

Tracing the Journey of AB English Program Graduates at National University – Manila, Philippines

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Abstract: Graduates are the finest proof of a program's employment, status, and promotion performance. Furthermore, they are an excellent source of information and feedback for assessing the program's relevance in the current labor market. This study was designed to obtain quantitative data for the graduates of Bachelor of Arts major in English at the National University - Manila from the Academic Year 2012–2013 to 2016–2017, with a total population of fifty-eight (58). The participants have an age range of 18 to 26 years old with various socio-economic statuses. This study aimed to trace the employment and positions held and promotions received by the graduates after their undergraduate degree. More importantly, this study examines how well the curricular programs contributed to the development of graduates' problem-solving, leadership, human relations, communication, and research skills. The study's results revealed that 92% of the graduates now work full-time, and most are involved in language training. The results also showed that the graduates' communication skills were extensively developed during their studies, whereas other skills like leadership, research, human relations, and problem-solving were extensively developed.

Keywords: 21st-century competencies; AB English program; employability; tracer studies

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Objectives

Tracer studies are empirical research that can present valuable data to evaluate the education and training results provided at a given institution (Menez, 2014; Aquino et al., 2015). Moreover, graduate tracer studies are an essential tool for educational planners since they provide vital information for assessing the outcomes of higher education institutions (Cagasan et al., 2017). The data gathered reduce any potential shortfalls in degree programs in terms of content, delivery, and relevance, as well as for further university development in the context of quality assurance. University tracer studies, according to Egesah and Wahome (2017), are becoming pathways through which higher education institutions (HEIs) can derive vital evaluation mainly for improving their study programs, particularly for revising curricula, developing study facilities, libraries, and laboratories, and reinforcing teacher-learner interactions for better learning outcomes. The current tracer study will provide meaningful data in the context of quality assurance and deliver appropriate preparation and training. Any gaps in its program offerings regarding administration, content, delivery, and relevance can be identified and corrected.

Moreover, the results of tracer studies will be used to investigate whether 21st-century skills are addressed and taught adequately to college students (Menez, 2014). According to Gines (2014), the graduate's alma mater and other education stakeholders for curriculum development can utilize the data gathered and other resulting reforms by

surveying the group of graduates from a specific institution, occupation, discipline, education level, and their job-related characteristics, competencies, and skills development. Palomeno et al. (2014) found that tracer studies assess the efficacy and relevance of curriculum and the influence of student learning experiences on post-graduation employment. Tracer studies evaluate graduates' work situations and progress after acquiring knowledge and skills at universities (Orilla, 2001; Tan & French-Arnold, 2012).

Further, according to Corro et al. (2011) and Cuadra et.al (2019), a tracer study is a suitable method to assess an institution's capacity for preparing graduates to fulfill workplace demands. Preparing students for future jobs is one of the primary purposes of higher education (Orejana & Resurreccion, 2010). In relation to this, information about the relationships between higher education and employment is significant. Accordingly, working with universities nationwide, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) conducts graduate follow-up surveys on all institutions to assess graduates' employability based on their majors and solve employment inequities nationwide (Alcober, 2018). The Philippine government continues to have serious concerns about underemployment and unemployment. Hence, this topic is a top priority on the CHED (2013, 2017) research agenda. The Philippines' unemployment and underemployment rates during the previous five years have been among the highest in the area compared to other Asian economies (Cull, 2017; Moya, 2017).

As the number of university graduates rises, employment possibilities become quite competitive. Most universities have a policy to increase ties with industries in response to this situation (Hillage & Pollard, 1998). The National University (NU) is currently taking steps to evaluate how its graduates have fared in their employment scene after graduation by conducting this graduate tracer study, which aligns with NU's mission to provide industry partners and employers with graduates who will contribute to their growth and development. The present study traces the graduates' employment profile after obtaining their Bachelor of Arts major in English (ABE) degree. More specifically, the current study determines the employment status of the graduates after pursuing the ABE program in NU from AY 2012–2013 to AY 2016–2017. Practically, the findings of this study will be used in evaluating NU's curricular programs in the development of graduates regarding (a) problem-solving, (2) leadership skills, (3) human relation skills, (4) communication skills, and (5) research skills. They also lessen any potential content, delivery, and relevance shortcomings in the program. Finally, the evaluation will provide a framework for enhancing the program and its implementation.

