

Bridging Access and Success: A Longitudinal Tracer Study of CHED Scholarship Grantees

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.907000381>

Received: 29 July 2025; Accepted: 31 July 2025; Published: 19 August 2025

ABSTRACT

This tracer study investigated the long-term impacts of the CHED Tertiary Education Subsidy (TES) and Tulong Dunong Program (TDP) on graduates of the Monkayo College of Arts, Sciences, and Technology (MonCAST). Anchored on Republic Act 10931, the study evaluated how financial aid programs influenced graduates' educational attainment, employability, and socio-economic mobility. Using a quantitative-descriptive design, data were collected from 300 CHED scholarship beneficiaries across key academic programs. Results showed that the majority of graduates were young, female, and concentrated in education and business-related fields. A high employment rate of 72.8% was recorded, with 58.7% working locally, 8.7% self-employed, and 5.4% employed abroad. However, disparities in job quality and income persisted—over half of employed graduates were in non-permanent positions, and 94.5% remained within the three lowest income brackets. While CHED scholarships effectively expanded access to higher education and enabled initial workforce integration, the study revealed limited upward mobility for many beneficiaries. These findings highlighted the need for strengthened career support, closer industry-academe alignment, entrepreneurship development, and continuous policy evaluation. Ultimately, the study provided valuable insights into how access-driven policies could be improved to ensure not only academic success but also sustainable, equitable post-graduation outcomes.

Keywords: Tracer Study, Graduate Employability, Socio-Economic Mobility, Higher Education Access, Financial Aid Impact

INTRODUCTION

The democratization of higher education in the Philippines has been significantly bolstered by national scholarship and financial aid programs, notably the Tertiary Education Subsidy (TES) and Tulong Dunong Program (TDP) under Republic Act 10931, also known as the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act. These interventions aim to alleviate the financial burden of higher education among economically disadvantaged but academically deserving students, particularly in state universities and colleges (SUCs) and local universities and colleges (LUCs), including institutions like the Monkayo College of Arts, Sciences, and Technology (MonCAST).

Despite increasing access to higher education through these financial assistance programs, the question of whether such access effectively translates into long-term success remains underexplored. The present tracer study seeks to examine the longitudinal impacts of TES and TDP on MonCAST graduates, investigating not only their academic journey but also their career trajectories, professional integration, and socio-economic mobility after graduation.

According to Schomburg (2003), tracer studies provide critical feedback to higher education institutions (HEIs) regarding the relevance and quality of education and training they provide. Furthermore, they serve as an empirical foundation for institutional planning, curriculum enhancement, and policy formulation. This aligns with the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum Order No. 46, s. 2012, which emphasizes outcomes-based education and institutional accountability through graduate employability and success indicators.

In addition, the World Bank (2010) has emphasized that financial aid programs must be assessed not only on access metrics but also on how they impact learning outcomes, employability, and long-term socio-economic development. As such, this study addresses a gap in empirical literature by providing a comprehensive assessment of the TES and TDP programs from a localized institutional perspective, focusing on both access and post-graduation outcomes.

This investigation is especially timely given the intensifying demand for data-driven policy and performance-based financing in Philippine higher education (CHED, 2020). Moreover, the study contributes to the body of knowledge on educational equity, particularly how financial support translates into labor market competitiveness, job satisfaction, career stability, and civic engagement (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009).

The context of MonCAST, as an emerging LUC in the region with over 3,000 graduates and more than 5,000 enrolled students, provides a unique institutional environment to explore the longitudinal effects of TES and TDP. The institution's strong emphasis on moral uprightness, service, and nation-building further situates the research in a framework that values not only academic success but also social responsibility and holistic development.

This tracer study aims to evaluate the benefits of these scholarship programs by identifying the specific bachelor's degrees completed, the types of scholarship grants received, and their post-graduation employment status, including the nature and duration of their job search, employment type, and sector. Furthermore, the study seeks to understand the socio-economic effects of the scholarships by analyzing the family income clusters of the beneficiaries, with the goal of providing recommendations for program improvement.

