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**A Case Study on the Impact of Internship Training in Finding Successful
Job Placements: With Special Reference to South Eastern University of Sri
Lanka**

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Abstract

In the current competitive environment, finding a suitable job with accordance to the qualification levels is actually a challenge especially in a developing country like Sri Lanka, where a considerable unemployment rate can be seen among the educated youth. Therefore universities and other institutional bodies should take interest in providing industrial training as a prime role of them. Hence our study is focused on revealing the impact of internships in finding successful job placements. This study was conducted among recently passed out graduates of the Faculty of Management and Commerce of South Eastern University from 2013 to 2015. 210 graduates were selected as the sample for this study using the propionate random sampling method which covered all three departments of all three years. Multiple data collection techniques were used to conduct this study which included semi-structured questionnaire, direct interviews, and interviews through social media. The findings revealed though most of the respondents experienced internships only few of them have experienced relevant training, and the rest has been irrelevant which indicates that there is a mismatch between the theoretical knowledge and practical exposure. The researcher suggests that the drawbacks can be eliminated through revising the faculty academic calendar, focusing on attending to number of MOU's with relevant industries, making industrial training compulsory, and continuous monitoring and feedback.

Keywords: Internships, Graduates, Employability Skills, Job Placements

Introduction

In the current competitive environment, finding a suitable job with accordance to the qualification levels is actually a challenge especially in a developing country like Sri Lanka, where a considerable unemployment rate can be seen among the educated youth. Therefore when we consider the Sri Lankan graduates, the universities and other relevant institutional bodies should take interest in providing internships which indeed has a significant impact on finding suitable job placements in employee perspective as well as finding competent employees in employer perspective. The universities have the responsibility of producing graduates who meet the expectation of the industries (Ayarkwa et al. 2012). This statement clearly indicates that there is a wider responsibility of educational institutions to successfully match with the employer expectations thus industrial training can be one way of allowing students to practically expose to the work environment and know what is actually required.

An internship represents a formal program that provides practical experience in which a student has intentional learning goals and reflects actively on what she or he is learning throughout the experience. Doing an internship provides opportunities for students to gain work experience and companies help them to get a job in the future. Also it is revealed that employers are usually more concerned with your work experience than your qualifications and internships are often the only way to get the work experience you need to secure a job, so they are a vital part of your resume. Many employers prefer or require applicants who have done an internship or relevant work experience and in many of the more competitive job markets it is essential to set you apart from the others which indicate that industrial training can have a high positive impact on finding successful job placements.

Since our study is focused on revealing the impact of internships in finding successful job placements, it is worthwhile to focus on the employability among graduates in Sri Lanka. Having a thorough educational background often leads to find a better placement. It is said that the major objective of promoting children for higher education in most of Sri Lankan families is to ensure their employability (Perera 2008 cited from Ariyawansa 2008; Perera 2005 cited from Ariyawansa 2008). The above statement gives us clear evidence that one of the main objectives of higher education is confirming a secured place in the job market. Even though most of them complete their higher education successfully, it's debatable whether they will find a placement as expected. The recent experience reveals that even talented graduates have to wait for a long time to be employed after the graduation. Some of graduates including Management graduates are waiting to be employed by government recruitment schemes (Wickramarachchi 2008 cited from Ariyawansa 2008). Many of the graduates having passed out obtain a certificate, which does not help enough them to find suitable employments. Even if one of the main objectives of the university education is to improve the skills of students to face the challenges in external society, they have to leave from the university without having sufficient self-confidence and assurance for better employments (De Silva 1977 cited from Ariyawansa 2008). Under this circumstance, graduates' unemployment has become a severe problem in Sri Lanka during the last few decades.

Internship Opportunities at South Eastern University of Sri Lanka

The South Eastern University of Sri Lanka was established in 1995 as a university college which was upgraded as a fully-fledged national university in 1996. The university was inaugurated with two faculties which now have five faculties namely Faculty of Management and Commerce, Faculty of Arts and Culture, Faculty of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language, and Faculty of Engineering. Currently it is one of the fastest growing universities in Sri Lanka which promotes high quality learning, research and innovations, and dissemination of knowledge and information, whose vision is "To be an internationally renowned center in South Asia for higher learning and innovations in sciences, technologies, and humanities".

