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ISSN (Online): 2455-7838

SJIF Impact Factor (2017): 5.705

EPRA International Journal of

Research & Development (IJRD)

Monthly Peer Reviewed & Indexed
International Online Journal

Volume: 3, Issue:9, September 2018



Published By :
EPRA Journals

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HOW THE SKILLS OF SRI LANKA'S UNIVERSITY STUDENTS CONNECT WITH JOB OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

One of the main reasons behind the unemployment problem of Sri Lanka's undergraduates evidently is their lack of knowledge or inexperience in a trade. There isn't any clear proof to show this field is brought under any research matter, yet. For the undergraduate candidate, to make his future successful, he must be fully aware, what basic skills he need to have. The skills such an undergraduate candidate need to cultivate are, skills in knowledge, thinking skills, personals skills and practical skills. Even though there is a growing demand within the island, for the need of Higher education, it is a very difficult task to employ those who have already passed out as graduates as shareholders of the productive force the development. Having obtained the Degree, the candidate now stepping in to the career world, faces a number of urgent needs. It is important to pay attention to absorbing in to the panel of Lecturers those who are specially skilled in giving the proper training in different fields in the job market and though rural specialist advice giving guidance of self-employment opportunities. The number of Arts graduates passing out of the universities is much higher, compared to those who graduate from other Institutions. And another factor that hinders their progress in finding employment is the subjects they have followed at the universities, are not practically applicable for those vacant in the job market. And those, such affected are mainly students of the Arts stream. Therefore it is prudent to have a thorough insight what the Employers expect from the graduated applicants and what level of job knowledge, the applicants actually already possess. And the areas that need to be addressed should be strengthened and the training, thus imparted, should remain with the student. When a graduate gets selected for a career, he will need a additional training to improve his skills. If the applicant is incompetent for a particular post and if he is not selected due to lack of particular skills, then it is possible to find out from the employer the exact skills expected for the post applied for.

KEYWORDS: Sri Lanka, Graduates, Skills, Unemployment, movements

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The main objective of the youth who enter the Universities to get a higher education, is to find employment. Bel in the year 1930 has remarked for a proper balance in personality a person should be economically stable, have a proper education and a desire to learn a skill. It is so unfortunate for our nation as a whole, the fact the external candidates get enrolled into the universities to obtain external Degrees for this very reasons. But the sad side of it is all who complete their full time education in the University are supposed to end up either as a Philosopher, Scientist, Researcher. But they enter the Universities aiming at a normal career. How sad that vision is? How distressing it is, that still the society believes that the "University Certificate" alone is sufficient to obtain employment. Those Undergraduates whose main focus is only on this

Certificate and totally ignore the need for skill development are the ones who are generally unemployed. This shows these category of graduates who are not having the skills required by global employment agencies doesn't even have enough skills even to obtain employment at a national level.

Under such conditions the fate which befalls the majority of University students in Sri Lanka, is to go with the begging bowl behind others, until they find some job. They demand their rights in the presence of those who supply jobs, and majority of them fall into the crutches of controversial mafia idealists. Some go behind politicians. There are even some movements formed by those unemployed youth. The function of these movements is controlled by politicians to fulfill their own agendas. Presently what the majority of the University students do is, competing with those who are better competent for a

certain job. A total of 22,000 students selected for a research project by Senior Philosophers are competing with more than 200,000 trade applicants, who undergo training in order to find employment. Even to come to such a place is a sad fact. A normal belief accepted among the of University students is, the University is one who has the capability to create jobs to industries and establishments and not someone who is always in search of jobs. Also they have an image built within themselves that wherever they are employed, be it a business establishment or a government Institution, they are the once who can uplift those entities to a better standard. Among these, there are some graduates who are really skilled who have no issues of finding employment. Of course, there are degree courses that are designed to make those undergraduates really competent to find immediate employment. But a majority of these graduates are unaware that they are qualified to hold managerial positions rather than accepting and remaining in a technological level. They are living in an era, where one should realize to become a productive Human Resource, they should possess aptitudes of higher standards. As such ones future career should be planned in a creative manner. If the graduate applicant who gets employed has a PhD in the field he has chosen to pursue his career, which means he is qualified to conduct researchers in the fields, then he becomes a suitable candidate, to apply for a career globally. But effort must also be made to pursue other necessary qualifications and practices.

Another doubtful area is, whether the majority of the graduate job seekers, have suitable skills to proceed. According to a “report of the findings” the researchers have come to the conclusion that in the sphere related to the local job market a larger number of graduates have not yet come to the accepted global levels of carrier standards. It is not that the majority of graduates within the country doesn’t have even sufficient knowledge, to fit into a job, that is comes to their door step.