Despite the expanding literature on scholarship programs and graduate employability, there remains a conspicuous research gap in the longitudinal assessment of how government-funded financial assistance—specifically TES and TDP—translates into real-world success among grantees from local colleges such as MonCAST. Additionally, there is a lack of localized, evidence-based analysis that connects scholarship support with long-term socio-economic mobility, particularly among graduates in rural and geographically disadvantaged areas like Monkayo. By addressing this gap, the study offers critical insights into how financial aid not only opens the door to higher education but also sustains graduates' paths toward economic security and meaningful societal participation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is quantitative descriptive research, designed to thoroughly describe and interpret the current characteristics and situations of CHED scholarship beneficiaries. Following Mertler's (2014) principles, this approach will allow us to accurately portray aspects such as their educational attainment, the specific scholarship grants they received, their post-graduation employment status, and the socio-economic impact on their families.

For this tracer study, a total of 300 graduates of CHED scholarship programs from a local college in the municipality served as respondents. This sample size is considered appropriate, particularly for detailed analyses (Hair et al., 2018) and was proportionally distributed across the different academic programs based on their respective past enrollment populations. The selection of these alumni was guided by specific criteria: they had to have officially graduated from one of the college's programs, including Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA), Bachelor of Science in Agriculture (BSA), Bachelor in Elementary Education (BEED), or Bachelor in Secondary Education. Furthermore, all participating graduates were of legal age and provided their voluntary consent to participate in the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of the tracer study are presented and discussed in the following figures, providing a comprehensive overview of the CHED scholarship graduates' profiles and post-academic journeys.

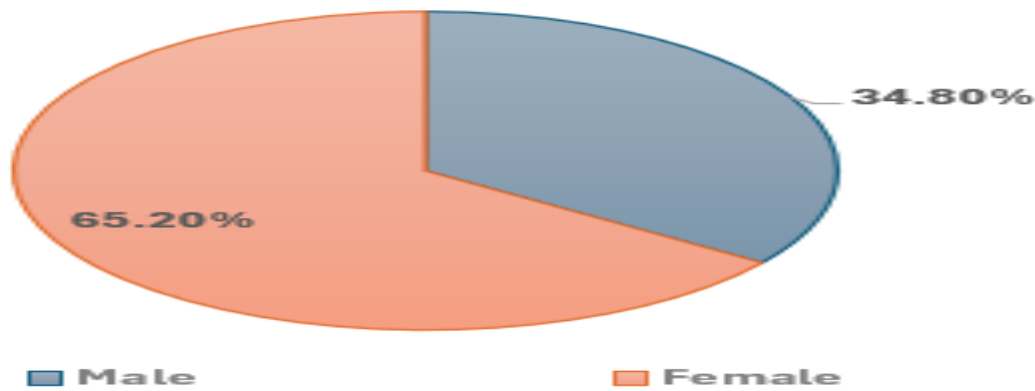


Figure 1. Distribution by Gender

Shown in Figure 1, Female graduates constituted a clear majority (65.2%) of the CHED scholarship beneficiaries in this study, compared to 34.8% male. This demographic skew could stem from higher female enrollment in relevant college programs, a greater number of female scholarship recipients, or a higher response rate from female graduates. Recognizing this gender disparity is vital for accurately interpreting any gender-specific patterns observed in employment, career trajectories, or socio-economic effects.

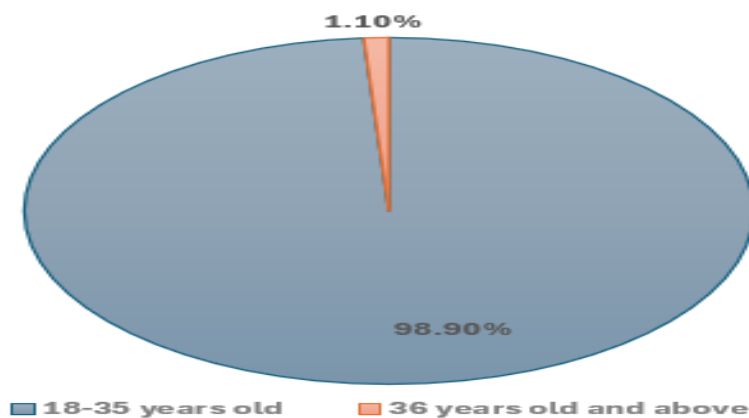


Figure 2. Distribution by Age

Presented in Figure 2 is an overwhelming majority of respondents (98.9%) were aged 18-35 years old, and a minimal 1.1% in the 36-55 age bracket. This age distribution highlights that the tracer study predominantly captures the experiences of relatively recent CHED scholarship graduates, thereby focusing the analysis of employment, career entry, and early-career socio-economic impacts on a younger professional cohort.

