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# ENGLISH-MAJORED STUDENTS' MOST COMMON CAREER OPTIONS AND THE LEVELS OF READINESS FOR THE CAREERS

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#### **Abstract:**

EFL students nowadays have a variety of career options. Most of them, however, still do not have a well-understanding or a strong readiness for their job targets. This study was conducted to find out the EFL students' most career options, some language standards when selecting careers and to what extent students feel that they are ready for their future careers. To answer these questions, we use exploratory questionnaires to survey the participants. The findings demonstrate that teaching English is the most attractive career that EFL students want to attend after graduating, followed by the freelancer. However, a group of students still cannot locate their future careers. Additionally, juniors and seniors are considered to have better preparation for their career prospects than freshmen and sophomores.

**Keywords:** common career options, students, employability skills, competencies, readiness

#### 1. Introduction

Most students at Vietnamese universities, and Can Tho University, in particular, are usually concerned about finding a career that suits their abilities and majors. However, it is a truth that few students are aware of whether or not they can satisfy the job's specific requirements, particularly the language and abilities necessary. Finding out the fundamental needs in terms of language and abilities so that students, particularly English language majors, may prepare and study effectively in order to be competent to accomplish the desired professions after graduation is extremely crucial in career orientation. This study aims to investigate EFL students' most common career options.

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Furthermore, this study explores some skills that students need to meet to be ready for their selecting-job requirements and to what extent students feel that they are ready for those requirements.

#### 2. Literature Review

#### 2.1 Employability Skills

Employability skills are always one of the top concerns of employers for applicants participating in recruitment. This section will provide readers with (1) the definition of employability skills and (2) the importance of these skills.

#### 2.2 Definition

The phrase "employability" refers to a collection of accomplishments that include knowledge, abilities, and character traits that increase a person's chances of landing a job and succeeding in it for the good of themselves, the labour force, the neighborhood, and the economy (Yorke and Knight, 2004, cited in Wickramasinghe et al., 2010). Due to their thorough study of those subjects during the degree program, students typically graduate from university with a positive perception of their chosen fields Additionally, employability skills are characteristics of individuals, other than technical competence, that makes them a benefit to an employer, according to Buck and Barrick (1987), cited in Wickramasinghe et al. (2010).

According to Down (2003), employability skills are the fundamental competencies and skills that are needed to find, maintain, and perform well in any job. They are useful in addition to the technical abilities necessary for a particular profession. Our training and education system has typically conceptualized skills in a way that reflects a rapidly fading work paradigm. We are now in the era of a high-performance workplace when all employees are expected to have the essential capabilities to improve the enterprise's overall performance. For example, until recently, the requirement for creative thinking in the general workforce would have been unthinkable, but it is now towards the top of the list of desired qualities.

In addition, Clarke (2017), stated that employability is defined as the ability to move freely within the labor market in order to realize one's full potential in a long-term career. Employability is determined by an individual's knowledge, skills, and attitudes, as well as how they use and display those assets to employers and the setting in which they seek employment.

#### 2.3 The Importance of Employability Skills

According to author Tran Thi Phung Ha (2014), "with mastering soft skills, students will easily have the opportunity to find suitable jobs, they will be flexible to change, learn and develop to match the requirements of the industry. Students can behave effectively in a cooperative relationship in a group with many different majors and work together on a program or a project, or work in a multinational and multicultural group".

There is a fact that many students believe that these job skills are not taught or guided clearly enough in their training programs. However, those skills are the ones that organizations, businesses or employment providers will need from their workers; and these are also the skills that students will need to develop themselves in the new global labor market. For example, in a study by Barrios et al (2016), the skills that employees are increasingly asked to improve their *cognitive skills* and *interpersonal communication skills* when they work together; Moreover, employers also look for employees with *learning skills*, *self-improve attitudes* and *flexibility*, in order to deal effectively with many colleagues with different personalities in different working markets.

In addition, according to the research results of Hu et al(2014), employers are extremely interested in employability skills and they consider that those skills are must-have skills for students after graduation. Those skills will be powerful tools for all graduates to compete in the global marketplace. The results of the study also show that the size of companies or organizations of the recruiting parties is directly proportional to the requirements in terms of working skills, regardless of the field in which the employees work. In other words, the larger the company, business or organization, the higher the requirements for employability skills.

