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## **Career Intention towards Private Sector Jobs among University Students**

**M.T. Geethma<sup>1\*</sup> and D.J. Jagoda<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

Most people expect to find a job that pays well and is well-recognized. Because of the current high inflation and competition, "employment" is a very important milestone. It is also the ultimate hope of anyone entering university. Those career intentions have been focused on different fields. It is important to identify whether factors influence the choice of one such sector. This study explored the key factors influencing university students' career intentions to turn to the private sector. A sample of 250 students was drawn using stratified random sampling from the Social Sciences and Languages faculty at Sabaragamuwa University in Sri Lanka. The study was conducted quantitatively, and the data was collected through an online questionnaire. Binary logistic regression was employed with 24 independent variables to achieve the main objective. It found that English Language Proficiency, working experience, and financial benefits were the most influential factors for students' career intention towards private sector jobs. It further pointed out that students with a high level of English proficiency were more likely to seek employment in the private sector than in the public sector.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Economics and Statistics, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, Belihuloya, 70140, Sri Lanka.

\*Corresponding Author: [mapatuna.thilini@gmail.com](mailto:mapatuna.thilini@gmail.com)

Regarding work experience, more students with no work experience are likelier to prefer jobs in the private sector than students with work experience. Finally, it found that students who preferred financial benefits given in the private sector were more inclined towards the private sector. This study further suggests that university students should receive positive motivation from the university, close friends, and parents to direct their career intentions to the private sector rather than stay in the public sector for long periods hoping for a job after graduation.

**Keywords:** career intention, private sector jobs, binary logistic regression

## **Introduction**

Everyone has different expectations about their future job from an early age. Who would you like to be in the future? This question has been asked many times since childhood. Children speak about future professions according to their parents' professions or parents' influence. However, those future careers built in childhood are subject to change over time. The intention is a thing that a person plan to do or achieve. When a person creates a goal for his career, it can be called a "Career intention". Strong and suitable career intentions have led the way for a correct career choice. The term "career" is derived from French and Latin words. Geciki (2002) defined it simply as "the occupational, commercial, or industrial activity that a person may engage in during his academic life or in some other portion of his life until his death. Career choice is a critical topic for a job seeker because it influences the individual's future life and the country's development. "Personality, interest, self-concept, cultural identity, globalization, socialization, role model, social support and access resources such as knowledge and finance influence career choice" (Kochung & Migunde, 2011).

In Sri Lanka, university education is the heart of the higher education. Graduate employees are one of the most important foundations in the economy of Sri Lanka. The government anticipates that their contribution will boost the economy's private and public sectors. Sri Lanka places a high value on education, with a free education program covering from year one to the university level. However, due to numerous impediments, it has been unable to reap the full benefits. The biggest problem is that university

graduates waste their valuable time and knowledge without jobs. It is greatly influenced by the career intentions they develop while at the university. The debate between private and government jobs has raged for a long time. This becomes a big problem for the government when all university graduates seek jobs in the public sector. Brac, in collaboration with the Brac Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) and Brac University, conducted a survey on 4200 Bangladeshi youths titled "Youth Survey 2018", which revealed that approximately 20% of the youth, mostly males, aged 15 to 35 are interested in going abroad for better living and career opportunities. Furthermore, most young people, 57 % of females and 42 % of males, want to work for the government.

As a result, many students are unemployed since they only have one option: a government job, which can be found in various fields (Daily Star,2019). Bai (1998) investigated how the current market economy influences university graduates' choices. He saw that when graduates were looking for jobs, they usually emphasized personal objectives such as money and power over society's interests. Al-Abri and Kooli (2018) stated that choosing a career path is a lifelong process, which is why students evaluate various criteria while deciding on a vocation, such as financial benefits and employment interest.

