

## EFL Majors' Knowledge of Career Paths and the Job Market for English Graduates in Costa Rica

El conocimiento de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera acerca de la trayectoria profesional y el mercado laboral para profesionales en inglés en Costa Rica

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### Abstract.

The present study sought to ascertain the knowledge of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) majors of their career path possibilities and the job market for English graduates in Costa Rica. A total of 47 senior English students completed a questionnaire. Main findings reveal inconsistencies in the knowledge of English majors of career paths and the job market in Costa Rica. Results also evince the undergraduates' lack of familiarity with the services provided to help them improve their knowledge of those topics. Practical implications are discussed.

**Keywords:** career paths, job market, orientation services, EFL students

### Resumen.

El presente estudio buscó determinar el conocimiento que tienen los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera relacionado con las posibilidades de trayectoria profesional y el mercado laboral para profesionales en inglés en Costa Rica. En esta investigación, un total de 47 estudiantes de último año de la carrera de inglés completaron un cuestionario.

Los principales hallazgos de esta investigación revelan inconsistencias en el conocimiento que los estudiantes de inglés tienen acerca de trayectorias profesionales y el mercado laboral en Costa Rica. Los resultados también demuestran una falta de familiaridad de los estudiantes con los servicios que existen para mejorar su conocimiento de esos temas. Además, se discuten las implicaciones prácticas.

**Palabras clave:** trayectoria profesional, mercado laboral, servicios de orientación, estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera

## Introduction

The evolving nature of the job market and the emphasis put on practical and specialized work has a lot of people under the impression that humanities' degrees cease to be important in the current economy. As a result, these disciplines have lost status in both academic and social contexts (cf. Anderson, 2002). In Costa Rica, this is the specific case of the English major, which is frequently mistaken with a teaching degree or a glorified training to become a customer service agent. These misconceptions about the BA in English have gone from being part of the popular opinion to having a place in the English major at the University of Costa Rica since the literature reveals that there is a tendency of English graduates to work in stereotypical positions (Comisión de Docencia, 2015).

Presently, these notions about the impracticality of the degree are helping plummet the expectations of English students, who, in general, feel great uncertainty about their prospects after graduation (cf. Smith, 1998). However, research about the versatility of the

English degree (e.g., Corrigan, 2017) and the advantages of career orientation in accomplishing a successful transition into the professional world (e.g., Clayton, 1981) have proven that English majors can have the same opportunities as professionals from other areas. Indeed, given the arguments that affirm the potential for adaptability of the English major, the tendencies observed about the performance of English majors of the University of Costa Rica in the job market suggest a need to discover the origin of the graduates' apparent inability to turn their skills into work opportunities. Additionally, due to the applicability of career orientation to assist English students in a successful entry to the job market, it is appropriate to explore the services provided by the Orientation Office at the University of Costa Rica. Such applicability becomes more relevant when considering that the research about the importance of vocational orientation in the country focuses on the context of high school (e.g., Rivera, 2014), and the services available tend to prioritize the needs of this population (R. Cascante, personal communication, September 15, 2020).

Nevertheless, no studies to the researchers' knowledge have been conducted to examine the causes of the tendencies observed and their connection to the knowledge of students of their degree. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to ascertain the knowledge of EFL majors of their career path and the job market for English graduates in Costa Rica.

## Literature Review

### **The current state of the job market in Costa Rica**

Nowadays, securing a job is a challenging endeavor irrespective of the profession a person has chosen. In particular, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students of the University of Costa Rica face the challenge of entering the job market with a degree that is not designed to fit one particular position and that is surrounded by stereotypes that overshadow its potential. Therefore, the current state of the market is relevant for this study since it can help evaluate the challenges that English majors might face in their process of transitioning to the workforce. The studies about the job market in Costa Rica provide an alarmingly negative view of the prospects for any person entering the workforce at the moment (e.g., Murillo, 2020). In June, the National Institute of Statistics and Census of Costa Rica published the results of a survey that reveals the current state of the job market in Costa Rica. The value of this study relies on the updated data it provides since it considers the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The negative predictions

regarding further changes in the market due to the pandemic will affect the thousands of Costa Ricans that are already seeking employment and the ones that are set to join the workforce in the near future (cf. Murillo, 2020). Besides updated data about employment in Costa Rica, the information related not only to the current demands of the job market in terms of the positions that generate jobs but also the desirable features of employees is important since it can provide a scope of the expectations that employers intend to satisfy in the hiring process. For 2020, the predictions indicated that the positions that would generate the most jobs would be related to engineering, technology, and mechanics (Barquero, 2019). These are all fields that require high technical skills. Additionally, with the arrival of the fourth industrial revolution, jobs require that people know how to handle technological devices (Barquero, 2019). While the reported prosperous fields suggest limited opportunities for people who hold humanities degrees, the professional skills listed by recruiters as valued among employers propose a different outlook since soft skills are highly valued and might even be considered more important than a degree (Barquero, 2019). Skills such as leadership, assertive communication, analytical thinking, attention to detail, and eagerness to learn are some of the few that recruiters cite as desirable (Barquero, 2019). Some of these skills might well be among the ones English students acquire throughout the major. Therefore, they could use them to their advantage when marketing themselves for a job. The previous information provides a general view of the opportunities and challenges that

students who are close to entering the job market can expect to find.

