results show that the respondents generally perceived the ASAP program graduates' profile as favorable in terms of employability and career outcomes. Most respondents are young adults aged 25–29 (57.78%), female (68.89%), and single (80.00%), indicating that beneficiaries are in the early stages of their professional development. This is consistent with the Pell Institute (2023) and Erasmus+ (2023), which highlight that financial assistance programs are largely accessed by young individuals transitioning from education to employment.

In terms of educational background, respondents came from diverse degree programs, with ABM graduates comprising the largest group (33.33%). The high employment rate (82.22%) suggests that ASAP contributes positively to graduate employability, supporting Kim and Lee (2019) and Becker's (1993) human capital theory, which emphasize that investment in education improves labor market outcomes. Most graduates were able to secure their first job within one year (66.67%), indicating a relatively smooth school-to-work transition.

However, the presence of a degree-job mismatch (33.33%) shows that not all graduates are working in aligned fields, which is consistent with Lent et al. (1994), who explain that career outcomes are also influenced by labor market conditions and contextual factors. Income is mostly concentrated between ₱10,001–₱20,000 (45.00%), reflecting entry-level earnings typical among recent graduates.

Finally, the dominance of government employment (57.78%) and local employment within Apayao (68.89%) aligns with Ocampo et al. (2020), suggesting strong local absorption of scholarship beneficiaries. Overall, the findings indicate that ASAP has a positive impact on employability and early career development, consistent with both international and local literature on student financial assistance programs.

Table 2. Perceived Impact of ASAP on Academic Success and Career Development

Indicators	Frequency	Rank
A. Academic Success		
Reduced financial burden	42	1
Improved ability to complete degree	40	2
Increased motivation to finish studies	40	2
Improved academic focus	40	2



Reduced likelihood of dropping out	38	3
B. Career Development		
Increased confidence in job applications	20	1
Enhanced professional network	20	1
Increased access to employment opportunities	19	2
Improved workplace readiness	19	2
Increased motivation to pursue career goals	17	3
Encouraged pursuit of further education or professional development	16	4
Contributed to career advancement	16	4

The results show that the scholarship program greatly helped the students in terms of academic success and career development. Under academic success, “Reduced financial burden” got the highest frequency of 42 and ranked 1st. This means that the scholarship helped students lessen their financial problems in school. Meanwhile, “Improved ability to complete degree,” “Increased motivation to finish studies,” and “Improved academic focus” all got a frequency of 40 and ranked 2nd. These findings show that the scholarship encouraged students to stay motivated, focused, and determined to finish their studies. On the other hand, “Reduced likelihood of dropping out” got the lowest frequency of 38 and ranked 3rd. Although it ranked lowest, the result still shows that the scholarship helped students continue their education and avoid stopping their studies.

In terms of career development, “Increased confidence in job applications” and “Enhanced professional network” both got the highest frequency of 20 and ranked 1st. This means that the scholarship helped students become more confident in applying for jobs and building connections with other people. “Increased access to employment opportunities” and “Improved workplace readiness” followed with a frequency of 19 and ranked 2nd, showing that the scholarship also helped prepare students for future work. Meanwhile, “Increased motivation to pursue career goals” got a frequency of 17 and ranked 3rd. Lastly, “Encouraged pursuit of further education or professional development” and “Contributed to career advancement” both got the lowest frequency of 16 and ranked 4th. Even so, these findings still show that the scholarship positively influenced students’ future goals and professional growth.

The findings suggest that scholarship programs play an important role in helping students succeed in school and prepare for their future careers. According to the Pell Institute, financial assistance programs help reduce students’ financial difficulties, allowing them to focus more on their studies and complete their education [1]. Similarly, the European Commission explained that financial aid provides students with more educational and career opportunities. In addition, Gary S. Becker stated that education is an investment



that helps improve a person's future career opportunities and productivity. Also, Robert W. Lent and his colleagues explained that support systems such as scholarships help increase students' confidence, motivation, and career goals.

The findings imply that schools and institutions should continue providing scholarship programs and strengthen support services for students. They may also offer career-related activities such as job preparation seminars, internships, and professional development programs to help students become more prepared for future employment and career advancement.