According to the central bank report, the 2019 unemployment rate in Sri Lanka was approximately 4.2 %; in 2020, it increased by 0.57 %. The 2019 Department of Census and Statistics Labor Force Survey Annual Report showed details about unemployment among graduates in Sri Lanka. According to it, 54.8 % were art degree graduates, and 45.2 % were other degree graduates. Now a day, graduate employees work in the non-government sector but are passionate about government jobs. When the government opens a new recruitment system for graduates, it is clear that many graduates already in private employment are struggling to find a new job in the public sector. Even though the government expects graduates to extend their cooperation to develop both the private and public sectors, they are staying away from the private sector for a variety of reasons such as job inquiries, work-life balance issues, family commitment, workload, leadership issues, career growth issues, and so on. (Buga et al., 2019)

Many researchers identified demographical and personal factors influencing students' career intention, such as age, gender, educational background, skills, competency, lifestyle, and previous working experiences. Midurangia, Suthab, and Wachissaraakey (2019) found that lack of experience, intense competition, political changes and lack of financial resources are among the variables that influence undergraduates' career goals.

The question is whether factors influence the choice of one such sector. Accordingly, it is important to determine if any factors influence the inclination towards only one such sector. Therefore, this study focused on undergraduates with career intentions towards private sector jobs and identified the factors affecting their career intention.

## **Material and Methods**

Students from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Languages served as the population for this study, which included students from all five departments of the faculty, representing third-year first semester, fourth-year first semester and fourth-year second semester. Their exclusion is because almost every student is excited about their future careers when they are about to leave university. By the time they are in their final year of university, they have a somewhat more accurate view of their future careers; therefore, only fourth- and third-year students were used for this study. A total of 800 students make up the student population. This study population divided small groups into five departments in the Social Sciences and Languages Faculty; Department of Economics and Statistics, Department of English Language Teaching, Department of Geography and Environmental Management, Department of Languages and Department of Social Sciences. A sample size of 250 students was chosen to reflect students from each department (each stratum) proportional to the population of each department. Since the English Language Teaching Department has a limited number of students and cannot obtain a suitable proportion, the proportion was calculated by adding the number of students in the Languages Department and the English Language Teaching Department. Therefore, the number of students in the Language Department also includes those in the English Language Teaching Department. Accordingly, 88 students from the Economics and Statistics Department, 43 from the Social Sciences Department, 33 from the

Geography and Environmental Management Department, and 86 from the Languages Department were selected for the sample.

In this study, secondary data were collected manually and electronically from website statistics, journal information, newspaper articles, and research articles, and primary data was collected from students of the Social Sciences and Language Faculty at the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka via an online questionnaire. Before completing the study, the researcher conducted a pilot survey to ensure and clarify any inconsistencies that could lead to misrepresentation among the respondents.

The researcher used 24 independent variables to conduct the study, of which 18 were categorical and 6 were continuous independent variables. The categorical explanatory variables were gender, age, working experiences, parents' working status, parents' education level, English language proficiency, interest in lectures and subjects, examinations and assignments, practical training opportunities, career guidance activities, the applicability of university degree studied, salary, freedom of workplace, the opportunity for career advancement, working environment, financial benefits, and non-financial benefits. Attitudes, self-confidence, competitiveness, influence from mass media and the internet, parental influence, and peer influence were continuous variables. The collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for the social sciences) software. The data analysis technique used in this study was Binary Logistic Regression. In addition, data analysis utilizes factor analysis, correlation analysis, one-way ANOVA test and chi-square test. The binary dependent variable is students with career intention towards private sector jobs and students who do not have career intention towards private sector jobs.

A conceptual framework shows what the researcher hopes to discover as a result of the research. According to the conceptual framework of this study, 24 hypotheses were developed.

