TRACING FRENCH ALUMNI CAREERS: INSIGHTS FROM UNNES TRACER STUDY

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of tracer studies as an evaluative instrument for curriculum development, focusing on alumni of the French Education Department at Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES). Tracer studies are increasingly recognized as essential tools for higher education institutions to assess graduate employability, monitor the relevance of curricula, and identify skills gaps in relation to labor market demands. Using a descriptive qualitative approach combined with survey data analysis, this research examined the career trajectories of 100 alumni from 22 cohorts spanning 2000 to 2021. The analysis included waiting periods for employment, types of professions, income distribution, and the relevance between academic training and current occupations. Findings indicate that while the majority of alumni are employed in education-related fields—such as teachers, lecturers, and language instructors—a significant proportion work in government, social services, journalism, creative industries, and entrepreneurial ventures. The study highlights a particularly strong orientation toward entrepreneurship, with alumni establishing businesses in culinary services, clothing production, and creative consulting. This diversification of careers demonstrates the adaptability of linguistic and pedagogical competencies beyond traditional teaching roles. The study concludes that alumni career diversity underscores the urgent need to enrich curricula with entrepreneurship, digital literacy, and intercultural communication. Strengthening alumni participation in tracer studies and utilizing their feedback as strategic input are crucial to ensuring curriculum responsiveness, enhancing graduate competitiveness, and supporting institutional performance indicators at both national and global levels.

Keywords – alumni careers, curriculum development, entrepreneurship, French education, tracer study)

Introduction

Higher education institutions (HEIs) across the globe are under increasing pressure to produce graduates who are not only academically competent but also employable in highly dynamic labor markets. The discourse of employability, as emphasized by Yorke (2006), refers to the set of achievements—skills, understandings, and personal attributes—that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations. In the Indonesian context, this urgency has been reinforced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology through regulations requiring systematic graduate tracking (tracer studies) as part of quality assurance and accreditation systems (Purwantini, Yuliani, & Muhdiyanto, 2018).

Tracer studies have become a global trend in higher education. In Europe, for instance, the Bologna Process has explicitly promoted tracer studies to monitor learning outcomes and labor market integration of graduates (Schomburg, 2016). Similarly, in Southeast Asia, universities are expected to conduct tracer studies regularly to provide data for curriculum reform and institutional evaluation (Dzomeku et al., 2024). Beyond employability, tracer studies also serve

to capture alumni perceptions, further study patterns, and entrepreneurial initiatives, which reflect broader educational impacts (Hariyati et al., 2022).

At Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES), the French Education Department has produced 684 graduates between 2000 and 2021. However, only 35% of them have consistently participated in tracer studies, echoing a common challenge in Indonesia: low alumni response rates (Syaefudin & Astuti, 2025). This low participation hampers data accuracy, limiting its usefulness for curriculum evaluation. Nonetheless, available tracer data provides valuable insights into alumni career trajectories, waiting times for employment, income distribution, and the match between academic training and occupational fields.

This study therefore aims to expand empirical understanding of the career outcomes of French Education alumni at UNNES, while situating findings within broader discussions on employability, curriculum responsiveness, and the role of humanities graduates in contemporary economies. Specifically, the study addresses:

1. What are the main employment sectors for French Education alumni at UNNES?

2. How long do graduates typically wait before obtaining their first employment?

3. What are the alumni income distributions relative to the regional minimum wage (UMR)?

4. To what extent are alumni occupations aligned with their academic training?

5. What skills and curricular improvements are identified as necessary by alumni to enhance employability?

By addressing these questions, the study contributes to institutional strategies for curriculum renewal, highlights the role of language education in fostering entrepreneurial and cross-sectoral careers, and informs national debates on graduate employability.

Literature Review
The Concept of Employability in Higher Education

Employability is no longer understood merely as obtaining a job, but as the ability to adapt, transfer skills, and sustain meaningful careers in changing contexts (Harvey, 2001). Recent studies emphasize transversal or soft skills—such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and digital literacy—as critical complements to disciplinary knowledge (Villegas, 2024; Adegbite, 2024). For language graduates, intercultural competence and multilingual skills further strengthen employability prospects (Xu, 2025).

Tracer Studies as an Evaluative Instrument

Tracer studies are systematic approaches to tracking graduates, often implemented one to three years after graduation (Schomburg, 2016). They provide evidence for curriculum improvement, accreditation, and labor market alignment. In Indonesia, tracer studies are integrated into BAN-PT accreditation requirements. However, challenges such as limited alumni engagement, fragmented data systems, and premature surveys reduce effectiveness (Akbar, 2022; Dini, Fauziyyah, & Yuliastuti, 2020). Digital platforms and automated career center systems have been proposed to improve

efficiency and participation (Cahyo Nugroho et al., 2018).

Alumni of Language and Humanities Programs

A recurrent stereotype in labor markets is that graduates of humanities and language programs face limited job opportunities compared to STEM graduates (Yahya, 2024). However, research shows that humanities graduates often demonstrate resilience, adaptability, and entrepreneurship by creating niche opportunities in education, creative industries, communication, and cultural mediation (Syed et al., 2023). In particular, language graduates possess transferable skills such as intercultural communication and critical thinking, making them valuable across sectors (Albina, 2020).

Tracer Studies in the Indonesian and Global Context

Empirical research on tracer studies in Indonesia has expanded in the last decade. Arbarini et al. (2019) emphasized tracer studies' importance in lifelong learning monitoring, while Palupi (2024) analyzed competency fit for workplaces. Internationally, Dzomeku et al. (2024) applied tracer studies in nursing education to assess program quality. Fahmy et al. (2025) reviewed tracer study implementations across institutions, advocating for holistic approaches capturing entrepreneurship and soft skills.

