Employability of Management Graduates of State Universities in Sri Lanka: Problems and Prospects

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Abstract

Employability must have to be attained in the journey to success in one's career life. Graduates must be equipped with employability skills, knowledge, and personal attributes as the government of Sri Lanka allocates substantial resources for higher education. However, after graduation, a considerable number of graduates in the field of social sciences including management fail to find suitable employment, hence, are forced to accept lower-paying jobs that are not commensurate with their qualifications and some graduates are unemployed or underemployed. In this context, this study examines the level of employment and employability of management graduates of state universities in Sri Lanka, identifies problems and difficulties faced by management graduates in finding suitable jobs in the industry, and proposes policy measures for improving the employability of management undergraduates of state universities in Sri Lanka. Quantitative research method was used to achieve the objectives of the study. Among 10,033 management graduates from 09 state universities, a sample of 1333 students was selected based on a stratified random sampling method. A postal survey with a structured questionnaire was used to collect the data. Descriptive statics were used to analyze the data. The employability level of management graduates is higher than the average level. Nearly, 90% of them are employed or self-employed, but most of them are seeking a new job. The degree, personality, work experience, English proficiency and professional qualifications are the most important reasons for getting their current job. Age and lack of experience are the major constraints faced by graduates in finding a suitable job. The study

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proposes policy measures to enhance the level of employment and the employability of management graduates.

1. Introduction

Employability is considered as the skills and personal attributes that are required by the globalized world. The term employability of a graduate is used to refer to the ability of the student to get (and retain and develop) a job after graduation (Harvey, 2001) and enhance the student's attributes (skills, knowledge, attitudes, and abilities) and ultimately empowering the student as a critical life-long learner (Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Harvey, 2001). To become successful at job interviews, graduates need to improve various employability skills. The main reason for the unemployment of graduates is the mismatching of skills between recent graduates' and employers' demands (Krajnakova et al., 2020). However, the real reasons must be revealed by undertaking a future study. Most of them have to wait for a long time to get a suitable career and many of them are engaged in jobs irrelevant to their qualifications with a lower salary (Weerasinghe, 2019). Several thousands of graduates are being produced annually both by public, private and foreign universities, and the available job opportunities are limited to graduates of state universities due to the competition arising from graduates from non-state and foreign universities. Graduates have to face several difficulties in finding a suitable job, even if they have a degree as a qualification. Losing job opportunities while having a degree is extremely problematic from a graduate's perspective.

Currently, the private sector has a major role in providing employment. The concern among the graduates is their inability to find work soon after entry into the labor market. Before the time of 1960s, all graduates were guaranteed a job opportunity relevant to their education qualification (De Silva, 1977). However, since late 1960, graduates have begun experiencing difficulties in finding jobs in both the public and private sectors.

Sri Lanka's unemployment rate has increased to 4.60% in June 2022, from the previously reported figure of 4.30% in March 2022 (Department of Census and Statistics, 2022). As per a tracer study of the University Grants Commission (UGC) (2018) the third largest unemployment rate is observed among Management graduates (27.7%). As of June 30, 2020, the total number of graduates who passed out from the university system was 25,284 and the number of postgraduates was 10,079 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2020). Graduates have to wait around one or one and a half years for the university entrance even though they have to spend a minimum of four years to complete their undergraduate studies. Annually, more than 20000 students are graduating from state universities (Tracer study of graduates

Universities in Sri Lanka, 2018). According to recent studies, most of the graduates in Sri Lanka are still unemployed and after their graduation, they have to wait for a long period to find a suitable job. Because of this reason, many graduates are employed in irrelevant jobs with low salaries (Wickramarachchi, 2008, as cited in Ariyawansa, 2008).

Thus, unemployed graduates are picketing and demanding government jobs, and the lack of job vacancies in the job market has also emerged as a critical issue specifically related to management graduates.

Enhancement of graduate employability is very important to the county as the government spends a considerable amount of rupees to be invested in the national education system which is inclusive of the 15 state universities in the country. The results of unemployed graduates impose a burden to the economy, which may lead to youth frustration, violence, unrest and other forms of anti-social behaviors. Even though higher education is free of charge up to the university level in Sri Lanka, the government allocates a considerable amount of resources for higher education. Thus, not only the government, but also graduates face serious problems if they are unable to find suitable jobs after their graduation.

Hence, this study identifies the main difficulties faced by graduates when searching for a suitable job and also examines the employability and employment level of management graduates of the state universities in Sri Lanka.

This study may help the governing bodies to design curricular and other educational policies for improving the employability of especially, the management undergraduates of the state universities in Sri Lanka.

2. Literature Review

This section will discuss theoretical aspects and empirical evidence on employability, graduates' employability, and unemployment.