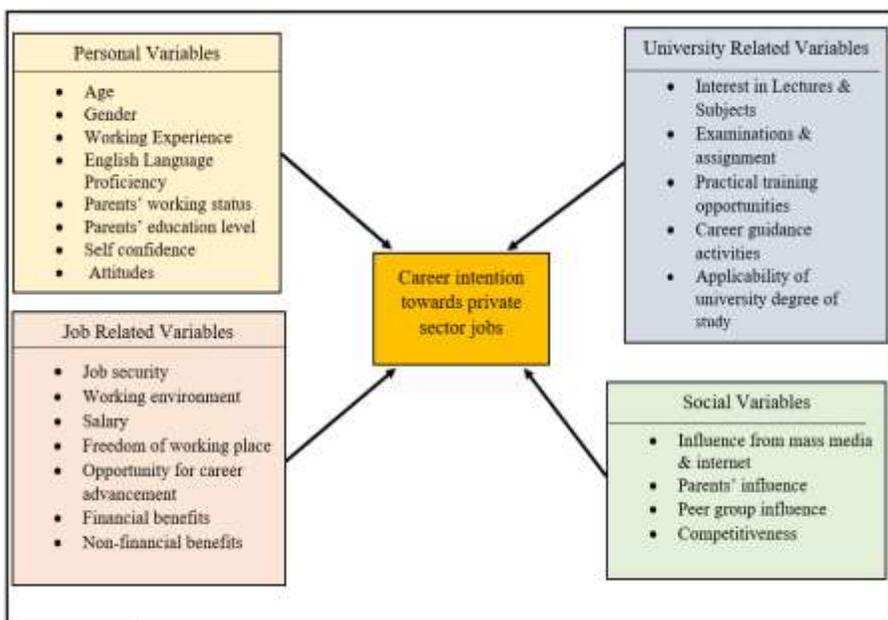


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Sample Survey 2021

## Results

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Category	Proportion
Department	Department of Economics and Statistics	35.2%
	Department of Geography and Environmental Management	13.2%
	Department of Social Sciences	17.2%
	Department of Languages	34.4%
Medium	English	61.2%
	Sinhala	38.8%
Duration of working experience	No experience	62%
	Less than 6 months	9.6%
	Greater than 6 months	19.2%
	Only 1 year	7.2%
Parents' working status	Greater than 1 year	2%
	Only father is working	25.6%
	Only mother is working	19.6%
	Both are working	54.8%

Source: Sample Survey 2021

According to Table 1, the highest percentage of respondents represented in Economics and Statistics department was 35.2 % and the lowest in the Geography and Environmental Management department. It was 13.2 %. All respondents were taken from representing two mediums, and the majority of respondents represented English medium which was 61.2 %. When the working experience of respondents was considered, most students (62 %) had no working experience. Accordingly, more than 50 % of the respondents have no work experience.

Regarding the employment status of students' parents, 54.8 % have both parents who work. Among them, the fathers of 82 students are employed in the government or semi-government sector, and 70 are employed in the private sector. As far as the mothers of the students are concerned, the mothers of 36 students are employed in the government or semi-government sector, and 35 are employed in the private sector. According to table 1 above, the percentage of students whose mother is employed alone is as low as 19.6 %, while 25.6 % of students reported that just their father is employed.

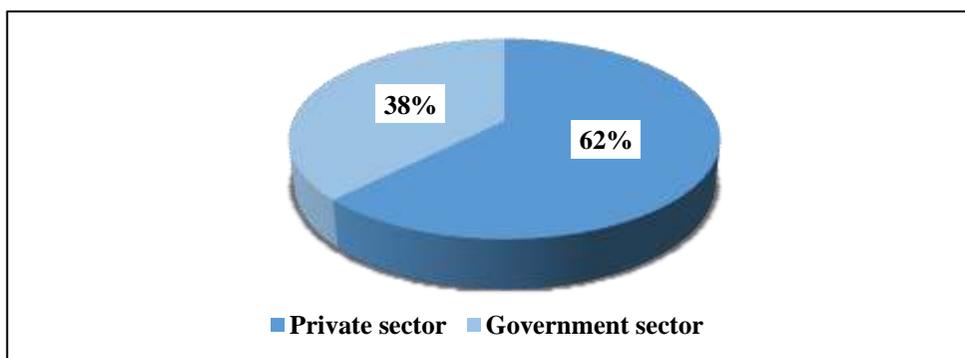


Figure 2: Students' Career intention towards private sector jobs  
 Source: Sample Survey 2021

The researcher gave the respondents two answers and asked this question: "What sector do you hope to work in your future job?" Most respondents were willing to do their future job in the private sector, which was 62 %. The other 38 respondents were willing to begin their future careers in the government sector.