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Among the above faculties, Faculty of Management and Commerce has played the role of being a pioneer to inaugurate the internship culture among the final year students knowing its importance to the job market. The faculty initiated the internship programme in 1998 which is successfully continuing for the past 17 years.

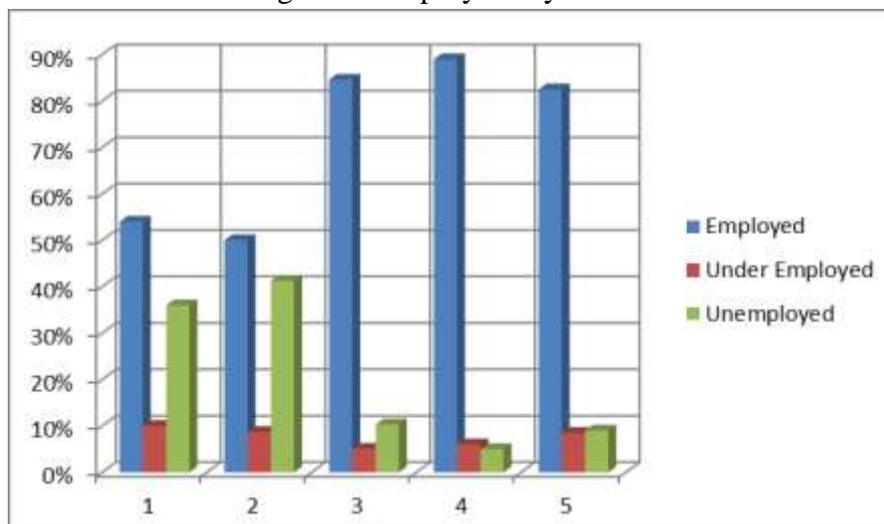
The annual employability survey conducted by the Career Guidance Unit of the university for the past five years gives us an indication of employability trends which can be highlighted as follows (Table 1 and Figure 1).

Table 1: Employability Trends

Year	Employed	Under Employed	Unemployed
2011 (1)	54%	10%	36%
2012 (2)	50%	8.7%	41.3%
2013 (3)	84.6%	5.1%	10.3%
2014 (4)	89%	6%	5%
2015 (5)	82.5%	8.5%	9%

Source: Annual Employability Survey Reports- CGU- SEUSL

Figure 1: Employability Trends



Based on the above data (Table 1 and Figure 1), it is clear that employability rate is at an acceptable level, but it is also important to find out whether it is relevant with the field of study, whether internships has actually influenced in finding jobs, what are the measures should be taken to reduce the unemployment and under employment rates further.

The important fact is that even though surveys are conducted, comprehensive evaluation and feedbacks are lacking which is seen as a timely gap to be filled which also in turn motivated us to engage in this study.

The Research Problem and Objectives

Based on the above discussion it is clear the employer expects much more than a paper qualification. Even though most of undergraduates follow their degrees with higher

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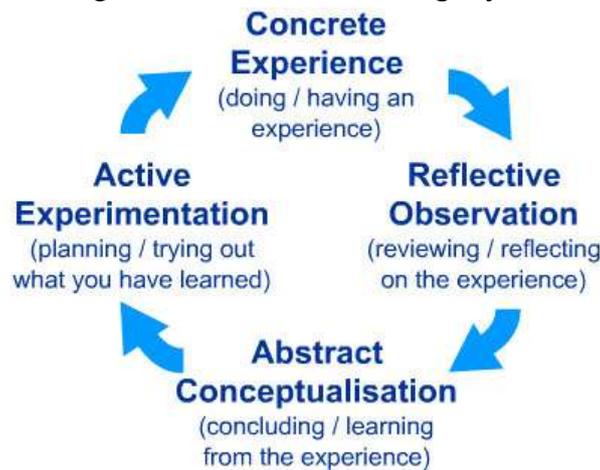
expectation of getting a suitable job, fulfilling this expectation has been a real challenge with the emerging market competitiveness over the last few decades. There is clear evidence that this challenge can be minimized through offering successful internships. Since the research gap has already been identified, the research problem in brief can be highlighted as *'Even though the numbers of graduates are increasing overtime there is a huge mismatch between employer employee expectations and so promoting internships must be thought of.* Thus the research question can be highlighted as *'Does Internship Training Have a Significant Impact on Finding Successful Job Placements among South Eastern Graduates?'*