2.1. Theoretical Aspects of Employability

Employability can be defined as a set of attributes, skills, and knowledge that all labor market participants should possess to ensure that they have the capability of being effective in the workplace to the benefit of themselves, their employer, and the wider economy (Confederation of British Industry - CBI, 2009).

Reddy (2016) defined employability as having more skills, knowledge, and personal abilities, chosen career, an understanding of the labor market, and knowing how to sustain in the labor market. The significant characteristic needed for graduates to be employable includes the ability to gain initial employment, maintain employment and obtain new employment if required.

2.2. Related Theories on Employability

Mainly, employability is described by several theoretical aspects, such as Human Capital Theory, Signaling Theory, Career Anchor, Outcomes Approach, Conflict Theory of Employability, Process Approach, and Human Development Theory.

As per Becker (1975) education and training were investments that could add to productivity. According to the Human Capital theory, knowledge and skills are vital parts of the product of investment and, combined with other human investments, predominantly account for the productive superiority of technically advanced countries. However, this theory has several criticisms.

Signaling Theory addresses the criticism leveled at the Human Capital Theory. "Employers use educational attainment to identify individuals with certain valuable 'innate' traits that cannot be observed directly" (Arrow, 1973; Spence, 1973, 1974, as cited in Rospigliosi et al., 2014). This theory argues that education does not enhance productivity, rather it is used by employers as a signal about an applicant's potential productivity, including their ability to learn on the job (Rospigliosi et al., 2014). Further, researchers argued that wages rise with education because more capable individuals experience less disutility from education and thus obtain more of it. This is particularly relevant to higher education where it is contended that students with higher cognitive ability reach higher levels of education (Spence, 1973, as cited in Rospigliosi et al., 2014).

As per Schein (1978), every employee possessed specific and unique 'anchors' – one's perception of one's values, talents, abilities, and motives, which form the basis of individual roles and development. The word 'career' is used by Schein (1990) as the general sense of the set of occupational experiences and roles that make up a person's work life. As per the author, everyone develops a career anchor, but in many occupations, there is insufficient flexibility in the work situation for the anchor to be expressed at work.

The outcomes approach emphasizes the development of personal traits, elements relevant to the workplace, and the quantitative measurement of employability using employment data, making it competence and employment-centered. Within this field, employability is defined as a person's capacity to find, keep, and advance in employment. This includes both skills and attitudes. Policymakers' responses to industry requirements and outside circumstances, such as labor market conditions, in relation to graduates' readiness (Fakunle & Higson, 2021).

"Conflict theory of employability takes into consideration the fact that society is characterized by inequalities in wealth, power, as well as status, and that these inequalities create conflict between individuals and social groups" (Matsepe, 2002, as cited in Jonck & Walt, 2015). This theoretical framework emphasizes the conflict between employers and academics and argues that higher education institutions cannot be solely responsible for students' employability (Selvadurai et al., 2012).

Therefore, it is the responsibility of employers to offer work environments that will improve employability. However, employers are faced with the enormous problem of responding to an external environment that is changing quickly and is essential to the existence of organizations. Employers anticipate graduates to be prepared for the workplace because of this (Stice, 2011).

"The process approach is considering the employability strategy at the institutional level. The employability initiatives that are available inside an institution are covered by the process approach and these programs include these objectives either expressively or implicitly through the careers service" (Fakunle & Higson, 2021).

The human development theory considers employability from the aspect of supply side and focuses on a variety of skills including but not limited to knowledge generation, professional preparation, cultural knowledge, and the enlightenment of the public sphere (Jonck, 2014).

The human capital theory, career anchor theory, outcome approach, and human development theory argue on education change of an individual and its preparation of him/her with skills required for the job market. However, social, economic, and political conditions should provide the foundation to convert education into an investment. The Signaling Theory argues that investment in education requires the provision of sufficient return through employment (Ambepitiya, 2016). The conflict theory of employability highlights the conflict between employers and academics, arguing that universities cannot be solely responsible for student employability. The process approach will be considered employability strategies at the institutional level.

2.3. Theoretical Aspects of Un-employability

According to the Sri Lanka Labor Force Survey (2021), "persons available and/or looking for work, and who did not work and taken steps to find a job during last four weeks and ready to accept a job given a work opportunity within next two weeks are defined as unemployed".

Higher education institutes need to equip graduates with deep intellectual competencies and apply practical professional skills which help them to put up their work-readiness. As in key findings of Lowden et al. (2011), degree and technical skills are the main qualifications expected by employers and the graduates have to demonstrate a broader range of skills and attributes including teamwork, communication, leadership, critical thinking, problem-solving, and managerial abilities. Today, most graduates are facing difficulties to find jobs, mainly due to the ineffective bridge between the labor market and the education system, as well as social welfare and urban-rural differences (Wu, 2018). The major unemployment theories in the west include the voluntary unemployment theory of the classical school, the involuntary unemployment theory of the keynesian school, the unemployment theory of the neoclassical synthesis school, the classical

unemployment theory, the implicit contract theory, and the neoclassical school theory of unemployment. These theories are based on the economic perspective.