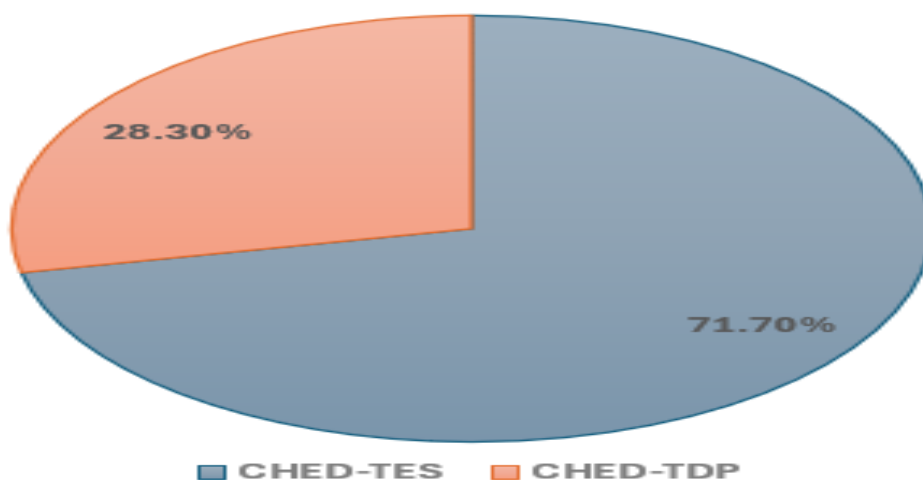


Figure 3. Distribution by Degree Programs Taken

It is reflected in Figure 3 that the majority of CHED scholarship graduates (71.7%) received the CHED Tertiary Education Subsidy (CHED-TES), with 28.3% benefiting from the CHED Tulong Dunong Program (CHED-TDP). This distribution underscores the critical role of CHED-TES as the primary scholarship supporting these beneficiaries' educational and employment outcomes.

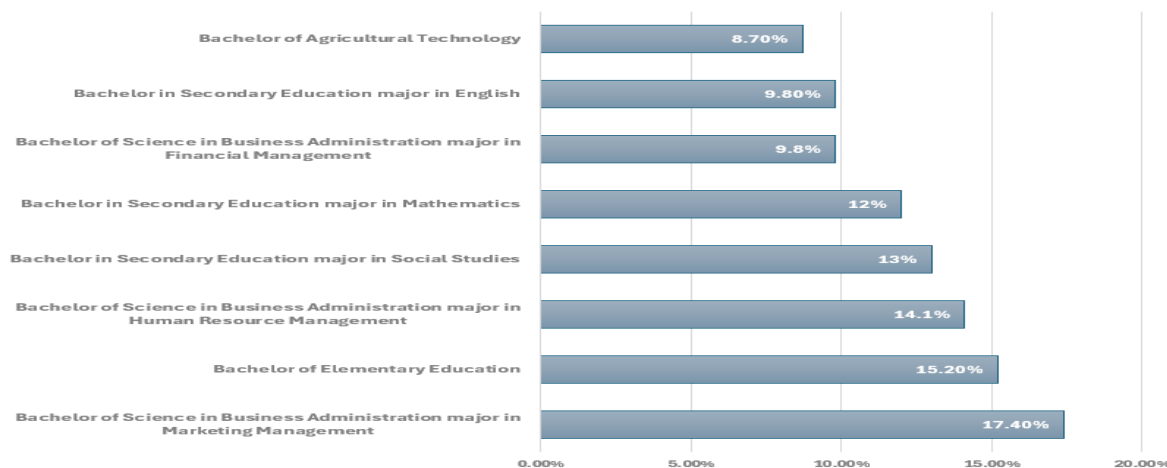


Figure 4. Distribution by Degree Programs Taken

As shown in Figure 4, CHED scholarship graduates completed a diverse range of academic programs, with strong concentrations in education and business-related fields. The Bachelor of Business Administration major in Marketing Management accounts for the largest share at 17.4%, followed by the Bachelor of Elementary Education at 15.2%, Human Resource Management at 14.1%, and Financial Management at 9.8%. In Secondary Education, specializations in Social Studies (13.0%), Mathematics (12.0%), and English (9.8%) also hold significant shares. Meanwhile, the Bachelor of Agricultural Technology comprises the smallest portion at 8.7%. This distribution reflects CHED's strategic support for key sectors in education, business, and agriculture, aligned with national human resource priorities.

