



Early careers of arts graduates towards the world of work

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ABSTRACT

Employability refers to an individual's ability to achieve, maintain and acquire a new job when needed. Education, skills, and experience may assist in keeping employment. Finding a suitable job for a fresh graduate with inadequate working experience is challenging. Accordingly, this research aims to explore the status of graduate employability, its accomplishments, strengths, challenges, and issues that arise within a short period after being exposed to the world of work. The study was conducted at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka during the period of 2017- 2019. Data was collected using an interviewee-administered questionnaire. 522 students out of 808 in 2017, 788 out of 838 in 2018, and 767 out of 871 in 2019 have responded respectively in each year including both General and Honors BA degree holders. Male student composition was less than 17% in each batch. Of the total sampled, 22% in 2017, 13% in 2018, and 18% in 2019 were employed after the first six months of their final examination. Of the honors degree holders 23% in 2017, 14% in 2018, and 19% in 2019 were employed. The graduates whose medium of instruction was English showed a high employability rate compared to the ones whose medium of instruction was in the local language. The majority (55%, 43%, and 54% in respective years) were employed on a temporary basis six months after the final examination. The majority were employed in the private sector (52%, 53%, and 59%). Medium of study, academic performance, internship training program, and field of study were found to be the decisive factors of graduate employability.

KEYWORDS: State Universities, Employability, Arts Graduates, World of Work, Sri Lanka

1 INTRODUCTION

Employability refers to a person's ability to find and keep a job, as well as the capacity to move to other work when necessary. Education, personal attributes, and experience may assist an individual in obtaining employment. The term employability has been in use since the early twentieth century, though its meaning has changed over time (Gazier, 1999 cited in Garsten & Jacobsson 2004). Employability, is about bridging the gap between education and the workplace (Harvey, Locke & Morey 2002). Accordingly, employability is a multi-faceted issue that requires collaborative responsibility from individuals, educational institutions, and the labor market. Employability is defined as the ability to obtain and continue a satisfying job (Hillage & Pollard 1998). Two prominent researchers in the field, Knight and Yorke (2004) delineated that employability describes a set of accomplishments, talents, understandings, and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to find work and succeed in their chosen industries, benefiting themselves, the workforce, the community, and the economy. Achieved employability is a prolific asset for an economy as well as to the community too. A productive employee is the result of the government's investment in higher education.

When understanding the key attributes of employability, Hillage and Pollard (1998) pointed out that knowledge, skills, and attitudes that remain within the person and the personality of delivering the skills to the employer are the most important. Following

these, graduate employability is not measured concerning subject-specific knowledge but holistic flairs which demand both transferable skills and competencies from graduates.

1.1 Interrelated Aspects of Employability

Generic skills are the most addressed in literature in search of attributes of employability. Skills in working effectively with other people, presentational skills and problem-solving approaches, are described as general skills (The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education 1997). Knight and Yorke (2004) in their work on embedding employability into the curriculum deliver a model which describes four interrelated components of employability that influence employability. Those four components are Understanding, Self-Efficacy Beliefs, Personal Skills/Qualities, and Metacognition which stand as the USEM model.

With the increasing number of higher education institutes all over the world, the concept of employability has been debated globally. A local study done by Ariyawansa (2008) discovered that English language proficiency is an important component for finding a job. Additional skills such as IT, leadership attributes, analytical ability, teamwork, and interpersonal relations are in high demand in addition to a degree. Hence, graduates are required and demanded to be highly competent, innovative, and qualified, by showcasing high-quality competencies, up-to-date knowledge, and improved skills.

Further, it is crucial to identify the external factors affecting the level of employability. According to Yorke (2006) "employability" refers to graduates' achievements and potential to obtain a graduate job, but it should not be confused with the actual acquisition of a graduate employment, which is influenced by other factors including the state of the economy. Indirect effects occur when graduates face disadvantages as a result of educational factors such as the subject studied, the institution attended, or admission qualifications which are systematically related to the background variables (Centre for Higher Education Research and Information 2002). The report further says that graduates' socio-economic background, age, and ethnic background affect employment even when the other factors are controlled. A tracer study of graduates of the universities in Sri Lanka conducted by the University Grants Commission (2018) reveals four different groups as tertiary education institutions, employers/industry, individuals (graduates), and government (policy) play roles in developing employability skills. Specially, the policy frameworks and action plans can influence employability while changes in the political party may affect the long-term curriculums of the educational institutes and industries (University Grants Commission 2018).

Graduate job paths mature slowly, and some graduates take 5 years or longer to settle into their careers. This implies extra studies for some, while others may have followed the

wrong track and had to reconsider their early career choices as part of their absorption into the labor market (Purcell & Elias 2004). Further, Purcell and Elias state that initial graduate underemployment is not a reliable predictor of longer-term labor market outcomes. The status of employability may vary with time and other social and political concerns even for the same set of graduates. Periodic surveys could aid in the creation of time series data of whether the graduates have become successful employees or not. Enrolling in Master's programs does not ensure a successful work outcome; as a result, some of those who pursue it may end up settling for a bachelor's level job (Schomburg & Teichler 2011).