### 3. Methodology

This study was carried out by quantitative method. Data were collected from 116 students (including 99 third and final-year students, and 17 second-year students majoring in English studies (a high-quality program) at Can Tho University). The number of students questioned included 31 males and 85 females. The data were collected by sending the survey randomly to students of the School of Foreign Languages, at Can Tho University.

The career options listed in the survey include 14 jobs (there are 11 listed in the training program of English studies (high-quality program) in 2019, and 2 other jobs are flight attendants and freelancers). The participants can also choose "None" if they still have no idea about what career they want to follow. From Trang's research (2019); Truong, Ha and Tram (2021) and the study of Cowan (2021), we listed 24 skills (In which there are 6 more skills in the English studies (high-quality program) training program in 2019). The participants will also have to self-assess 24 skills and abilities on the following 5 levels: Very weak; Weak; Average; Good; Excellent. Finally, the students are asked to provide up to 3 skills that they would like to be supported by the school to develop in the future.

## 4. Findings

#### 4.1. Students' Most Common Career Option after Graduating

This section is the result of the first question in the survey of occupations chosen by English language students after graduation, it also contributes to the answer to the first research question about the most common career options selected by students. The data is extracted from the Analyze Descriptive Statistic function in the SPSS-26 application. The results are the number of students choosing and the percentage in each profession.

Table 1: Students' most common career options

	F	Percent	Cumulative percent
English teacher	31	26,7	26,7
Interpreter	7	6,0	32,8
Translator	11	9,5	42,2
Consultant	2	1,7	44,0
Media (MC, editor, reporter)	3	2,6	46,6
Tour guide	5	4,3	50,9
Hotel manager, receptionist	6	5,2	56,0
Marketer, public relations	8	6,9	62,9
Office worker	10	8,6	71,6
State employees	1	0,9	72,4
Flight attendant	3	2,6	75,0
Freelancer	16	13,8	88,8
None	13	11,2	100,0

The table illustrates some most common careers that English-majored students at Can Tho university choose to work in the future. Overall, the most popular career is English teaching (26,7%, N=116). Meanwhile, the lowest choice could be seen in government office work (0,9%). Some other attractive careers like freelancing, translating, interpreting, office work and marketing are also chosen by students, at 13,8%, 9,5%, 6%, 8,6% and 6,9%, respectively. However, 11.2% of students still cannot decide on their job at the moment. In comparison to the study of Dr. Nguyen Hai Quan (2020), there is a similarity between the two outcomes. Becoming an English teacher is still one of the most attractive future careers that high-quality-program English-majored students want to achieve after graduating (45%, N=40). The big difference between the two findings is the proportion of students choosing to work in tourism and hospitality, which has been narrowed down at present, from 40% in the study of Quan (2020) to only 4,3%.

## 4.2. Factors Affecting Students' Career Prospect

This part is the results of research in survey question number 2 on factors affecting students' career choices. The data is extracted from the Analyze Multiple Response functions from the SPSS v26 software. The results show the number of choices for each variable, the percentage and the percentage of cases.

The outcome shows that most of the students agree that they work because of their passion which means they do not pay much attention to the influence of the career that they chose. By contrast, very few students chose the job due to its fame. We see that students choose their careers because their passion takes a big part (17,4%, N=116). In addition, some other factors like *income*, *job description*, *potential self-development*, *society needs* and *work environment* are also common factors that make them choose a job, at

12,1%, 11,9%, 12,1%, 12,6% and 12,1%, respectively. Some last elements like *professional ability* (7,4%), *teachers' advice* (2,6%), *friends' comment* (2,4%), *family orientation* (4,6%), *fame of the job* (0,7%), *location* (4,1%) do not give any influence to students' selecting suitable jobs.

