

A Study of Job Opportunities for English Language Students at Ho Chi Minh City University of Food Industry

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to explore job opportunities and employability of English language students in a globalized economy, as well as the types of qualifications and skills that are required for positions. Another aspect of the study will look into whether English language students satisfy the requirements of the recruiter. The study was carried out by investigating recruitment advertisements on a popular job-hunting website. Besides, a survey questionnaire was sent to all English language students at HUFU to understand the job expectations they want to pursue after graduation and their abilities. The finding showed that there were various career fields that students could do after graduating, and also the requirements they needed to meet in the job market. However, many students still do not meet some requirements of recruiters. This study will provide all of the students with an overview of their profession in the future. As a result, they can build a plan to achieve qualifications, skills, and degrees to apply for the position that they want

Keywords: job opportunities, employability, English language students, requirements, job expectations

1 Introduction

In the globalized economy, companies are gradually expanding their operations and transactions in many countries. As a result, dealing with customers from all over the world has made foreign language communication an essential part of the job. That increases the importance of learning foreign languages, especially learning English, in most countries. English has become the lingua franca of the business world in the international sphere, regardless of geographical, social, political, or religious differences (Pandey & Pandey, 2014). The English language was considered to be the world's leading language for business and education (Abu-Humos, 2016). Many job opportunities open up for students, particularly those majoring in English, who can participate in a variety of fields.

English majors have gone on to work in a variety of fields, including professional writing and communication in information technology, city government, and finance, librarianship, law, social work, and psychology, as well as business and management (Beal, 2020). It can be said that studying English is an advantage both academically and professionally, offering chances for building success in students' lives in the future. Thus, English is a course that is not risky for job opportunities, but rather insurance for job opportunities because it can be regarded as 'currency' in the field of professional development (Adjoe, 2017). Another advantage aspect of English major is the promotion in path job. For example, an individual who is fluent in English can make strides in the management ladder (Pandey & Pandey, 2014).

However, there are many challenges in competing for jobs when compared to many other industries. Many graduates face unemployment problems, including English language students. There are many causes leading to unemployment among Vietnamese students. Previous research has found that the main cause of unemployment was a mismatch of skills between recent graduates and demanding employers (Ai, Truong, Truc, & Giang, 2022). Most employers appear to be dissatisfied with the quality of higher education output. Furthermore, one of the reasons for unemployment is a lack of professional qualifications, a lack of job



skills, soft skills, the quality of graduates, market conditions, and so on. However, all of these problems stem from students' attitudes toward learning and improving their knowledge and skills. Another challenge that many students face after graduation is career orientation. Many graduates from English language studies feel they can do almost anything but in fact nothing because they do not have as much field-specific knowledge and skills as others. Therefore, it is important to research these students' capacity and readiness to meet the demands of employers.

The study distributed questionnaires to English language students at HUFU and examined the recruitment advertisements. The study's goal is to determine whether students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes meet the needs of employers. That is the gap that the current study is trying to fill. Furthermore, the research will look into what qualities employers look for in English language graduates. As a result, students will be able to plan their future careers as well as prepare for the requirements of jobs right now. The present study seeks to contribute to research on the relationship between employment and English major graduates.

2 Literature review

English major has many opportunities for jobs as well as graduate employability. There are many different definitions of graduate employability depending on the context. Employability is defined as a set of accomplishments, skills, understandings, and personal characteristics that make graduates more likely to gain employment and succeed in their chosen occupations, benefiting themselves, the workforce, the community, and the economy (Yorke, 2006). According to Hillage, J. and Pollard, E, employability is about three abilities: gaining initial employment, maintaining employment, and obtaining new employment if required. It also mentions the quality of such work or employment (1998)

Career opportunities include scholarly work such as teaching and research; business and industry jobs such as public relations, advertising, and documentation; and media and publishing jobs such as writing, translating, and editing; and government and diplomatic service,... The study reflected a wide range of businesses and organizations in China that were interested in Business English graduates, but the majority of job opportunities are in the retail and consumer goods sectors, with private and non-public companies making up the majority of the businesses (Zhu, 2020). Besides diverse jobs, students also face competition for jobs compared to other majors. Considering the fierce competition, there is a constantly growing need for knowledge, skills, attitudes, and effective in applying them in the workplace that can be given to compare and compete. How English language graduates can be more competitive than graduates from other majors such as marketing major, as the number of people fluent in English grows?

Employers mainly want the following factors from graduates: education (degrees), experience, job skills suitable for employers, and personal qualities. It can be seen that job postings often ask for work experience. However, fresh graduates won't be able to get a lot of job experience. Therefore, the main opportunity for students to gain experience during their studies is in the form of internships, part-time, and club participation. According to Gagalang (2020), employers valued personal qualities such as determination and perseverance, self-discipline, and specialized skills such as communicating in English fluently, accurately, and creatively, as well as producing well-written texts for various academic and professional purposes. The results also showed many employers paid attention to personality, which challenged the notion that in the workplace, skills were more crucial than personal qualities.