The theory of voluntary unemployment of the classical school is based on the premise of the private ownership of the means of production and the assumption of complete free competition. From the perspective of classical economists, in perfect competition, if wages can fluctuate in line with changes in labor supply and demand, all available labor resources can be used for production and full employment can be achieved through the spontaneous adjustment of the market price mechanism (Wu, 2018).

According to the involuntary unemployment theory of the keynesian school, sole dependence on the spontaneous market force does not enable to achieve the balance between supply and demand and form an effective demand sufficient to eliminate involuntary unemployment and achieve full employment (Wu, 2018). The Keynesian theory believes that the root cause of involuntary unemployment is the shortage of effective demand, and the other three basic rules demonstrate the possibility of long-term involuntary unemployment, namely; decreasing consumption trends resulting in inadequate consumption, decreasing marginal efficiency of capital bringing insufficient investment demand and money flow preference causing insufficient investment demand (Wu, 2018). Also, it claims that involuntary unemployment can be reduced by stimulating consumption, expanding effective demand, and encouraging investment. Therefore, to achieve full employment, the government intervention is very important.

Classical unemployment theory describes that unemployment increases with government regulation or intervention. There are different ways regulations and interventions contribute to unemployment, for example, raising the minimum wage increases labor costs, and labor laws restrict layoffs or downsizing, promote the security of tenure, and mandate the provision of benefits beyond wages (Pineda, 2018).

The implicit contract theory tries to explain the primary cause of unemployment during a recession. This theory specifically claims that labor contracts and labor laws make it difficult for employers to cut the wage of their existing laborers. Hence, during a recession in which businesses need to save costs and optimize their operations, they usually choose to layoff their laborers or downsize their workforce instead of implementing wage reductions (Pineda, 2018).

The new classical school theory of unemployment's argument is based on the assumption of market clearing. "Prices and wages are therefore adjusted to balance supply and demand. This assumption means there is no possibility of involuntary unemployment and all unemployed people who want a job are provided by their employer. By allowing wages and prices to be adjusted flexibly, everyone can work at market wages, and businesses can produce and sell as much as they want at market prices" (Gebretsadik, 2016).

Even though graduates are a highly valuable human resource of a country, most of them have to wait for a long time for suitable jobs. The mismatch between the degree and the demands of the job market as the main reason for this issue seems to be a conventional belief and seems like an invalid measure. Issues in the development of the macro-economy of the country appear as a greater drawback in the case of graduates' employability. The unemployment problem is especially critical among some areas in humanities and social science and some management graduates, as many students graduate annually. It can be noticed that there are booming job opportunities for graduates in the private sector, mainly for Science, Engineering, Management, and Commerce graduates but lesser opportunities for Social Sciences and Humanities graduates. (Ariyawansa, 2008, as cited in Luxaraj, 2019).

As this study focuses on enhancing the employability of management undergraduates of state universities in Sri Lanka, the following research questions are to be addressed.

1. What is the level of employment and employability of management graduates of state universities in Sri Lanka?

2. What are the problems and difficulties faced by management graduates of state universities in finding suitable jobs in the industry?

3. What are the policy measures for enhancing employability of management graduates of state universities in Sri Lanka?

3. Methodology

3.1. Study Area

There are only 15 state universities in Sri Lanka under the direct administration of the University Grants Commission which controls funding and appointments. However, this study focuses only on state universities that produce management graduates. Hence, the study area is the state universities of Sri Lanka which have Management Faculties. However, four (04) universities were excluded from the study as their data could not be accessed including the University of Jaffna, University of Colombo, Sabaragamuwa University, and the University of Moratuwa since they have not completed any batch of students to the date of the data collection.

The study area of the research is 09 state universities in Sri Lanka namely, the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, University of Kelaniya, University of Ruhuna, Uva Wellassa University, Wayamba University, Rajarata University, South Eastern University, University of Peradeniya and Eastern University.

3.2. Research Method

This study used quantitative research methods. The population of this study is 10,033 (including management graduates from 09 state universities for the last 03 years of

2017, 2018, and 2019). According to "Krejcie and Morgan Table", the approximate sample size is 1333 to maintain the validity of the findings at a 95% confidence level with a 2.5 error rate. As a larger sample guarantees more accuracy level of the findings, this study received 1026 responses (10.22% of the population). To maintain a higher response rate, 2508 questionnaires (one-fourth of the population (10,033*25%= 2508) were distributed. A sample of 1333 management graduates from the last 03 academic years was selected by using a stratified random sampling method. A postal survey with a structured questionnaire was used to collect the data and descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data.