### **The specific conditions of learning a foreign language**

Although the current state of the job market in Costa Rica as depicted in the previous paragraph might be interpreted as hostile for English graduates, a significant amount of literature concentrates on the opportunities that are available for this population due to the versatility of their degree. English majors can choose between a wide variety of possible jobs distributed among different fields (cf. Department of English, n.d.). A more thorough examination of the professional possibilities for students of English suggests a new perspective on the future of English graduates that challenges the negative opinions that surround the humanities degree (cf. Corrigan, 2017). In his review of the possibilities available for English majors, Corrigan (2017) offers a particularly interesting perspective directly from English graduates that have successfully transitioned from college to the professional world and that have found opportunities in a variety of career paths. This information is valuable for this study since it highlights the recruiting potential of English graduates and helps revamp some of the stereotypes associated with the major. The growing body of literature that concentrates on the competitiveness of an English degree in the job market offers a refreshing perspective that contradicts the automatic connection some people make between the English degree and teaching or customer service positions.

The variety of jobs English graduates can aspire to is directly related to the skills they develop throughout the major. Indeed, English students acquire a remarkable number of skills that place them in an advantaged position against other professionals that have obtained a vocational training that prepares them to do a specific job (cf. Mansfield University, n.d.). The literature shows that several experts on the topic agree on the practicality of skills such as: “writing,” “research,” “critical thinking,” and “communication” (Mansfield University, n.d.), which are integral to the English degree. In fact, experts define these skills as “marketable” (Meyers, 2016). A characterization that reveals their value in the highly competitive job market. The evidence accumulated in favor of the business potential of the skills learned in English is relevant to provide a justification for the idea that English majors can successfully adapt to the demands of the current job market and survive its future modifications.

Another spectrum of literature addresses the specific case of the English majors of the University of Costa Rica. This information is relevant to determine if the possibilities presented in the literature translate accurately into practice. A 2015 study focused on a Costa Rican context produced a general description of the characteristics of English graduates, some job possibilities, and the institutions in which English majors could work (Comisión de Docencia, 2015). Notably, while the study echoes other works that cite writing, critical thinking, and communication as some of the skills that English majors develop, it only mentions three professional areas in which

English graduates can work: translation, language, and English literature (Comisión de Docencia, 2015). This information contradicts the growing body of literature that attests to the English major's potential to connect students with a variety of jobs in different work fields. Notwithstanding this valuable contribution to the literature, there seems to be a gap in the studies available since there is a lack of explanation as to why the potential of the English major exposed in the literature does not translate into the Costa Rican context. In this respect, the current study offers insight into the reasons behind English major's apparent inability to employ their competitive skills in a variety of jobs that do not necessarily pertain to one field in particular.

### **The role of the orientation service**

While a portion of the literature evinces a positive outlook on the prospects of success of English majors in the professional world, transferring the expectations presented in the literature to practice can sometimes pose a challenge. In this regard, the literature that endorses the essential role of the orientation service in the transition from college to a career is required to understand the need for more adequate services at the university level. Although research that argues the advantages of implementing career education at a high school level dominate the publications available, a growing body of literature focusing on the benefits of orientation services in higher education reveals a need to rethink the priorities of the orientation system. Some preliminary work on this topic stresses that the evolving

nature of the job market demands continuity in career education instead of limiting the process to a specific time in people's lives (Foeller, 1976). Essentially, the author advocates in favor of a service that provides students with the tools to adjust to the dynamic job market at different points of their professional career. More recent work on the relevance of career counseling in the context of college argues that students require assistance from counselors in order to be prepared to overcome challenges such as cultural changes, insufficient experience, and unrealistic expectations (Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008). In other words, anticipating the hurdles that might emerge during the transition from college to the workplace might alleviate the process and ensure a successful introduction to the workforce. Recently, another study restated the relevance of the role of counselors by highlighting how these professionals can help students to "make relevant connections between their interests and possible career paths" (Kingston, 2017). This description of a counselor's job demonstrates how the orientation service can complement the academic knowledge obtained in the degree to cope with the challenges that the insertion to the job market might present. The literature suggests the transformation of the orientation process to obtain services that support students in different stages of their academic life. This innovative approach proposes a redefinition of the system that could ultimately have benefits for both students and their future employers and is a valuable contribution to the field.