Table 3. Challenges Encountered by the ASAP Grantees during their Transition from Education to Employment

Challenges	Frequency	Rank
Lack of job opportunities	23	1
Job not related to degree / job mismatch	16	3
Lack of professional experience	22	2
Geographic limitations	8	5
Financial difficulties	14	4

The results reveal that ASAP grantees encountered several challenges during their transition from education to employment, with lack of job opportunities ranking as the most serious issue ($f = 23$, Rank 1). This suggests that despite completing their degrees, many graduates still face limited availability of suitable positions in the labor market. This finding is consistent with Lent et al. (1994), who emphasize that career outcomes are strongly influenced by external environmental conditions such as labor demand and opportunity structures.

The second most common challenge is lack of professional experience ($f = 22$, Rank 2), indicating that graduates often struggle to meet employer expectations that require prior work exposure. This reflects the common gap between academic preparation and workplace requirements, as also noted in human capital theory (Becker, 1993), where education alone may not fully substitute for practical experience.

Meanwhile, job mismatch or employment not related to degree ranks third ($f = 16$, Rank 3), showing that some graduates accept available jobs even if these are not aligned with their field of study. This supports findings in tracer studies such as Ocampo et al.



(2020), which highlight that underemployment and job mismatch are common among graduates in provincial settings due to limited specialized opportunities.

Other challenges include financial difficulties ($f = 14$, Rank 4), which may affect job search mobility, training, and transition costs, and geographic limitations ($f = 8$, Rank 5), suggesting that some graduates face restricted access to employment opportunities outside their locality.

The results imply that while ASAP supports educational attainment, graduates still face structural labor market barriers during transition to employment. These findings highlight the need for stronger employment linkage programs, internship opportunities, and career placement support to bridge the gap between education and work.

Table 4. Recommended Program Improvements

Challenges	Recommended Strategies
Lack of job opportunities	Strengthen job placement programs
Lack of professional experience	Provide internships and trainings
Job mismatch	Enhance career guidance and industry alignment programs
Financial difficulties	Expand financial assistance and livelihood support programs
Geographic limitations	Build partnerships with institutions and employers outside Apayao

The results present the respondents' recommended program improvements aimed at addressing the challenges encountered during the transition from education to employment. These recommendations highlight the need to strengthen not only financial assistance but also employment facilitation and career development support within the ASAP program.

For the most critical issue, lack of job opportunities, respondents recommended strengthening job placement programs. This implies the need for more active linkage between graduates and potential employers to improve employment absorption. This aligns with Lent et al. (1994), who emphasize that career outcomes are highly influenced by access to opportunities within the labor market.

To address lack of professional experience, respondents suggested providing internships and trainings. This reflects the importance of bridging academic learning with



practical workplace exposure, consistent with Becker's (1993) human capital theory, which highlights the value of skill development beyond formal education.

For job mismatch, respondents recommended enhancing career guidance and strengthening industry alignment programs. This suggests the need for better career planning support to ensure graduates pursue jobs aligned with their academic preparation, consistent with findings in tracer studies such as Ocampo et al. (2020).

In terms of financial difficulties, expanding financial assistance and livelihood support programs was recommended, indicating that continued economic support is still necessary during the transition phase from schooling to employment. Lastly, for geographic limitations, respondents emphasized building partnerships with institutions and employers outside Apayao, suggesting the need to widen employment networks beyond local opportunities.

Hence, the findings imply that program improvements should focus on strengthening employment linkages, practical training, career guidance, and expanded partnerships. This supports the idea that while ASAP is effective in supporting education, enhancing its career development component is essential to improve graduate employability outcomes.

Summary of Findings

This study aimed to determine the impact of the Apayao Student Assistance Program (ASAP) on the academic success and career development of its graduate-grantees from 2019 to 2024. Specifically, it sought to identify the profile of the respondents, determine the perceived impact of ASAP on academic success and career development, identify the challenges encountered during the transition from education to employment, and propose strategies to address these challenges.

The study used a mixed-methods research design that combined quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data were gathered from 45 ASAP graduate-grantees through a validated questionnaire adapted from the graduate tracer study of Apayao State College [8] and semi-structured interviews. Descriptive statistics such as frequency count, percentage, ranking, and weighted mean were used to analyze the quantitative data, while thematic analysis was applied to the interview responses.