Hence, the main objective of this study will be finding, *up to what extent does industrial training impacts on finding successful job placements* while this study also will help to design better curriculums in higher educational institutions which matches the employer expectations.

Review of Literature

There are many local and foreign studies conducted previously related with our study. According to Bilal and Ummah (2014), in any country the university students are termed as the *'cream of the society'* because the society values them so much and if we are brave enough it should be understood that the society or the community expect something from us that of which can be some valuable contribution to the society. Adding to that Clements in 2010 (cited from Matamande et al. 2013), states four methods to building a learning capabilities which are, Making sure that students interact with industry activities during their period of study, Introducing new talent to organizations through industrial attachment programs, Offer on the job experience opportunities, and Interacting with the community. All the above mention ways indeed help students a great deal which also confirms possibilities of getting a new job. The same article explains that the arrangement for students to be put in various organizations for a learner ship program is an academic requirement for students to gain relevant work experience so that students gain the necessary skills to augment their theoretical skills, which is also very important because students can study many theoretical aspects which they can make no use of if the relevant practical knowledge isn't gained. The following points gives us a thorough knowledge of what are the areas that practical education focuses on and what is actually expected through the practical exposure. Even if we focus on Kolb's Learning Styles Model, it is clear that various types of learning styles are available which can be explained as Figure 2.

Figure No 2: Kolb's Learning Styles



Source: Kolb, 2014 *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*

As explained in the above model, there are many ways to learn but after completing the first three phases it is really important to complete the 'active experimentation' in order to make sure we have acquired the needed knowledge and skills which can be applied practically in an effective manner. Based on a research which was conducted among recently graduated students, it was found that, leadership, business skills, assuming responsibility, making decisions, and demonstrating high ethical standards were felt to be more appropriately developed in the workplace, either during work placement or in an employment situation, than at university where opportunities were more limited, which again justifies that practical implementation of knowledge is useful to develop skills and competencies which also increases the potential of people who are engaged.

Further, another study reveals that the students' industrial training cannot be taken for granted because it does have a great effect on their employability after graduation. According to this study, students need the practical skills to secure jobs, however competency can be acquired on the job. This is an important point since it is clearly emphasized that industrial training must not be taken for granted thus industrial training should be taken into serious consideration if the expected outcomes of it are to be achieved. According to Ayarkwa et al. (2012), the student-respondents agreed that "exposure to the real working environment" and "increase in job prospects" were among the major factors motivating them to undertake industrial training. Further he says Industrial training provides benefits such as job prospects, more confidence in terms of job qualification, and more knowledge and guidance in job selection after graduation. It also significantly improves the students' performance on personal attitude, work attitude and communication skills. Their self confidence, oral communication skills and subject knowledge significantly improved after training.

Furthermore, Schoffstall (2013) reveals that student work experience has long been viewed positively by industry stakeholders, and therefore has been incorporated into most U.S. hospitality undergraduate programs. This researcher further explains that students work for a

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variety of reasons; many are dedicated to securing a better job or career position upon graduation. Students are able to develop teamwork skills and experience service quality delivery during hands-on work experiences; these are qualities that employers value in entry-level managers which give enough evidence that working while studying can benefit a lot to get successful job placements. The same study identifies some challenges of balancing studies while engaging in internships explaining that decreased academic performance and increased stress often characterize students trying to balance school and work and students acknowledged their jobs reduced studying time, yet relatively few thought work was directly detrimental to their overall education. In addition some other challenges were poor working conditions affecting educational studies, the need for extended time (beyond traditional time frames) to complete their education, low paying jobs until they completed their educational goals, an increase in dropout rates resulting in uncompleted degrees. The above study also suggests that higher educational institutions must encourage students to meet employer expectations through developing curricular-related connections between employment and academic skills, and formally recognizing students' employment experiences in their programs of study.