Besides, widespread dissatisfaction with graduates' skills remains alarmingly high. The previous research revealed the lowest levels of satisfaction with specialized skills, such as the graduates' ability to facilitate English language learning in a variety of social, cultural, academic, and professional settings; and general skills, such as planning and organizing, as well as management or leadership qualities (Gagalang, 2020). Aside from the requirement for some soft skills, many students recognized the value of learning information technology not only in school but also in the workplace (Phuong & Hua, 2020).

3 Materials and Methods/ Methodology

Participants of the study are 57 students of English language studies at HUFU. The study used quantitative content analysis to examine the expected jobs of the students. The questionnaire consisted of 5 sections. Section 1 aims to investigate the career expectation of students. Section 2, 3, and 4 aims to consider English level assessment and soft skills and abilities that students owned. The last section discovers students' perceptions and attitudes. From the results obtained, it will be considered whether the student has met the requirements of the employer or not.

The study examined job advertisements on vn.Indeed.com with the keywords “Ngôn ngữ Anh” (English language). Search results were taken from 1/5/2022 to 14/5/2022. In total, there were 819 jobs relating to English, but the study only considered some popular jobs that employ students graduating from programs of English major.

Indeed, it is a job-seeking website based in the United States that was established in November 2004. It is an independent subsidiary of the multinational Recruit Co. Ltd., which has offices all over the world. The website collects job listings from thousands of websites, such as job boards, staffing firms, associations, and company career pages.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Some popular jobs for English major

Table 1: *Some popular jobs for English major*

Job	Requirement
English teacher	TESOL certificate or TOEIC/IELTS certificates. Skills: planning and organization, communication. Ability to work in stressful situations and under pressure. Patience, creative.
Translators and interpreters	English: Fluently use 4 skills, priority is given to candidates with 2 or more foreign languages. Skills: communication, presentation. Agility, enthusiasm, honesty.
Sales Assistant	Skills: Proficient in Microsoft Office, communication Characteristics: Proactive, hard-working, reliable, responsible.
Marketing Staff	Skills: communication skills, teamwork, organization skill, and problem-solving skill. Design, photoshop: are a plus.
Customer Service Executive	Fluently use 4 skills. Good at another language is more reference. Skills: problem-solving, communication/ negotiation skills, MS Office (Word, Excel). Proactive, dynamic, integrity, careful, teamwork. Able to work under high pressure.
Tour Operator Assistant	High proficiency in English (4 skills, especially Writing). Skills: strong communication and problem-solving. Proactive, diligent, creative, careful, and responsible. Positive attitude and multi-task ability. Work independently or under pressure well.
Import-Export staff	Graduated from Business English, ...

	Be able to read, understand and reply to foreign customer transaction letters. Skills: Data analysis, team working, system familiar, problem-solving, reporting, proficiency in the office computer.
Pricing & Customer Staff Logistics	Chinese 4 skills (with HSK 4 or higher), English reading comprehension. Able to work under pressure and have good problem-solving skills, and proficiency in office computers.
Purchasing Executive	Good English communication skills (4 skills: listening - speaking - reading - writing). Able to work under high pressure.
Director Assistant	Fluent in English (speaking and writing skills). Skills: Organization, Great communication, thoughtful, time management, excellent MS Office skill.

Table1 summarises some popular careers from the website Indeed. English language graduates can find jobs in different sectors, but most of them are in education, interpretation and translation, and business, ... It can be seen that acquiring English skills is a prerequisite for applying for positions. Employers also value soft skills, foreign language ability, computer ability, and personality traits are vital for graduates to be employed

4.2 Career expectations and English major students' ability to meet employer requirements

Career expectations of English language students

55 juniors, 1 sophomore, and 1 senior took part in the survey. There were many students who chose to work after graduating and had a career orientation for the future.

In response to the expectations of their future careers, respondents (as shown in figure1) ranked business as the most likely field they expect to join after graduation with around 42.1%. The underlying reason behind their choice is that Business is a wide field with different jobs. It also relates to some subjects that they studied like marketing, HRM, Business English, Finance – Banking, Education was in the second rank with 33.3%, which is considered to be a potential career for many graduates for English as it is a compulsory subject in schools and an important language. The other fields stood at third rank with 14% while tourism accounted for 8.8%. On the other hand, science and technology had the lowest percentage. Because students do not have much knowledge in this field, so many students didn't choose it.