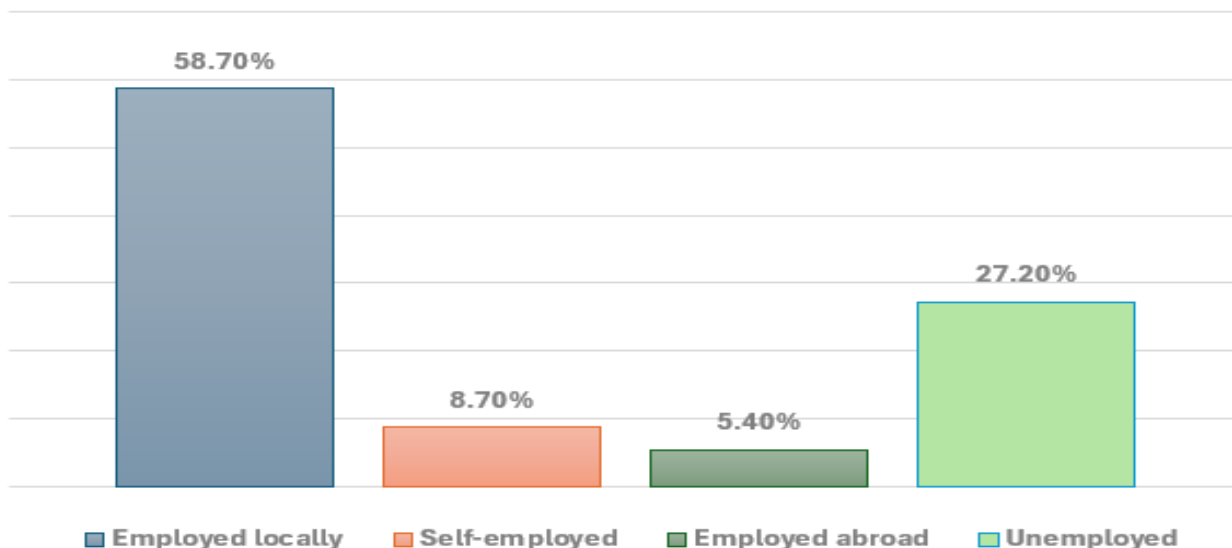


Figure 5. Employment Status

The employment status of CHED scholarship graduates presented in Figure 5 indicates a strong workforce integration, with 72.8% currently employed. This includes 58.7% working locally, 8.7% self-employed suggesting entrepreneurial inclination, and 5.4% employed abroad, demonstrating international competitiveness. Conversely, 27.2% of graduates remain unemployed. These findings highlight both the scholarship programs' success in facilitating diverse employment and areas where further support for integration may be needed.