In reviewing more evidences, a study by Herath and Ranasinghe (2011), revealed that the objective of higher education is to produce the output that meets the requirements of a society and therefore, important to identify what the labour market demands from higher education. It is also explained that employers want graduates who are primed for work, able to communicate, share their skills and appreciate their place in a wider organization and its business which confirms that employers expect competent graduates at the entry level and therefore they welcome prior experiences most often than not. The same study reveals that Employers complain that most of the graduates lack necessary core skills needed to be succeeded at work and needed for their future career. But on the other hand, university graduates have few chances to develop and practice the necessary knowledge and skills which required by employers due to traditional teaching and learning process in the university system which emphasizes that there is a gap to be filled and even the trend has been the same for the past two decades which makes us feel some moderations are needed in the whole set up. However, to provide training and relevant education for particular jobs etc. is a meaningful attempt only if the expected employment opportunities are created in the market. Therefore, it is argued that the diversification of university courses into new pathways is only meaningful if they are in the line with the national development plans (De Silva 1977 cited from Ariyawansa 2008). This also indicates that there also should be some match between the theory and practice. Even most of the unemployed graduates face those issues because they heavily rely only on the paper qualification rather than trying to practice where in some cases, even the curriculum doesn't support them to do so. Practical exposure is one of the best ways to learn where you find your own mistakes and learn from them while the old saying 'practice makes perfect' proves it all.

Based on the above reviews and previous evidences it is clear enough that industrial training has a significant impact in finding successful job placements though it also has some

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challenges. These evidences suggest not only just the need of industrial training, but the significance of it as well.

Methodology

This study was conducted among recently passed out graduates of the Faculty of Management and Commerce of South Eastern University from 2013 to 2015. The population of this study was 493, which included graduates of all the three departments namely Department of Management, Department of Accountancy and Finance, and Department of Management & Information Technology (MIT), from which 210 graduates were selected as the sample for this study using the propionate random sampling method which covered all three departments of all three years. Multiple data collection techniques were used to conduct this study which included semi-structured questionnaire, direct interviews, and interviews through social media. The population and sample can be summarized as follows (Table 2).

Table 2: Population and Sample

Year	Department	No of Students	Total Population	Sample
2013	Management	65	158	67
	Accountancy and Fin	40		
	MIT	53		
2014	Management	77	175	75
	Accountancy and Fin	34		
	MIT	64		
2015	Management	64	160	68
	Accountancy and Fin	40		
	MIT	56		
			493	210

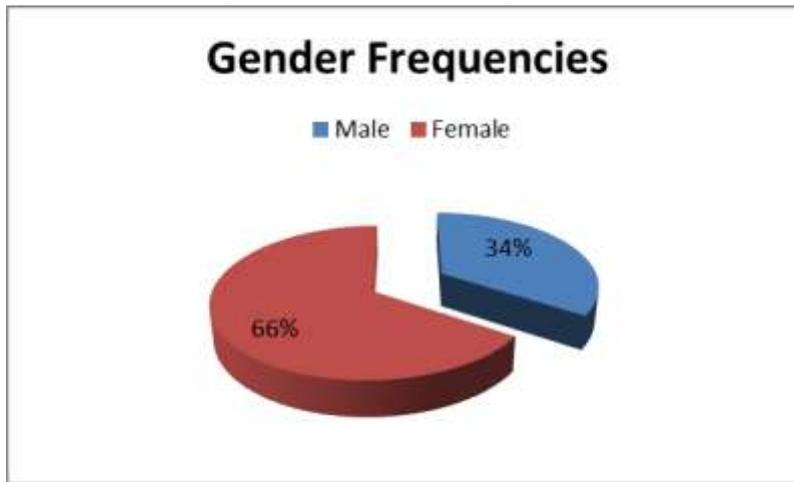
Discussion and Findings

Before moving towards our in-depth analysis it is better to find out the frequencies of gender of those who have responded since that is an important factor affecting this study, which can be summed up as follows (Table 3 and Figure 3).