Having acknowledged the literature's arguments in favor of the need for career counseling on a college level,

it seems appropriate to continue this discussion with evidence about the need of the service in the specific context of the English major. While habitually the task of guiding students in the process to enter the workforce is performed by professionals from the field of orientation, some of the literature available explores the possibility of involving the faculty in the process and stipulates the following reasons to do so: “1) There aren't enough professional counselors available. 2) We need to heal, not expand, the split between intellectual development and career development. 3) A career counselor knows how to help a student begin the process of career planning and has resources available for the student to explore. But a departmental advisor can help shape tentative decisions into an academic program” (Clayton, 1981). In this excerpt, Clayton (1981) offers a compelling rationale to enlist the assistance of the members of the English department to accompany students in the process of transitioning from college to the workforce. The current competitiveness of the job market requires that students arrive prepared for the difficulties they may face and having an insider's perspective to prepare a strategy in advance can represent a competitive advantage. In his study, Clayton (1981) also mentions several actions that he helped implement through the English department of the University of Massachusetts to help students prepare for their future introduction to the job market. The actions, which proved successful, included: organizing workshops, creating an internship program, and setting up a system of communication between current students of the major and alumni (cf. Clayton, 1981).

More recently, the work of another researcher presents the results of offering a course to help students create connections between their major and a career path (cf. Meyers, 2016). This growing number of initiatives proposes that there is more than one way to provide students with opportunities to enter the workforce more prepared. Different authorities can participate in using their resources to support students during this complicated process.

To date, research about implementing career path education in college and, specifically, in the context of the English major confirms its benefits for students. A review of the specific case of the University of Costa Rica reveals a concerning tendency to direct orientation services to the population that is transitioning from high school to college. Furthermore, the Orientation Office is the only entity in the university that is responsible for providing services to guide students in their transition to the workforce. For advanced and senior students, the Orientation Office provides: a vocational fair, assistance for CV writing, workshops to help students prepare for interviews, and a service that establishes contact between students and companies that want to hire (Oficina de Orientación, n.d.) in addition to specialized one-on-one meetings in which students can receive detailed information about postgraduate studies offered by the university (R. Cascante, personal communication, September 15, 2020). Therefore, while the service exists, it seems deficient when compared to what the literature shows that can be done. This is relevant information in order to understand the way in which the college experience of English students in Costa Rica can

have an impact in how they navigate the challenges posed by their entry to the workforce. While this review provides a glimpse of the role orientation services play in a higher education context, there is a lack of comprehensive studies about the subject since much of the literature concentrates on the implementation of orientation services in a high school context.

### The Current Study

In particular, the literature exposes a worrying outlook on the capabilities of English students from the University of Costa Rica to adapt the skills they develop in the major into varied lines of work. While a portion of the literature provides evidence regarding English majors' competitive advantages in the job market, another section suggests that this characteristic is not manifested in the context of Costa Rica. Further discussion on the topic might suggest a need to update the information and resources available to assist students of the English major at the University of Costa Rica in the transition from college to the workplace. However, to arrive at that conclusion, the gap regarding the lack of a clear-cut explanation for the phenomenon observed must be filled first. The following research questions (RQ) guided this study:

- RQ1: How knowledgeable are fourth year EFL majors about their career path possibilities and the job market for English graduates in Costa Rica?
- RQ2: To what extent are fourth year EFL majors familiar with the career path orientation service offered by the university's authorities?

## Methodology

### Participants and setting

This study was carried out in the University of Costa Rica, a public university located in the capital of the country. Specifically, the study took place in the School of Modern Languages, which offers the Bachelor of Arts in English. In total, forty-seven students (37 female, 9 male, and 1 non-binary) participated in the study. The participants (ages 20-50) are all fourth-year students of the English major. Thus, they are close to graduating and will have to make decisions that include considering career paths and the job market in the country. Moreover, they were selected using a convenience sampling method.

### Materials

The purpose of this research was to ascertain the knowledge of fourth-year English majors of the career path possibilities and the job market for English graduates in Costa Rica. To gather the data, the participants completed a questionnaire (cf. Appendix) that was created using Google Forms, a data collection software. In accordance with the objective of the research, the data collection instrument was built to measure the participants' knowledge of career paths and the job market in Costa Rica and their familiarity with the orientation services offered by the University of Costa Rica. The forty-seven participants anonymously completed the questionnaire, which included four sections. The first section gathered the participants' background information. The second section consisted of nine

dichotomous questions that probed the students' perception of their knowledge of career paths, the job market in Costa Rica for English graduates, and the orientation services offered by the University of Costa Rica. In this part, the students had to indicate whether they thought they knew or not about the topics by answering "yes" or "no." The third section included eight multiple choice questions to elicit the students' actual knowledge of career paths, the job market, and the orientation services. For this part, the participants had a list of options for each question, and they had to check all the items that, according to their knowledge, were possibilities for English majors. Each question from part three was related to a question from part two. Finally, in the fourth section, the students were given open-ended questions to obtain their opinions about the topics in their own words. For this part, they had to write three short answers about their sources of information when it comes to career paths and the job market, their suggestions of how the information about the topics should be made available, and the entities that should oversee this task. Finally, the information of several websites proved useful for the design of the following parts of the instrument:

Part III. Item 1 (fields of work) Department of English (n.d.)