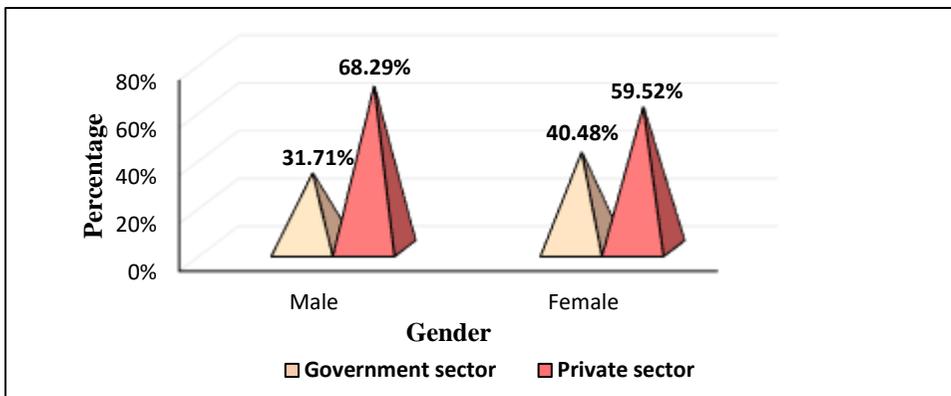


Figure 3: Student Career intention towards private sector jobs based on gender  
Source: Sample Survey 2021

According to Figure 3, 68.29 % of male students and 59.52 % of female students were looking for jobs in the private sector. Male students were more likely to be employed in the private sector than female students. Accordingly, the career intention of male and female students has shifted to the private sector rather than the public sector.

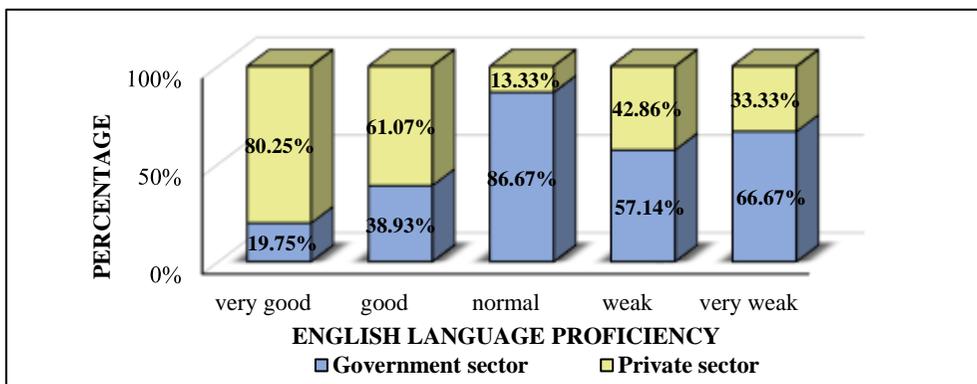


Figure 4: Student Career intention towards private sector jobs based on English Language Proficiency.  
Source: Sample Survey 2021

The most significant percentage of students with an excellent command of the English language was willing to work in the private sector, which was 80.25 % and 61.07 %, respectively. Only a low percentage of 13.33 students with average English proficiency are looking for jobs in the private sector. Students with weak and very weak English language skills are more likely to seek employment in the government sector than in the private sector.

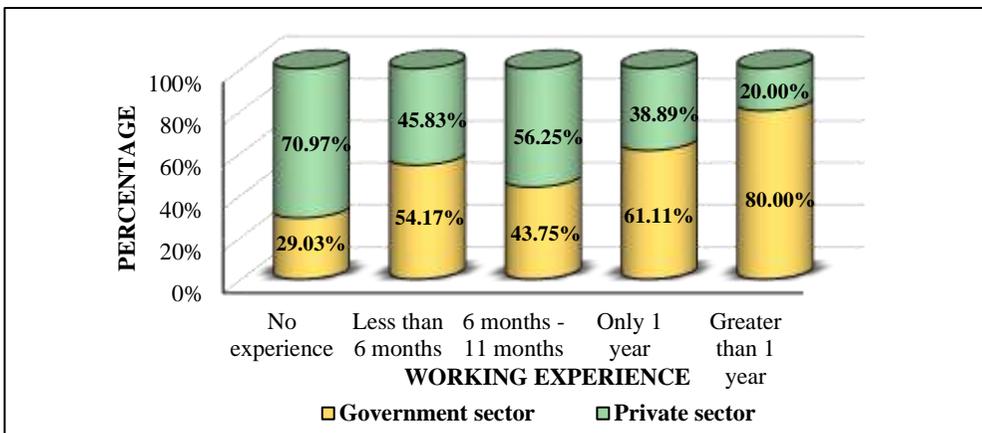


Figure 5: Student Career intention towards private sector jobs based on Working experience  
Source: Sample Survey 2021