Table 2: The confidence level of students' applying skills

	N	Percent	Percent of cases
Teachers' advice	12	2,6%	10,3%
Friends' comment	11	2,4%	9,5%
Family orientation	21	4,6%	18,1%
Society needs	58	12,6%	50,0%
Passion	80	17,4%	69,0%
Income	56	12,1%	48,3%
Work environment	56	12,1%	48,3%
Professional ability	34	7,4%	29,3%
Job description	55	11,9%	47,4%
Fame of the job	3	0,7%	2,6%
Potential self-development	56	12,1%	48,3%
Location	19	4,1%	16,4%

It can be noticed that most of the students agree that they can apply these skills (N=116, mean > 3). Nevertheless, a small group of students still feel these skills magnification of their weaknesses (minimum value  $\approx$  2).

## 4.3. The Importance of Employability Skills

This section is the results of survey questions 3 and 4 about the importance of skills and the level of confidence that students can apply. The data is extracted from the Analyze Descriptive Statistic function in SPSS 26 software. Since the two questions are in 5-level Likert format, the results will include the minimum value (1) to the maximum value (5), the mean and standard deviation of the responses for each variable.

**Table 3:** The confidence level of students' applying skills

	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Completing assigned-work ability	3	5	3,86	,617
Planning skills	2	5	3,66	,699
Analyzing, evaluating, and proposing quality improvement skill	1	5	3,56	,816
Technology skill	2	5	3,56	,837
Self-study and self-training skills	2	5	3,77	,727
Adaptation and development skills	2	5	3,88	,748
Discipline	2	5	3,81	,823
Confidence building skills	2	5	3,80	,737
Taking self-responsibility ability	2	5	4,03	,733
Self-study and updating new knowledge ability	2	5	3,92	,700
Creativity	2	5	3,56	,878
Self-control ability	2	5	3,83	,805

Understanding and applying principles of professional ethics ability		5	4,04	,796
Stress-management skills	1	5	3,53	,937
Connecting-people ability	1	5	3,64	,898
Working individual ability	2	5	3,83	,749
Decision-making skill	1	5	3,63	,880
Organizational skill	2	5	3,70	,749
Collaboration skill	2	5	3,89	,743
Problem-solving skill	1	5	3,83	,738
Leadership skill	1	5	3,51	,880
Negotiation skill	1	5	3,51	,890
Task-management skill	2	5	3,84	,757
Job seeking skill	1	5	3,47	,796

Overall, it can be seen that the skills from both inside and outside the curriculum are selected to be applied at a good level by the students, including understanding and applying professional ethics skills, which have been chosen at a good level by the vast majority of students (Mean=4.04; N=116). Besides, job application skills in the curriculum selected by students can be applied more than the average (Mean=3.47, N=116), but lower than the remaining skills. However, a small group of students still feel these skills are their weaknesses (minimum  $\approx$  2).

#### 4.4. The Readiness Level of Students for Their Future Job

This section is the result of survey question 5 on students' readiness for future careers, which uses two observed variables: students of cohorts 45, 46 & 47 and male students and female students. This also contributes to answering the second research question about the level of readiness for the future career of English-majored students. The data is extracted from the Analyze Descriptive Statistics in Crosstabs function of SPSS 26 software. The result is the number of students selected in each answer including Completely not ready, Not ready, Neutral, Ready, Completely ready. In addition, the research team also uses ANOVA to check the Sig value (the similarity between the answers).

**Table 4:** The readiness level of students for future career from 3 main cohort

	Completely not ready	Not ready	Neutral	Ready	Completely ready	Total
Senior	4	20	16	32	5	77
Junior	2	10	1	8	1	22
Sophomore	1	7	6	3	0	17
Total	7	37	23	43	6	116

From the table, we can easily see that many seniors (final-year students) have been extremely ready for their future job (5 out of 77 participants, N=116), followed by one student from the juniors. On the other hand, 22 participants from the former say that they are not ready for a future job and four others believe that they are completely not

prepared for that. Furthermore, most of the sophomores (2nd-year students) express that they are not ready to take part in a career (7 out of 17 participants). By using ANOVA from the SPSS platform, we can see that there are not many differences among students' answers.

Table 4: Anova

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5,252	2	2,626	2,344	,101
Within Groups	126,610	113	1,120		
Total	131,862	115			

Moreover, the readiness between male and female students for their future job has been discovered.