It can be clinched that graduate employability is directly affected by four decisive factors, firstly external attributes such as geography and location, social and economic background, timing (pandemics/ conflicts or massive scale natural disaster situations may delay employability) and graduate demand and supply in relation to career opportunities in the relevant field of study. Second, the attributes of the individuals or interpersonal aids such as qualities, experience and skills which might develop through university education may affect employability. Third, employers' expectations (specific skills and attributes) may affect graduate employability as some employers only recruit graduates from specific disciplines. Last, demographic features such as age, race/ethnicity, and gender directly affect the type of job and the job role.

A part of the institutional responsibility is upon policymakers to demolish the mismatch between the job search and the field of education. Practice-oriented learning should be expanded in order to increase the links between academic learning and future professional duties, in addition to enlightening interpersonal capacities. Internships, project-based learning, and the involvement of practitioners as part-time teachers are all common approaches (Schomburg & Teichler 2011). It is important to underline that employability is about bridging the gap between education and the workplace (Harvey, Locke & Morey 2002). Literature conveys that a holistic approach is necessary for employability development.

1.2 Nature of the Arts Degree

As the Bachelor of Arts degree entails a large number of courses to study, having a broad scope for an arts graduate is a difficult undertaking. Arts graduates normally obtain a broader subject knowledge compared to applied or technology students. Applied sciences more directly prepare the student for focused education with a focused career. In contrast, for Arts graduates, the working environment might be challenging if they do not prepare for their future work environment or have not received some institutional training. In many countries, BA curriculums are designed to offer students with general skills needed to fulfill the demands of a changing labor market. According to the BA Scoping Study, BA is not a stand-alone program, but rather the first degree (DASSHc, cited in Havey & Shahjahan 2013). In this sense, Arts students are more capable of facing

different work environments and different work experiences as they are established in broader conceptual platforms. However, as the BA Scoping Project has proven, referring to all Arts graduates as a homogeneous cohort in terms of their employability prospects is inaccurate (Trent & Gannaway 2008). The employability of BA degree holders may vary by the nature of the subject area or the areas they follow. Further, Harvey & Shahjahan (2013) stated that BA graduates have more options than their professional/technical counterparts where the major job tasks do not require specific technical/professional skills. In the sense, BA degree provides a strong base for an individual.

1.3 Sri Lankan Context of University Education

In Sri Lanka, until the 1990s, the provision of higher education, particularly university education, was a state monopoly (Gunaratne, Ramanayake, & Panagoda 2018). Referring to the year 2018, as a sample year, a total number of 30,141 candidates have been admitted for about 100 course units offered by 15 government universities under normal provisions. As well, another 409 candidates were admitted based on the aptitude tests (University Grants Commission 2018). This is about 19% of the students who are qualified for university education in the particular year from the G.C.E. Advanced Level examination. Among these, about 9438 candidates were Bachelor of Arts degree admissions in this particular year. Accordingly, a significant number of Arts graduate admissions are provisioned by the country annually.

Finding a graduate-level job is the targeted achievement in terms of education. Acquired knowledge and capacity must be invested in employment where both the graduate and the institution or the government may gain the best outcomes of free education. Many researchers describe employability as a phenomenon that should be obtained as a collective goal by individuals, institutes and the job market. Thus, identifying each role and finding the mismatch is a crucial point. Obtaining a fulfilling graduate-level job is a competitive target to achieve. As a developing country, we are still in belief that education is an investment for the future. According to the existing policy framework in the country, the government takes care of 19% of university admissions over three or four years of free education, hostel facilities, scholarship systems, lab and library facilities, teaching and other facility provisions, etc. Hence, unemployed graduates who do not take part in earning is a loss to the national economy. The investment on education should be achieved properly on an individual level.

Undergraduate selection criteria for the local universities are based on the Z- Score which is calculated by the results of the Government Certificate of Education in Advanced Level examination and district quota system. Arts or Humanities and Social Sciences education of Sri Lankan tertiary education includes dance, cultural studies and religious education. Apart from the GCE Advanced level examination, the University Grants Commission of Sri Lanka has made provisions to admit a limited number of government teachers for degree programs

under special provisions each year. For example, a limited number of teachers who have passed the General Arts Qualifying (External) examination with English as a subject under the Arts stream are admitted in this way (UGC Annual Report of 2017/18). A limited number of foreign-qualified students and students with international/ national level achievements are also given a chance under special provisions. The selected number of applicants are provided with three to four-year degrees with all the benefits of the free education system of the country. Hence, the output of the degree programs should be considered in the longer term.

Within this background, finding a suitable job for a fresh graduate is challenging with inadequate working experience. Therefore, the research questions were raised to ascertain the following. How many graduates are capable of absorbing into the world of work immediately after completing the bachelor's degree? In addition, what are the most influencing skills and backgrounds needed to increase graduate employability? Accordingly, the main objective of this research is to understand the current status of graduate employability, its strengths, challenges, and issues arising immediately after completing the degree. Under this, the specific objectives of the study were to assess the rate and trends of employment patterns soon after the final examination of the graduates and to recognize the factors that influence graduates' employment prospects.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Study Site

The study was conducted at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (FHSS), University of Sri Jayewardenepura, which is one of the mainstream universities located in Sri Jayewardenepura, the administrative capital of Sri Lanka. The university comprises eleven faculties including FHSS. This was a descriptive cross-sectional study conducted in 2017, 2018, and 2019 focusing on the graduates of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

2.2 Data Collection Method

The total number of students who met all of the degree programs' requirements and were eligible for the general convocations in 2017, 2018, and 2019 were chosen for the study. The proposal for the study was submitted to the faculty research committee and written consent was obtained from the Dean of the Faculty to conduct the study. Questionnaires were distributed among the students when they came to pay the convocation fees to the faculty office approximately six months after finishing their studies (final examination). Students were informed about the purpose of the study and were asked to hand over the completed questionnaire within the day itself. The questionnaire was fully self-administrated and the students had the opportunity to skip the questions if they were not comfortable with the question.

