

## INVESTIGATING THE CAREERS OF ENGLISH MAJOR GRADUATES

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**Abstract:** *This study was conducted to investigate the careers of English major graduates of a college in Bandung, Indonesia, from 2010-2014. Eighty five alumni were interviewed to find out information about them, their careers, and their skills so that they were accepted for their first posts and they were able to perform their jobs. The results reveal that most of the respondents were regularly employed as administration officers, marketing staff and customer services. Many of the alumni found their first jobs in only less than 3 months. They also found most skills learnt in class to be useful for their career. In addition, they found English speaking skills and business writing skills as the most useful competencies for their first job. Improvement in communicative skills and comprehensive scope in business were suggested for improvement of the English major curriculum. Interpersonal skill dominates the additional skill required in the workplace.*

**Key Words:** *career, English major, graduates, and English skills*

### Introduction

English major in university is identical with literary works, linguistics and language teacher. Many even think that English major students will have limited career positions, will not make good money and English major skill have no currency outside of academics (Lemire, 2006).

English major graduates is, in fact, may find it very challenging when it comes to obtaining a job as their corresponding position in the society is very limited. Their interrelated vacancy is restricted around the jobs of a translator or teacher. There has never been a job that is offered to an English graduate for a post such as secretary, manager or the like, although they will be able to perform such generic jobs. However, there are a lot of ads that place English language proficiency as central requirement for various types of occupation.

However, research is needed to find out the performance of graduates of English major in industry. Such research is also required to see how useful are the subjects given to their former students. Furthermore, research on alumni performance will provide a bridge on the gap of industry and university.

Peng-Tan and Nang (2012) suggests that the success of an institution lies in its graduates and the quality of graduates is measured through the employability and transformation they gained as they exposed themselves to the real world. To find out the success of university graduates, a tracer study on them or alumni survey is required. Furthermore, Peng-Tan and Nang

(2012) averred that tracing graduates is an important action on the part of the institution, making it an essential tool in the evaluation of institution's program for improvement.

Making the institution's curriculum in line with the industry's job demand is obviously required. Flomo (2013) noted that tracing graduates is a retrospective assessment of the graduates' course in relation to the industry needs and the connection between the theories learned at school and the application of the same to work.

Through this study we would like to investigate how English graduates of a college fulfill the career in industry. Several research questions are then set to make this research well directed.

- What are the first positions of English department alumni after graduating?
- How long did they gain the first career after graduation?
- What skills are needed to fill the career positions?

### **Career, Tracer study and alumni survey**

Tracer study and alumni survey are terminologies to refer to investigation on alumni performance of an educational institution. They share the main purpose which is to see how the alumni gain their first employment and how they develop their careers,.

Career is the job which is done by someone along the period of life. According to Oxford Dictionary (2010) career is the series of jobs that a person has in a particular area of work, usually involving more responsibility as time passes. In addition, Collin Cobuild dictionary (2003) defines career as the job or profession that someone does for a long periods of life. The definition above will be a guidance to identify career for English majors.

San Jose (2014) used questionnaire to determine the demographic, employment and training profiles, leadership and volunteerism of graduates. He found that the majority was regularly employed in the local corporations as ESL tutors, and family concern was one of the reasons for non-employment of some. In connection with this, Mercado (2010) mentioned the initiative of the Commission on Higher Education in the Philippines to spearhead the conduct of graduate's tracer study among selected Higher Education Institutions in order to obtain data that would show if English program is offering courses or programs that produce graduates to meet the needs of industry and society.

A study by Gines (2014) stated that tracer study reveals the employment characteristics, transition to employment and the level of satisfaction of the PNU (Philippine Normal University) graduates. Still, regarding the graduate tracer study, Ramirez, Cruz, and Alcantara (2014) indicated that graduates and their academic-acquired skills and competencies are related to their present occupations. Furthermore, they suggest that tracer studies can provide the information

needed to reform educational programs to bring about the match between the requirements of the employment world and study. As for the present research, we are addressing on the working area of graduates and skills that are required to support the career.

However, Ramirez et al (2014) found that surveys do have their disadvantages for it is sometimes difficult to locate graduates and let those complete questionnaires. Similarly, Schomburg (2007) insists that the graduates might not always be able to identify the relationship between the knowledge acquired during study and their professional lives. Nevertheless, research findings on alumni survey are valuable inasmuch as planners can turn the findings into concrete reforms.