4. Analysis and Discussion

The first part of this section presents the sample description, reliability analysis, and factor analysis to measure and validate the construct of employability, which consists of twelve dimensions. Descriptive analysis including frequency analysis is presented to identify the employability and employment level and the problems faced by management graduates at the job interviews.

4.1. Analysis of Demographic Variables

Table 01 presents the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 01: Analysis of Demographic Variables

Variable	Count	Percentage
Gender		
Male	351	34.2
Female	673	65.6
Age		
24-25	173	16.9
26-27	459	44.7
28-29	313	30.5
30 and above	80	7.8
Ethnicity		
Sinhala	919	89.6
Tamil	60	5.8
Muslim	42	4.1
Burgher	4	0.4
University		
Eastern University	41	4.0
Rajarata University	86	8.4
South Eastern University	38	3.7
University of Kelaniya	195	19.0
University of Peradeniya	49	4.8

University of Ruhuna	116	11.3
University of Sri Jayewardenepura	333	32.5
Uva Wellassa University	57	5.6
Wayamba University	111	10.8
Special/ General Degree		
Special/Honors	985	96.0
General	38	3.7
Class of the Degree		
First Class	142	13.8
Second Upper	284	27.7
Second Lower	251	24.5
General	345	33.6

Source: Field Data

According to table 01, 66% of the sample is female and about 45% of the sample is between 26 – 27 years. About 90% of the sample is Sinhalese. University of Sri Jayewardenepura represents the highest percentage of the sample that is 32.5% and the University of Kelaniya, University of Ruhuna and Wayamba University have presented a large percentage of the sample respectively 19%, 11.3% and 10.8%. About 96% of graduates are Special/Honors degree holders but nearly 34% of the sample has completed their degree without a class.

4.2. Reliability and Validity of the Measures

To ensure the reliability of the measures, the reliability test (Alpha Value) was conducted. An alpha level of 0.5 or above is generally considered acceptable (Cronbach, 1951; Karunasena & Deng, 2012). Construct reliability between 0.6 and 0.7 is acceptable (Hair et al., 2014). As with all the reliability coefficient values of the variables in this study the values were higher than 0.5 ensuring reliability.

4.3. Factor Analysis

The factor analysis was used to screen all the sub-variables of employability to ensure the validity of measures and factors with a higher factor load which were considered (a factor load greater than 0.05 is considered significant) thus, ensuring the construct validity.

Table 02: Results of Factor Analysis

Variable	Items	Factor loading	TVE	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	AVE	CR
Ability to get a job			66.762	0.748	0.668	0.857
AJ_1	My degree helped to get this job easily	0.748				
AJ_2	My degree trained us how to improve my job career	0.864				
AJ_3	Due to the training of my degree, I can work in this job for a longer time period	0.835				
Enhanced knowledge			76.664	0.681	0.767	0.868
EK_1	This job is related to the field I studied in my degree	0.876				
EK_2	My degree trained me on how to improve my knowledge related to the job	0.876				
Enhanced job-related skills (Technical skills)			89.407	0.882	0.895	0.945
JS_1	The degree helped to obtain job-related skills	0.946				
JS_2	Because the degree improved my job-related skills	0.946				
Enhanced managerial competency			79.507	0.914	0.795	0.939
MC_1	The degree trained us to take responsibility for our work	0.903				
MC_2	My degree trained us to take responsibility for the results of our work	0.920				
MC_3	Degree trained us to combine our work with other works as a whole (integrate the works)	0.883				
MC_4	The degree trained us how to see the whole	0.860				

	picture of any situation (how to think holistically)					
Ability to work independently			74.633	0.632	0.746	0.855
WI_1	Got the training from the degree on how to act independently in my organization	0.864				
WI_2	My degree helped to improve independent thinking	0.864				
Stable			77.058	0.851	0.770	0.910
ST_1	Because of the training from my degree, I am secure with my job	0.901				
ST_2	I am financially secure because of my training from the degree	0.885				
ST_3	Because of the degree, I can work for many years in this job	0.846				
Improved entrepreneurial skills			71.481	0.789	0.715	0.883
ES_1	Degree trained us to take risks related to my job	0.845				
ES_2	Degree improved my ability to generate new ideas	0.894				
ES_3	Degree trained us to start my own business	0.795				
Dedication			80.541	0.879	0.806	0.925
DD_1	Degree trained us to find new ways to help others in my organization	0.897				
DD_2	Degree trained us to find new ways to help other people outside my organization	0.919				
DD_3	Degree trained us to solve other problems related to my work environment	0.876				