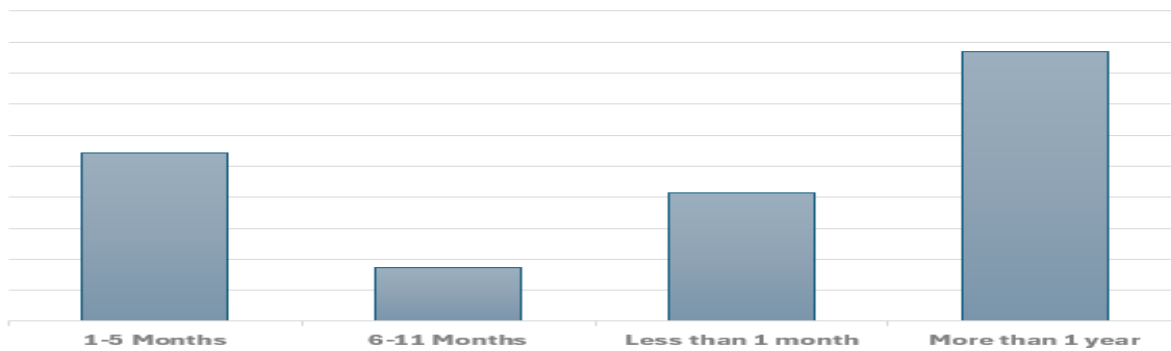


Figure 6. Duration of Job Search

Highlighted in Figure 6 is the duration of job search among CHED scholarship graduates is varied, notably polarized. While 43.5% faced prolonged searches exceeding one year, a combined 47.9% secured employment relatively quickly (20.7% in less than one month; 27.2% within 1-5 months). A smaller 8.7% searched for 6-11 months. This dichotomy suggests diverse challenges or opportunities influenced by factors like field competitiveness, market conditions, or individual job-seeking strategies.

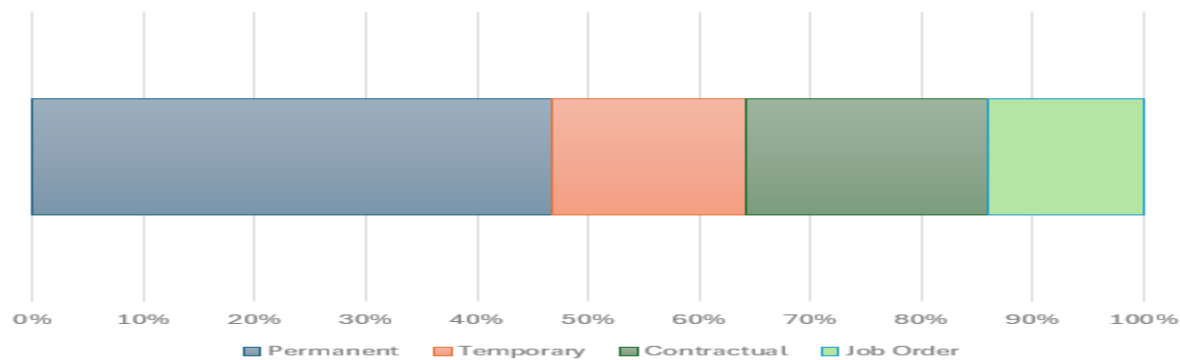


Figure 7. Employment Type

Presented in Figure 7 the employment type among CHED scholarship graduates shows diverse job security. While 46.7% hold permanent positions, a majority (53.2% combined) are in less stable arrangements: 21.7% contractual, 17.4% temporary, and 14.1% on job order. This highlights that despite common permanent roles, a substantial segment of graduates faces varying, often less secure, employment arrangements, reflecting either industry structures or a need for more stable opportunities.

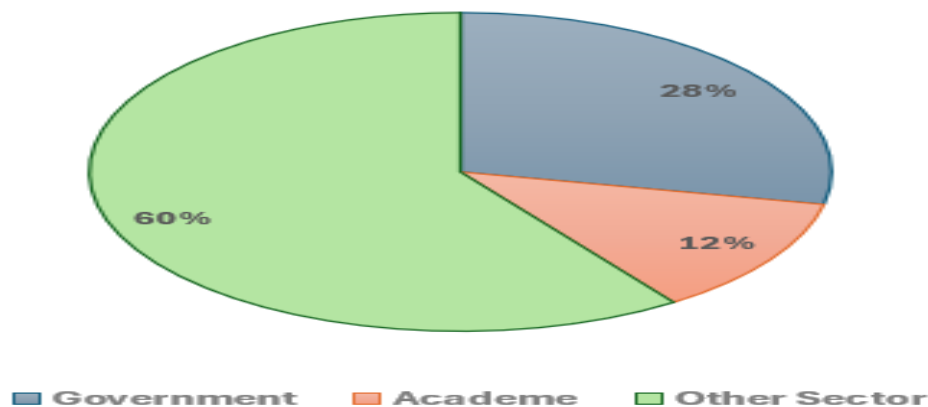


Figure 8. Employment Sector

The employment sector data revealed in Figure 8 reflects that CHED scholarship graduates primarily find employment in the "Other Sector," comprising 59.8% of respondents and indicating their diverse absorption into private industries or non-profits. The remaining significant portions are in Government (28.3%) and Academe (12.0%). This distribution highlights the scholarship's effectiveness in preparing graduates for varied

career paths, with a notable lean towards non-public sectors, while still enabling contributions to public service and education.

