Career Pathways and Employability of the Management Graduates: Reference to Passed out Graduates of the Faculty of Management Studies, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Graduates' Unemployment and the under employment is continued to be an issue. Policy makers and the educational authorities are very much concerned to find the suitable remedies to this problem and still the public is not happy about the situation. On the other hand undergraduates find many strategies to face these problems and very often, gathering paper qualifications as many as possible is very much apparent. Postal survey was done to collect information form the passed out graduates during 2000-2005 to investigate this issue. Study was envisaged to understand the extent of following professional courses by the undergraduates and their impact on the career development after graduation. English languages and Information Technology (IT) education during the university education was also assessed towards their career pathways. The results indicated that only about 19% of the undergraduates had completed their degrees exclusively in the English medium and about 50% had completed in Sinhala Medium. IT education offered to them was not much satisfactory and majority of students had reported that usage of IT in the work place is mandatory. Nineteen percent of graduates had engaged in pursuing any form of professional courses during the university life and majority follow Charted Accountancy. About 55% of the graduates have completed any form of professional courses after graduation . But 91% of the graduates have reported that prime qualification which had been helpful for them to find the present job was the university degree. Emphasis on Postgraduate education was seemed to be very low due to time and financial barriers. Study shows that there is no outstanding benefits enjoyed by students form the professional courses other than English and IT to find an employment It is well known that following professional course by many of the management undergraduates has hampered the university education and quality of the degree obtained is questionable. It is also found that, during the university period, completion rate of Charted Accountancy and CIMA qualification too low even though students committed for the professional courses than the degree program. Hence, timely it is important to device policies at the university level to help the students to enjoy the benefits of the professional courses without deteriorating the quality of the degrees.

Key words: Management graduates, unemployment, underemployment, career development, IT education, English knowledge, and professional courses.

Introduction

Graduate unemployment has been a key socio-politico problem in the open economy of Sri Lanka for the past 35 years. The problem of unemployment mostly a structural issue that requires a positive response from both demand and supply side of the labour market. On the supply side, universities need to be more dynamic and market oriented in the delivery of graduate out put(Gunawardana, 2008). A study of a cohort of graduates adn.itted to universities in 1987/88 also found that the most disadvantaged in access to remuneration employments were arts, Commerce and Management woman graduates (Jayaweera and Sanmugam, 2002). More recent study conducted by the University authorities (Statistical Bulletin, UGC, 2002) also found the similar trends.

Labor market information very often reported that vacancies existed for professionally qualified persons are greater than degree holders in the area of accounting, Finance and Management arena. Ministry of Labour Relations and Manpower (2007) reported that among the required professional and other higher educational qualifications, CIMA becomes the top level qualification. Legislators, senior Officials and mangers, professionals, technicians are the occupations which CIMA and ICASL are most required.

In the context of high demanded professional courses, students enrolling Management faculties often under estimate the value of the degree and tend to follow professional courses in Accountancy, Marketing and related fields with less priority for the undergraduate education. This trend has raised many issues in the University education and this situation has resulted poor attendance for the lectures, and weak assignment and finally to high failure rates. It was observed that, in general, failure rate at the end semester examination is varied from 30 – 40 %. Hence, studying the underlying causes in detail and taking remedies are of paramount important in shaping the educational process for the future generations.

Therefore, this study aimed at studying the level of education in various aspects before and after entering the university and their relation to the employment status after graduation. It

was also envisaged to use this information to make necessary changes in the academic process and in career guidance for betterment for their life..

Methodology

This study was a exploratory type of research to study the career path ways of students. A mail survey was conducted to gather information from the graduates of the Faculty of Management Studies. A detailed questionnaires were posted to 600 graduates passed out between 2000 – 2005. This sample has covered period of 5 years. Only about 145 graduates had responded out of the 600 targeted sample. Likert Scale also used in the study for measurement of attitudes on some issues.

Results and Discussions

Profile of the graduates

1) Districts

Of the respondents 57 % graduates were male and 43 % were female. Seventy two percent were married while 28 % were single. The study focused on the district wise distribution and found that they are distributed across 20 districts of which majority, 16 % were from Anuradhapura district. Polonnaruwa was second highest number reported, 11 %. Table 1 indicates the distribution of graduates.

Table 1. Districts and distribution of graduates

District	Percentage of graduates
Anuradhapura	16
Polonnaruwa	11
Galle	9
Matale	8

Colombo	7.5
Gampaha	7.5
Kandy	7.5
Kalutara	6.0
Matara	5.0

The percentage reported to b·? less than 5 % graduates are from Ampara, Badulla, Hambantota, Kegalle, Kurunegala, Monaragala, Nuwara Eliya, Puttlum, Ratnapura and Vavuniya.

2) Medium of learning

Table 2 shows that only about 16 % students have completed their degrees totally in the English medium. However percentage o students those listening to the English medium lectures is considerably as high as 58 % . On he other hand, nearly 57 % of graduates have answered the examination in Sinhala medium regardless whether they follow lectures in Sinhala or English medium.