Most students with no work experience were looking for jobs in the private sector, which was 70.97 %. The students with less than six months' work experience were hopeful for jobs in the private sector, accounting for about 45.83 %. More than half of those with 6–11 months of work experience wanted to work in the private sector as a future career. Considering the career intentions of students with only 1 year or greater than 1 year of work experience, it seems that more students are looking for jobs in the public sector than in the private sector. Only 38.89 % of students with only 1 year of work experience and 20 % of students with more than 1 year of work experience hope to work in the private sector.

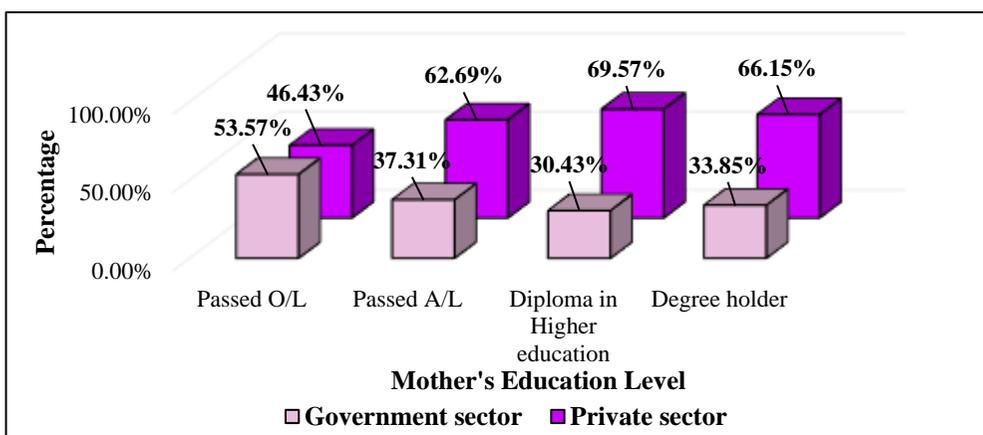


Figure 6: Student Career intention towards private sector jobs based on Mother's Education Level, Source: Sample Survey 2021

The career intentions of 53.57 % of students whose mother's education was only O/L were in the government sector, and 46.43 % were in the private sector. 37.31 % of students whose mother's education level is only advanced level want to work for the government sector, while 62.69 % want to work for the private sector. More than 60 % of students with their mother's education level or a higher diploma or degree have career intentions in the private sector.

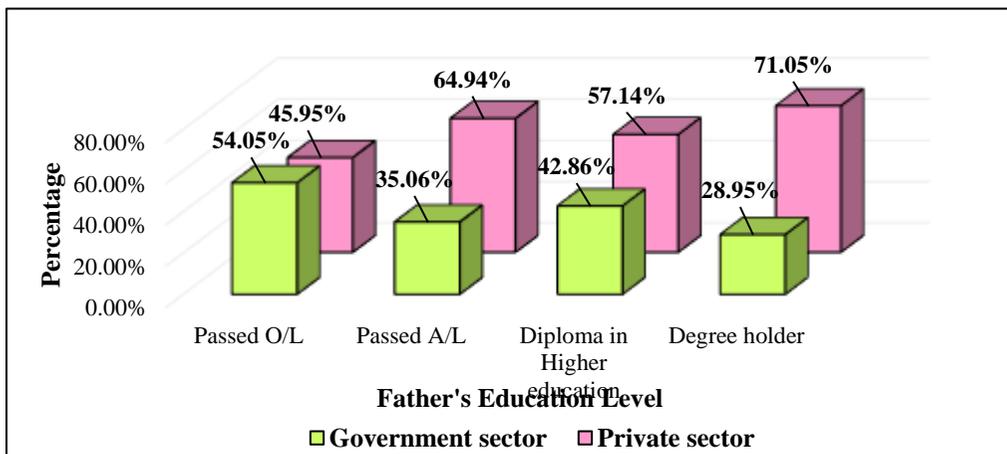


Figure 7: Student Career intention towards private sector jobs based on Father's Education Level, Source: Sample Survey 2021

When considering the father's education level and the student's career intentions, 54.05 % of students whose father's education level was only up to O/L were pursuing career intentions in the government sector. There is a greater tendency for the private sector than the government sector regarding the career intentions of students whose father's education is only up to the advanced level. It was 64.94 %.

