

Employment Status of the Bachelor of Arts in English Language Graduates: Insights for Curriculum Enhancement

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ABSTRACT

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) play a crucial role in national development, with graduate employability as a key indicator of educational quality. This study examines the employment status of Bachelor of Arts in English Language (BAEL) graduates from the 2019, 2020, and 2022 cohorts at Bukidnon State University. The objectives are to assess the graduates' employment rate, classification, and occupational roles and to propose curriculum enhancements based on employment trends. A convergent parallel mixed-method design was used, gathering data through an adapted CHED questionnaire. The findings reveal a positive trend in employment rates, with a significant increase in permanent employment and a decrease in self-employment, likely due to economic shifts favoring stable, salaried positions. Many BAEL graduates find work in the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector, capitalizing on their strong English language skills. However, fewer graduates are employed in administrative roles, indicating a possible mismatch between skillsets and job placement in that sector. Additionally, the study underscores the versatility of BAEL graduates who pursue careers in education, customer service, and professional roles such as virtual assistants and technical writers. The study concludes that aligning the BAEL curriculum with current employment trends can further enhance graduates' job prospects. Establishing an alum network early during students' university years is also recommended to improve graduate tracking and response rates for future studies. These measures will help ensure that BAEL graduates remain competitive in an evolving job market.

Keywords: employability; career paths; Bachelor of Arts in English Language; curriculum enhancement

INTRODUCTION

Higher Education Institutions are critical in transforming lives and driving national progress. This expectation is documented in several quality assurance indicators for education where employability, as reflected in their graduates' employment outcomes, is considered a key metric. It plays an important role in economic growth [23] and human resource development [19], thus compelling universities to remain relevant and responsive to the dynamic demands of the job market. It is aligned with the statement that Philippine State Universities aim to produce graduates with the skills and knowledge that match those needed in the job market [2]. This role of universities in developing human capital is further underscored in [3], which identifies employability as one of the measures of the quality of education received by their graduates.

Several studies presented a review of the concept of employability, which revealed multiple definitions ranging from skills, attitude, self-sufficiency, and job satisfaction to employment maintenance and meeting employer expectations [7], [10], [24]. The lack of coherence in the definition of employability led to the percentage of employment as its measure [10]. However, the reviewed literature argued that this approach should consider the following [10]: (1) global and local market conditions, (2) employability as a continuous skill development process rather than simply gaining employment, (3) employment is influenced by factors beyond a college degree, such as salary, willingness to relocate, and others, and (4) employability as a shared

responsibility of universities, the alums, government, and other stakeholders. Keeping this argument in perspective, the percentage of employment of a university's graduates must be interpreted cautiously and not in isolation, considering the factors that can affect job employment.

Employability research highlights a range of factors influencing employment outcomes. It is observed that the number of university graduates has grown, yet the demand for these graduate-level jobs has fallen behind [15]. Other factors that contributed to unemployment and underemployment can be attributed to economic conditions, the misalignment between graduates' skills and market demands [1], [9], [26], and the need for additional specialized training [1]. Given that economic conditions are beyond the internal control of universities, the persistent observation of the mismatch between academic training and industry demands suggests an acceleration of the university's responsiveness to adapt and implement curricular enhancements quickly.

Regular employability research is a quality assurance mechanism that informs universities of market demands, ensuring that their curricula and instructors' training align with the industry's evolving needs. Without such studies, universities risk producing graduates whose hard and soft skills fall short of employer expectations. So, to strengthen their contributions to human capital development, studies relevant to graduates' employment must be conducted. This information allows universities to make data-driven decisions to enhance their students' employability.

Research Questions

This study aims to describe the employment data of the Bachelor of Arts of English Language (BAEL hereafter) graduates and use this information to propose an enhancement of the BAEL curriculum.

1. What is the employment status of the 2019, 2020, and 2022 BAEL graduate in terms of:
 - a. employment rate
 - b. employment classification
 - c. occupational roles
2. How can the BAEL curriculum be enhanced to align with the employment trends and occupational roles of the BAEL graduates?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Framework of the Study

This study was anchored in the human capital theory [5] and employability. Human Capital Theory posits that education and training are critical investments that increase an individual's productivity, skills, and overall economic value, thus benefiting both the individual and society. According to this theory, the value of labor is not solely determined by the quantity of work but by the quality of the workforce, which is shaped by the knowledge, skills, and abilities acquired through education and training. This perspective is further supported by scholars [22], who highlight the positive relationship between education and earnings, and [25] who argue that investments in human capital improve individual outcomes and contribute to economic growth and development.