Table 2. Medium of the instruction

Medium	Percentage students listening	Percentage students writing
All subjects in English	23	16
Less than 5 subjects in English	35	23
All subjects in Sinhala	41	57
Not responded	01	04

3) Improvement in the English language throughout the career

Study revealed that knowledge of English has been considerably improved from the University education and continue to improve at the work place. Writing, reading and speaking ability of the graduates of about 60% graduates have been found be average level both at the University

and the work place. Number of students very good at writing, reading and speaking was to be reported by percentage of graduates 32 %, 49 % and 19 % respectively.

Table 3. Improvement in the English language

Level of knowledge	Writing		Reading		Speaking	
	At the entry	At percent	At the entry	At percent	At the entry	At percent
Weak	13	2%	9	0	31	5
Average	74	66	73	51	61	76
Very good	13	32	18	49	84	19

The survey also revealed that the most contributing factors for the English language improvement in the University were ; teaching programs by ELTU and lecturing the subjects in the English medium. According to the responses these are equally contributed 31% and 32% of the graduates respectively. Self studies too have been contributed to about 26% of the students. Only about 9% students have gone for private tuition (Fig.1).
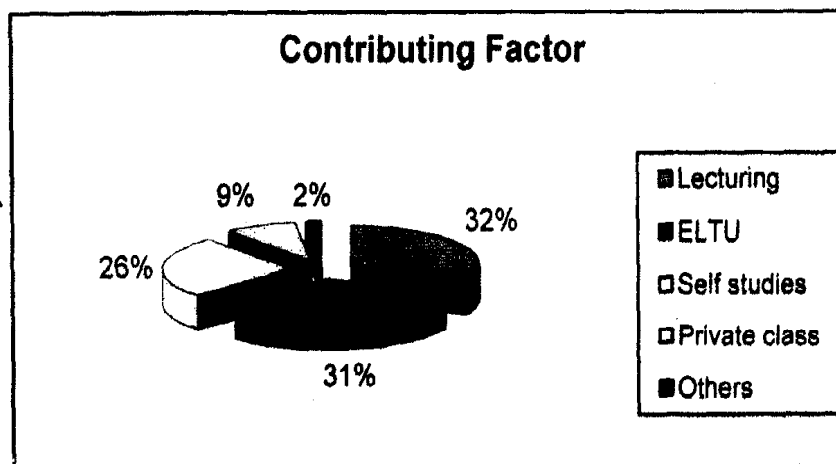

Contributing Factor

9% 2% 32%
26%
31%

■ Lecturing
■ ELTU
□ Self studies
□ Private class
■ Others

Fig.1 Significance of the contributing factors on the English education

4) Improvement of IT related knowledge.

According to the Likert Scale measurements, at the time of entry their IT knowledge is not sufficient and seemed to be low. In response to the adequacy of the content of the IT program mean value 2.91 indicate that it is average. Moreover, practical facilities arranged for the IT education was to report average with the indication of 3.0 mean score. students' view was that overall knowledge gain is also at the average level. These findings suggest that Syllabi and the teaching methodologies and practical facilities to be improved to a satisfactory level.

Table4. Assessment on the IT knowledge, program offered and the workplace usage.

Element	Mean of the Likert scale
Knowledge at the University entrance	2.61
Content in the IT program	2.91
Practical facilities Available	3.0
Overall knowledge improvement	3.15
Usage at work place	3.51

In response to the question raised against the extent of usage of IT knowledge at the work place, indicated that it is beyond the average level and towards the high in the scale.

Professional Training

Twenty six percent of the graduates have followed professional courses with an intension to find a job after the graduation. According to the responses, 6% of the graduates have followed Charted Accountancy and similar percentage of graduates to have completed computer related programs immediately after the graduation. Number of graduates selected to complete management related program is lesser than the aforementioned programs and is about 4%. It is worthy to note here that 19% of the graduates had engaged in pursuing any professional courses while being the undergraduates and the outstanding selection was to follow Charted

Accountancy. However, 91% of the graduates have reported that prime qualification which had been helpful for them to find the present job was the university degree. Postgraduate programs completed by some graduates (2%) also had been contributed.

Table 5   Professional Courses Completed and Continuing at present

Program	Percentage Completed	Percentage Continuing
Charted	11	4
Computer	8	4
Postgraduate	6	10
English	6	4
Management	4	-
AAT	2	-
Dip . education	-	1
Banking	-	2
CIMA	-	-
Other	13	5