Out of the 24 independent variables,10 were asked in the questionnaire to measure the variables of mass media and internet influence, peer influence, parents influence, attitudes, and self-confidence. Five new variables were created after adding a few of those questions and doing a factor analysis. When the correlation was checked, it was discovered that ten questions were highly correlated, which were then used for factor analysis. As the first set, six questions were used to measure the variables of mass media and internet influence, peer influence and parents' influence.

Table 2: Eigen analysis for collinear variables: Set 1

Component	Initial Eigenvalues		
	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %
1	<b>2.588</b>	43.131	43.131
2	<b>1.139</b>	18.987	62.117
3	.762	12.694	74.811
4	.642	10.698	85.509
5	.452	7.533	93.042
6	.417	6.958	100.000

Source: Sample Survey 2021

According to Table 2, there were two Eigen values greater than one. However, when considering the cumulative variance explained by the first two components, it was only 62.117 % and could not reach at least 80 %. When the first three components were added together, the cumulative variance was 74.811 %, extremely near 80 %. As a result, three factors were extracted for this set of components.

Table 3: Factor Loadings

	Rotated component Metrix			Newly generated variables
	Component			
	1	2	3	
I regular get job information on social media like newspapers, YouTube & Facebook	.081	<b>.926</b>	.022	Mass media & internet influence
Social media has a huge impact on my choice to do this sector (private sector or government sector) in my future job	.559	<b>.559</b>	-.208	
I choose this sector because my parents also work in this sector	-.036	-.009	<b>.963</b>	Peer influence
My parents think that I should do my future job in this sector (private sector or government sector)	-.794	-.016	<b>.357</b>	
I discuss my future job with friends who are closer than my parents	<b>.619</b>	.508	.099	Parents influence
I choose this sector because I have close friends who can help me get a job in that sector	<b>.760</b>	.157	.126	

Source: Sample Survey 2021

According to those factor loadings in Table 3, three new variables were generated. Therefore, newly defined variables were mass media and internet, parent, and peer influence.

Table 4 represents the factor loadings of the second set of collier questions. After performing factor analysis, two new variables were generated. Based on factor loadings, the first two sets of factor loadings were named attitudes, and another set was named self-confidence.

Table 4: Factor Loadings

<b>Rotated Component Metrix</b>			<b>Newly generated variables</b>
	<b>Component</b>		
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	
I think the sector I have chosen is the most suitable sector for my future career	<b>.910</b>	.215	Attitudes
I can get more benefits as well as opportunities from the sector I have chosen than the other sector	<b>.883</b>	.236	
This sector led me to choose to do my future career because I have good faith that I can make my maximum contribution	.639	<b>.651</b>	Self-confidence
I choose this sector because I have required skills & qualifications	.183	<b>.958</b>	

Source: Sample Survey 2021

From the factor analysis, five new independent variables were generated; Mass media and internet influence, peer influence, parents' influence, Attitudes and Self-confidence.

It is critical to determine whether there is an association between the explanatory and dependent variables before fitting the Binary Logistic Regression Model. Therefore, the Chi-square test was used to check the relationship between categorical explanatory variables and dependent variables, and the One-way ANOVA test was used to check the dependency between continuous explanatory variables and dependent variables.

The following hypothesis is used to check the association.

H<sub>0</sub>; There is no association between explanatory variables and career intention towards private sector jobs among university students.

H<sub>1</sub>; There is an association between explanatory variables and career intention towards private sector jobs among university students.