**Table 5:** The readiness level of students for future career between two genders

	Completely not ready	Not ready	Neutral	Ready	Completely ready	Total
Male	2	7	9	10	3	31
Female	5	30	14	33	3	85
Total	7	37	23	43	6	116

According to the table, we can easily see that many female students believe that they are ready for their job (33 out of 85 female participants, N=116), whereas only 1/3 of male students confirm that. Similar to females, male students have the same number of people who agree that they are totally ready for their job (3 participants). However, 30 female students still are not ready to apply for a job, which takes nearly 25% of this finding. Additionally, 2 male students feel completely not ready for a future job, and only 5 out of 85 female students have the same problem.

In addition, the result also shows that students want to learn more about some specific skills before graduating. Overall, analytical and critical skill is the most crucial skill that students really want to dig into, while applying professional ethics skill could be found as the last choice. Moreover, technology skills, discipline ability, adaptability, creative ability and stress-controlling skills are the other five attractive skills that students want to be delivered, at 6,4%, 6,1%, 6,4%, 6,7% and 5,8%, respectively. In addition, some skills in the curriculum are selected by students including collaboration skills (2%), problem-solving skills (3,2%), leadership skills (2,3%), negotiation skills (4,4%), work-management skills (2,9%) and job-seeking skills (4,7%). In detail, we can see that negotiation skills and job application skills are two ideal choices in the curriculum that students want to learn more about.

#### 5. Discussion

From the data analysis of the research instrument and the findings were presented as (1) Students' most common career option after graduating, (2) Factors affecting students'

career prospects, (3) The importance of employability skills, (4) The readiness level of students for their future job, (5) Students' selecting on skills that need to have a deeper insight learning at school.

The outcomes of this study have provided insight into high-quality Englishmajored students' most common career options and their readiness for those jobs. A large percentage of English-majored students want to enter the profession of teaching. This is most likely due to the fact that these students may not know what an English-majored entails, or they may be thinking of becoming an English teacher as a backup plan if they do not get into their field of choice. The findings have shown that most of the students in the third and fourth years have a good preparation for their future careers and can determine what they need to cultivate for their career prospects. It has also found that students from cohort 47 cannot be able to locate their future careers at the moment. This study also reuses the survey of Dr. Nguyen Hai Quan to find the differences among students' common career options. The findings of these two studies have reflected that English-majored students nowadays have a diversity of career choices and they are willing to work in any workplace environment, either English or non-English. Furthermore, students can realize factors that affect their career options as the researcher expected. Moreover, the study has found that students can apply all skills (inside or outside the curriculum), which are provided in the questionnaire, but at a variety of different levels. Most of the students agree that these skills are really necessary for them and some skills need to have a deeper insight into learning at school. The findings also showed a significant difference between the genders when it came to considering careers.

Further researches are needed to establish well-organized details about the careers that they want to investigate. They should be carefully reinforced with other sources that may assess students' career awareness.

#### 6. Limitations

The study did not collect data from all students who majored in English studies in the high-quality program of Can Tho University. This means that only a part of the students from the target group participated in the survey. Moreover, the research team also faced difficulties in collecting pilot data due to the Covid-19 epidemic. Second, the participants' answers on the levels of the Likert scale are mainly based on the respondents' feelings. Finally, the career options and skills and competencies required for the research question are also limited because we cannot list all the careers and skills as well as competencies that EFL learners can choose.

#### 7. Conclusion

The research shows that juniors and seniors have a good perception of the skills and competencies they have learned at the university. In addition, the study has also shown a difference between male and female students when asked about their readiness for the

future career they want to pursue. In particular, female students are considered to be more likely to be ready for a future career than male students. In addition, many students have shown that they want to learn more about *analytical and evaluative skills*, as well as *creativity* to help improve their career prospects. From the above research results, it can be determined that there is a large proportion of current students majoring in English studies (high-quality program) who have the desire to participate in the field of English Teaching in the future. Besides, most of the third and final-year students are already job oriented and ready for their chosen profession.

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#### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

All of the authors completely agreed with the publishing policies and the publication process of this paper. Moreover, the authors declared that there was no conflicts of interest during doing the study. We take responsibilities for advantages and harms equally after this paper is published. In addition, the materials shown in the paper are our original work and we used appropriate citations for other copyright resources.

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