Results of the study   revealed that 55% of the graduates have completed any form of professional courses after the graduation and majority have completed Charted Accountancy, i.e 11% of the sample. Computer studies, Postgraduate courses are next in order   completed by 8% and 6% respectively.   Thirty two percent of graduates are reported to following courses at present and outstanding feature is the postgraduate programs are given a priority than other courses. Ten percent of the gradates who have passed out between 2000-2005 to continue with post graduate studies and is an indication that after 4-5 years time of graduation, there is a trend of   following postgraduate courses. However postgraduate education of the graduates is rather lower than it should be. In response to the reasons, prime factor highlighted by 32% graduates

was the lack of time. Other reasons were then in order, lack of money (24%), poor knowledge in English(13%) and 4% reported to not interested.(Fig. 2)
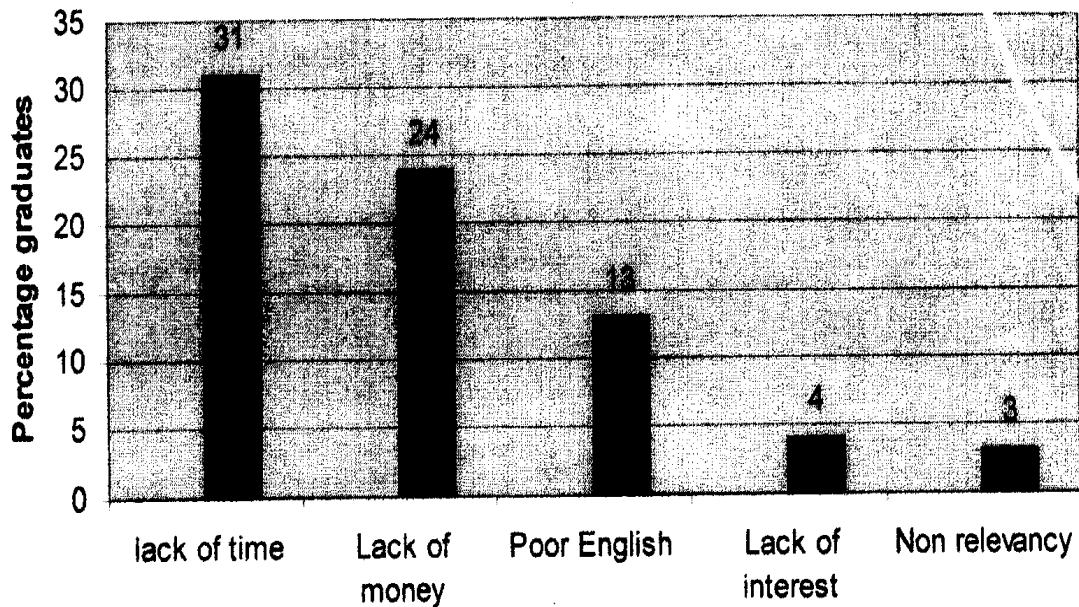

Fig.2. Barriers for postgraduates education

Occupations

It was found that all the grandaunts are employed. Results indicated that 86% graduates are employed in the government sector and reasons given for the choice over the private sector were found to be; stability(50%), social recognition (19%), fitting to the qualification (11%), proximity to the home(4%) and 3% for the freedom. On the other hand only 14% graduates were employed in the private sector organizations and given reason is the high salary. How ever, Dilrukshi et.al., (2002) reported that among the science graduates, higher proportion, 42% employed in the private sector and 29% in the public sector. The least responses found on the salary and 18% of the graduates had been to responded. Majority had reported between Rs 10,000- 20,000. of monthly salary.

Table 6. Relevance of the degree to the present employment

Degree of relevance	Percent graduates
None	7
Low	21
Average	28
High	21
Very High	20

Relevance of the degree to the present employment was indicated as illustrated in the Table 6. About 41% of the reported that the degree is in high or very high relevancy to the present employment and is a good indication.

Conclusions and Recommendations

There are greater number of graduates entered the Fac. Of management studies, from Anuradapura and Polonnaruwa Districts during the period under the study. Of the graduates 57% are males. Fifty percent of the graduates have completed the degree in the Sinhala medium in term of both listening and answering .Only about 16% of the graduates had completed exclusively in the English medium. Survey indicated that improvement of English Language is continued even after graduation and during the university education, following lectures and ELTU programs had equally helpful for them than other means.

At the entry of university, IT knowledge and the skills were found to be low and improvements during university education was only to average level as supported by delivery and the content of the programs. Nineteen percent of graduates had been engaged in any form of professional course and during the university education preference was mainly for charted accountancy. At the time of survey, 55% of the graduates have completed any form of professional courses and only very few have completed (6%) postgraduate courses. But there was a increasing trend of pursuing postgraduate studies at least after 5years of graduation. Lack of time was the main

barrier to report in this respect. According to the survey almost all the graduates were employed and 86% were involved in the government sector jobs .Social recognition was given high priority for selecting a government sector job and those who were in the private sector it was high salary. Furthermore, relevance of the degree to meet the market need also reported to have at a satisfactory level.

Information on the monthly salary was the least responded and majority are getting about Rs 10000- 20000. According to the survey, improving English and IT Knowledge and the related skills are to be further improved to fulfill the needs of the job market. Owing the fact that 91% of the graduates had found their employment with the degree qualification present graduates be educated on the correct time frame for professional course in order for enjoying the benefits of the degree and the professional courses.