Findings revealed that most respondents were aged 25–29 years old, female, single, and employed. Many graduates finished courses related to Accountancy, Business, and



Management (ABM), and most were employed in government institutions within Apayao Province. The majority also secured employment within less than one year after graduation.

In terms of academic success, respondents perceived ASAP as highly beneficial. The program helped reduce financial burdens, improve academic focus, increase motivation to finish studies, and support degree completion. These findings suggest that the financial assistance provided by ASAP allowed students to focus more on their studies and continue pursuing their educational goals.

Regarding career development, respondents shared that ASAP contributed to their workplace readiness, confidence in job applications, motivation to pursue career goals, and career advancement. However, professional networking opportunities were perceived to be limited compared to other aspects of career development.

The study also found that graduates experienced several challenges during their transition from education to employment. The most common challenges were lack of job opportunities, lack of professional experience, job mismatch, financial difficulties, and geographic limitations. To address these concerns, respondents recommended strengthening job placement programs, providing internships and trainings, enhancing career guidance, expanding financial support, and building partnerships with employers outside Apayao.

Overall, the findings showed that ASAP positively contributed to the academic success and employability of its grantees and continues to serve as an important support system for students in Apayao Province.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, the study concludes that the Apayao Student Assistance Program (ASAP) plays a significant role in supporting the academic success of its beneficiaries by reducing financial barriers and increasing students' motivation to complete their studies.

The study further concludes that ASAP contributes positively to graduate employability, as most beneficiaries were able to secure employment within a reasonable period after graduation, many of whom are employed in positions related to their field of study.

Moreover, the program has a Very High impact on academic success and a Moderate impact on career development. While it strengthens educational attainment and



employability readiness, its influence on direct career advancement and employment access is limited.

However, employment outcomes are not determined by the program alone. External factors such as job availability, lack of experience, job mismatch, geographic constraints, and labor market conditions also significantly affect graduate career pathways. Therefore, ASAP improves employability but does not guarantee employment success for all beneficiaries.

ASAP is an effective educational assistance program that supports human capital development by improving access to education and enhancing graduates' readiness for employment. Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the Apayao Student Assistance Program (ASAP) has positively contributed to the academic success and career development of its graduate-grantees. Most of the respondents were young adults who were already employed, particularly in government institutions within Apayao Province, showing that many graduates were able to transition successfully from education to employment.

The findings further revealed that ASAP played an important role in helping students continue and complete their studies. The financial assistance provided by the program reduced students' financial burdens, improved their academic focus, and increased their motivation to finish their education. These results show that the program became an important source of support for students, especially those coming from financially challenged families.

In terms of career development, the study found that ASAP also helped graduates become more prepared and confident in entering the workforce. The program contributed to workplace readiness, motivation to pursue career goals, and career advancement. However, despite these positive contributions, graduates still encountered challenges during their transition from education to employment, particularly the lack of job opportunities, lack of professional experience, and job mismatch.

Overall, the study concludes that ASAP is not only a financial assistance program but also a valuable investment in the development of human capital in Apayao Province. The program helps students achieve their educational goals while also preparing them for future employment and professional growth. However, strengthening career support services, employment linkages, internships, and industry partnerships may further improve the employability and long-term career outcomes of ASAP graduates.

Recommendations



Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are offered:

1. The Apayao Student Assistance Program (ASAP) should strengthen its job placement and employment facilitation services to improve graduate transition to the workforce.
2. The program should enhance career development initiatives such as internships, skills trainings, seminars, and job placement programs to help graduates gain professional experience and improve employability.
3. Schools and partner agencies may strengthen career guidance programs to help students choose career paths aligned with their skills, interests, and degree programs.
4. The program may establish stronger partnerships with government agencies, private companies, and institutions outside Apayao to expand employment opportunities for graduates.
5. Continuous employability development programs such as resume writing, interview preparation, and career counseling should be institutionalized.
6. An alumni tracking system should be developed to monitor employment outcomes and assess the long-term effectiveness of the ASAP program.
7. Future researchers should further examine the long-term effects of educational assistance programs on career advancement, job stability, and socio-economic mobility.

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