The data was collected using the convenience sampling method. Both General and Honors degree holders have participated in the survey.

2.3 Sampling Design

The convenience sample method was used in the survey where the first available primary data source was considered for the research.

Only the duly completed questionnaires were taken for the data analysis and the incomplete ones were removed.

Table 1: The Targeted Total Number of Eligible Students for the Convocation in the Respective Years.

Targeted year of the final examination	2017	2018	2019
Targeted population (Total no: of eligible Graduates for the general convocation)	808	838	871

2.4 Analysis of Data

Descriptive statistics were used to determine the percentage values as a significant amount of categorical data were collected. The Pearson chi-square test was used to examine the significance of the variables with graduate employability using inferential statistics where necessary.

The data were analyzed using Excel spreadsheet software and SPSS statistical analysis software (version 27).

3 RESULTS & DISCUSSION

3.1 Response Rate

From the three batches, the following number of questionnaires were collected and duly completed questionnaires were taken into the survey with a response rate of 70%, 94% and

88% respectively for the years 2017, 2018 and 2019 (Table 02).

Table 2: Response Rate in Each Year

	2017 (%)	2018 (%)	2019 (%)
Total Response rate	522, (70)	788, (94)	767, (88)

3.2 General Profile of the Responded Graduate Sample

The general profile was investigated to approach the background levels of the respondents. The majority of the Arts graduates of these three years were females and the representation of the male population was comparatively less. In each year, the male population was less than 18% of the total respondents. The year-wise breakdown of student composition is depicted in Table 03.

Considering the composition of the graduates by the type of entrance, the majority were selected (90%) under the normal intake provisions. Usually, the additional intake gives provisions for a selected number of candidates under given categories. Categories of students who entered under additional intake were: 1) Students who have excelled in extracurricular achievements at international/ national and school level, 2) Students with international qualifications equal to the Sri Lankan G.C.E (A/L) Examination, 3) Government teachers who passed the General Arts Qualifying (External) Examination with English as one of the subjects, and 4) A limited number of additional students for selected disciplines (students admitted when an adequate number of students was not selected for general intake based on admission criteria). The number of

additional intake students was high in 2019 according to the received responses. The number of additional and normal intakes were shown in Table 03. The highest number of additional students was recorded for the following subjects: English, Teaching English as a Second Language, Business Statistics, and Dancing.

The sample group was offered two types of degree courses. For the honors degree program, undergraduates were selected at the end of the first year based on their grades obtained for the first-year semester-end examinations. Undergraduates who have obtained the highest average results for a particular subject were selected to the particular honors degree program. Others were encouraged to follow the General degree while some of them were offered provisions to enter to Honors degree programs at the end of the third academic year based on their overall performance. For that, particular undergraduate needs to obtain “B+” passes or more for all the course units he/she followed. Further, the honors degree program includes 8 semesters and runs through 4 years, while the General degree program runs through three years including 6 semesters. The majority, 85%, 84% and 82% respectively in 2017, 2018 and 2019 have obtained Honours (special) degrees respectively.

When compared to other disciplines in Sri Lankan universities, Social Sciences and Humanities degree programs have a high tendency to be conducted in the respective native languages (Sinhala and Tamil). Though

there are many universities in Sri Lanka offering both Sinhala and Tamil medium instruction, the mediums of instruction at the

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of USJ, are Sinhalese and English.

Table 3: General Profile of the Sample of Graduates

<i>Selected years for the survey</i>		2017 (%)	2018 (%)	2019 (%)
<i>Number of Graduates eligible for the convocation</i>		808	838	871
<i>Number of Graduates Participated in the Study</i>		522 (70)	788 (94)	767 (88)
<i>Gender</i>	Male	97(18)	129 (16)	125 (16)
	Female	425 (81)	659 (84)	642 (84)
<i>Type of the university intake</i>	Normal Intake	506 (97)	750 (95)	690 (90)
	Additional Intake	15 (3)	38 (5)	71(9)
<i>Type of the degree</i>	Bachelor's	76 (15)	124 (16)	131 (17)
	Honors	445 (85)	664 (84)	635 (83)
<i>Medium of instruction</i>	English	79 (15)	86 (11)	112 (15)
	Sinhala	423 (81)	557 (71)	599 (78)
<i>Overall academic performance</i>	First class	7 (1)	51 (6)	54 (7)
	Second Upper	190 (36)	347 (44)	337 (44)
	Second Lower	134 (26)	148 (19)	152 (20)
	Pass	11 (2)	68 (9)	98 (13)

Each year less than 15% have completed their degree programs in English medium. The majority 81% in 2017, 70% in 2018 and 77% in 2019 have followed a degree in Sinhalese language. About 4%, 18%, and 7% have not mentioned their study medium. The results indicate that undergraduates are less confident to use English as a medium of instruction even after following English as a second language at least for 10 years of the school curriculum.

