

# Finding the Linguist: An AB English Graduates Tracer Study

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## Abstract

This study was conducted to find the employability of the AB English graduates from 2001 – 2013. The Alumni Tracer Study Questionnaire was used to determine the demographic, employment and training profiles, leadership and volunteerism. Results revealed that most of the respondents were female, single, graduated in 2012 and few took the Civil Service Eligibility and Licensure Examination for Teachers. Moreover, majority were regularly employed in the local corporations as ESL tutors, and family concern was one of the reasons for non-employment of some. Also, majority found their jobs before graduation, and they found relatedness of the AB English Programs to their jobs. Respondents found their jobs as either recommended by someone or information from friends. Moreover, majority waited only less than a month to land their first jobs. It was also revealed that salaries and benefits and career challenge were factors for staying and leaving their jobs. Further, most respondents stayed in their jobs either 1 to less than 6 months. They found communication skills and critical thinking skills as the most helpful competencies in their first job. Respondents unanimously agreed the usefulness and applicability of the English Program to their present job; however, only 80% to 100% found usefulness and applicability of the AB English Training. Professionalism was the personal value they believed most useful in achieving employment success. Unfortunately, most graduates did not involve in organizational membership and volunteer work. Improvement in communicative skills and comprehensive scope were suggested to improve the AB English Curriculum and On-the-Job-Training respectively.

**Keywords:** Linguist, AB English, Tracer Study, University of Mindanao, Davao City, Philippines

## 1. Introduction

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. 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. Hence, making the institution's curriculum in line with the industry's job demand. Weber et. al. (2000) on the other hand pointed out that tracing graduates re-invigorate the rapport between the Alma mater and her graduates while Omeje (2001), Schomburg (2003) and Flomo (2013) noted that tracing graduates is a retrospective assessment of the graduates' course in relation to the industry's needs and the connection between the theory learned at school and the application of the same to work. Mason, et. al. (2006) noted the effort of the universities to improve it graduates' employability and to determine their successes insinuate getting a better chance of landing a short-term than long-term job. However, students believe that the trainings they receive from the learning institutions are not useful in the stiff competition in the labor market. However, they acknowledge that academic qualifications are still necessary for employability. They considered having a high degree gives high advantage in landing for a job (Tolimson, 2008). Additionally, Støren and Aamodt (2010) found out that graduates' employability is affected by their labor market experiences. College education for Filipinos is of utmost importance. Filipino parents believed that college or university education for their children means gaining useful knowledge, acquiring appropriate skills for work, and landing an employment or doing business. Hence, (Mercado, 2011) emphasized that parents chose a school which they believed can live with their expectations for their children's future. This view is previously supported by Blossfeld, and Shavit (2010) who found that throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, people have observed the increasing importance in industrial societies the role of education in nation building. Moreover, Tan and French-Arnold (2012) contended on the responsibility of the Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) in enhancing the employability and competitiveness of the graduates to fill the ever increasing demands of labor force. He further elaborated that the Higher Education Institutions (HEI) contribution to economic progress is manifested in generating labor force; generating skilled individuals; and improving the new information system. Thus, it is now a global trend that Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) should address the call of employability of their graduates - making employability as an indicator of the educational system's efficiency. It is for this ground that this tracer study is conducted.

## 2. Method

This study made use of the quantitative-descriptive method. This method was adapted because it produces factual, reliable outcome data that are usually generalizable (Steckler, et. al., 1992). Moreover, quantitative method seeks to confirm the hypothesis, used structured questionnaires, and described characteristics of population which characterized quantitative method and utilized in this study.

### 2.1 Research Respondents

The research respondents of this study were the AB English graduates from 2000-2013. Data

from the University Registrars showed that there were 249 AB English graduates from year 2000 to 2013. However, only 41 graduates responded to participate in the study. The time frame for tracing these graduates started on November 21, 2013 and ended on May 21, 2014.

### *2.2. Research Instruments*

In gathering the data pertinent to the study, the researcher made use of the modified UM Institutionalized Alumni Tracer Study (ATS) to gather information concerning the personal profile, employability, graduates' organizational membership, volunteer work rendered, awards received and suggestions to improve the AB English curriculum and on-the-job-training.