Part III. Item 2 (career paths) Mansfield University (n.d.)

Part III. Item 6 (skills developed in the major) Oficina de Orientación (n.d.)

### **Design and procedures**

This study was conducted in a virtual setting due to the COVID-19

pandemic during the second semester of 2020. Therefore, the use of online platforms to distribute the questionnaire was essential to obtain the help of the participants. The data collection process took 12 days in total. The survey was first distributed on October 7th, and the last day to complete it was October 18th. The procedure to reach the participants entailed the help of several professors of fourth-year courses of the English major. The professors were asked to send an email with a message to their students to request their help. The survey, which took between 10 to 15 minutes to fill out, was sent to the students of four different courses. Finally, to reach more people, the questionnaire was shared using the social media platforms WhatsApp and Facebook.

### **Data Analysis**

The quantitative data obtained was transferred into an Excel sheet. This made it possible to quantify the answers for each category. More specifically, the answers were arranged into four sections: background information, self-perceived knowledge, verification of knowledge, and open-ended questions. Then, the answers were quantified according to the number of times each option was chosen. As for the qualitative data from the open-ended questions, we arranged them in Word tables and color coded the answers to use an inductive approach (cf. Creswell, 2008). This means that (any) commonalities resulting from the analysis "emerge[d] out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (Patton, 1980, p. 306).



## Results

The research questions examined the knowledge of fourth year EFL majors of career paths and the job market in Costa Rica for English graduates (RQ1). They also looked into the participants' familiarity with the career counseling services offered by the Orientation Office of the University of Costa Rica (RQ2). The results for the two research questions will be reported in the following section.

### Quantitative Results

#### Reported knowledge of career paths, job market, and orientation services

Table 1 displays the number of English majors with knowledge of career

paths, the job market, and orientation services. As can be seen, while the majority of students said that they know about the topics related to work fields, career paths, postgraduate studies, and skills acquired in the major, fewer people affirmed to know about the jobs available for English graduates ( $n = 27$ ). Additionally, when asked about orientation services, more participants chose "no" to indicate not only that they did not know about the authorities in charge or the services offered but also that they have not employed the services that the Orientation Office provides.

**Table 1**

*Number of English majors with knowledge of career paths, job market, and orientation services*

	Yes	No
Fields available to work in	31	16
Career paths to pursue	35	12
Jobs available	27	20
Postgraduate studies to pursue	37	10
Skills acquired	41	6
Authorities in charge of career counseling	8	39
Use of Orientation Office services	14	33
Career path education services offered by the Orientation Office	6	41

*Note.*  $N = 47$

Source: Elaborated by authors

### Professional Context

Table 2 presents an overview of the number of English majors with knowledge of fields, career paths, and job prospects. As can be seen, in the category of *fields*, there are three noticeable patterns in which the answers can be arranged. While all the participants chose *education*, and the majority chose *communication/media* (n = 33) and *hospitality/tourism* (n = 40) as the fields in which English majors could work, those numbers decreased for the remaining options since around half of the people chose *government*

and *advertising/marketing* and even less than half of the people chose the remaining options. In the next category, most people chose *editor*, *copywriter*, *linguist*, *teacher*, *university professor*, and *critic* as the main careers that English majors can pursue once they graduate. However, few people chose *lawyer*, *research analyst*, *job recruiter*, and *librarian*. Finally, for the category of *jobs*, with the exception of *job recruiter*, which was chosen only by a small number of people (n = 16), the majority of participants chose every option to indicate that English majors are qualified to get any of the jobs listed.

**Table 2**

*Number of English majors with knowledge of fields, career paths, and job prospects*

Response variable	n
Fields	
Education	47
Communication/Media	33
Business Management/Administration	10
Government	24
Engineering	3
Advertising/Marketing	25
Hospitality/Tourism	40
Technology	18
Legal	14
Careers	
Lawyer	3
Journalist	20
Editor	44
Copywriter	30

Research analyst	18
Job recruiter	14
Linguist	41
Tour guide	31
Business owner	20
Teacher	47
University professor	42
Critic	33
Librarian	8
Jobs	
Teacher	47
Professor	37
Translator	45
Editor	44
Interpreter	44
Tour guide	42
Job recruiter	16
Customer service agent	41

Note.  $N = 47$

Source: Elaborated by authors

### Academic Context

Table 3 shows a summary of the number of English majors with knowledge of postgraduate studies, skills, and career counseling authorities. As can be seen, in the category of *postgraduate studies*, most participants chose the master's programs in *literature* ( $n = 44$ ), *translation* ( $n = 42$ ), *linguistics* ( $n = 42$ ), and *English teaching* ( $n = 45$ ) while less than a quarter of the population consulted chose *international relations*, *law*, and *journalism* as options that English graduates can pursue.