Graduates' level of performance during their four or three years of academic endeavor was graded using the Grade Point Average System (GPA). The overall performance was determined under four categories according to the final GPA value that each individual obtained after sitting for all the examinations of the subject units relevant to their degree programme. Categories include First Class,

Second Class Upper Division, Second Class Lower Division and General Pass. Considering the sample population, each year, the majority, nearly 40% were able to obtain second-class upper divisions, and nearly 20% obtained second-class lower divisions. Less than 12% have obtained general passes and nearly 7% of the population was able to achieve first-classes. Percentage-wise graduate performances are shown in Table 03. More than 80% were able to obtain second lower classes or more than that, indicating that the majority of the graduates were able to earn the maximum benefits of the free higher education system in the country. That is a good indicator of the free education system and the apprentice accomplishment. It should also be noted that some respondents have not responded to particular questions.

Considering the geographical location, the majority of the graduates were from Southern (32% in 2017, 26% in 2018, 30% in 2019), Western (23% in 2017, 26% in 2018, 26% in 2019) and Sabaragamuwa (15% from 2017, 2018 and 2019) provinces. Accordingly, the majority were representing the districts of Galle (16% in 2017, 12.4% in 2018 and 16% in 2019), Kalutara (12% in 2017, 13% in 2018 and 12% in 2019) and Rathnapura (12% in 2017, 12% in 2018 and 11% in 2019). Ampara, Polonnaruwa, Nuwara Eliya, Trincomalee and Vavuniya districts represented less than one percent of the total population of the respondents every year.

3.3 Employability of the Graduates

This section summarizes the findings made on the overall employability of the students. The results highlighted the student employability six months after their final examination and the survey was carried out before the convocation of the respective years.

The least employability level was recorded in 2018. However, these results were obtained not because they were unable to obtain any employment but because 58% of respondents who graduated in 2018 had not answered the particular question. Therefore, there could be a possibility to increase the level of employability in 2018 than the results shown in the graph. Apart from that 15% in 2017 and 20% in 2019 skipped the question. The respondents were allowed to skip the questions that they were not ready to answer. These are responsible for the obtained lower rates of employability.

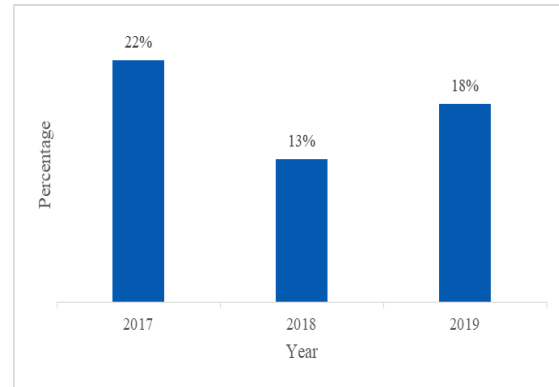


Figure 1: Graduate employability 6 months after the final examination

Gender-wise contribution in securing a job was a considerable factor as Sri Lankan state university's higher education sector was predominantly represented by the female population.

Table 4: General Profile of the employed graduates.

Year	2017	2018	2019
	% (n=118)	% (n=105)	% (n=138)
Currently Employed	22	13	18
Gender			
Male	20	14	16
Female	80	86	84
Intake			
General	92	87	82
Intake			
Additional	8	13	16
Intake			
Type of the degree			
General	13	13	14
Honors	87	87	86
Medium			
English	42	36	38
Sinhala	57	49	61
Class			
First Class	1	8	8
Obtained			
Second	35	46	41
Upper			
Second	31	15	25
Lower			
General	3	10	19
Pass			

However, out of the 18% of the males representing all the batches, more than 15% were able to secure employment. In the year-wise breakdown, among the total employed graduates, 87%, 87%, 86% in respective years

were honors degree holders and 13%, 13%, 14% were general degree holders respectively. The distribution of the employed graduates based on academic performance was depicted in Table 04.

All the private sector companies and to some extent the state sector companies expect English language proficiency as a basic requirement of their employees. Considering the medium of instruction of the total employed graduates, in the respective years 57%, 49% and 61% of the employed graduates' medium of instruction was Sinhala (Table 04). In the year-wise breakdown, English medium graduates have secured 42%, 36% and 38% of the employment rate from the total employed population.

3.4 The Employability Status

The employability status of the graduates was shown in Figure 02. According to the responses, the majority, 55%, 43% and 54% were engaged in temporary employment. In 2018, a significant number (47%) was able to secure permanent job positions. But in 2017 and 2019 only 23% and 22% respectively were able to obtain permanent positions. The period of six months appeared to be too short for a graduate to obtain a permanent job position in the Sri Lankan context.