### **3. Results and Discussions**

The findings of this study revealed that AB English as a course was more enticing to female than male. It is noted that from 2000 to 2013, female graduates surpassed male. In fact, out of the total 251 AB English graduates, 72 are males and 179 are females. It reveals that in every 3 males there were 7 female graduates. Further, most graduate-respondents are single and belong to batch 2012. It is safe to conclude that AB English graduates in the later years can easily be accessed than those older batches. Interestingly, data show that though minimal, a handful of graduate-respondents took the National Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET). This is an indication that most of the AB English graduates are not adhering to government jobs. Moreover, despite not taking government exams, most graduate-respondents are employed - an indication of their employability. AB English graduates can directly take the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) because the UM AB English curriculum is hybridized. This means that twenty-four (24) General Education units are included in the curriculum – the one of a kind in Davao City. The main purpose of the inclusion of general education courses is to give a ready opportunity for graduates to land a job in teaching should they desire to.

The data also elucidate that few graduate-respondents did not decide to work because of family concerns. Though not elaborated, this decision is typical of Filipino values. Filipinos are known for strong family ties. As a matter of fact, because of the strong influence of the family to its members, one's plan is subjected to family's decision. Asis (1994) averred that Filipino well-being is anchored on the family. Each member of the Filipino family considers family as the most important and the most cherished. Few of these components are love for parent's or siblings' decision and respect to each family member.

Also, data show that less than half of the numbers of the graduate-respondents are regular or permanent. Though this might be an indication of good eligibility, dedication to work, and good disposition; however, there are more than half of the respondents who are not secured on their jobs. This could be because most of the graduate-respondents are newly graduates.

In terms of designation at work, most of the graduate-respondents are English tutors or instructors, BPO agents, proof readers, and journalist. This is an indication that AB English are potentially employable, which means that they have the knowledge, skills and attitude the companies are looking for in an applicant. This finding favored Schwarz (2003) who averred

that most AB English majors often go into teaching and interested into becoming writers. However, he also noted that though most of the graduates were placed in the position where communicate competence were required; there were others who were under-employed. Also, in this study some of the graduates-respondents landed in the jobs where their knowledge and skills are not utilized to the fullest. Such jobs are service operations specialists, management trainee, credit coordinator, risk operations analyst, administrative aid, radio anchorman, associate pastor and quality assurance personnel. The findings implies that education in the third world countries had not produced the types of graduates who contribute to the expected productivity; hence, high unemployment and serious mismatched among graduates happened. The results further imply that there is mismatched between the graduates' competencies with the requirement of work which means that graduates accepted the jobs not consistent with their academic qualification and training because there are no jobs available for them. This a saddening reality.

It is also shown in the data that most of the graduate-participants are locally employed. This implies that there are locally available jobs for AB English graduates. This is also an indication that the graduate-respondents are not attracted to go abroad in spite of the demands of English teachers and English as Second Language (ESL) tutors in countries like Oman, China, Japan, Bahrain, and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Moreover, most of the AB English graduates work in a corporation and a few in government, NGO, and foundation. This indicates that most of the graduates preferred to be employed in a corporation. It is also worth noticing, that the graduates are scattered in the different sectors of employment though their volumes are not equally distributed. Comparatively, this recent result has different finding compared to Misoles' (2005) tracer study among AB English. He found that among the 42 respondents, 20% was with the Education sector, 17.6% was into Business, 9.4% was in the government sector, and 7.9% was in private corporations. This implies that AB English's place of work varies as time passed by.

Interestingly, most of the AB English respondent-graduates have already experienced working even before they graduated from their course. This is an indication that most of the AB English are self-sufficient, self-determined, and industrious. They do their works and at the same time do their studies. In the respondents' qualitative information, some reveal that they are part-time English tutors, call center agents, fast food crews while they are students. While in terms of relatedness of their jobs to the AB English program, more than half of the graduate-respondents find relatedness of the AB English programs to their employments. This is an indication that even before the Outcome-Based-Education (OBE) implementation, the AB English had already designed its programs to the needs of the industry. Therefore, the UM Academe-Industry Collaboration Program, the first of its kind in Mindanao, was made to reinforce the engagement of the industry stakeholders to become valued partners in developing the academic curricula fit to the needs of the society (Outcomes Based Education: Academe-Industry Partnership, 2013).

The data also reveal that most of the graduate-respondents find their jobs because it was recommended by someone, informed by friends and as walk-in applicants. This implies that AB English graduate-respondents have sense of belongingness – this means that they have

personal attachment to each other and that they believe in each other's capability. However, it is worth noticing in the results that only few graduate-respondents are interested to apply in a job fair or job arranged by school's job placement officer. This implies that most AB English graduates prefer to apply in jobs where information are given to them by people close to them.