Improved ability in problem-solving			88.077	0.864	0.880	0.936
PS_1	Degree trained us to find solutions for unsolvable problems	0.938				
PS_2	Degree trained us to overcome difficulties and obstacles	0.938				
Improved skills of work-life balance			88.315	0.867	0.884	0.938
WB_1	The degree helped me to realize how to balance my job with my personal life	0.940				
WB_2	The degree trained me how to fulfill job requirements while fulfilling requirements of the personal life	0.940				
Enhanced positive attitudes			93.972	0.936	0.939	0.969
PA_1	Degree trained us to build positive attitudes	0.969				
PA_2	Degree trained us to think positively	0.969				
Improved skills of lifelong learner			91.120	0.902	0.912	0.954
LL_1	Degrees trained us to improve our knowledge continuously throughout our life	0.955				
LL_2	Degree trained us to improve our skills continuously throughout my life	0.955				

Source: Field Data

4.4. Discriminant Validity

To ensure the internal constancy of measures, Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were computed. Composite Reliability (CR) is a measure of internal consistency in scale items (Netemeyer, 2003). To ensure CR for the construct, the value should be greater than 0.6 and AVE should be greater than 0.5 (Fornell & Larker, 1981). These minimum thresholds were maintained by ensuring CR and AVE. As per Hair et al. (2014), AVE estimates for any two factors should be greater than the square of the correlation between the two factors to provide

evidence of discriminant validity. These criteria were met, and internal consistency and discriminant validity were ensured.

4.5. Analysis of Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Table 03: Descriptive Statistics of Dimensions of Employability (N=1026)

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Ability to get a job	3.9	0.8	1	5
Enhanced knowledge	3.8	0.9	1	5
Enhanced job-related skills (Technical skills)	3.9	0.8	1	5
Enhanced managerial competency	4.0	0.8	1	5
Ability to work independently	4.0	0.9	1	5
Stable	3.4	0.9	1	5
Improved entrepreneurial skills	3.6	0.8	1	5
Dedication	3.6	0.8	1	5
Improved ability in problem-solving	3.8	0.8	1	5
Improved skills in work-life balance	3.7	0.9	1	5
Enhanced positive attitudes	4.0	0.8	1	5
Improved skills of lifelong learner	4.0	0.8	1	5

Source: Field Data

The mean values of the twelve sub-variables of employability are indicated in table 03. Accordingly, the Mean values of the ability to get a job, Enhanced knowledge, enhanced job-related skills (Technical skills), Enhanced managerial competency, Ability to work independently, Stable, Improved entrepreneurial skills, Dedication, Improved ability of problem-solving, Improved skills of work-life balance, Enhanced positive attitudes, Improved skills of a lifelong learner, are respectively 3.9, 3.8, 3.9, 4.0, 4.0, 3.4, 3.6, 3.6, 3.8, 3.7, 4.0, 4.0. There are four dimensions indicating mean value of 4 which is in the agreed level. These are the degrees that helped them to enhance managerial competency, enhanced positive attitudes, improved lifelong skills, and be able to work independently. The level of other dimensions also indicated more than the average level.

4.6. Level of Employment of Management Graduates

Table 04 presents the employment of the graduates, their employed sector and the type of employment, and their work experience.

Table 04: Analysis of Employment Information

	Count	Percentage
Presently employed or self-employed		
Yes	922	89.9
No	98	9.6
If yes, the job title		
Manager	52	5.1
Officer	124	12.1
Executive	317	30.9
Assistant	119	11.6
Analyst	23	2.2
Academics	29	2.8
If not, the reasons for not having a job		
Looking for jobs, but haven't got a job yet	82	8.0
Planning to start a business	20	1.9
Planning to go abroad	6	0.6
Not looking for a job	13	1.3
Other	30	2.9
Employed sector		
Public sector	371	36.2
Private sector	537	52.3
Semi-government	48	4.7
Self-employed	13	1.3
NGO	4	0.4
Foreign	15	1.5
Type of employment		
Permanent	598	58.3
Temporary	77	7.5
Contract-basis	89	8.7
Part-time	4	0.4
Training	207	20.2
Total work experience		
Less than 1 year	114	11.1
1-2 years	413	40.3
3-5 years	430	41.9
6-8 years	21	2.0
More than 8 years	9	0.9
How did you find this job?		
Newspaper	128	12.5
Online	277	27.0
Personal contacts	213	20.8
Competitive exam	134	13.1
Via internship	82	8.0
Job fair	12	1.2
Other	119	11.6
Important reasons for getting the current job (respondents were asked to indicate more than one answer)		
Degree	475	46.3
Class of degree	108	10.5
Reputation of the university	95	9.3