Alumni survey tries to seek information about the alumni after graduating with regards to their first jobs, their capability in handling the jobs and their experience in learning as well as their suggestions for their former institution. Borden (2005) used alumni research to align program improvement with institutional accountability. Puerzer, & Rooney (2002) used alumni survey to evaluate their programs and stated that it was an effective assessment tool for small engineering programs. Cabrera et al (2005) used alumni survey for measuring alumni outcomes, engagement and competencies, and alumni giving. While Davidson et al (2004) used alumni survey and student databases for program evaluation and planning.

In fact, there is a great deal of research on alumni or university graduates with the aims for program or curriculum development. Except for a study by Jose (2014), there is virtually none of alumni survey on English language graduates. There are alumni surveys on law school graduates (Baird, 1978), on dental graduates (Rafaek, et al, 2004), on architecture alumni (Boyer and Mitgang, 1996), and on public health alumni (2007).

However, there is an alumni survey to find out the effects of English language proficiency on adjustment to university life (Andrade, 2009), and on the needs of workplace English among computer science graduates (Kaneko et al, 2009). While Nerad & Cerny (2000) investigated the career paths of English graduates of PhD. The later tracer study which used questionnaire to find out the lives of PhD in English program is very useful to find out the benefits of PhD programs, and improvement of the programs for future students.

As there has not been research about alumni on English language graduates in the Bachelor or Diploma level, the present study is very beneficial to find out the roles and functions of such alumni in the community.

## Method

To collect data, the researchers used social media such as Whatsup (WA), Line, Blackberry Messenger (BBM), and Facebook. Chat messaging was employed to ask about their alumni careers and their involved aspects such as about when they gained their first jobs, what positions they had, and what skills were needed to conduct their first jobs.

## Sampling

The maximum purposive sampling has been applied for collecting the data with 85 alumni respondents. The alumni were graduated from 2010-2014. The following is more details about the alumni under investigation

Year of Graduation	Number of respondents	Percentage
2010	5	5.88
2011	6	7.06
2012	15	17.65
2013	15	17.65
2014	44	51.76
<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 1: List of alumni respondents**

The number of sample respondents above is adequate if we compare with the population of the alumni from 2010 until 2014 which is 101. As the present research is not intended for regression analysis, the sample size which is 84.15% is unquestionably acceptable. The population itself is not too large as the department under investigation is relatively new. It was founded in 2006, and the first students were graduated three years later.

## Gender of respondents

This table shows information about the gender of respondents. We can see that the majority of the respondents are female; this is in line with the condition in the English department college which is also dominated by female students.

Year of Graduation	Number of respondents	Percentage
Male	25	29.41
Female	60	70.59
<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 2: Gender of respondents**

To process the data further, there are several steps that were employed. First, the data were tabulated, then they were classified into groups before they were analyzed further.

### Result and Discussion

The following is the result of the present research and we tried to answer the research questions as a guideline for study.

#### The first positions of the English department alumni after graduation

The table shows the result of survey of the alumni respondents when asked about what they did after graduating from English department. A very small number of graduates pursued further studies primarily to satisfy their personal ambition and to assure their career development. Most of the graduates were employed in line with their interests and chances. In addition, entrepreneurship is another possible career for the alumni after graduating. There are four graduates which are unemployed. Then, we found that they were graduates from 2014 when the study was conducted.

Condition	Number of respondents	Percentage
Employed	73	85.88
Unemployed	4	4.71
Continuing study	4	4.71
Entrepreneurship	4	4.71
<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 3: Condition of respondents after graduation**

### Working area and positions of alumni first career

From Table 4 below, we can see that working in media industry is the position that alumni had most. It is followed by manufacture industry, transportation, bank & finance, and education.

Other working areas that employ graduates (3 %) are service industry which comprises hotel and accommodation as their first career. Furthermore, Table 4 also shows that 7 % of the graduates are-self-employed. The businesses they most run are event organizer enterprises.

Working areas	Number of respondents	Percentage
Media	24	31.17
Manufacture	21	27.27
Transportation	10	12.99
Education	7	9.09
Event organizer & Entrepreneurship	7	9.09
Banking and Finance	5	6.49
Hotel & Accommodation	3	3.90
<b>Total</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 4: Working areas of alumni first positions**

Table 5 shows the alumni jobs in the information media area. It shows media industry sector which provides 13 different occupations for the graduates. Amongst others, three posts the graduates work for are copy writer, administration officer, and marketing officer. Each post employs three graduates. The other occupations the graduates take are related to technical support representative, customer service online, corporate secretary, data analyst, and account executive. Each employs two graduates. The remaining concentrates in five different categories which are journalist, supervisor, translator & interpreter, quality control, and human resource officer. Each category gives work to one graduate.