In terms of period waited to land the first job, most of the graduates wait for less than a month only. This is a very strong indication of the employability of the AB English graduates. It clearly implies that companies which hire UM AB English graduates have trust and confidence to the capabilities of the applicants. Comparatively, this recent study results show a different finding with Misoles' (2005) who found that majority of AB English graduates find their job within one year after graduation.

On the aspect of reason for staying on the job, graduate-respondents reveal two reasons. First, the salaries and benefits and second the career challenge. However, it is worthy to note that contrary to the reasons why graduates are not employed, family concerns have the least influence why graduates stay in their jobs. This is a strong manifestation that graduate-respondents independently decide on the aspect of staying their jobs. It can be observed that most graduate-respondents are single, hence, they decide on their own. Moreover, the results of this study corroborated with Hausknecht, Rodda, & Howard (2009) who found that work satisfaction, external incentives such as compensation and fringe benefits, relationship among colleagues, commitment to the organization, and organizational reputation were the factors why workers stay in their jobs. Curtis & Wright (2001) on the other hand averred that for the employees to stay, the company should develop some areas to enhance employees' commitment and briefly looks at issues like pay, benefits, flexible work options and career development and training.

In terms of satisfaction in the first job, most of the graduate-respondents stay in their first job for 1 to less than a year while 1 year to less than 2 years and 3 years to less than 4 years. This is an indication that those graduate-respondents who do not stay in their first job for long are not pleased with their first work while those who stay longer like their first jobs. It implicates that those who do not dwell for long in their first jobs are not happy with their salaries and benefits and that they want to have a more challenging jobs. One of the reasons seen is because of the nature of the work. ESL tutoring and BPO employees are paid based on the contact hours. Moreover, these kinds of employment seldom offer regularization status to the workers. Furthermore, graduate-respondents leave their jobs because they are confident that they can easily find another job fast.

Interestingly, salaries and benefits and career challenge emerge as reasons why graduate-respondents change their jobs or look for another job. These are also the reasons why graduate-respondents stay in their jobs. This implies that graduate-respondents have similar reasons in staying and in leaving the jobs. Weiler (1985) observed that probability of accepting an outside offer is positively related to salary gain, while Jackson, Schwab, and Schuler (1986) found that burnout phenomenon associated with unmet employee expectations and job conditions was the reason of employees' leaving their jobs; Coomber, Barriball (2007)

averred stress and leadership issues; and Cropsey, et. al. (2008) confirmed that the three most common reasons for leaving the institution included career/professional advancement, low salary, and leadership issues.

In terms of competencies acquired, graduate-respondents indicate that communication, critical thinking, and multi-tasking skills are the most helpful abilities in their first jobs. This reveals that the AB English curriculum is successful in its goal. It stated, *“after graduation students are expected to develop in them the highest qualities of character and behavior as well as knowledge, skills and dispositions that support excellent communication and professionalism and develop students’ critical and creative thinking skills* (Course Syllabus, 2011). This indicates that the AB English Program of the University of Mindanao is successful in its goal of giving its graduates with skills relevant to their course. On the other hand, the graduate-respondents unanimously agree that the AB English Training is 80-100% useful and applicable to their present jobs. This is a good indication that the AB English curriculum is responsive to the skills needed by the industry.

Professionalism, Dedication/Hard-work, Dependability/Reliability/Responsibility are the most helpful personal values graduate-respondents learned and developed in achieving employment success. Again, this result proves that the graduate-respondents are able to inculcate in their minds the AB English Program’s education objectives – to have *“excellent communication and professionalism.”* It is safe to imply that graduate-students observe these values from their professors and administrators and these values resonate to their persons as they perform their professions. This further implies that the University of Mindanao’s goals are clear and understood by its employees such as *“Produce graduates who are competent leaders and productive members of society and Harness a pool of ethical, qualified and highly trained human instruction resources.”* However, this does not mean that graduate-respondents haven’t learned other values. Professionalism, Dedication / Hard-work, Dependability / Reliability / Responsibility are the values they find helpful and necessary in the practice of their chosen career. They consider professionalism as beneficial because it involves dedication and dependability. Ohbu (2011) pointed out that professionalism involved commitment to competence, integrity, morality, altruism, and the promotion of the public good while Finestone (2012) claimed that good manners and aspirations were the indicators of professional individuals.