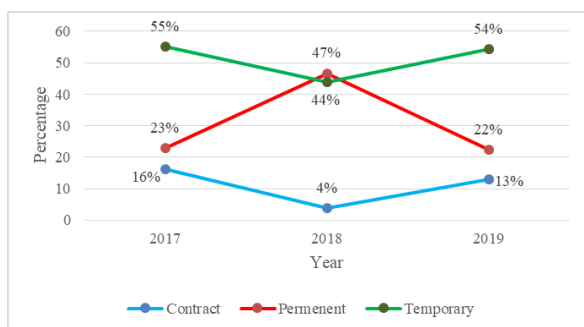


Figure 2: Status of Graduate Employment

According to Figure 03, regarding the sector of employment, the majority were employed in the private sector. Generally, recruitments in the government sector have to go through a lengthy procedure and require a long time to process. In this study, more than half of the population were recruited by the private sector amounting to 52%, 53% and 59% respectively.

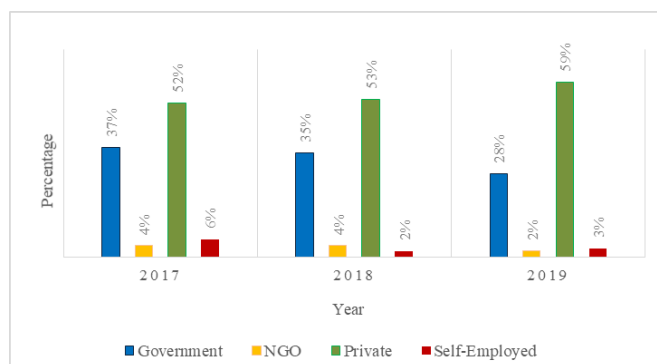


Figure 3: Sector of Employment

Further, the education system needs to provide more capable graduates to meet the demands of the private sector. Few graduates (6%, 2%, 3%) were self-employed. The main reason for unemployment could be the lack of coordination between the education sector and related state or private sector regarding the types of graduates required in the job market, with needed skills to cater to the demands of the job market.

3.5 Fields of Employability

The fields of employability of graduates also can be considered as an important factor. According to Figure 04, seven prominent fields of employment were recognized, such as administration, banking, education, information technology, management, services, and others. It revealed that the education sector is the most preferred sector of employment for Graduates in

the disciplines of the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences. The management sector is also one of the popular sectors for employment. The services category was composed of counselors, special needs therapists, etc.

It was noted that a small number of graduates were entitled to academic or academic-supportive careers in the university system. The faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences usually recruit students with the highest performances/GPA to the respective departments as demonstrators/ temporary assistant lecturers, for a period of twelve months, which may be subjected to an extension to a further year according to the performance of the individual. Apart from that, students with excellent academic records are recruited as research assistants/ field assistants to certain departments/units or centers, while few others join private universities and other state universities according to the availability of cadre positions. Accordingly, the number employed in the universities was 13%, 11% and 12% in 2017, 2018 and 2019 respectively. However, of the sample population, the number recruited by the university institutions was less than 3% each year.

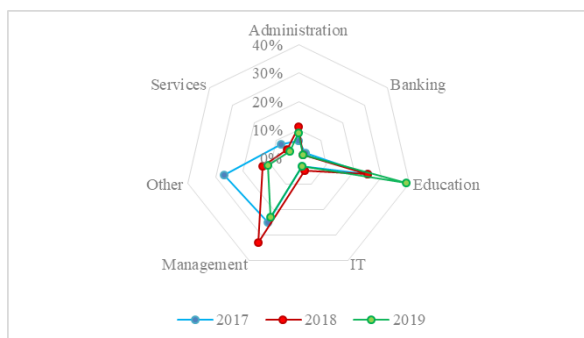


Figure 4: Fields of Employment

Since the survey was carried out just after six months after the completion of the final examinations, questions were given to understand the possibility of securing a job just after the exams. Hence questions were asked regarding employability and the duration it took the graduates to find employability. Accordingly, it was discovered that few were able to secure employment prior to their final exam. It should be noted that this includes the English teachers of the government schools who were eligible for university entrance under additional provisions made by the University Grants Commission. Each year 14%, 10% and 12% were employed before the final examination (Figure 05).

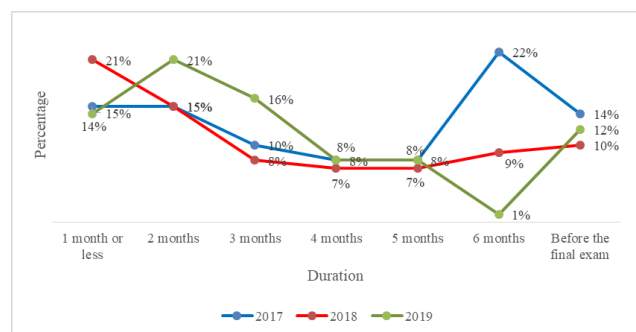


Figure 5: Latency Period for the First Employment after the Final Examination.

3.6 Internship Training

Internship Training programs provided strong platforms for students to set their career goals and to collect experience from the world of work. Training is expected to provide a workstation environment that allowed students to get firsthand experiences to make them easy to adjust to the working environment. In this sense, internship training was first introduced by the faculty for the year 2018 graduates. The

programme was offered only to the students who followed the honors degree.