Occupations	Number	Percentage (%)
Copywriter	3	12.5
Marketing officer	3	12.50
Admin officer	3	12.50
Technical support representative	2	8.33

Customer online service	2	8.33
Journalist	1	4.17
Corporate secretary	2	8.33
Data analyst	2	8.33
Account executive	2	8.33
Supervisor	1	4.17
Translator & Interpreter	1	4.17
Quality Control officer	1	4.17
Human resource officer	1	4.17
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 5: The Alumni's Occupation in the Information Media Area**

The data on alumni jobs in manufacture area are pictured in Table 6. All of the information on the names of occupations taken by graduates is recorded in order. The table shows that 8 different posts are occupied by graduates. Amongst others, the post of administrator officer overtakes the post of manufacture sector as the biggest number of positions for graduates (8 alumni). It is followed by the post of marketing staff (5 alumni).

The other posts the manufacturer industry employs two graduates for two different occupations are public relation officer and document controller. The remaining is as a human resources officer, secretary, procurement & sales officer, and supervisor. Each post hires one graduate.

Occupations	Number	Percentage (%)
Human resource officer	3	21.43
Secretary	3	21.43
Admin officer	2	14.29
Document controller	2	14.29
Marketing staff	1	7.14
Public relation officer	1	7.14
Procurement & Sales officer	1	7.14
Supervisor	1	7.14
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 6: The Alumni's Occupation in the Manufacture Area**

List of occupations in transportation sector surveyed for the alumni is shown in Table 7. It shows that transportation industry offers 8 different posts for the graduates. Amongst others, the post of customer service (4 alumni) is mostly filled up by the graduates. The second place is followed by the post of secretary (2 alumni). The remaining includes flight attendant, travel

assistant officer, marketing officer, and administration officer. Each post employs one alumnus.

Occupation	Number	Percentage (%)
Customer Service	4	40.00
Secretary	2	20.00
Flight attendant	1	10.00
Travel assistant officer	1	10.00
Marketing officer	1	10.00
Admin officer	1	10.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 7: The Alumni's Occupation in the Transportation Area**

The occupation in banking & finance sectors for graduates is shown in Table 8. It shows three of the graduates work as a customer service office whilst one graduate for the rest of occupations is in charge as a bank teller and an account officer.

Occupation	Number	Percentage (%)
Customer service officer	3	60.00
Teller	1	20.00
Account officer	1	20.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 8: The Alumni's Occupation in the Banking & Finance Area**

Table 9 is concerned with jobs in education, 5 graduates begin their life careers as teachers of English at a private institution. The rest, two graduates work as administration officer in academic sector.

Occupation	Number	Percentage (%)
Teacher	5	71.43
Admin officer	2	28.57
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 9: The Alumni's Occupation in the Education Area**



Table 10 shows that two different occupations for graduates are in event organizer and entrepreneurship sector. Three graduates work as an event organizer officer and 4 of them establish their own enterprise as an independent entrepreneur.

Occupation	Number	Percentage (%)
Entrepreneurship	4	57.14
Event organiser officer	3	42.86
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 10: The Alumni's Occupation in the Event Organizer & Entrepreneurship Area**

The occupations in the hotel and accommodation sector for graduates are shown in Table 11. It shows two graduates are responsible as front officers whereas one alumnus runs his/her - own private business.

Occupation	Number	Percentage (%)
Front office officer	2	28.57
Business development officer	1	14.29
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>14.29</b>

**Table 11: The Alumni's Occupation in the Hotel & Accommodation Area**

### Length of waiting time after graduation

The table shows most alumni gained their first jobs within 3 months after graduation. Only 6% of the alumni obtained their job after 1 year of their graduation. This means that the majority of English graduates did not find it difficult to find employment in the industry. This finding is similar with what Setiawan (2014) found in his research which among others include respondents from English department.