Involvements in organizations and Volunteerism are not popular among graduate-respondents. Generally, most of the graduate-respondents are not members of any organization and few involve in volunteer work. This result is unfavorable because of the nature of work of the graduate-respondents. More often than not, conflict or irregularity of schedule is the main reason why they weren’t able to participate in any organization or volunteer work. Moreover, involvement in organization and volunteerism of employees are dependent on the nature of the company. Barber (2013) assumed that volunteerism depends on the company’s or individual’s awareness and emotional involvement to societal concern. Hess, Rogovsky, & Dunfee (2002) pointed out that volunteer work is dependent on the institutions values, capabilities, mission-vision and goals. Institutions which push for aggressive volunteerism programs are those that sought benefit and improvement for their reputation, competitiveness,



and moral obligation to the public. This result implies that most companies where the graduate-respondents were employed do not observed their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

In terms of award received, few of the graduate-respondents garnered awards. This result can be interpreted into three. Firstly, AB English graduates are 1) passive or don't want to explore their talents. Secondly, they are disinterested to compete for the awards; and thirdly, the company doesn't have programs where employees can be given awards. This implication is reflected from the few awards received by the graduate-respondents during their college years. Most of the graduate-respondents are not actively involved in club activities. Frey (2007) mentioned that rewards are external benefits which are highly practiced only in private institutions. However, much of these initiatives are not given attention by the workers.

Finally, improvement of communicative skills particularly grammar and speaking, application of theories learned, and additional language subjects are the themes of the suggestions to improve the AB English curriculum. It may be reflected from the suggestions that though communication skills is the competency learned most helpful to the graduates, they still reiterate it to be necessary for the improvement of the AB English curriculum. This implies that communication skills for AB English is significant in their field and therefore the same should given more emphasis because it is deemed necessary in the industry. It is assumed that the respondents' suggestions are greatly influenced with what they had experienced from their work places. Top Ten Skills (2014) found ten skills mostly sought competencies by companies from their candidate employees 1) verbal communication – the ability to express ideas clearly and confidently in speech; 2) teamwork – can work confidently within a group; 3) commercial awareness – the ability to understanding the commercial realities affecting the organization; 4) analyzing and investing – the ability to gather information systematically to establish facts and principles; 5) initiatives – the ability to put ideas forward; 6) drive – the determination to get things done; 7) written communication – the ability to express clearly in writing; 8) planning and organizing – the ability to plant and carry activities effectively; 9) flexibility – the ability to adapt to changing situations; and 10) time management – the ability to prioritize tasks. While Crebert, et. al. (2004) previously pointed out that skills valued most by employers are good work habits, personal-social skills, good communication, and basic reading. On the other hand, comprehensive scope of the On-the-Job-Training is suggested to be relevant to improve the same. This involves making longer time allotment for the OJT, exposure to other related jobs aside from teaching, and dealt in improving the trainees' competencies. These suggestions coincide with Tziner, Haccoun & Kadish (1991) who discovery that cognition, understanding and application of a certain skill is more effective and useful if individuals were exposed to longer time in the trainings.

## **5. Conclusion**

Below are the significant conclusions of this study.

