

## **A TRACER STUDY OF GRADUATES OF THE BA IN ENGLISH AND ELT PROGRAMME AT OUSL**

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Tracer studies are one of the key methods by which systematic assessments regarding the quality and employability of graduates of degree programmes can be made. These studies help identify the effectiveness of different components of educational programmes. These studies also provide feedback on the curriculum and the teaching learning process and they are useful in obtaining information on students' overall experience of being an undergraduate in higher education institutes. The findings of such studies can also provide valuable information that can guide future changes to the programme. The OUSL has carried out tracer studies as part of its institutional research agenda by obtaining data from students who graduate from various faculties. These studies give a composite picture of the characteristics and attributes that will help students gain employment after graduating from the diverse array of programmes offered by the OUSL. The present study focuses on one of the programmes offered by the OUSL which is the Bachelor of Arts in English and English Language Teaching. This programme is offered by the Department of Language Studies of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. It was introduced over 15 years ago and is unique in that it was one of the first degree programmes in Sri Lanka that concentrated exclusively on the related disciplines of literary studies, applied linguistics and language and literature teacher education. The study wished to ascertain the extent to which the BA in English and ELT has helped graduates in gaining employment, career advancement, and further education. It also explored the extent to which the curriculum is relevant to employability in the field of English Language teaching and other related fields. The study also investigated the perceptions of graduates regarding the skills acquired through the programme and the learning experience at OUSL. The study used a mixed-method research design and collected data using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were collected from the closed ended questions in the questionnaire while qualitative data were collected from the open ended questions as well as the interviews. Questionnaires were sent to fifty graduates who comprised the sample for this study. In-depth interviews were carried out with 10 participants. The quantitative and qualitative data collected revealed broad trends that indicate to what extent the BA in English and ELT has had an impact on the career prospects of its graduates. The results reveal that the majority of the participants were employed in a range of contexts related to ELT at the point of entry to the programme when they enrolled for the degree. The impact of the qualification could therefore be seen in the manner it had enhanced their career prospects and mobility. The results also indicated to what extent the curriculum of the programme had contributed to the employability of the

graduates in terms of the academic and professional competencies it had helped to develop. Particular mention was made by the participants of the importance and relevance of the course in teaching methodology and teaching practicum that was seen as being important to professional development of teachers. One of the most significant findings of the study was that a majority of the students had progressed on to higher levels of postgraduate study which indicates the programme has laid a firm foundation which has enabled students to avail themselves of opportunities for continuous professional development. While some participants opined that the curriculum of the programme could be further enhanced and developed by introducing additional subject areas, there were others who commented on issues related to administration and certification. The study shows that even small-scale studies can reveal important insights into the career aspirations and other expectations of its graduates and to what extent these have been met by individual programmes and the institution as a whole.

Keywords: Tracer Study, B.A in English and ELT, ELT Teacher Competencies

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