Specifically, this tracer study sought to address the following:

1. Establish the profile of NU graduates in terms of employment and position held and promotion received after they obtained their bachelor's degree.
2. Assess the graduates' level of satisfaction with NU services, facilities, and learning environment and;
3. Examine how well the curricular programs contributed to the development of graduates in terms of (a) problem-solving and decision-making skills, (b) leadership skills, (c) human relations skills, (d) communication skills, and (e) research skills.
4. Assess the effectiveness, adequacy, and relevance of NU's curricular programs.

1.2 Bachelor of Arts in English

The Bachelor of Arts in English (ABE) is a four-year degree focusing on the theoretical aspects and practical application of English and Literature. This course aims to give students a deep insight into the nature of language and its unique properties and structure (San Jose, 2014; Valmonte, 2010). The program was developed to provide students with the knowledge and skills they need to express themselves effectively and generally achieve a high level of English proficiency. Academics, call centers, broadcasting, advertising, publishing, business, law, and the public sector are among the professions that ABE graduates can enter. Graduates can also find employment as English teachers if they attend additional courses and pass the teacher's exam. Additionally, the ABE is an excellent starting point for further language, literature, and legal studies.

Utilizing Gines's framework (2014) in this tracer study, two of the primary purposes of this research are to evaluate the relevance of the ABE degree program in local and global employment (Barudia & Caluscusin, 2010) and to assess if the skills and competencies the graduates acquired in the duration of their collegiate life have helped them in their chosen professional employment or career.

1.3 21st-Century Skills

College, job preparedness, and 21st-century skills have recently gained popularity in education. Although these abilities are not new, educators and policymakers have only recently realized that these abilities must be explicitly incorporated into academic subject standards, taught concurrently with the conventional academic curriculum, and systematically evaluated for all students (Corpuz, 2013). Students need experiences that help them connect with others, speak clearly, be open to different viewpoints, and incorporate group criticism into their academic work. Long-term success also necessitates teamwork and innovative collaboration with others. To educate students for college and future employment (Tutor et al., 2019; Valenzuela & Mendoza, 2012), curriculum designers acknowledge the importance of developing educational objectives and teaching strategies.

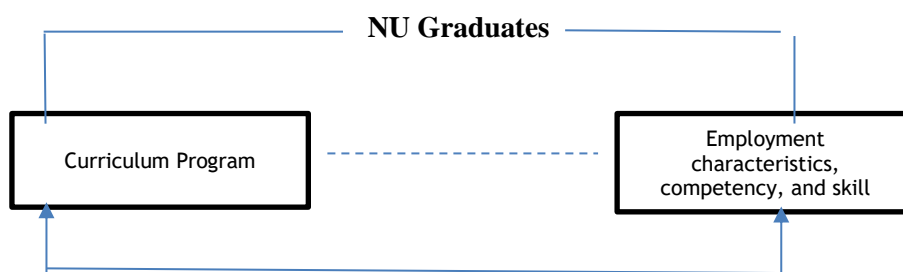
The 21st Century Skills Partnership lists the skills, knowledge, and expertise students must acquire to succeed in work and life in the 21st century: (a) content knowledge; (b) learning and innovation skills; (c) information, media, and technology skills; (d) life and career skills (Alismail & McGuire, 2015; Andrade, 2016). The current tracer study examines whether these skills are being addressed and adequately taught to college students, especially English students at the National University.

The present tracer study is significant in evaluating NU's curricular programs in the development of graduates regarding (1) problem-solving, (2) leadership skills, (3) human relation skills, (4) communication skills, and (5) research skills. Also, it will reduce any possible shortfalls in any graduate program regarding content, delivery, and relevance (Dimaiwat, 2011; Gapasin et al., 2007).

Lastly, the evaluation shall provide a basis for improving the graduate program and implementation process. Schools must integrate 21st-century abilities into core courses and classroom environments for students to succeed in demanding higher education coursework and a globally competitive employment environment. Educators can impart the competence needed for success in the modern world by integrating skills and content (Johnson, 2009).

1.4 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that serves as a guide in conducting this study is anchored on the framework proposed by Gines (2014).



This framework assesses graduates' competencies (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) in services, learning environments, facilities, and areas of specialization, as well as other competencies such as communication skills, interpersonal skills, leadership skills, and research skills. Such feedback is necessary to determine the impact of the AB English program and can provide the information needed to reform existing programs.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Study Design and Instrument

This tracer study is designed to obtain the quantitative data for the graduates of the AB English Program at the National University from AY 2012–2013 to AY 2016–2017, with a total population of 58. Of the total 58 graduates, only 36 willingly participated in the survey.