A graduate applicant, whose desire is to successfully play the role, as a member of the society, need to have the needful, practical skills to fall in line with the career chosen. Along with paper qualifications, the degree holder, should have career related experience and the required skills, to be accepted globally such applicants need not make a big issue publicly to get employment.

1.1 Methodology

Secondary data is used to prepare this report. Articles and books, written on the relationship between the skills and job opportunities, connected with the students of the Sri Lanka’s Universities have been studied.

2.0 SKILLS REQUIRED BY A DEGREE HOLDER TO FIND EMPLOYMENT

It is very important that a Graduate applicant, verify what basic skills are required by him, to make his future career a successful one. Any country, when

engaged in the process of recruitment of degree holders to their respective job markets, adhere to certain criteria, concerning the skills. According to them, a graduate applicant have certain skills, as shown below.

- Knowledge Skills
- Thinking Skills
- Personal Skills
- Personal implied senses
- Practical Skills

There are a large number of opportunities within Sri Lanka, for anyone to get the degree qualifications. Under such prevailing conditions the responsibility of the student who gets a free education from the Universities, have been seriously affected. Therefore the university student should have a vision to identify the levels of modern global expertise, whilst at the same time preserving his national pride, must be willing to incline to international standards. What is meant here is the internationalization of knowledge. An undergraduate must have certain skills along with his career, in order to be successful, apart from his learning at the university. These skill are compulsory.

- Information Technology Skills
- flexibility
- A strong competitive spirit
- Ability to think logically
- Ability to communicate orally and writing
- Result focused vision
- Ability to make decisions
- Analyzing skills
- Good leadership skills

Much attention is focused how these skills be sharpened within the Sri Lanka Universities, under the scheme of a team of academics, by introducing service institutions and new syllabuses. As such immediate steps should be implemented to direct the undergraduate students to stay connected with these service institutions. There is a possibility that after 3 to 4 years being in the university and obtaining the degree, facing a period being unemployed. If that takes place it is very likely, these intelligent students will undoubtedly get frustrated, anxious and be full of discouragement.

There is a strong competition among the students to get admission to the Government University System. The opportunity is open only to a very limited number who are qualified in their secondary education. (As per the World Bank Report). The basic requirement to get admission to the Universities is based on the results to get admission to the Universities is based on the results of the G. C. E. (A/L) results. That is a requirement laid down by the University Grants Commission, guide lines, and the initial selection is based on the students acquired skills and on district the basic. The only objective of those students getting admitted to the Universities is to find suitable employment after qualifying for the degree. Therefore it’s important to

know, what the qualifications are the employer is looking for.

A carrier means, obtaining knowledge through higher education, about a particular field and then performing a task in a specialized manner. Such an entity is known as a trade Institution. Carrier wise, these are divided in to 03 main fields or areas.

They are

- Service - 42.8%
- Agriculture - 33.0%
- Industry/ Trade - 24.1%

The service level of the population representing labour,

- Representing Government Service - 14.4%
- Representing Private Sector - 40.5%
- Service Providers - 2.9%
- Self-Accounts Labour - 31.5%
- Contributors to family labour - 10.8%

For the graduates to get selected for a post, he has to sit for an exam on a prior appointed date.

Until then the applicant has to prepare application indicating his knowledge obtained in the university and qualifications. The time spent in the university is a useful period for the students to get temporary employment or follow a trade. While the students engage in specializing, the career profile also go through a stage of specialization, enabling to accept easily a number of opportunities both local and foreign. With the termination of the university education, as the students have acquired enough skill, they can get involved in such undertakings. Those who have a first class degree, along with a career qualification, are much sought after by the job market.

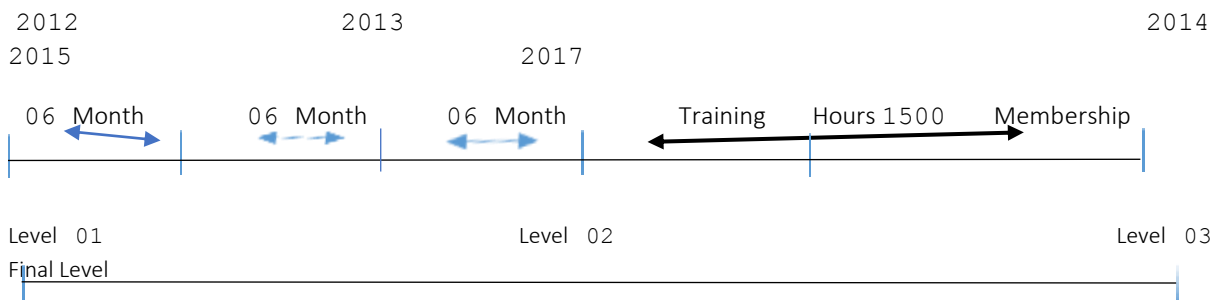
As an example let us imagine a certain student enters the university in the year 2013. The student has the opportunity to get the membership to follow a career plan of his choice, before he gets his admission. The undermentioned note will show it clearly.