Regarding the skills obtained in the English major, *writing*, *research*, *critical thinking*, *communication*, *organization*, *editing and proofreading*, and *creativity* were the options repeatedly chosen by the participants. In contrast, *empathy*, *time management*, *originality*, *flexibility*, *independence*, and *collegiality* were less popular answers. In the third category, the vast majority ( $n = 42$ ) selected the *Orientation Office* as the entity in charge of career counseling while very few people chose the *School of Modern Languages* ( $n = 12$ ), and the *Faculty of Letters* ( $n = 9$ ).

Table 3

*Number of English majors with knowledge of postgraduate studies, skills, and career counseling authorities*

<b>Response variable</b>	<i>n</i>
Postgraduate studies	
MA in Literature	44
MA in Translation	42
MA in Linguistics	42
MA in International Relations	9
MA in English Teaching	45
MA in Law	1
MA in Journalism	11
Skills	
Writing	47
Research	40
Critical thinking	46
Communication	42
Empathy	11
Organization	26
Time management	17
Editing and proofreading	44
Originality	21
Creativity	33
Flexibility	14
Skills	
Independence	19
Collegiality	9
University authorities in charge of career counseling	
School of Modern Languages	12
Orientation Office	42
Faculty of Letters	9
I don't know	2

*Note.*  $N = 47$

Source: Elaborated by authors

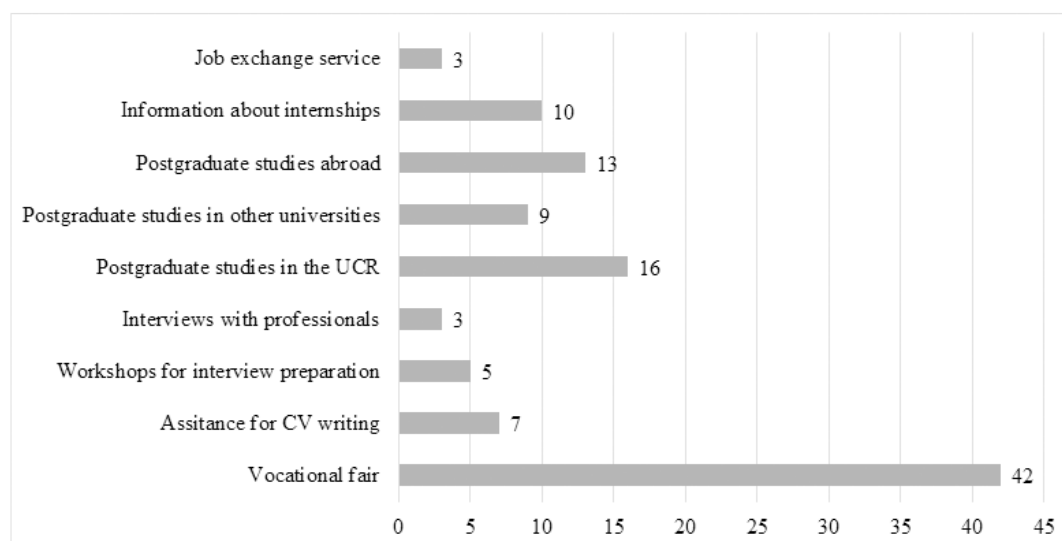
### Orientation Services

Figure 1 provides an overview of the number of English majors with knowledge of the services provided by the Orientation Office. As can be seen,

most participants ( $n = 42$ ) only checked the *vocational fair* as one of the services offered by the Orientation Office. The other services listed were chosen only by a small number of participants in each case.

**Figure 1**

*Number of English majors with knowledge of the services provided by the Orientation Office*



Note.  $N = 47$

Source: Elaborated by authors

### Qualitative Results

In addition to the quantitative results previously displayed, a set of three open ended questions provided qualitative information that will be disclosed successively. The data obtained from these three questions are organized thematically. Particularly, when asked about the origin of the information about career paths and the job market, English undergraduates indicated three main sources as the ones they employ to keep informed

on the topics. Their answers included: peers, the internet, and Modern Languages professors. Additionally, when asked to make a suggestion about strategies that could contribute to making the information about career paths and the job market available for students, the participants offered a variety of options. Their ideas included: posts on social media, lectures, workshops, internship programs, and elective courses. Finally, for the third question, the students were asked to name the authority that, in their opinion,

should be in charge of career counseling, to which most responded *the School of Modern Languages*.

## Discussion

The contribution of this study to the field lies in its provision of new insight on the deficiencies in knowledge of English majors when it comes to career paths, the job market, and the orientation services available at the University of Costa Rica.