The instrument used is based on the tracer study developed by CHED. This questionnaire has two parts: Part I is on the Biographical Data covering (1) personal data, (2) educational background, (3) employment characteristics, (4) employment history, (5) professional achievement, and (4) transition. Part II is on Retrospective Evaluation of the Program covering (1) satisfaction with the services, learning environment, and facilities, (2) adequacy of skills learned, and (3) appropriateness and relevance of the curricular program in terms of competencies. This tracer study questionnaire was used to obtain quantitative and qualitative feedback from the graduates about their course-related skills, attitudes, reactions, and suggestions.

2.2 Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers gathered the data following these procedures:

1. A master list of AB English graduates from AY 2012–2013 to AY 2016–2017 was secured from the National University Alumni Office;
2. The participants were contacted via email, Facebook, and other social network accounts;
3. The participants were oriented on the purpose of the study; permission and informed consent were obtained from them before the actual survey;
4. Data were collected through online surveys.

2.3 Data Analysis

The present study used a descriptive survey covering the graduate profile, employability, and general impression of the school and the AB program. The frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and rank were computed to describe the profile and rating of the respondents.

3. RESULTS

3.1. On profile of the NU ABE graduates in terms of demographics, further studies, employment characteristics, and transition to employment

A preponderance of females characterized the 36 respondents who willingly participated in the study over males as females constituted 75% and males comprised 25%. These statistics gave the impression that AB English course is more prevalent among female students seeking a collegiate degree. As Figure 1 indicates, most respondents were Batch 2016 and 2017 graduates, consisting of 27.8%. The graduates of Batch 2013 comprised the least of those who participated in the survey, with 11.1% of the total respondents.

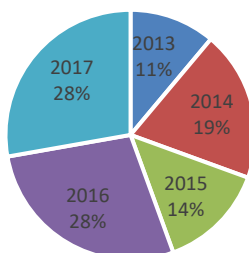


Figure 1. Respondent's Year of Graduation

Only a few % of the total respondents, 3 out of 36 (about 8.3%), took the professional or licensure examination after graduation. They either took the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) or the Civil Service Exam. Similarly, among the 36 graduates, only 3 (8.3%) took short courses or training programs to assist them in finding a job after graduation. These short courses/training programs were Journalism, Speech, and Education units.

Graduates were asked when they started looking for a job. Figure 2 shows that more than half (55.6%) of them began seeking employment after graduation, while about 36% started job hunting even before graduation.

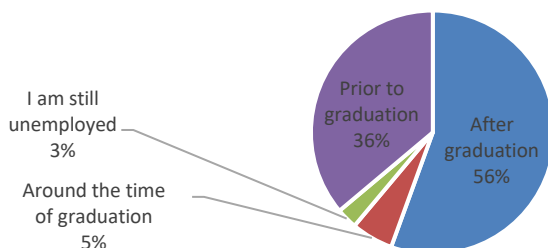


Figure 2. Period when the Graduates began looking for a Job

Figure 3 below indicates that 22.6% of the respondents took a month to get accepted to their first employment after graduation.



Figure 3. How long did it take the graduates to find their first employment?

Figure 4 below reveals that almost all (91.2%) AB English graduates worked full-time jobs. A few working full-time were seeking part-time employment (2.9%).

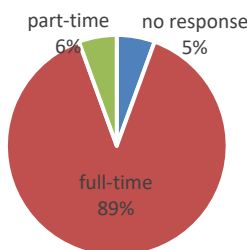


Figure 4. Graduates' Employment Status

The graduates were asked about their occupational classification in connection to their current employment. Figure 5 indicates that 36.4% of their jobs were classified as customer associates.

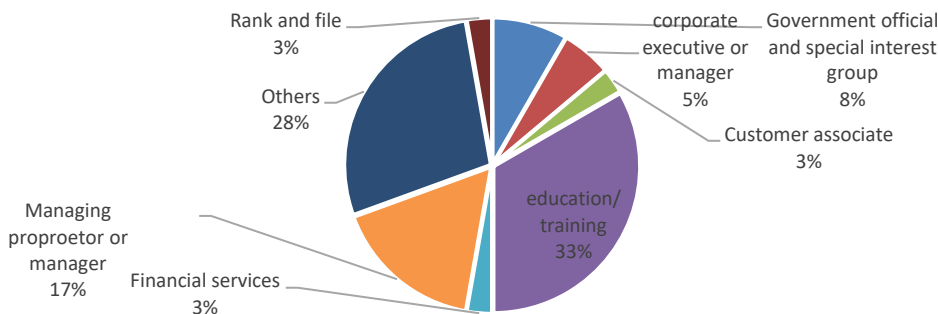


Figure 5. Graduates' Occupational Classification

When asked about their primary area of work assignment, the respondents were primarily involved in teaching/training, as revealed in Figure 6 below, followed by customer service.