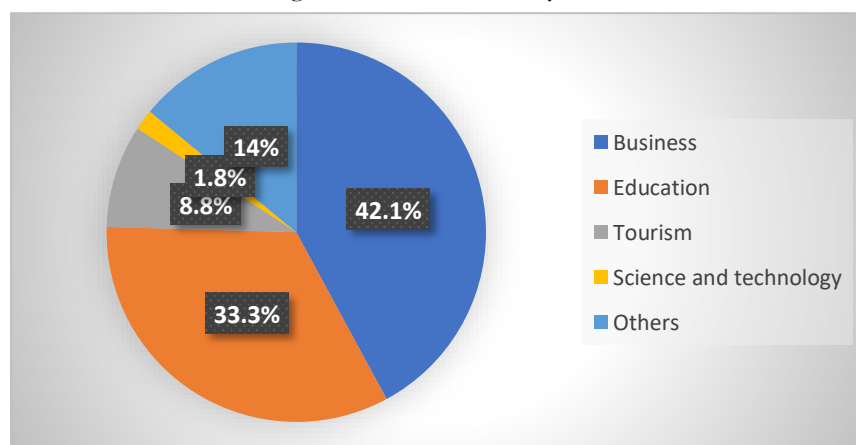


Figure 1: English language students' career expectations in various fields

Student's level of four English skills

Table 2 shows that English students with medium proficiency in four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) accounted for the highest rate, with 63.2 percent, 59.6 percent, 61.4 percent, and 64.9 percent, respectively. Second place was bad listening and writing skills, while pretty good speaking and reading skills also ranked in this position. In general, students are not very effective in their English language ability.

Table 2: *Student's level of four English skills*

	Very bad (%)	Bad (%)	Medium (%)	Pretty good (%)	Very good (%)
Listening	1.8	19.3	63.2	14	1.8
Speaking	1.8	12.3	59.6	22.8	3.5
Reading	3.5	7	61.4	26.3	1.8
Writing	5.3	14	64.9	10.5	5.3

Employers are always looking for candidates who are proficient in English skills in most jobs. The majority of their international business requires writing skill from applicants. Because business correspondence is written in English, including emails, corporate documents, faxes, phone calls, videos, well-read and popular business resources in print and electronic media, and other social media. Most corporate firms nowadays hire personnel who are fluent in speaking English and have excellent communication skills because these skills will be extremely valuable to the organization's future success. The recruiters believe that applicants with strong skills can effectively represent their firms at international conferences, seminars, workshops, business gatherings, and transactions with foreign customers. Besides, reading and listening skills are vital in the workplace. In order to understand the texts, documents, and contracts, proficiency in reading will help convert information and data quickly. Listening skills are equally important. When listening skills are good, it becomes effective to encode information and pass it on to a second party. Depending on the type of job, there will be higher requirements for certain skills. However, these 4 skills cannot be separated.

Therefore, if English major students with average and weak levels compete with candidates in other majors who also have English ability, it will be difficult for them to be employed in the same job.

Evaluating students' soft skills

The results of the questionnaires also show that the majority of students had the soft skills required for jobs. Teamwork skills with pretty good levels had the highest percentage (64.9%). Time management and work planning ranked second on the list with 45.6%. Leadership skills at a pretty good level ranked the last with 21.1%. In addition to the skills mentioned above, students also had skills such as critical thinking, making decisions, and negotiation.

Possession of soft skills is very important to enhance the employability of graduates. Soft Skills also can provide promotion in the career path. Thus, soft skills need to be improved in students to make them competent enough to meet the demands of the current job market.

Table 3: *Soft skills of students*

Attribute	Very bad (%)	Bad (%)	Medium (%)	Pretty good (%)	Very good (%)
Presentation	1.8	8.8	52.6	31.6	5.3
Working in group	1.8	0	21.1	64.9	12.3
Time management and work planning	3.5	0	42.1	45.6	8.8
Leadership	5.3	14	52.6	21.1	7

Other abilities

Some other language of English language students

Figure 2 shows that Chinese, Korean, and Japanese were three popular languages that many students had the ability to use. More than 40 students chose Chinese as a language they could use because Chinese is a part of HUFU's training program.

Because the Vietnam market is very dynamic and has a lot of development potential, many foreign investors choose Vietnam to invest and expand their business. As a result, it's not surprising that employers expect hires to be fluent in multiple languages. English major graduates who are fluent in other languages such as French, Korean, Chinese, and so on will have a competitive advantage when seeking work.