Next is the concept of employability. It is the ability to gain and maintain employment, which is closely linked to the percentage of graduates who secure jobs [28]. In the lens percentage of employment among graduates, employability is influenced by factors such as the alignment of educational programs with labor market demands and the overall economic climate [17].

Additionally, employment rates are also affected by external factors such as sector demand and employer expectations, with graduates being more likely to be employed if their education aligns with industry needs [21], [27].

On the other hand, occupational roles in employability are the specific positions individuals hold within the workforce, shaped by their education, skills, and career aspirations. According to this framework, employability goes beyond merely securing a job; it involves obtaining a role that aligns with one's qualifications and career goals while adapting to the shifting demands of the labor market [14], [21]. Furthermore, this framework emphasizes the critical role of higher education in preparing graduates for suitable occupational roles, where the alignment between educational outcomes and labor market needs determines the type of roles graduates are likely to access and thrive in [27], [8].

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-method design, utilizing both primary and secondary data in analyzing the first research question and qualitative data to answer the second and third research questions. This approach in collecting and analyzing data aligns with the design's practice of collecting quantitative and qualitative data separately and then using both data to understand the phenomenon better [18], in this case, as a basis for crafting recommendations for curriculum enhancement.

Study Setting

The research was conducted at Bukidnon State University, Philippines. The study population involved the Bachelor of Arts in English Language from batches 2019, 2020, and 2022. Due to the K-12 implementation, there were no graduates in 2021 and, supposedly, in 2020. Those who graduated in 2020 completed their studies under the old curriculum.

The BAEL Program has been recognized as a Center of Development, a quality assurance award given to academic programs with the potential to become a Center of Excellence. It is also a Level IV AACUP accredited program, which means that it exhibits excellence in areas like instruction, research, and community extension, among others.

Instrumentation

The study utilized an adapted and modified CHED questionnaire to gather data for the 2019, 2020, and 2022 cohorts. This questionnaire aims to collect information from graduates to assess employability and improve university course offerings. The questions include information about the graduate's employment status and job details. Data from this questionnaire are compared with the secondary data on the same indicators, specifically employment rate, employment classification (permanent, contractual, and others), and occupational roles. The data sets are part of a more extensive tracer study of the BAEL students' employment outcomes. The e-questionnaire and consent form were sent to the program's alumni chat groups to gather the data.

RESULTS

Employment Status

This study defines employment status in terms of employment rate, employment classification, and occupational roles. The employment rate refers to the number of BAEL graduates of the 2019, 2020, and 2022 batches who are employed, unemployed, and self-employed. These data were taken from the data gathered using the CHED-approved instrument. Table 1 presents the employment rate among the three groups of graduates.

Table I: Employment Rate of the 2020 and 2022 Bael Batches

Employment Status	Batch					
	2019		2020		2022	
	(f)	%	(f)	%	(f)	%
Employed	5	63%	12	80%	9	92%
Self-employed	0	0%	3	20%	3	8%
Unemployed	3	37%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	8	100%	15	100%	12	100%
Untracked	16	67%	7	33%	10	45%

The initial trend analysis of the employment status of the 2019, 2020, and 2022 BAEL graduates revealed a positive result. Two things to note: First, the program did not have graduates in 2021 due to the K-12 implementation; the 2020 graduates were students from the old curriculum. Second, the number of untracked graduates may affect the employment estimations and prevent the drawing of definitive conclusions. The response rate for Batches 2019 is 33.33%, 2020 is 68.18, and 54.55% for the 2022 graduates.

The data in Table 1 showed a steady increase in the number of employed BAEL graduates, suggesting a strong employment rate. Self-employment jumped from 0 to 20% in 2020 and declines in 2022. This implies shifts in the direction of employment, which may imply changes in the economic situation. In terms of untracked graduates, the result is inconsistent, suggesting a difficulty in tracking the 2019 graduates and this may be brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. The fluctuation in the percentage of untracked graduates may also be due to changes in address or other personal factors.