In general, the perception the students have of their knowledge of the topics may be important to understand some of their behaviors. For example, many of the students seem to be confident about their knowledge of career paths. Therefore, they probably do not feel the need to seek help from authorities on the subject. However, the fact that fewer participants were certain about their knowledge of the topics related to the job market in Costa Rica might be problematic since as students in the last year of college, they will have to make decisions in which the knowledge of the job market might make the difference between getting the job that they want or settling for something else. The answers from the questions on the orientation services showed a very different pattern from the previous ones since in the three questions about this topic, more than half of the participants chose “no.” Moreover, the authority in charge of career counseling at the University of Costa Rica is the Orientation Office. Therefore, this entity has the task of helping the students translate the knowledge they acquire throughout the major into a career path (cf. Kingston, 2017). However, the negative answer

to the questions related to orientation services might be associated with the uncertainty in the knowledge of the job market of almost half of the population that was consulted for this study. Particularly, the students’ unawareness of the services provided by the Orientation Office might explain the low number of people that have enlisted the assistance of its staff. In this respect, the practical implications of this tendency are worrying because if students do not make use of the service, they cannot take advantage of its benefits, which may in turn affect their introduction to the job market.

In particular, the results related to the professional context reveal that the participants tended to choose options pertaining to fields, careers, and jobs that are directly related to the English degree as studied at the University of Costa Rica. To elaborate on this idea, the School of Modern Languages offers a curriculum that includes writing, translation, linguistics, and literary criticism courses (Universidad de Costa Rica, 1990). This might explain the popularity of answers such as *communication/media* in the *fields’* category; *editor* and *linguist* in the *careers’* category; and *translator*, *editor*, and *interpreter* in the *jobs’* category since they are all related to the content studied in the major. The frequency with which *hospitality/tourism*, an option that is not contemplated in the English curriculum, was chosen (n = 40) might have an explanation in the language component necessary to succeed in this occupation. Similarly, the strong preference of the participants (n = 41) for the option of *customer service agent* in the category of *jobs* might have to do with the proficiency of the English

language acquired in the major, which is also a requirement for the job. However, following this logic, it seems contradictory that only 16 participants selected *job recruiter* in the category of *jobs* since, just as for the options of *hospitality/tourism* and *customer service agent*, a brief training would render an English major eligible for his job as well.

Additionally, the recurrent choice of careers and jobs related to the field of education might be related to the stereotypical view of the degree as a teaching major. Another pattern of results showed that in the category of *careers*, options such as *lawyer*, *research analyst*, *job recruiter*, and *librarian* were less chosen by the students despite being valid possibilities (cf. Corrigan, 2017). While the English major might not have courses directly related to these career paths, some of the skills acquired in the major give students the possibility to explore these options as well. Finally, there seem to be discrepancies in some of the answers since equivalent options across categories were not chosen consistently. For example, in the category of *fields*, 25 people chose *advertising/marketing* while in the category of *careers*, 30 people chose *copywriter*, which belongs to the advertising field. While this result does not show a large difference of participation since only 5 more people chose the equivalent option in the *careers'* category, it does suggest an inconsistency in knowledge. The findings previously discussed are surprising because the majority of participants were confident in their knowledge of the topics. However, subsequent results challenge the students' assertions in the first question (i.e., on the

students' self-perceived knowledge of career paths, the job market, and the orientation services). Furthermore, the tendencies observed in the results are important to note since they may suggest that the participants could have a gap in the knowledge related to the versatility of the major, which is in line with previous work (e.g., Corrigan, 2017). As a result, the graduates' unawareness of the full potential of their degree might hinder their entry to the job market.

The findings related to the academic context are important because they reveal with more detail the participants' attitudes regarding the topics of this study. In particular, the results in the category of *postgraduate studies* diverge considerably. Again, the majority of the students showed preference for the options that are directly related to the English major while the three choices that belong to different fields were chosen by less than a quarter of the participants. This also accords with earlier observations, which showed an inclination from the participants to discard fields, careers, and jobs that do not have a direct link to the English major but that can turn into a possibility with further training. In fact, these results show further evidence of some inconsistencies in the knowledge shared by some of the participants in the study.

Notably, the students consulted for this study consistently chose options related to the field of linguistics as possibilities for English majors. The English curriculum at the University of Costa Rica only offers an introductory course related to linguistics (Universidad de Costa Rica, 1990). Therefore, an English graduate will most likely need

further education to pursue a job in this field. This logic is echoed in some of the participants' choices. For instance, they selected *linguist* as a possibility in the careers' category and then chose *MA in Linguistics* in the postgraduate studies' category. However, the same cannot be said about careers such as journalism and law, which were not equally chosen and might also turn into possibilities after pursuing a master's degree in those disciplines. The assessment of some of the tendencies in the results is relevant to understand what prevents English students from using the versatility of the major to explore a variety of job opportunities once they enter the job market. If the students do not know about the vast possibilities they have with their degree, they might not be able to apply that knowledge to their advantage.