Table 3: Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	72	34.29
Female	138	65.71

Figure 3: Gender of Respondents

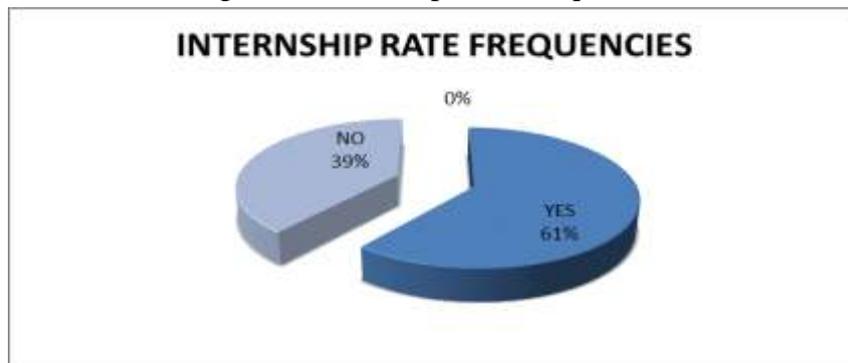


Out of 210 respondents, females were dominant with a percentage of approximately 66%, while the rest were males. Based on the feedback received there are some important reveals which can be pointed out. The initial intention was to find out the percentages of those who experienced internships and not. The results can be summed up as follows (Table 4 and Figure 4).

Table 4: Internship Rate Frequencies

Attended Internships	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	128	61.3
No	82	38.7

Figure 4: Internship Rate Frequencies



The above data clearly indicates that more than 60% have under gone internship training which is a positive factor to consider. Out of those 128, 66 were males and 62 were females which indicate that even though most of the respondents were females, there has been a male dominance in receiving internships due to factors such as distance to travel, security reasons et. *'receiving an internship is good but commonly female students face some issues such as distance to travel, security reasons, and late night transport issues'* added a respondent confirming that even the willingness and support from home is very less as well. But, importantly among those 61% (128), there were two categories of graduates with different exposures.

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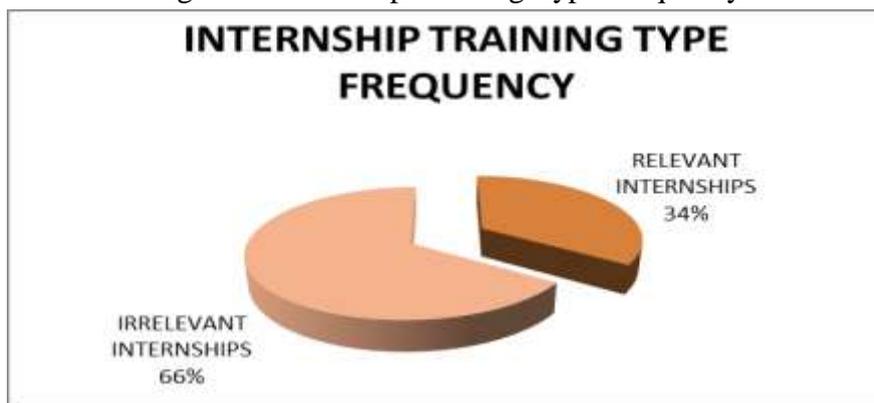
1. Those who successfully completed internships which was relevant to their field of study
2. Those who followed internships which is irrelevant to their field of study and current job

The frequency rates of those categories are as follows (Table 5 and Figure 5).

Table 5: Internship Training Type Frequency

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Relevant Internships	44	34.4
Irrelevant Internships	84	65.6

Figure 5: Internship Training Type Frequency



There were very interesting stats on below categories where one respondent highlighted that internships formed the base for the current job and he is happy to be employed at the same organization as a permanent staff member. Moving along another added that internship was a great motivation which inspired her to get to the current position beyond all the challenges. Another successful intern sharing his experience stated that internships enabled him to gain the practical exposure along with practical application of knowledge acquired in the study programme. *‘I attended training. I worked in the IT field, now I teach IT subjects training helped me a lot’*, *‘I joined a private firm as an HR intern which help me grow up there and now I am a senior executive in the same company’*, added another indicating internship plays a vital role in long term job orientation.