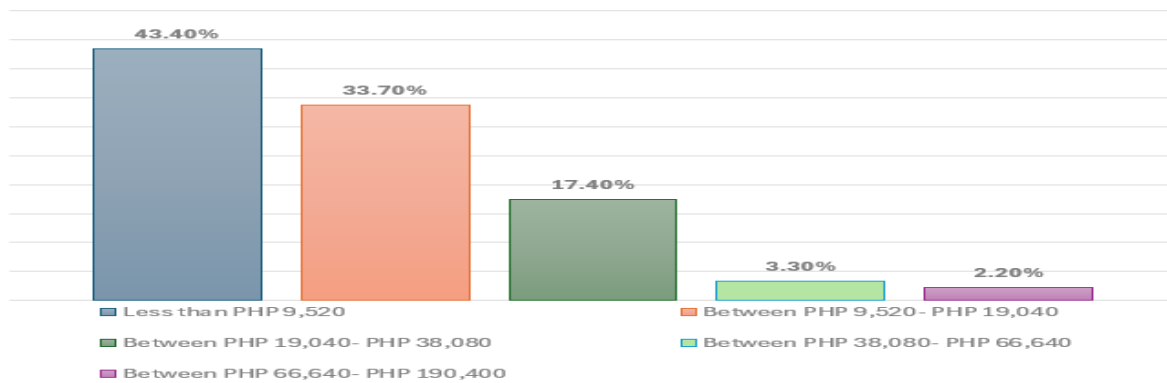


Figure 9. Income Cluster

As shown in Figure 9, CHED scholarship graduates largely remain within the lower income brackets after graduation. A significant portion, 43.4%, earn less than PHP 9,520, while 33.7% fall within the PHP 9,520–PHP 19,040 range. Another 17.4% earn between PHP 19,040–PHP 38,080. Altogether, 94.5% of graduates are clustered within the three lowest income tiers (up to PHP 38,080). Only a small percentage earn higher incomes: 3.3% fall between PHP 38,080–PHP 66,640, and 2.2% earn between PHP 66,640–PHP 190,400. These results indicate that despite access to education and employment, the majority of graduates continue to face economic challenges, highlighting the need for strategies that promote career advancement and income growth.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the tracer study provide a comprehensive view of the experiences of CHED scholarship graduates, revealing both the positive impacts and the ongoing challenges they face after completing their academic programs. The data show that the majority of graduates are young and predominantly female, with concentrations in education and business-related fields. Most graduates have successfully entered the workforce, with many securing employments either locally or abroad, and some even pursuing self-employment. These results affirm the effectiveness of the scholarship program in supporting access to higher education and facilitating initial career entry.

However, the study also reveals significant disparities in employment quality and economic outcomes. A considerable number of graduates experienced prolonged job searches, with 43.5% taking over a year to find employment. Moreover, more than half are in non-permanent roles such as contractual, temporary, or job order positions, which may lack job security and benefits. Despite gaining higher education, the majority of graduates remain in lower income brackets, with 94.6% earning less than PHP 38,080 per month. These findings suggest that while CHED scholarships succeed in improving access to education, they do not yet guarantee upward socio-economic mobility for many beneficiaries.

In light of these insights, several recommendations are proposed. First, CHED in collaboration with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), and higher education institutions should strengthen career support services by offering job placement assistance, employability skills training, and career counseling. This can help reduce job search time and improve employment outcomes. Second, stronger linkages between academia and industry should be fostered to ensure that academic programs are aligned with labor market demands, leading to better job matches for graduates. Third, continuous review of scholarship-supported programs is essential to ensure their responsiveness to evolving employment trends.

Additionally, more support should be extended to graduates pursuing self-employment and entrepreneurship, through training, mentorship, and access to funding opportunities. Institutionalizing regular tracer studies can also help monitor graduate outcomes and inform policy adjustments. Lastly, CHED should consider interventions that focus on improving the quality of employment and promoting income growth, such as

professional development programs and incentives for industries that hire and retain scholarship graduates in stable, well-paying roles.

By addressing these areas, CHED can further enhance the long-term impact of its scholarship programs—not only providing access to education but also ensuring that graduates can achieve meaningful, stable, and prosperous careers.

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