Previous work experience	221	21.5
English proficiency	192	18.7
Professional qualifications	174	17.0
Computer literacy	143	13.9
Your personality	223	21.7
Extracurricular activities	62	6.0
Looking for employment right now		
Yes	619	60.3
No	375	36.5
The sector(s) they are willing to be employed in future		
Public sector	619	60.3
Private sector	178	17.3
Semi-government	34	3.3
Self-employed	58	5.7
NGO	4	0.4
Foreign	66	6.4
Expected Monthly Salary		
Up to 30,000	11	1.1
30,001-50,000	126	12.3
50,001-100,000	459	44.7
100,001-150,000	212	20.7
Over 150,000	165	16.1
If employed,		
whether is it a full-time job		
Yes	824	80.3
No	85	8.2
Getting a satisfactory salary		
Yes	405	39.5
No	501	48.8
Have to work a specific period		
Yes	600	58.5
No	301	29.4
If self-employed,		
Yes	58	5.6
No	64	6.2
Earning enough money with the self-employment		
Yes	50	4.8
No	70	6.7

Source: Field Data

As per table 04, about 90% of the sample is presently employed or self-employed. Among them, 48.1% are holding executive positions including manager, officer, and executives, and about 10% of the graduates are not presently employed. About 8% of them are looking for a job, as they do not have a job yet (8%). Most of the (52%) graduates are employed in the private sector. Nearly, 58% of the graduates are permanent employees. Most (42%) of the graduates have 3-5 years of working experience and 40% of the graduates have 1-2 years of working experience. Online is the most useful source for finding a job. Nearly, 46% of the graduates have

considered their degree as the most important reason for getting their current job and other important reasons are work experience, personality, English proficiency and professional qualifications.

Among the sample, about 60% of the graduates are seeking for a job right now. Among them, about 60% of the graduates are willing to be employed in the public sector in the future. About 45% of the graduates expect Rs. 50,001 to Rs.100, 000 as their monthly salary. Among the employed graduates, about 80% of the sample has full-time jobs but nearly 49% of the graduate employees do not get a satisfactory salary whereas nearly 40% were satisfied with their salary. Moreover, most of the graduates (59%) have to work for a specific time. Among the graduates who have participated in the postal survey, only about 5% of the sample of graduates are self-employed and among them, nearly 5% of the graduates can earn enough money with their self-employment.

4.7. Problems that Graduates Faced in Getting Suitable Jobs in the Job Market

Graduates have to face various problems when they get a suitable job in the job market. Those problems are presented in table 05.

Table 05: Problems that Graduates Faced in Getting a Suitable Job

Variable	Count	Percentage
Age	460	44.8
Lack of industry experience	331	32.3
Due to a lower grade of the degree (class of the degree)	13	1.3
Degree not related to the job	36	3.5
Deficiency in the English language	20	1.9
Deficiency in computer literacy	1	0.1
Lack of personal contacts	90	8.8
Political interventions	34	3.3
Lack of other professional qualifications	13	1.3
Lack of job-related skills	7	0.7

Source: Field Data

About 45% of graduates indicated that age is a limiting factor for them when finding a suitable job. Also, 32% of graduates indicated that the lack of industry experience was another issue in finding a job, and nearly 9% of graduates were unable to find jobs due to a lack of personal contacts.

4.8. Discussion

The study revealed that graduates have to face various problems when they get suitable jobs in the job market. Similar findings have been observed by various scholars in their previous studies as follows.

As per the analysis, it is revealed that age is the most affected limiting factor for Sri Lankan graduates when finding a suitable job. Jayasekera (2012) has stated that "Indian students in university education are usually between the ages of 18-24 and similarly, Chinese undergraduates too graduated in an average of 24 years. In comparison, Sri Lanka does not seem to be placed particularly lower in terms of its median age of graduation, which is 24+. However, what is important to note is that Sri Lankan students could graduate at a much younger age, ideally 22+ or 23 years at most, if not for the long-time lags taken by the authorities to release results and make selections and admissions for universities. This also delays the job market entrants who would be on, or above, the industry norms of entry-level age requirements. This leads to the waiting time for state employment longer". It was confirmed by Abas and Imam (2016) that "the current age has created opportunities along with challenges and complexities that affect employment". Similar findings presented by Husin et al. (2021) and www.guardian.ng (2020).

Nagarajan and Edwards, (2014) stated that faculties of universities need frameworks beyond current graduate attributes to successfully address the development of skills such as the ability to work across different cultures. Mason et al. (2021) revealed that work experience during the undergraduate study is positively associated with finding a first job, up to date, there has been very little to validate claims that clear teaching of common employability skills contributes positively to graduates' job performance in their early years of employment and subsequent career progress. Singam, (2017) stated that the economic system of the country has not been able to absorb its graduates into the development process of the country because of the limited relevance of curricula and the lack of quality degree programs, and even talented graduates have to wait for a long time to get employment after graduation.