Even though there are graduates with successful experiences, most of who received training (66%- 84 out of 128) shared that even though they attended training it was irrelevant to their field of study where one respondent said that even though she underwent internships it was pointless because she was unable to use the subject knowledge practically and it is neither relevant with her current position. Another added, that they expect much more support from the university to find suitable job placements since most of the organizations does not recognize the institution due to lack of MOU’s with relevant authorities where she also pointed out only few state banks provided them with opportunities in which they had no choices to make. One of the respondent added *‘I needed to follow an internship but very few*

organizations were available here which recognized the letter offered by the university where none of those organizations were relevant with my field of study, finally I had to stick with whatever available despite the relevance’, another added ‘I worked as a management trainee at zonal educational office Akkaraipatthu which didn’t help me since I was specialized in finance but I had no preferences based on my willingness’ which indicates that suitable internship opportunities are hard to come by thus the university needs to pay much more attention on this regard.

Moving along the discussion, it is also worthwhile to focus the other side of the coin where 39% (82 respondents), who didn’t follow any internships. Among those were two categories which are as follows;

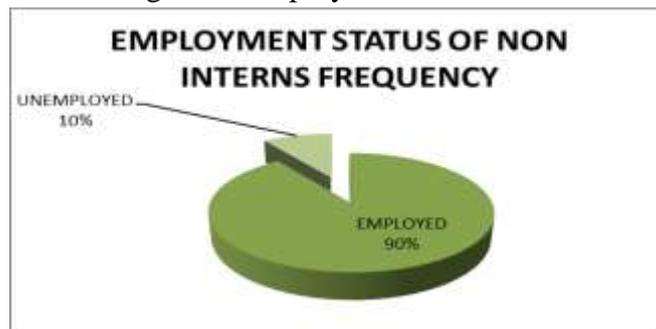
1. Employed
2. Unemployed

The frequency table and respective percentages for those can be highlighted as follows (Table 6 and Figure 6).

Table 6: Employment of Non-Interns

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Employed	74	90.2
Unemployed	8	9.8

Figure 6: Employment of Non-Interns



Based on the above stats, 90% (74 out of 82) are employed, or underemployed, where some of them said that they directly joined a job and not interested in internships due to some factors such as difficulty in finding proper placements, geographical location of the university hence the distance to travel, issues with academic calendar since they have to submit a dissertation during the same period (within the last semester of the degree), additional costs, and so on. Further, some others added that they are not concerned of job matches and they need to find a way of income based on the prevailing economic conditions, family responsibilities and therefore joined a job to get started rather than waiting for a suitable job. ‘I didn’t plan to follow any internships due to heavy costs and time constrains, further we don’t get a considerable allowance to cover up the costs’ added one of them while ‘we had our own family business and as the eldest of the family, I had to take the responsibility of continuing the business and so I didn’t focus on getting any jobs’ added another indicating

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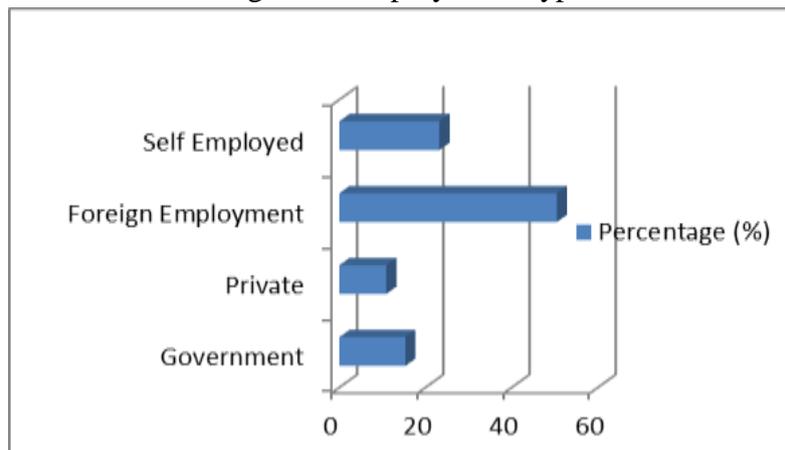
that considerable amount of non-interns also have found themselves a job which should be focused as an important outcome of this study.