Finally, it was identified that, out of 24 independent variables: gender, parents' working status, parents' education level, interest in lectures and subjects, practical training opportunities, career guidance activities, Applicability of studied university degree, Job security, Salary, workplace freedom, non-monetary benefits, and competitiveness were not related to the dependent variable. The next step was to check for multicollinearity among explanatory variables after determining the relationship between the explanatory variables and the dependent variable. One-way ANOVA and Person correlation analysis were used to achieve the Chi-square test. Among 12 significant variables, "Attitudes", "Parent influence", and "Mass media and Internet influence" were highly correlated with other independent variables. Accordingly, seven categorical and two continuous variables were selected for the analysis. In order to select the best-fitted model, the highest G<sup>2</sup> value of each significant variable was considered.

The final result of the Binary Logistic Regression model is given in Table 5.

Table 5: Best-Fitted Model

Variables in the equation							
Parameter	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	Reference
<b>English Language Proficiency</b>			22.736	4	.000		Very weak
Very good	2.004	.810	6.122	1	.013	7.418	
Good	1.183	.782	2.286	1	.035	3.264	
Weak	.403	.976	.170	1	.040	1.496	
<b>Working experience</b>			11.516	4	.021		Greater than 1 year
No experience	2.335	1.142	4.180	1	.041	10.328	
Less than 6 months	1.526	1.228	1.544	1	.018	4.600	
6 months-11 months	2.041	1.182	2.984	1	.044	7.699	
Only 1 year	.958	1.230	.606	1	.036	2.606	
<b>Financial Benefits (1) (Preferred)</b>	1.022	.404	6.406	1	.011	2.779	Not preferred
<b>Constant</b>	-3.591	1.450	6.139	1	.013	.028	

Source: Sample Survey 2021

**According to the English Language Proficiency**

Students with excellent English language proficiency have a 16.98 % chance to lean their career intention towards private sector jobs compared to students with very weak English language proficiency.

Students with a good level of English language proficiency have an 8.26 % chance to lean their career intention towards private sector jobs compared to students with a very weak level of English language proficiency.

Students with a weak English language proficiency have a 3.96 % chance to lean their career intention towards private sector jobs compared to students with very weak English language proficiency.

**According to the work experience**

Students with no working experience have a 22.17 % chance of leaning their career intentions towards private sector jobs compared to students with more than 1 year of working experience. Students with less than 6 months of working experience have an 11.25 % chance to lean their career intention towards private sector jobs compared to students with more than 1 year of working experience.

Students with 6– 11 months of working experience have a 17.51 % chance to lean their career intention towards private sector jobs compared to students with more than 1 year of working experience.

Students with only 1 year of working experience have a 6.7 % chance to lean their career intention towards private sector jobs compared to students with more than 1 year of working experience.

**According to the financial benefits**

There is a 7.12 % chance that students who are more interested or more preferred in financial benefits than those who do not care or do not prefer much about the financial benefits provided by the private sector will turn to private sector jobs.

## Discussion

Some new things were covered in this research when considering other similar research findings. According to Hellen, Stella & Omare (2017), gender significantly impacts a student's profession choice. The finding also indicated that age is the second most important factor influencing career choice. However, this study found that gender was not an influencing factor but that age was an influencing factor for career intention. Saranalapala and Devadas (2020) confirmed that, family background and peer groups did not influence Sri Lankan management and commerce undergraduates' career choices, but Wen, Hao, and Bu (2015) argued that, the influence of parents, teachers, and peers has an impact on accounting students' career choices in China. This study also confirmed that parents' and peers' influence significantly affected career intention. Exciting lectures and seminars, successful examinations, practical and laboratory-based learning sessions, assignments, and student seminars were highlighted as affecting medical undergraduates' career choices by Tennakoon, Vidanapathirana, and Sutharan (2005). This study showed that interest in lectures and subjects, practical training opportunities, and examinations and assignments influenced the students' career intentions.

Lim and Soon (2006) conducted the employment selection criteria of final-year economics students at the University of Utara in Malaysia. According to the study, the most important job selection factor was long-term career expectations, followed by job security, working environment, salary, learning opportunities and flexibility in the working schedule. However, this study identified that job security and salary were no significant impact, but the working environment of the working place has some effect on students' career intentions. According to Galhena and Rathnayaka (2011), 'enjoying a career' and 'financial and non-financial factors' majorly impact students' career choices. Saranalapala and Devadas (2020) also discovered that, 'enjoying the job' and non-financial rewards such as job prestige, career availabilities, promotional and educational opportunities, and migration majorly affect management and commerce undergraduates' career choices. This study showed that, although financial benefits affect students' career intentions, non-financial benefits do not affect their future career intention.