"Sometimes the economy has employment opportunities, for some job categories, since job seekers are not adequately found for the majority of the other jobs that are available while job seekers do not have the necessary skills" (Singam, 2017). Deficiency in the English language and computer literacy is also another constraint that graduates have to face when they are seeking a suitable job in the job market. "ICT and English language are the most demanded skills in the country. English speakers have access to better quality jobs with higher salaries and benefits at home and abroad" (Employment Diagnostic Study, 2017). It has been confirmed by Ariyawansa (2008); Singam (2017); Kanagasingam (2017) and Ambepitiya (2016). Lack of industry experience is one of the problems that graduates faced in getting suitable jobs in the job market confirmed by Singam, (2017); Ariyawansa (2008), www.the good universities guide.com (2021); Redelman (2011); White (2012) and Nagarajan and Edwards (2014). Further Nagarajan and Edwards, (2014) have identified a lack of job-related skills as a challenge when they seek a suitable job.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

To address the above-mentioned issues and difficulties, policy measures are proposed for the attention of the graduates, the universities, and the industry (the government / private sector organizations).

5.1. Recommendations for Graduates

5.1.1. Continuous efforts for improving employability

These actions have to be taken to enhance managerial competency, enhance positive attitudes, improve lifelong skills, and be able to work independently. Graduates should be able to take responsibility, integrate the work, and should know how to think holistically to enhance their managerial competency. Also, they should be able to improve their knowledge and skills continuously throughout their life. Graduates should know how to act independently and how to improve independent thinking. Not only that, but they should also improve their job career, improve job-related skills and improve their ability to generate new ideas.

In developing such skills, undergraduates can get support from the Career Guidance Units in the universities. Individuals should have a pleasant personality to work with other colleagues, as interpersonal support is essential in the contemporary working environment. Normally, management graduates are recruited for junior executive/supervisor positions. Thus, leadership qualities have to be acquired.

5.1.2. Nurture positive attitudes

As a result of the graduate's negative attitudes, they think they are graduates who should not do some blue color jobs. Graduates demand a higher level of salary even in their very first interview, but they should not expect a higher salary at the first appointment as most of them do not possess work experience. If they accept any position at a lower level even if that may not be much related to job qualifications and skills, such a situation is a good opportunity for them to start the job from the very beginning and then their career progression may be easier.

5.1.3. Should have a clear plan for their employment and pre-preparation

Most graduates do not have a clear career path or plan for their future to reduce the waiting time for their first job. Graduates should be able to recognize their interesting job positions and fields of work and continued efforts have to be taken to realize the plan. All the required qualifications, knowledge, and other job requirements should be fulfilled before applying for the position. Then, their job expectations could be realized without any difficulties.

5.2. Recommendations for Universities

5.2.1. Amendment to the internship program

As the lack of industry experience (32.3%) is one of the main issues faced by graduates, many respondents have suggested that a considerable revision should be made to the internship program, which is a good chance to get working experience during the degree program. The duration of the internship program should be extended to at least a year or two years and it must be made compulsory. Apart from the time enhancement, it would be better if the university reschedules and revises internship programs with the consultation of the organizations that offer such trainings and establish specific criteria that need to be fulfilled by the internship program.

5.2.2. Collaborate the universities with private and public sector organizations

University administration should make the public and private sector organizations aware about the degree program and its curriculum and because of this ignorance, graduates face various difficulties at the interviews. Further, it would be better if the university administration can build up a better network and Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) with a specific set of institutions (Public and Private both) for obtaining training and employment opportunities as one of the difficulties faced by graduates in getting a suitable job is the lack of personal contacts (8.8%).

5.2.3. Amendment to the curriculum

The existing curriculum of the degree programs in the universities should be revised gradually in line with the job market requirements. New courses should be introduced to provide new knowledge and enhance required skills with advanced technologies, technical subjects, and other modern concepts, which need to be equipped by any graduate in the modern context.
Integration of ICT with each subject is very essential. Apart from that, English communication skills have to be developed as many graduates' face difficulties during their education and especially in finding employment. Such skills could be improved through special training programs, joining clubs, social events, and so on.

5.2.4. Other encouragements

University administration can organize job fairs with the assistance of leading private and public sector organizations and encourage the graduates to participate in such events and initiate their businesses. A learning environment with such kind of encouragement will help the graduates to find suitable jobs without much difficulty.

5.3. Recommendations for the Government / Private Sector Organizations

5.3.1. Revise the annual registration of undergraduates

Annual registration of students at universities is increasing year by year. Though it is an indication of the progress of the economy, the number of enrollment of students should be aligned with the needs of the human resources for the country. If the government could expand economic growth, that will lead to an increase in the demand for new job opportunities. Thus, the graduates with new degree programs could be absorbed by new jobs created by the expansion of the economy which could lessen graduate unemployment.