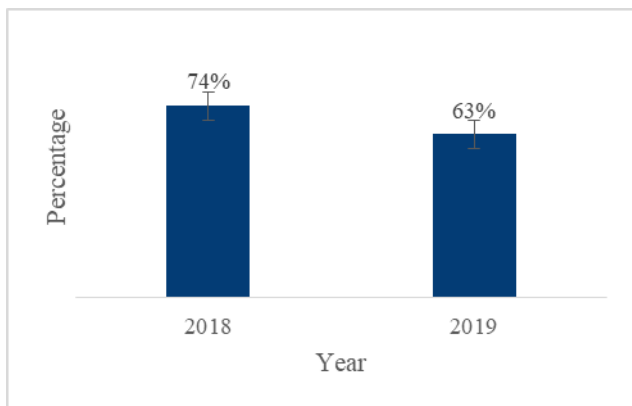


Figure 6: Participation in the Internship Training Programme

Accordingly, 74% (n=664) of 2018 and 63% (n=635) of 2019 honors degree students participated in internship training programs. The participation rate dropped by 11% from 2018 to 2019. In the initial step, 3 months of training were scheduled but according to the need of the internship offering institution and the student willingness they were allowed to extend the training somewhat further as long as it did not hinder their other studies at the university. Accordingly, the majority of the graduates completed three months of training (66% in 2018 and 74% in 2019). Only 3% in 2018 and 2% in 2019 were able to continue internships for more than 9 months (Figure 07).

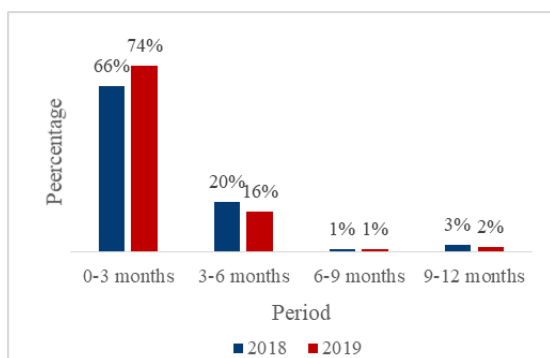


Figure 7: Duration of Internship Training (n= 493 in 2018 and n= 401 in 2019)

Participants' perception regarding the effectiveness of the training programme was asked because, at the time of the survey, participants have already gained experience in the working environment. Among the participants, only 2% of the students were dissatisfied with the internship training from both years and the majority were satisfied with their experience gained during the internship training. 49% and 38% stated that the internship offered them a very good working experience. However, 3.4% from 2018 and 40% from 2019 have not responded to this question (Figure 08).

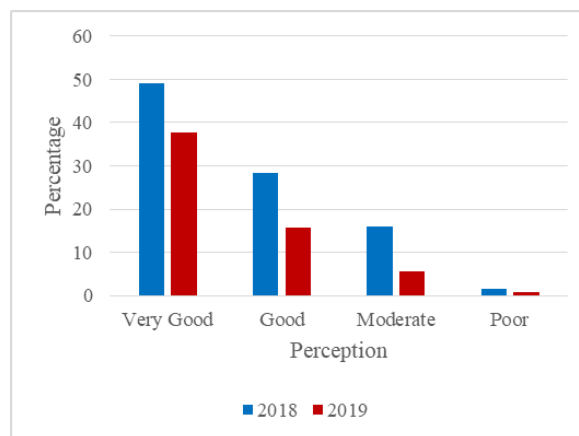


Figure 8: Graduate Perception on the Internship Training Programme (n= 493 in 2018 and n= 401 in 2019)

3.7 Engagement in Further Studies

Postgraduate studies or further education provides a strong platform for a graduate when choosing his/ her carrier path. Postgraduate studies or further education provides a strong platform for a graduate when choosing his/ her carrier path. Therefore, the student engagement in further education was surveyed from the same group just after six months of their final examination. It seems that a less number was registered for a postgraduate degree or other education. 6% from 2017, 1% from 2018 and

5% from 2019 were engaged in further studies. Delays in issuing the final results and degree certificates could be a barrier for willing candidates to get register for further studies.

In 2017, one student has been following two vocational training courses. Apart from that, 0.1% of the participants were pursuing LLB degrees in the 2017 and 2019 groups. Others were following Postgraduate diploma courses, Master's degree programmes (Arts, Social Sciences, Science, Business Administration, Philosophy) and other vocational training courses. None of the graduates were registered to read for a direct PhD degree.

3.8 Overall Employability and Significant Factors of Graduate Employability

Table 5: Employment Status as a Percentage of the Total Sample

		2017	2018	2019
		(%)	(%)	(%)
Gender	Male	24	12	18
	Female	22	14	18
Type of the degree	Bachelor's	20	11	15
	Special	23	14	18
Medium	Sinhala	16	9	14
	English	62	44	46
Class Obtained	First Class	14	16	20
	Second	22	14	17
	Upper			
	Second	28	11	23
	Lower			
	Pass	27	15	27

Table 5 shows the detailed description of percentages of employed graduates belonging to each category out of the total batch.

Further, to determine the significance of the factors that affected graduate employability, the chi-square test was used particularly for the

three years. The results of the chi-squared tests are depicted in Table 6.