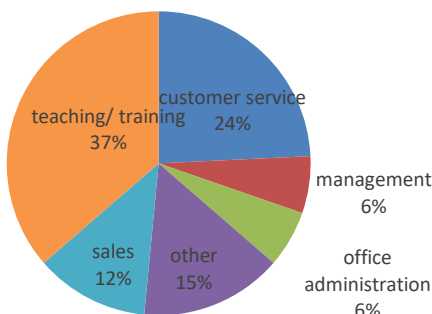


Figure 6. Graduates' Primary Area of Work Assignment

3.2. On study conditions and provisions

Graduates were asked to retrospectively identify which modes of teaching and learning were emphasized by NU and its faculty.

Figure 7 below indicates that the graduates recognized theories, concepts, and paradigms as the most emphasized mode of teaching and learning (33 out of 36), followed by writing a thesis and research (26 out of 36). Independent learning was the least emphasized mode (14 out of 36).

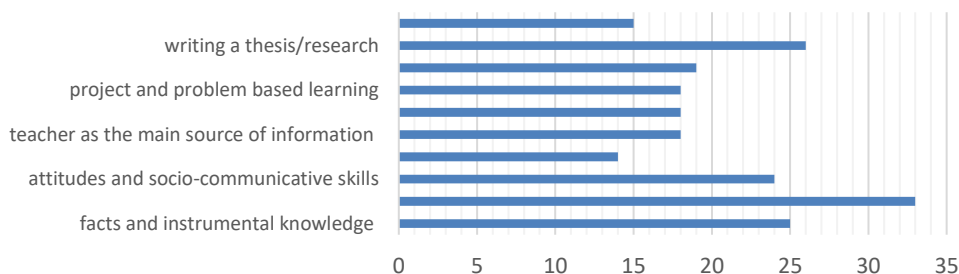


Figure 7. Modes of Teaching and Learning emphasized by NU and its Faculty

The findings presented in Table 1 revealed that the AB English graduates were satisfied with most of the study provisions and conditions of the program. However, the findings also revealed that the design of the program and the chance for them to impact university policies only moderately satisfied them.

Table 1. Study Provisions and Conditions Ratings by the Graduates

Statements	M	SD	Rank	Verbal Interpretation
Teaching quality	3.97	0.84	1	Satisfied
Testing/grading system	3.86	0.87	2.5	Satisfied
Practical emphasis on teaching and learning	3.86	0.9	2.5	Satisfied
Chances to participate in research projects	3.86	0.9	2.5	Satisfied
Academic advice offered in general	3.81	0.75	5	Satisfied
Course content of major	3.69	0.92	6	Satisfied
Provision of work placements and other work experience	3.67	1.01	7	Satisfied
Chance for students to have an impact on university policies	3.53	1.08	8	Satisfied
Design of degree program	3.36	1.05	9	Moderately Satisfied
Chance for students to have an impact on university policies	2.75	1.13	10	Moderately Satisfied

Legend: 1.00 to 1.80 – Very dissatisfied, 1.81 to 2.61 – Dissatisfied, 2.62 to 3.42 – Average, 3.43 to 4.22 – Satisfied, 4.23 to 5.00 – Very Satisfied

3.3. On the contribution of curricular programs to the development of graduates

Table 2. Graduates' Rating of the Extent of their Study Program developed their Skills

Statements	M	SD	Rank	Verbal Interpretation
communication skills	4.33	0.86	1	Very Extensive
human relation skills	4.22	0.76	2	Extensive
Problem-solving skills	4.06	0.75	3	Extensive
leadership skills	4.00	0.89	4	Extensive
research skill	3.97	1.00	5	Extensive

Legend: 1.00 to 1.80 – Not Extensive, 1.81 to 2.61 – Slightly Extensive, 2.62 to 3.42 – Moderately Extensive, 3.43 to 4.22 – Extensive, 4.23 to 5.00 – Very Extensive

Table 2 provides the graduates' rating of the extent their study program developed their skills. The results showed that the graduates' communication skills were extensively developed during their studies, whereas other skills like human relations, problem-solving, leadership, and research were extensively developed.