Table 2 provides a breakdown of employment classification, specifically categorizing respondents based on their permanent or temporary employment status. This distinction is crucial for understanding the nature of the respondents' job stability and contractual terms, as permanent status typically indicates long-term, secure positions with benefits. In contrast, temporary status refers to short-term or contractual roles that may lack long-term security. The table likely highlights differences in workforce composition, labor conditions, or outcomes related to job stability, offering insights into the prevalence and implications of permanent versus temporary employment within the study's context. This classification is essential for analyzing trends, disparities, or policy impacts in the labor market.

Table 2: Employment Classification

Employment Classification	Batch					
	2019		2020		2022	
	(f)	%	(f)	%	(f)	%
Permanent	4	80%	4	27%	6	50%
Self-employed	0	0%	3	20%	3	25%
Job Order	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Temporary	0	0%	1	6%	0	0%
Contractual	1	20%	4	27%	3	25%
Casual	0	0%	3	20%	0	0%
Total	5	100%	15	100%	12	100%

In terms of employment classification, there was a decline in the percentage of permanent employees and the presence of self-employment in 2020 which continued in 2021. Further, the percentage decrease of graduates involved in self-employment, like early-stage entrepreneurial activity, is due to economic shifts toward formal employment. It highlights how economic instability pushes graduates toward salaried roles. The number of

untracked graduates may be attributed to the inability of some graduates to respond to surveys which stems from a combination of logistical challenges (e.g., outdated contact information), psychological factors (e.g., survey fatigue, lack of motivation), and technological barriers (e.g., inaccessibility).

The result of the contractual, temporary, and casual classifications of employment may indicate that while permanent employment rose, the work of a portion of the BAEL graduates is also less stable because they typically involve short-term, project-based contracts without the long-term commitment or security found in permanent employment. These factors contribute to decreasing temporary work arrangements as employers and employees shift toward more stable and long-term employment options.

Table 3 shows the occupational roles or the jobs of the BAEL graduates. In the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector, graduates can demonstrate proficiency in information and communication roles, such as customer service, technical support, or communication training, where advanced English language skills and cross-cultural competence are critical. Entrepreneurs operating in private households or self-employment can leverage their linguistic abilities in tutoring, content creation, and freelance writing, contributing to personalized education and media production. In administrative aide positions, their expertise in written and verbal communication and organizational proficiency facilitates efficient office management and effective correspondence. Additionally, within professional, scientific, and technical occupations, their specialized knowledge in language analysis and clear communication is instrumental for research, technical writing, editing, and policy formulation, highlighting the degree's broad applicability across multiple disciplines.

As illustrated in Table 3, the relatively high percentage of employed English language graduates in the BPO industry in 2019 can be attributed to several factors that align the skill sets of these graduates with the specific demands of the sector. This is mainly due to their strong English and cross-cultural communication proficiency, which are essential for roles like customer service and technical support. However, while the number of graduates was previously equally high on entrepreneurial ships, the decrease in number by 2022 indicates economic shifts favoring formal employment. This trend underscores how economic instability tends to drive graduates toward salaried positions. The absence of BPO BAEL employees in 2020 and 2022 may be reflective of the global health and economic situation during that time. An observation that may also hold with the increase in self-employed graduates.

On the other hand, there is a fluctuation in the percentage of BAEL alumni employed in administrative type of jobs. This may be due to other alternative opportunities or perhaps a limited number of jobs requiring administrative work. No graduate in these three batches was involved in jobs requiring scientific and technical writing skills. It is possible to assume that the graduates are possibly not interested in this type of work or there is a mismatch in industry and job skills, which has to be investigated further.