Table 6: Results of the chi-squared tests

Factors		2017	2018	2019
1	Gender	.572	.453	.358
2	Type of Entrance	.060	.081	.137
3	Degree Type	.864	.741	.576
4	Medium	.000	.000	.000
5	Class	.050	.046	.000
6	Subject Field	.000	.000	.000
7	Internship Training Programme		.000	.003

Understanding gender-wise employability, a slight difference can be seen among both male and female groups. In 2019, out of the total batch, same percentage (18%) of both males and females were employed. In 2017, the male job occupancy rate (24%) was higher than the female job occupancy (22%) while in 2018 female (14%) job occupancy was higher than that of males (12%) and equal in 2019 (18%). It seems that gender was not a considerable factor for employability for graduates. To determine the significance between gender and employability chi-square test was used. In 2017, 2018, and 2019, the Pearson Chi-square test revealed no significant relationship between graduates' gender and employment rate ($p > 0.05$), ($p = 0.05$).

The relationship between the type of entrance (Normal intake/ Additional intake) and employability was tested for the three years and there was no significant association between the type of entrance and employability in the corresponding years ($p > 0.05$), ($p = 0.05$). Regarding the type of degree, out of the total

batch, 20%, 11%, and 15% from the general degree group and 23%, 14%, 18% of the honors degree graduates were employed in each year respectively. However, no significant relationship was found between the degree type and employability in each year ($p>0.05$), ($p=0.05$) (Table 6).

Apparently, the results indicated that out of all the English medium graduates, 62%, 44% and 46% have secured a job while only 16%, 9% and 14% of the Sinhala medium graduates were able to obtain jobs. The Pearson chi-square test which was run separately for each year (Table 6), revealed that there was a significant relationship between the two criteria of the medium of instruction and employability in 2017, 2018 and 2019 ($p<0.05$), ($p=0.05$).

Pearson Chi-Square test was tested for the class obtained at the degree and the rate of employability and noted a significant relationship between the two criteria ($p<0.05$), ($p=0.05$). Accordingly, it indicated a significant relationship between the subject field and graduate employability in the first six months in the respective years ($p<0.05$), ($p=0.05$). The survey data revealed that there is a significant relationship between participation in the Internship Training Programme vs securing employment according to the Pearson chi-square test in 2018 and 2019 ($p<0.05$), ($p=0.05$).

Since employability is the willingness to obtain and maintain a job, long-term data is needed to have a broader and better understanding of the situation. Further, longitudinal studies can be conducted to find out the employment rates and

higher studies information from the same cohorts. This result does not depict the ultimate employability status of the Arts graduates or the graduates in general in this particular institute. Tracing their status from time to time can provide the actual picture of graduate employability.

According to the survey's findings, approximately 18% of Arts graduates are capable of finding work within six months of finishing their final exam. The literature demonstrates that the students who followed the Arts stream have a good knowledge base and capacity to engage in any work environment (Harvey, 2013). Thus, employability after the final examination and even before the convocation is a considerable positive determinant in Arts graduate employability.

Considering all the factors, type of university entrance, gender and type of degree was not much significant in finding employment though there is a difference between male and female participation in university education. The annual male student population was less than 18% each year. In the Sri Lankan context, female graduates' engagement in state universities is higher (UGC, 2018). But the employability rate indicated no significant influence on gender when it comes to finding jobs. Though the results of Jayamanne and Ramanayake (2017) indicated that special degree graduates find work before general degree graduates, the present study demonstrated that there was no significant association between the type of degree (General/Honors) and employability. However,

this could be due to the small sample size and the single education institute in this study.

The medium of study, academic performance, internship training program, and field of study are found to be the decisive factors of graduate employability. Further, Ariyawansa (2018) states that proficiency in the English language is a decisive factor for employability. Supporting this argument, the present study too reveals that language is an essential factor when entering to the world of work. More over half of English-medium graduates found work within the first six months, but less than 16% of Sinhala-medium graduates found work during the same time period. Accordingly, graduates with English as a medium of instruction were more successful as a whole when compared with the graduates who followed their study programs in the Sinhalese language. Graduate Tracer Study, 2018 also revealed that the rate of employment among English-medium arts graduates was comparatively higher (UGC, 2018).

With regard to the internship experience, according to the student perception, the internship program had a positive influence on finding employment and has provided a useful experience for the undergraduates. 16% and 23% of the graduates who participated in the internship program (2018/2019) had obtained jobs within the first six months. According to the survey results, a substantial number of graduates work in the private sector. Therefore, the curricula, teaching-learning methods and methods of assessments have to be revised to improve the skills of the graduates which may cater to the private sector job market.

Jayamanne and Ramanayake (2017) who conducted their research using randomly chosen Arts graduates from ten Sri Lankan universities indicated the median waiting time to secure a job was higher for all other sectors (public sector, self-employed and the university staff) other than in the private sector and further indicated that the mismatch between demand and supply in the labor market must be addressed. Accordingly, Chandrakumara (2014) stated that the student intake for various degree programs or domains of disciplines should be changed based on job availability. He went on to say that exposing students to more professional courses will help to alleviate the problem in general, which will relieve the government of the burden of unemployed graduates. The education sector seems to be the most attractive career path for Arts graduates. The majority wanted careers as teachers in public or private schools.