1. AB English is more attractive to female. There are more female graduate-respondents for the period of 13 years.

2. Most of the AB English graduate-respondents are single. This is not surprising because most of the graduates who responded belong to the latter batches.
3. Few of the graduate-respondents have taken the National Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET).
4. Family concern is the main reason why few graduate-respondents do not decide to work.
5. Few of the graduate-respondents are regular or permanent in their works. Regularization of graduate-respondents at their respective jobs is affected by the fast turn-over of employees because of salaries, benefits, and job challenge.
6. Most graduate-respondents are English tutors or instructors, BPO agents, proof readers, and journalist. It indicates that AB English graduates are not only potentially competitive and employable but also are in demand to the different industries which need their skills and competencies.
7. Most graduate-respondents are employed locally. This was a strong indication that jobs for AB English abound in the local industry. This is also positive sign that there is a competitive employability of the AB English graduates among other AB English graduates from other colleges and university. This also implies that graduate-respondents are not interested to work nationally or internationally in spite of the growing demands of English major outside of Davao City.
8. Most of the AB English respondent-graduates have experienced working even before they graduated from college. Some of them are working at Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) as call center agents, as English Tutors to elementary, high school, and foreign students, and as Fast Food Chain attendant. This is a good indication that graduate-respondents are able to practice their skills even before their graduation – an additional factor for employability. This is also a sign that UM AB English graduate-students are self-sufficient, self-determined, and industrious. Moreover, this is a significant point that even before the implementation of Outcome-Based-Education (OBE), the AB English have already designed its programs to the needs of the industry.
9. Most of the graduate-respondents find their jobs as recommended by someone, informed by friends and as walk-in applicants. This implies that AB English graduate-respondents have sense of oneness. This means that they have personal attachment to each other and that they trust in each other's competence. It also shows that most AB English graduates prefer to apply on jobs where information are given to them by people whom they know.
10. Most of the graduate-respondents land on their jobs for less than a month after graduation. This is a significant indication of the employability of the AB English graduates. It could also imply that companies which hired UM AB English graduates have trust and confidence to the potentials and aptitudes of the UM AB English applicants.
11. Salaries and benefits and career challenge are the two reasons why AB English graduate-respondents stay in their jobs. Moreover, family concerns have the least



influence why graduates stay in their jobs. The latter was contrary to the previous finding as to why the graduate-respondents do not find jobs.

12. Most of the graduate-respondents do not stay in their jobs for long. Besides their age, compensations, benefits and challenges are the reasons why they don't keep on their works. Moreover, graduate-respondents left their jobs because they are confident that they can easily find another job fast because of their high potential employability.
13. Graduate-respondents found communication, critical thinking, and multi-tasking skills as the most useful skills in their first jobs. They considered these skills to be most beneficial because their jobs require these competencies.
14. Graduate-respondents considered professionalism, dedication / hard-work, dependability / reliability / responsibility as the most helpful personal values in achieving employment success. This is a manifestation that the graduate-respondents are mindful of the AB English Program's educational objectives which is to have "*excellent communication and professionalism.*"
15. Graduate-respondents are not engaged in any organizations and involved in volunteerism. The reason behind this is because of the nature of their work. Most of them are in the BPO industry and ESL Tutors. Their jobs hinder them to be active in any organization and volunteer works. Most BPO and ESL tutorials are mostly conducted in the graveyard shift and online respectively.
16. Graduate-respondents' suggestions to improve the AB English curriculum focus on the improvement of communicative skills particularly grammar and speaking, application of theories learned to future jobs, and additional language subjects. The graduate-respondents suggest these ideas because they realize previously that communication, critical thinking, and multi-tasking skills as the most helpful and useful skills in their first jobs.
17. Graduate-respondents find that lengthening the duration for the OJT, exposing students to other related jobs aside from teaching, and dealing with improving the trainees' competencies are the most helpful actions to improve the On-the-Job-Training.

This study has not only highlighted the employability of the AB English graduates but also their involvement in organization, awards received and suggestions on how to improve the AB English curriculum and On-the-Job-Training. Though results of this study are positive, the AB English Program has no reason to lay its back flat. It is necessary for the program to continue its maneuvering strength to lead it graduates into the limelight of the industry. To attain this goal the programs should 1) widen and strengthen its linkages with industries which cater the skills of the AB English students. This effort may answer the problem of under-employment of the AB English graduates; 2) continue its English enhancement programs for students to improve their communication skills which are found very helpful by the graduate-respondents in the industry; 3) work together with the Business Developing Office (BDO) in the conduct of job placement for the graduating students. This may allow opportunities for students to land job fast; 4). On-the-Job-Training should not only focus on

teaching rather to other fields such as in the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), Newspaper companies, and publishing houses. Moreover, OJT should be lengthened from 100 to 150 hours. This is to improve the trainees' specific competencies; 5). Lastly, the program may coordinate with the Records and Admission Center (RAC) to formulate measures on how to trace the AB English graduates. Possible options are online interactive survey – this can be done through the use of the university's website where graduates are encouraged to fill in their information in the Alumni Tracer Study (ATS) or Manual Survey where graduates are asked to fill in the Alumni Tracer Study (ATS) whenever they request for their credentials. These may allow the fast tracing of all UM Alumni.

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## **Glossary**

OJT: On-the-Job-Training.

ATS: Alumni Tracer Study.

LET: Licensure Examination for Teachers.

BPO: Business Process Outsourcing.

NGO: Non-Government Organization.

OBE: Outcome-Based-Education

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