Another important finding in the academic context is related to the skills developed in the major. Indeed, every option listed in the category of *skills* can be acquired in the process of obtaining an English degree (cf. Mansfield University, n.d.). However, not all of them were equally chosen by the participants. This result might be yet another indication that the students that took part in this investigation may not have all the knowledge necessary to be successful in their search for a job. If the sample size of this study gives any indication of the knowledge of the rest of the students in the major, the implications suggested by these findings are that students might benefit from instruction regarding their career choice in order to be able to transfer their skills into a career path that they can be satisfied with. Finally, the results from the category of *authorities in*

*charge of career counseling* provided an unexpected outcome since in the first question, most participants declared ignorance about the entity responsible for career education at the University of Costa Rica. However, while most students do know where they can obtain assistance to guide them in their transition to the professional context, they are not applying that knowledge for their benefit. This might be either because they are not aware of the initiatives of the Orientation Office for career guidance or because they do not find them helpful.

The results associated with the orientation services are useful to interpret and understand the previous findings. As mentioned in the literature review, the Orientation Office provides the following services: a vocational fair, assistance for CV writing, workshops for interview preparation, and a job exchange service that establishes contact between students and companies that want to hire (Oficina de Orientación, n.d.). However, from this list, the only option chosen by many students was the *vocational fair*. Therefore, very few people seem to be aware of the other services provided by the Orientation Office. This might explain why even though students know that the Orientation Office is the authority in charge of providing career counseling services, few of the students have actually used those services. This behavior suggests that the students are not familiar with the guidance offered by the Orientation Office. This hints at the possibility that the information about the work of the entity related to career counseling might not be successfully reaching the students. In this case, there might be a problem with the actions



the Orientation Office is taking to communicate their efforts to the undergraduate population. As a result, these findings could be taken to indicate that the current system of career counseling needs an update in order to divulge the information about their services more efficiently.

Currently, this office disseminates information using the institutional email and Facebook, and they focus on advertising the vocational fair. However, other strategies that could be useful to reach more students include using additional social media outlets such as Instagram and acknowledging their other services in their publications.

The qualitative results obtained in this study complement the quantitative findings since they offer insight into the students' attitudes and opinions about the topics explored in this research. The type of information provided in these sets of responses is relevant to this study because it might suggest initiatives to help students in their transition to the professional context. In particular, the first set of answers in this section reiterates that the students do not turn to the Orientation Office for advice when it comes to career paths and the job market for English graduates. Surprisingly, they mentioned professors from the School of Modern Languages as one of their sources. This finding agrees with the literature that argues in favor of the involvement of the English department in the career education process (Clayton, 1981). This idea is further supported by the answer to the question about the entity that should be in charge of informing the students about the topics since the students consistently brought up the School of Modern Languages in

their answers. Finally, the results for the question that invited participants to make suggestions of strategies to assist in the effort of informing English undergraduates about the topics reveal a need for different actions to the ones being implemented at the moment. Notably, ideas such as lectures, workshops, internship programs, and elective courses would require the participation of the School of Modern Languages. Furthermore, these proposals are, in fact, quite pertinent since there is a precedent for their application and benefits in the context of the English major (Clayton, 1981; Meyers, 2016). Overall, the results of this study give insight into a tendency observed in the literature regarding the presumed inability of English graduates of the University of Costa Rica to apply their skills in a variety of jobs. Ultimately, this investigation might be a starting point for more specific research to determine the actions that need to be taken in order to provide an adequate solution to fill the gap in knowledge of English undergraduates that was evidenced in this section.

## Conclusion

This study sought to ascertain the knowledge of EFL majors of the University of Costa Rica of career paths and the job market. The results of this study indicate deficiencies in the knowledge of English students regarding career paths, the job market, and the orientation services. Additionally, this study provides useful insights regarding the students' attitudes when it comes to searching for instruction in the topics and how these attitudes

might be influenced by the lack of knowledge of the services provided by the Orientation Office. Finally, this study suggests a need to review and update the orientation services provided at the University of Costa Rica to offer adequate support for students as they prepare to enter the workforce. Moreover, while aspects such as the participants' sample size limit the implications of this study, the results obtained shed some light on the participants' perceptions of career paths, the job market, and their familiarity with the orientation services available at the University of Costa Rica. Furthermore, the study makes a strong case for the importance of career education in the context of the Bachelor of Arts in English at the University of Costa Rica. Finally, future research could examine the impact of implementing interdisciplinary programs to assist students in the transition to the job market.

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## Appendix. Survey

**Instructions:** The following survey seeks to elicit your knowledge of the career path possibilities and the job market for English graduates in Costa Rica. Please, keep in mind that your answers are anonymous. Thank you for your participation.