In sum, tracer studies bridge the gap between academia and industry by providing data for evidence-based curriculum reforms. Yet, their effectiveness hinges on alumni participation, data integration, and institutional commitment to responsiveness.

Method

This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach with survey-based data collection. A total of 100 alumni from the French Education Department at UNNES, spanning cohorts 2000 to 2021, were purposively sampled. Participants were contacted through alumni networks, social media platforms, and direct institutional outreach.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument was embedded in the UNNES tracer study system and consisted of both closed and open-ended questions. It covered:

1. Demographics (gender, cohort year, further study).
2. Employment status (employed, self-employed, unemployed).
3. Waiting time for first job (0–5 months, 6–18 months, >18 months, employed prior to graduation).
4. Income range relative to regional minimum wage (UMR).
5. Relevance between academic competencies and current occupation.
6. Skills needed and curriculum feedback.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage distributions), while qualitative feedback was coded thematically to identify recurring themes related to curricular needs.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to research ethics by ensuring voluntary participation, confidentiality of responses, and informed consent. No personally identifiable information was disclosed in the analysis.

Finding and Discussion

Findings
Employment Sector Distribution
Approximately 45% of alumni work in education—as school teachers, university lecturers, or administrative staff in educational institutions. Beyond education, alumni careers span **government services, journalism, creative industries, social work, and entrepreneurship**. Around 40% of respondents identified as entrepreneurs, operating businesses in culinary services, clothing production, travel agencies, and creative consulting. This reflects the adaptability of language and pedagogical training for non-traditional career paths.

Employment Latency
Analysis revealed that 30% of alumni secured their first job within 0–5 months after graduation, another 30% within 6–18 months, while 30% experienced waiting times exceeding 18 months. Interestingly, 10% were already employed or self-employed before completing their degree. This distribution illustrates diverse transition experiences influenced by job market conditions, skill levels, and individual initiative.

Income Levels
Most alumni reported incomes exceeding the local UMR, with teachers and civil servants generally earning stable but modest salaries, while entrepreneurs reported higher but more variable earnings. A small percentage earned below UMR, often associated with freelance or part-time work.

Competency-Job Relevance
Less than 25% of respondents indicated strong alignment between their academic training and their current jobs. More than half considered their jobs only partially or not at all aligned with their competencies. This suggests curricular misalignment with labor market demands and highlights the importance of integrating practical, entrepreneurial, and digital skills.

Alumni Feedback on Skills Development
Alumni responses consistently emphasized several key areas of skill development that they considered essential for strengthening employability. Many highlighted the importance of entrepreneurial competencies, particularly in business planning and financial literacy, as these skills are crucial for those pursuing self-employment or managing educational and creative ventures. In addition, digital literacy emerged as a pressing need, with alumni underscoring the relevance of mastering ICT tools and online teaching platforms to adapt to rapidly evolving technological demands in education and professional settings. A strong call was also made for multilingual proficiency, not only in English but also in other global languages such as Spanish and Mandarin, which could expand graduates' opportunities in international contexts. Equally significant were soft skills—including leadership, teamwork, and communication—since these personal attributes play a vital role in career advancement and workplace collaboration. Finally, alumni stressed the value of experiential learning opportunities, particularly through internships and project-based courses, which allow students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts and develop practical insights that directly enhance job readiness.

Discussion
Relevance of Tracer Studies
The findings confirm the value of tracer studies as mirrors reflecting the strengths and weaknesses of academic

programs. Alumni career diversity validates the necessity of curriculum renewal that goes beyond traditional pedagogy. Similar to international evidence (Dzomeku et al., 2024; Palupi, 2024), this study demonstrates the mismatch between academic training and job realities, especially in transversal skills.

Curriculum and Employability

The low alignment between academic competencies and job relevance resonates with critiques of humanities programs globally (Yahya, 2024). However, the entrepreneurial orientation of alumni reflects a promising direction. Integrating entrepreneurship education into language curricula can transform graduates into job creators rather than job seekers (Syed et al., 2023).

Digital and Intercultural Skills

Alumni highlighted the urgency of digital literacy. This aligns with Adegbite (2024) and Kristianto (2025), who underscore digital skills as central to graduate employability. Furthermore, intercultural communication and multilingualism are increasingly valuable in globalized labor markets (Xu, 2025).

These findings reinforce the critical role of tracer studies in curriculum development and graduate employability enhancement highlighted in the literature (Dzomeku et al., 2024; Palupi, 2024). The data confirm widespread gaps between educational training and labor market demands, especially in transversal skills and digital literacy (Emanuel, 2021; Adegbite, 2024).

Entrepreneurial initiatives observed among alumni call for stronger curricular integration of business skills and startup ecosystems, aligning with current trends advocated by Syed et al. (2023). Moreover, the low alumni response rate aligns with challenges highlighted by Akbar (2022), necessitating strategic enhancements such as gamification and LinkedIn integration to boost participation.

The feedback supports expanding the curriculum to include practical entrepreneurship, digital communication, intercultural competences, and hospitality-related language skills, congruent with recent research priorities (Sanasintani, 2023; Fahmy et al., 2025). The development of soft skills remains paramount for employability success and requires institutional investment in novel pedagogical approaches (Villegas, 2024).

Conclusions

The career trajectories of UNNES French Education alumni reflect both opportunities and challenges. While a significant proportion are employed in education, many pursue entrepreneurship and diverse professional fields, indicating the transferability of language and pedagogical competencies. However, the persistent gap between academic preparation and occupational demands underscores the urgency of curriculum reforms.

Embedding entrepreneurship, digital literacy, and intercultural communication into the French Education curriculum will enhance graduate employability and align outcomes with labor market needs. Strengthening tracer study designs and alumni participation strategies is essential for institutional responsiveness, continuous quality improvement, and global competitiveness.

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