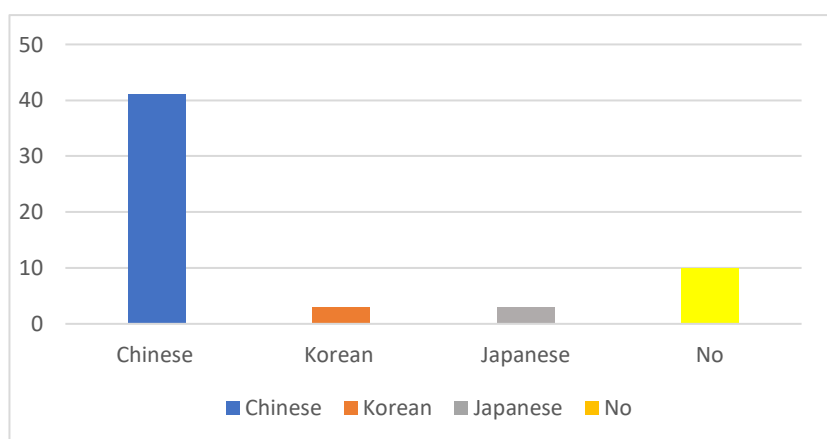


Figure 2: Other language abilities of English language students

Office computer skills

Besides foreign language ability, computer skills are equally crucial in many fields. It can be seen that 89.5% of students owned office computer skills. Because the school's output requirements required students to have a computer certificate, many students who had computer skills could meet recruitment requirements in some fields.

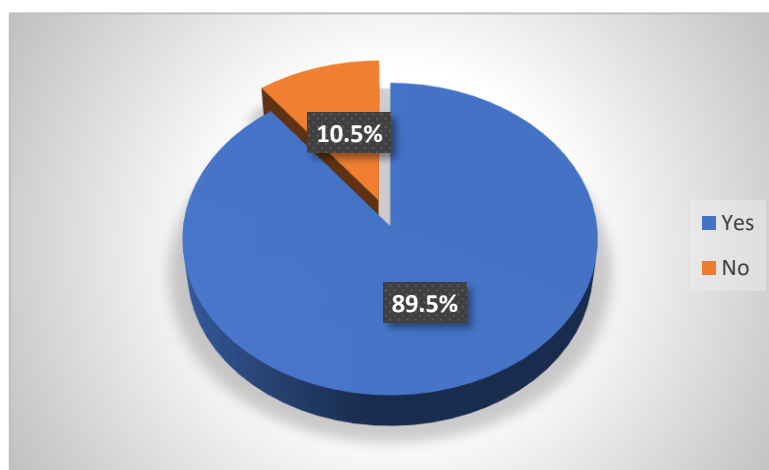


Figure 3: Office computer skills of students

Perceptions of and attitudes toward work among students**Table 4:** Students' perception and attitudes towards work

Attribute	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
I am a quick, enthusiastic, and trustworthy individual.	0	5.3	40.4	43.9	10.5
I have the ability to work under pressure	3.5	1.8	43.9	49.1	1.8
I have creativity and flexibility in work	0	5.3	35.1	49.1	10.5
I'm ready to join the training	1.8	1.8	26.3	40.4	29.8

Table 4 reveals a positive response when more than 40 percent of students agreed to have a good perception and attitude toward work. This finding shows that when it comes to future jobs, students have a high readiness level and commitment to adapt to the working environment.

Among the three factors of knowledge - skills - attitude, all 3 factors are extremely important in the eyes of employers, but the most important factor for employers is the attitude of the employee. Companies do not need people who are too good, just people who have a heart for what they are doing. That is also the reason that Attitude is also a decisive factor in the quality of work

Most recent graduates often do not have much work experience, and professional knowledge and soft skills are lacking. Therefore, it is difficult for them to compete with other senior candidates. New graduates' professional knowledge and working skills can all be improved during their work. However, if they have a bad attitude, it will be difficult to change and lose job opportunities.

5 Conclusions

This study examines job opportunities for English language students at the Ho Chi Minh City University of Food Industry. It also investigates the requirements that students need to apply for the positions as well as students' level of meeting employers' terms of English proficiency, soft skills, working perception and attitude, and other requirements.

As a result, the research found many job opportunities as well as the qualifications and skills required for the job listed on a popular job-hunting website in Vietnam. Firstly, English language graduates could find jobs in different sectors, but most of them **were** in education and business. Secondly, education and business **were** the most popular fields that students expected. Thirdly, the student's level of four English skills and soft skills on average held a large amount. Finally, students had a positive perception and attitude toward work. In general, students had a higher level of meeting employers' requirements of working perceptions and attitude and office computer skills than English skills and soft skills. In this regard, curriculum designers and educators have to think about how graduates improve their English skills and soft skills. Besides, students need to improve their language proficiency on their own.

The limitation of the present studies is the lack of support tools, and there is a large amount of data on job-hunting websites (Vietnamworks.com, CareerLink.vn). Hence, the study cannot select all of the data, which results in a lack of diversity. Another limitation of this study is that the majority of responses were provided by third-year students. Thus, the findings cannot illustrate all of the abilities of English language students.

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