5.3.2. Avoid age limit problem of the graduates

According to the evidence, administrative shortcomings are the main reason for taking a longer period for graduation in Sri Lanka. It is important that Sri Lankan students should be able to graduate at a much younger age, preferably 22+ or 23 years at most, which could be made possible if not for the long time gaps taken by the authorities to release results and make selections for universities. In Sri Lanka, a student who gets selected for university education would be wasting nearly two years until administrative and examination procedures are completed. Therefore, governing bodies should take necessary actions to avoid these administrative inefficiencies and delays. It is obvious that speeding up the process of admitting students to colleges would greatly enhance the experience of young undergraduates in the labor market as they would have more time to prepare for the private sector.

5.3.3. Introduce new degree programs to cope with emerging fields and trends in the job market

The degree programs should provide enough knowledge and skills to cope with the needs of a dynamic environment. Some existing degree programs should be replaced with new curriculums and new degree programs that have to be introduced focusing industry-related subjects, are more practical-oriented and adding advanced technologies with a longer training period. More specifically, those curriculums should be updated at least once every two years to add more value to the graduates and thus they could be easily absorbed into the job market.

5.3.4. Change government recruitment policies

The existing recruitment process of the government sector is not time-framed and normally the government calls applications for new recruitments when the Ministry allows it. There should be a proper human resources plan and a systematic recruitment process that should be implemented to acquire better human resources for the government organizations

5.3.5. Formalize the recruitment processes and internship program in private sector organizations

Though the private sector plays a considerable role in contributing to the economy by employing graduates, several inefficiencies in the recruitment process could be identified. Several respondents revealed that the use of personal relations in recruitment is a common phenomenon. In addition, the private sector should formalize internship programs with a clear set of functions to perform and train graduates accordingly. After completion of the training, those who performed better could be offered permanent positions.

5.3.6. Introduce management trainee programs

Some private-sector organizations have initiated management trainee programs for undergraduates and fresh graduates. Through such programs, a loyal workforce could be built and also employee retention could be ensured.

5.4. Conclusion

This study focused on the employability of management graduates in State Universities in Sri Lanka, and it revealed that there is a relatively satisfactory situation in management graduate employment and employability level when compared to arts graduates in Sri Lanka.

Quantitative research method was used to examine the level of employment and level of employability of management graduates of state universities in Sri Lanka among the graduates who passed out during 2017-2019. The employability level from the student's perspective is more than average. Even though the employment level is high among the management graduates in Sri Lanka, 80% of them are doing a full-time job, but looking for another job in the public sector and only 40 % of them are satisfied with the salary. Some of them have to face various problems when they seek a suitable job such as age, lack of industry experience, due to a lower grade of the degree (class of the degree), degree not related to the job, deficiency in the English language, deficiency in computer literacy, lack of personal contacts, political interventions, lack of other professional qualifications and lack of job-related skills. Finally, recommendations have been suggested for addressing these issues and improving graduate employability.

This study also suggests recommendations that can be taken to overcome those issues faced by a graduate. These recommendations have been suggested from three perspectives in graduate, university, and government/private sector organizations. It has been suggested for the graduates to improve the required skills, knowledge, and nurture attitudes and have a plan and be hard working to achieve the plan. In terms of the university, actions can be taken such as amending the internship program, amending the curriculum, coordinating with private and public sector organizations

and making agreements, and other encouragements like organizations of job fairs and skill development programs and more generalized degree programs at the undergraduate level. Government or private sector organizations should amend the annual registration of undergraduates, introduce new degree programs for emerging needs of the job market, change the government recruitment policies, formalize the recruitment processes and internship programs in private sector organizations, and introduce management trainee programs.

6. Limitations and Further Research

This study faced several limitations. Due to the Covid 19 pandemic situation, physical contact with the respondents had not been made and the discussions were made only through telephone conversations. This is one of the main limitations of this study. Also, very few graduates were unemployed during the interview period because of the bulk recruitment of graduates by the government as their policy. Under such a situation, there may be defects in the revealed information. This study can be conducted by considering some other universities situated far away from the Capital. Issues faced by graduates from those universities may differ from the graduates at the universities situated in the western province. As mentioned above, thousands of graduates were recruited by the government in the recent past of study and it mitigates the accuracy of the revealed information. This study has given more emphasis only on management graduates and future studies could be conducted by covering other graduates such as art and science graduates. It is better to expand the focus on cross-analyses of gender-wise, age-wise, graduation year-wise, university-wise, sex-wise, public, and private sector-wise, and university-wise. Further research could also be undertaken to study the factors that affect graduate employability in past contexts and present contexts as it could identify the changing patterns of the contexts over time and suggest more effective policies for the future.

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