3.4. Assessment of the effectiveness, adequacy, and relevance of the AB English curricular program

Table 3. The Usefulness of AB English Program on Graduates' Employability

Statements	M	SD	Rank	Verbal Interpretation
For the development of personality/education	3.97	1.00	1	Useful
For future professional development/career	3.89	0.85	2	Useful
To find an adequate job after finishing studies	3.86	1.05	3	Useful
For fulfilling present professional tasks	3.81	0.95	4	Useful
For the economic development of country	3.75	0.91	5	Useful

Legend: 1.00 to 1.80 – Not Useful, 1.81to 2.61 – Slightly Useful, 2.62 to 3.42 – Moderately Useful, 3.43 to 4.22 – Useful, 4.23 to 5.00 – Very Useful

Table 3 shows that the AB English program at National University was helpful for the graduates' employability.

Table 4. Graduates' Rating as to the extent the AB English Program helped them in Job Placement, Career Prospects, and Personality Development

	Mean	SD	Rank	Verbal Interpretation
development of personality	3.89	0.85	1	Extensive
long-term career prospects	3.67	1.01	2	Extensive
Satisfaction on job	3.53	1.13	3	Extensive

Legend: 1.00 to 1.80 – Not Extensive, 1.81to 2.61 – Slightly Extensive, 2.62 to 3.42 – Moderately Extensive, 3.43 to 4.22 – Extensive, 4.23 to 5.00 – Very Extensive

According to the results presented in Table 4, the AB English Program extensively helped the graduates with job placement, career prospects, and personality development.

Table 5. Perception of Graduates to School and AB Program

	Mean	SD	Rank	Verbal Interpretation
Choose the same course of study (AB English)	3.81	1.17	1	Likely
Choose the same University	3.69	1.41	2	Likely

Legend: 1.00 to 1.80 – Not at all, 1.81to 2.61 – Least likely, 2.62 to 3.42 – Neutral, 3.43 to 4.22 – Likely, 4.23 to 5.00 – Very Likely

Table 5 revealed that the graduates were satisfied with the provisions and conditions of the program when they responded that they were likely to choose the same course of study in the same university.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Graduate tracer studies are an essential tool for curriculum planners as they provide valuable data for evaluating the performance of colleges and training institutions. The present Graduate Tracer Study aimed to evaluate the National University's curricular programs in the development of graduates in terms of (a) problem-solving, (2) leadership skills, (3) human relation skills, (4) communication skills, and (5) research skills. The evaluation shall render a basis for improving the program and implementation process. The study revealed the following significant findings:

More than half of the graduates sought employment immediately after graduation and were hired within two months after their employment application. This phenomenon indicates that the AB English program provided the necessary skills employers look for from their prospective employees. As of this writing, almost all graduates are employed in full-time positions. The graduates possessed the necessary skills needed for full-time employment. Most graduates are in the training, teaching, customer service, and financial industries, which confirms that graduates of the AB English program are competitive and employable in different fields.

The graduate respondents recognized theories, concepts, and paradigms as the program's most emphasized mode of teaching and learning, indicating that the faculty's instructional modes were mainly based on content. The respondents were satisfied with the teaching quality, testing/grading system, the practical emphasis on teaching and learning, and the chances to participate in research projects provided by the program.

The graduates rated communication skills as the most extensively developed skill during their studies in the AB English program. However, other skills such as human relations, problem-solving, leadership, and research skills are also extensively developed. As assessed by its graduates, the current AB English program of the National University helped them in their chosen professional employment or career. However, the program must continue to provide adequate and relevant competencies by integrating the 21st century and lifelong learning skills to help graduates succeed professionally and personally.

Considering the preceding, the researchers offer the following recommendations:

- 1) Strengthen the program's linkages and partnerships with private industries, government offices, and non-government agencies where undergraduate students can engage in meaningful collaboration, joint activities to develop student mobility, and scholarship grants for the underprivileged but deserving students.
- 2) Engage the undergraduate students in fieldwork, practicum activities, and internships to provide them with opportunities for experiential learning and avenues to hone their skills and prepare them for the workplace.
- 3) Implement career counseling to inform the students of the program's career paths.
- 4) Expose the students to national and international competitions, conferences, seminars, and workshops to develop their cognitive, communication, problem-solving, human relations, and research skills while at the same time widening their networks and contacts for future employment options.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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