Further, the results indicated that more than 80% of the graduates required more than 6 months to be employed. This period of waiting must be minimized in order to maximize the contributions of new graduates to the country's economic progress. Some graduates have been waiting for a long time in the hope of being hired through government recruitment programs. According to a survey conducted with Arts graduates at the University of Botswana, more than half of the graduates were able to get their first job within the first nine months following graduation, whereas fewer women were able to do so (Ama, 2008). Lyonette, Hunt and Baldauf (2017) also noted

that some Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences graduates take longer time than others to move into graduate-related careers and there are differences between the values and certain skills attached to them. Few graduates tend to follow post-graduate degrees just after finishing their first degree. This could mainly be due to the financial difficulties and the cost that an individual has to bear for a post-graduate or further education. Ratnayake & Elvitigala (2020) have identified greater competition, lack of monetary facilities to follow professional courses, entry requirements of professional courses, and fluency in English as major drawbacks associated with career-related aspirations.

A study conducted at a local university, Ariyawansa (2018) highlighted the significant demand for other talents such as IT skills, leadership traits, analytical ability, collaboration, and interpersonal interactions which are added advantageous to gain employability. Providing graduates with more hands-on skills in IT, leadership, and proper instruction on career guidance and improving the quality of the internship program by providing more opportunities will enhance the skills that were expected from the arts graduates by the industry.

4 CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Employability ultimately derives from complex learning and skills-based education. Not only achieving employment, continuing it and being a successful employee is a competitive task

(Pfeffer et al, 2005). Apart from the subject knowledge, many interpersonal skills needed to be developed within individuals during the undergraduate study period to be successful in the world of work. As the Arts stream does not provide specific technical training as in engineering or medical sciences degrees, those graduates need to be tactful in finding employment. Therefore, the arts degree cannot be marketed compared to professional or vocational degrees which prepare the graduates for a specific job role. However, it is of utmost importance to improve the non-technical skills that might be marketable in Arts graduates to be competitive in the world of work.

As the study highlights the significance of English as an international language, undergraduates in the scheme need to be encouraged to improve their skills in oral and writing English (academic writing, corporate English etc). As they have already followed English as a subject during 13 years of school curriculum authorities must encourage them to obtain a full English medium degree. The students following the degrees in native languages need to be encouraged to make themselves fluent in English, as a second language. Further, the authorities need to focus on improving generic or soft skills for the personal development of the graduates. Some important skills such as analytical skills, creation of new knowledge, research and development, the ability to apply the subject knowledge in different scenarios, bearing responsibilities, independent decision making, leadership qualities, language skills,

communication skills, presentations skills, flexibility and adaptability according to the environment, time management and project management may lead individuals to secure employability in the world of work.

Other skills important for graduate employment, such as computer literacy, must be strengthened through course study programs and during the evaluation process of the study. Students have to be encouraged to incorporate more Work Integrated Learning (WIL) methods in classrooms for developing their skills. Electronic versions of presentations, data visualizations, and using specific software in learning might improve computer literacy as well. For example, ArcGIS, Coral draw, Nvivo and SPSS may value add the curriculum. Apart from that, software with more advanced applications such as Nvivo, AMOS, Workbench, QGIS, ERDAS Imagine, SocioViz, etc are useful in their career developments.

The results of the study demonstrate that internship training provides a great opportunity for undergraduates to expose to the working culture. Further, it would be advantageous to incorporate an internship training experience into the general degree program which is only available to honors (special) degree programs at the period of study.

Since social science and humanities subjects provide a strong base for social well-being, the graduates need to be encouraged to achieve some higher education qualification competency as soon as they graduate.

Whenever possible, interactive overseas learning opportunities should be introduced into the undergraduate curriculum. Further, issuance of the final results and detailed degree certificate takes considerable time, therefore, mechanisms should be implemented to release the results of the students and detailed degree certificates within a short period after the final exams. This will enable the students to find jobs sooner with a certificate of proof.

In addition, faculty collaborations with the industry have to be strengthened. The students should be given more opportunities to interact with the industry by organizing interactive sessions with the experts in the fields. Guest lecture series, workshops, and industrial visits would be more efficient methods to share the experience of the industry among students.

The Career Guidance Unit (CGU) must be available in the university to provide career related solutions and should play an active role in guiding students to find employment opportunities. Specially workshops on CV preparation, writing job applications, email writing, work communication, work environment ethics, training interview sessions, counseling on career planning and career development sessions will be helpful for students to grow in employment.

Further, better communication should be facilitated between students, lecturers, career advisors and continuous guidance should be provided in achieving successful employability opportunities for the graduates.

Employability, by its definition, stands as being capable of achieving a job and maintaining it. Therefore, this research contributes to acquire better information on the employability of BA graduates in Sri Lanka. In addition, the study will serve as a springboard for future longitudinal employability surveys, which might be useful for sectoral approaches and restructuring undergraduate learning and teaching at the country's higher education institutions. The findings will aid in the formulation of national policy in education reforms.

We emphasize that graduate employability is not a static phenomenon: therefore it has to be monitored continuously in regular time intervals to take appropriate actions to the changing demands of the job market. Surveys conducted shortly after graduation can only provide a partial picture of the graduates' working careers. Therefore, this survey will be helpful to conduct more comprehensive future tracings of the same cohort for graduate employability. Hence, longitudinal cross-sectional studies conducted at predetermined time intervals are needed from cohort groups to find out the factors that contribute to securing permanent employability related to the respective disciplines after graduating from a university.

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