The below table and chart on current field of jobs among those who are employed will provide a clear picture of preferences followed with their reasons (Table 7 and Figure 7).

Table 7: Employment Type

Type of Job	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Government	31	15.34
Private	22	10.89
Foreign Employment	102	50.50
Self Employed	47	23.27

Figure 7: Employment Type



Based on above stats it's clear that the concern is more on earning much as possible rather than sticking to their field, waiting for government jobs, or working with regulations since more than 50% of the respondents are employed overseas, and almost another 25% of them are self-employed viewing facts such as *'with self-employment, we have much more freedom, can take own decisions, work independently, and so on.* Even comments from overseas suggests that those who needed to takeover more family responsibilities, decided on foreign employment despite the scarifications to be made, where some had previous internship exposure and some didn't. *'I am the only child to the family and I had to anyway take the responsibility of building the living standard of my family, which forced me to choose foreign employment', 'we sacrifice a lot to get educated and I am not happy with the measurements and treatments that we get locally. So, I thought of a foreign job', 'though it is tough to live here, we have to earn as much as we can in our younger ages where we can work hard and earn more and this is the best time to do it'* added few respondents.

This gives an indication that even though most of them prefer internships, internships are not considered in choosing their final occupation.

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Among those 10%, the common finding was that most of them are awaiting suitable government jobs, preferred job types, and jobs within closer distance, where one of the respondents added '*Though I got an appointment, it was at a private firm in Colombo, which is far from home and they hardly pay a sufficient salary and therefore I didn't consider that*', which indicates those sticky resistances to change personalities also still appear in the society. Overall the findings have given us a more complex but a comprehensive picture of our study.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Thus far we have discussed the findings of our study based on which some important conclusions can be highlighted. 61% in average has experienced internships which gives an indication that importance of internships is known among those graduates. Most of the interns have been males even though most of the respondents were females which reveal that the female interest in internship is lacking due to so many reasons such as personal security, family willingness, and distance to travel as discussed above. Another important fact is that even though they have been at training, only 34% of those have experienced relevant training, and the rest has been irrelevant which indicates that there is a mismatch between the theoretical knowledge and practical exposure due to lack of MOU's with internship providers, limitation of choices, and problems with the academic calendar. Moving further, the researcher found that 90% of those non-interns also are employed in same way whether it is preferable or not which means just a job for the sake, when there is no option which is also a problem in the long run. Considering the employment types, most of them are either abroad or self-employed, whether they have undergone internships or not. The current economic set up of the country and the social pressure towards enjoying higher living standards has guided many to move in this way despite the level of experience, ability, or self-preference which tells us that the internships hasn't made a significant impact in finding a job. The fewer percentage of unemployment among those graduates is also an issue which has been difficult to see off from the society due to classical and conventional expectations of those graduates. We mustn't forget that distance from the urban area and geographical location of the university also has made a significant impact for the results of this study.

Based on the conclusions, it is clear that even though internships play a dominant role in finding suitable job placements most often than not, internships have somewhat failed to lead to the successful job placements of South Eastern graduates. Therefore it is worthwhile to address some corrective actions to improve the effectiveness of internships in future. First and foremost revising the Faculty academic calendar to reduce clashes between course units during job training is important while increasing internship opportunities through focusing on attending to number of MOU's with relevant industries. Another important way of seeing this through will be making industrial training compulsory and introducing it as a credit course which will help to design a better curriculum since higher educational institutions can incorporate ideas of those who received training to design a better curriculum which matches with the employer expectations. Finally, continuous monitoring and feedback is crucial to keep improving the entire process.

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Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted focusing only the Management Faculty passed out graduates of South Eastern University and only three years data were used. Further, the data was collected through semi-structured questionnaire direct interviews, and even using social media since difficulties of reaching out respondents and time limitations.

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