### Consent:

Do you give consent to the anonymous use of your answers?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

**Part 1.** Please, answer the questions below with your background information.

1. Please, select your age group.

- |          |          |
|----------|----------|
| a. 20-24 | e. 40-44 |
| b. 25-29 | f. 45-49 |
| c. 30-34 | g. 50-54 |
| d. 35-39 | h. 55-59 |

2. What gender do you identify as?

- |           |               |
|-----------|---------------|
| a. Female | c. Non-Binary |
| b. Male   | d. Other      |

3. Which of the following best describes your current employment status? (More than one answer is possible.)

- |                         |                  |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| a. Student              | d. Self-employed |
| b. Full-time employment | e. Internship    |
| c. Part-time employment | f. Unemployed    |

**Part 2.** In this section you will be given dichotomous questions. Please, answer “yes” or “no” based on your knowledge of the topics. To answer the following questions, please, keep in mind that they refer to a Costa Rican context.

1. Do you know what fields BA in English majors could work in?  
a. Yes b. No
  
2. Do you know what career path possibilities BA in English majors have?  
a. Yes b. No
  
3. Do you know what institutions BA in English majors can work in?  
a. Yes b. No
  
4. Do you know what jobs BA in English majors can get?  
a. Yes b. No
  
5. Do you know what postgraduate studies BA in English majors can pursue?  
a. Yes b. No
  
6. Do you know what skills BA in English students acquire throughout the major?  
a. Yes b. No
  
7. Do you know which authorities of the University of Costa Rica are in charge of dealing with career counseling?  
a. Yes b. No
  
8. Have you ever used the services provided by the Orientation Office?  
a. Yes b. No
  
9. Do you know what services related to career path education are offered by the Orientation Office of the University of Costa Rica?  
a. Yes b. No

**Part 3.** In this section you will be given multiple choice questions. Please, choose the answers based on your knowledge of the topics. To answer the following questions, please, keep in mind that they refer to a Costa Rican context. For all items, more than one answer is possible.

1. Check the fields in which BA in English majors could work.

- |                                       |                          |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Education                          | f. Advertising/Marketing |
| b. Communication/Media                | g. Hospitality/Tourism   |
| c. Business Management/Administration | h. Technology            |
| d. Government                         | i. Legal                 |
| e. Engineering                        |                          |

2. Check the careers that you know BA in English students can pursue after they graduate.

- |                     |                         |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
| a. Lawyer           | h. Tour guide           |
| b. Journalist       | i. Business owner       |
| c. Editor           | j. Teacher              |
| d. Copywriter       | k. University professor |
| e. Research analyst | l. Critic               |
| f. Job recruiter    | m. Librarian            |
| g. Linguist         |                         |

3. Check the institutions in which you know BA in English majors could work.

- |                       |                              |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| a. Public university  | e. Private institutions      |
| b. Private university | f. Multinational corporation |
| c. Language institute | g. Translation company       |
| d. Public institution |                              |

4. Check the jobs that you know BA in English majors can get.

- |                |                                 |
|----------------|---------------------------------|
| a. Teacher     | f. Tour guide                   |
| b. Professor   | g. Job recruiter                |
| c. Translator  | h. Customer service agent       |
| d. Editor      | i. Other (please specify) _____ |
| e. Interpreter |                                 |

- 
5. Check the postgraduate studies that BA in English majors can pursue.
- |                                  |                           |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| a. MA in Literature              | e. MA in English Teaching |
| b. MA in Translation             | f. MA in Law              |
| c. MA in Linguistics             | g. MA in Journalism       |
| d. MA in International Relations | h. Other                  |
6. Check the skills that you know BA in English students acquire throughout the major.
- |                      |                             |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| a. Writing           | h. Editing and proofreading |
| b. Research          | i. Originality              |
| c. Critical thinking | j. Creativity               |
| d. Communication     | k. Flexibility              |
| e. Empathy           | l. Independence             |
| f. Organization      | m. Collegiality             |
| g. Time management   |                             |
7. Check the university authorities that are in charge of dealing with career counseling.
1. School of Modern Languages
  2. Orientation Office
  3. Faculty of Letters
  4. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
8. Check the services that you know the Orientation Office of the University of Costa Rica provides.
1. Vocational fair
  2. Assistance for CV writing
  3. Workshops for job interview preparation
  4. Interviews with professionals in a field of interest
  5. Detailed information about postgraduate studies in the University of Costa Rica
  6. Detailed information about postgraduate studies in other universities of the country
  7. Detailed information about postgraduate studies abroad
  8. Information about internships
  9. Job exchange service (a service that establishes contact between students and companies that are hiring)

**Part 4.** In this section you will be given three open-ended questions. Please, write your answers.

1. When it comes to career paths and the job market for English graduates, what are your sources of information?
  
2. What could contribute to knowing more about career paths and the job market for English graduates? Do any suggestions come to mind?
  
3. What entity in your opinion should be in charge of informing UCR students about career paths and the job market for English graduates?