Time period	Number of respondents	Percentage %
0-3 months	65	84.42
4-6 months	7	9.09

6-12 months	1	1.30
More than 12 months	4	5.19
<b>Total</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table 12: The length of waiting time to for first position

### Skills required to gain their first employment

The table below shows most of the skills and knowledge which are identified by the alumni as necessary to gain the first employment. Those skills and knowledge are found in the subjects which can be categorised into three: those related to English language skills, those which are not related to English but taught in class and those which are neither related to English and nor taught in class.

Grouping	Skills and Knowledge	Number	Percentage (%)
<b>Group 1: English skills</b>	Speaking	46	21.10
	Writing	26	11.93
	Business writing	22	10.09
	Reading	21	9.63
	Translation	15	6.88
	Listening	10	4.59
	Presentation	9	4.13
	Grammar	9	4.13
	Business communication	7	3.21
	Cross cultural understanding	7	3.21
	Integrated English for business	6	2.75
	Accountancy	5	2.29
	Vocabulary	4	1.83
	Textual analysis	1	0.46
<b>Group 2: Non English</b>	Computer Application	11	5.05
	Office management	5	2.29
	Entrepreneurship	3	1.38
	MICE	3	1.38
	Business law	1	0.46
<b>Group 3</b>	Other skills	7	3.21
<b>Total</b>		<b>218</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table 13: Skills and knowledge identified as essential by alumni

As seen from the table, in the first category of the most required skill and knowledge for the first job are speaking, reading, and writing.

The second category, which are the skills other than English play the roles as supporting subjects in English department. The most required skills to gain the job and applied at work are computer application skill and office management.

In the third category, the skills and knowledge which the respondents stated as necessary to gain the job but they were not taught in class. They confessed that they gained the skills and knowledge at their work places. The following is the list of other skills necessary at work.

Skills and Knowledge	Number	Percentage (%)
Interpersonal	6	18.75
Time Management	4	12.50
Banking	3	9.38
Creative thinking	2	6.25
Hospitality	2	6.25
Technical knowledge	2	6.25
Analysing data	2	6.25
Table manner	1	3.13
Marketing	1	3.13
Other languages	1	3.13
Tax finance	1	3.13
Social media knowledge	1	3.13
Telemarketing	1	3.13
Toughness	1	3.13
Computer	1	3.13
Photography	1	3.13
Designing	1	3.13
Sewing	1	3.13
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 14: Other skills and knowledge identified as essential by alumni**

This table shows others skill that support graduates in working area. These skills were not taught in English department, yet this skill is learned by the graduates in working area. Interpersonal skill and management skill are the skills that were desired by the alumni to support their career.

## **Conclusion and recommendation**

English major graduates from the institution under investigation can fill a variety of career aspects in industry. One of the reasons is due to the fact that English department students learn many subjects that can be applied in industry. The subjects taught have been proved very useful for filling the skill requirements for their first employment.

Many of the findings in this study showed clear performance of the English major graduates. We can see that most of the alumni work in media information industry and manufacture industry. Only a few work in transportation, hotel and accommodation. Surprisingly, the majority of graduates waited only less than 3 month to land their first jobs.

The skills identified in the present study, which are categorized as those related to English language skills both as major and minor skills, are usually taught or found in the curriculum in English department in Indonesia. While other supporting skills such as computer, office management the other skills in the third group may not be taught in the English department, they have been identified as necessary skills used in their work places. Lastly, the other skills other than English which are not taught in class are skills that can be found in society as life skills. Some skills such as data analysis and marketing are embedded in the subjects such as research method and entrepreneurship, but they may not realize it. While other skills such as hospitality and table manner can be obtained through trainings which are provided by community colleges or institution.

The present research has uncovered the truth about English language graduates. It has ruined the assumption that they can just work in education as teachers or language services such as translators and interpreters. With additional skills other than English taught in their college, they can compete with alumni from other fields and work in a variety of occupations. The present research also shows us that there is a need to give our students additional skills and knowledge other than just all language-related subjects.

Further research on graduate tracing is needed, especially for updating the information about the alumni. The research also should include the improvement in communication skills and comprehensive scopes in business which could improve the English major curriculum and its internship program. In addition, further research should also concern the implementation of soft skills in the working area.

It will be interesting to find out how English major graduates to cope with their jobs other than translating and teaching such as on the professions of secretary, manager, stewardess and other general occupations that do not require engineering skills. The findings from such investigation will be useful for curriculum development of English major in updating the

necessary other skills other than English to perform in their jobs.

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