Although many researchers study the topic of career intention with a specific career in mind, this study has not limited to one sector such as the private or government sector. Also focusing on the unemployment problem of art graduates in Sri Lanka, this study has not been conducted previously using students in the faculty of arts. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation, it was not easy to gather data. Data collection by an online questionnaire was less effective than a face-to-face interview. Therefore, giving an online questionnaire increases the likelihood that some students will miss the response. It was one of the limitations of this study. Studies on the career intentions of students who have completed the G.C.E. Advanced Level examination can be conducted as future research directions, not just for university students.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

After finding the most influential factors in the students' career intention towards private sector jobs using the Binary Logistic Regression model, the three variables that English Language Proficiency, working experience and financial benefits, were selected as the best model.

### **English Language Proficiency**

Students who are fluent in English are more likely to seek employment in the private sector, as the private sector is more concerned with speaking and writing English than the government sector. Students who are not very proficient in English are less likely to turn to the private sector. Accordingly, it appears that students with low English proficiency showed some reluctance to pursue employment in the private sector compared to students with good English proficiency.

### **Working Experience**

Work experience is a key qualification in recruiting private sector employees. However, according to the results of this study, students with no work experience were more willing to work in the private sector than students with some work experience. In Sri Lanka, it is clear that even graduates with years of work experience are looking for a job in the public sector while working in the private sector. According to the research "A

descriptive study on Job switching from private sector to public sector" by Kalyani and Madhuwanthi (2021) said that, when a new public sector recruiting program is launched in Sri Lanka, most graduate employees tend to switch from the private to the public sector. Finally, they found that the primary force influencing job hopping and job insecurity is at the organization level; leadership, family pressure, compensation and rewards, and individual stress are the major secondary factors influencing graduate employees' job hopping from the private to the public sector.

### **Financial Benefits**

According to the final result, there was more chance that students who preferred the financial benefits offered by the private sector chose the private sector to pursue their future career rather than students who had no preference or were not much considered financial benefits.

There are financial and non-financial benefits for both private and public sector employees. Sometimes people are more concerned with the benefits they will obtain and their salary. Many people are more inclined to choose the private sector for their jobs as the private sector offers more benefits than the government sector. Larger salaries, more growth opportunities, and better benefits such as insurance coverage, vacation time, and annual bonuses are all advantages of working in the private sector. The financial benefits of working in the private sector are frequently greater than those of working in the public sector. A small business can generate products and services that are in high demand owing to the creativity of one person or a group of employees. As a result, employees are frequently rewarded with an increased salary, more benefits like insurance coverage and vacation time, and bonuses.

In some circumstances, working in the private sector provides profit-sharing options unavailable in the public sector.

### **Recommendations**

The "university" is a very important place to produce educated and intelligent people in the country. State universities are the main ones because

not every student can enter a state university. If the minority of students enrolled in state universities can be well managed and expelled, it will add great value to the country's economy and future. These intellectuals who graduate from state universities often suffer from the rising unemployment rate in Sri Lanka. The main reason is that they wait long until they get a job in the public sector to start their careers after university. The following suggestions are made to reduce it to some extent.

The university must provide the programs, activities, etc., required to direct the same attitude of students looking for employment in the public sector to the private sector. Providing practical training opportunities to all graduates leaving the university before they leave will also help them successfully pursue their future careers. Similarly, providing opportunities for students afraid of English language behaviors to develop their proper skills at the university will enable them to pursue the career intentions of students reluctant to return to the private sector. It is also important for the students to have the confidence to leave the university and choose the job that suits them best without being influenced by their parents, and graduates should be given proper jobs according to their qualifications.

As the final question in the questionnaire given to the students, researcher asked the main reason why they chose to pursue their future careers in the government or private sector. Considering the answers given, it was found that the common reasons for students seeking employment in the government sector to be more inclined towards that sector are the availability of a pension, the ability to work freely, the permanence of employment, and the recognition of society. As well as common reasons for students seeking employment in the private sector, there was the availability of adequate salaries, access to professional development, excellent financial benefits, and increased efficiency in the private sector over the public sector.

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