Table 3: Occupational Roles of the 2020 and 2022 Bael Graduates

Occupational Roles	2019 Batch		2020 Batch		2022 Batch	
	(f)	%	(f)	%	(f)	%
Information and Communication (BPO, VA)	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%
Entrepreneur: Private households and self-employed person	0	0%	3	20%	3	25%
Admin Aide	2	40%	7	47%	2	17%
Scientific and technical-related jobs	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Others	2	40%	5	33%	7	58%
Total	5	100%	15	100%	12	100%

DISCUSSION

Conducting a tracer study and examining the employment trend of a program's graduates is essential to enhance the curriculum, ultimately preparing the graduates for the workforce and ensuring the program's relevance to the evolving demands of the job market. However, tracking the graduates proved to be a problem, an issue consistent with the experience of other researchers [11], which may affect the accuracy of the trend analysis. However, it was explained that a 30-40% response rate is already sufficient for credible tracer studies [4]. Thus, while the study aims for higher participation, the current response rates from the 2019, 2020, and 2022 BAEL batches may still yield valuable insights into how the program's alumni are doing regarding job placement.

The result reveals a positive employment trajectory, with an increase in employment and a decline in unemployment in 2022. The employment rate of English language graduates suggests favorable market opportunities for those who are proficient in the English language. A similar result came out in the study [6], which confirmed that the program meets industry needs.

There is an observed reduction in self-employment, suggesting that the graduates must have preferred a structured work environment over business engagement. During the COVID-19 outbreak, startup entrepreneurs recognized market opportunities [13]. The scarcity of traditional job opportunities may have fueled the rise of small businesses to cope with income loss. Twenty-three students from a university, for example, built their small businesses during the pandemic, necessitating additional staff or family involvement to accommodate the growing demand [12]. The BAEL students may not have received formal entrepreneurial training, but the study shows that knowledge of business, regardless of academic background, is important for enhancing their quality of life. Entrepreneurial education should be considered part of the university experience regardless of the academic program.

The occupational roles of BAEL students are also diversified, ranging from a comprehensive knowledge of the English language, including its origin, growth, development structure, and use, to presenting appropriate language use strategies through heightened awareness of how English works in different situations in the Philippines, Asia, and the rest of the world. These jobs suggest that the students apply their English skills in a real-world context.

Curricular Implications

The Bachelor of Arts in English Language (BAEL) program of Bukidnon State University is a quality-assured program, as evidenced by its Center of Development Status and Level IV AACUP accreditation. Consequently, much is expected from the program and the kind of graduates that it produces. Living up to its name, the program may strengthen its admission and retention policies, ensuring that students meet the criteria for admission and are provided with instructional support to complete the program requirements and graduate with the expected English language proficiency of a BAEL graduate.

Graduating with the expected English language proficiency will enhance the graduates' confidence in speaking and writing in English, thereby increasing their chances for employment. Research has concluded that applicants, particularly those applying to foreign companies, should invest more time in refining their English language skills [20], [16]. This will enhance their career prospects and offer a wide range of opportunities. In this regard, the program must regularly examine its curriculum and course activities to ensure that the topics and skills remain relevant. For example, remote work has become a growing trend, and many jobs require strong English language skills. Content writing, for example, pays well, but the BAEL program does not currently include it in its technical writing course or other writing subjects.

The integration of artificial intelligence is also crucial for the graduates to keep up with modern work requirements, so the graduates need to be tech-savvy [16]. This gap is due to the teacher's limited exposure to the job requirements offered in this online work. Therefore, the program must not only update its curriculum

but also ensure that the English language instructors are immersed in the new career opportunities that require using the English language. The study also shows that some BAEL students engage in entrepreneurial activities, which may be attributed to the lack of innovative and entrepreneurial skills [29]. Perhaps it is time to introduce entrepreneurial learning in the BAEL curriculum. Moreover, incorporating co-curricular activities that expose students to emerging job opportunities and equip them with new skills will better prepare them for employment. The BAEL alumni and other experts can be invited for this purpose.

To increase the response rates in the program's tracer studies, an accurate and comprehensive student data bank should be established [4]. Orienting the students while they are still at university about the importance of participating in tracer studies may encourage them to respond consistently.

CONCLUSION

The employability rate suggests that English language skills are an asset. Producing graduates with strong English language skills that align with the needs of the current job market will increase their chances for job placement. While self-employment is decreasing due to the availability of traditional or remote jobs, entrepreneurial skills are also important and may provide graduates with career options. Further, establishing the alumni network early while the students are still in the university may increase the chance of a higher trace study response rate.

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