2.1 The distribution of career education qualifications

The period in the University



The time taken to complete career related education



With a minimum a year period of training, it is possible to get the membership. Though this opening at the beginning or end of the third year a student can get a permanent highly paid job. But practically this is difficult. Because the student has to sit for exams, practical forward reports and at the mid semester proposals and at the end of the semester, proposals, keeps the student extremely busy. But the graduate who owns all these skills will be accepted globally with a warm welcome.

2.2 Unemployed Degree holders

When discussing the unemployment problem Sri Lanka is currently facing, it can clearly seen, that the most affected are those having higher qualifications. Accordingly in the year 2001, the number of youth, with G. C. E O/L qualifications,

which is the lowest was 2.7%. And among them 5.8% were unemployed, and those with A/L qualifications 7.8% were unemployed. (Taken separately 4.4% were males and 11.6% were females) These statistics reveal the fact that, majority who are affected by the unemployment issues, are among those who are highly educated. Though Sri Lanka gives an important place for the education sector, only 3.5% of the competing youth between the age groups 20-24 can get selected to the Universities. Even within this selected percentage the issue of unemployment has yet to be solved.

When we compare the seriousness of the problem with the other countries around the world, we can clearly see, the unemployment among graduates is not a problem faced by Sri Lanka only.

Unemployment among the graduates, has become an issue, even in developed countries. For example a survey carried out by professional higher education service institute of the United Kingdom, the unemployment rate in the United Kingdom had been 8.9%. It is during this particular unfortunate stage in life, commonly known as “Unemployed graduates”, that a large number of the educated segment of the country who can contribute much to the country, is forced to idle, wasting their time. Therefore there outcry is not only to get an income for their livelihood, but also to give them an opportunity to serve the country. It is also the responsibility of the authorities, to get some work done by those, on whose behalf much money of the country had been spent. While the country is facing an ongoing problem of unemployment already, every year more and more, affected people are getting added to this number. As such this problem faced by the graduates gets more and more complicated with time. Those who were affected and had been in that situation for a long time, were expecting a speedy solution for this problem under the present government. But there isn't any attempt that had been made up to the present time. We cannot put the knowledge gained by the graduates into a corner by ignoring them and expect the country to progress. Once their age, when they show their maximum productivity is spent in vain the time in future also shortens. Therefore we should look at them with more empathy. The present unemployed, number of graduates in Sri Lanka has reached to 40, 000. Those such affected unemployed graduates have unitedly formed an Association of unemployed graduates, from where they address their grievances to the authorities expecting a solution. Today the situation Sri Lanka is facing because of the unemployed graduates is very sad indeed.

2.3 The reasons behind the graduate unemployment problem

2.3.1 The problems connected with inadequate knowledge of English language

Sri Lanka's graduate unemployment problem is more prominently seen, as per many reports is among those who have obtained their degrees in Arts, Social Sciences, Humanities and Commerce subjects. Among 4000-5000 languages spoken in many countries round the world, English is a language that is used very widely, as a mother tongue English language is spoken by such a vast number of people, which next to English, only Chinese language is spoken by a larger majority. During the period of British colonialism there were different mother tongues that were in usage, but the administration and educational activities were carried out in English. When the educational medium changed from English to other mediums, to other mediums, people became less interested in maintaining their standard of English. As the school text books came to be printed in the local Sinhala and Tamil languages, children were able to continue their

college education, without a knowledge of English. As most of students who got selected to the University were Sinhalese Buddhists, motivating them to improve their knowledge of English became a tiresome task. As such their ability to read English text books and explore knowledge became diminished. This is one of the major reasons why the graduates who pass out from the Universities to degenerate.

It is very important to have a good knowledge of English to read and understand new innovations introduced within the world. In order of facilitate this introduction of rapid English Language Courses and the improvement of the standard of Sinhala and English to the highest level became vital. Therefore, it is very important, when re-organizing lesson plans, to give prominence to the best methods the knowledge of English could be imported to the undergraduates.

2.3.2 The need for guidance and involvement with activities concurrent with the subject

There are many students who during their entire education carrier at the Universities, not had the chance to speak one word with their lectures of professors. All students who enter the University are brought under the supervision of an instructor. It is very important, this instructor plays the role of parent and mediator between the student and the University, during the student's entire educational carrier. If a student has an issue in this area, he may find it difficult to find suitable employment, one he gets his Degree Certificate. To solve the unemployment problem the role and the personality of the leader counts a lot. Today most of the graduates are unemployed, because they have not been able to actively participate in the above factors. However it is high time, that in order to lessen the unemployment problem, attention should be paid to the restructuring of the faculty lesson plans.

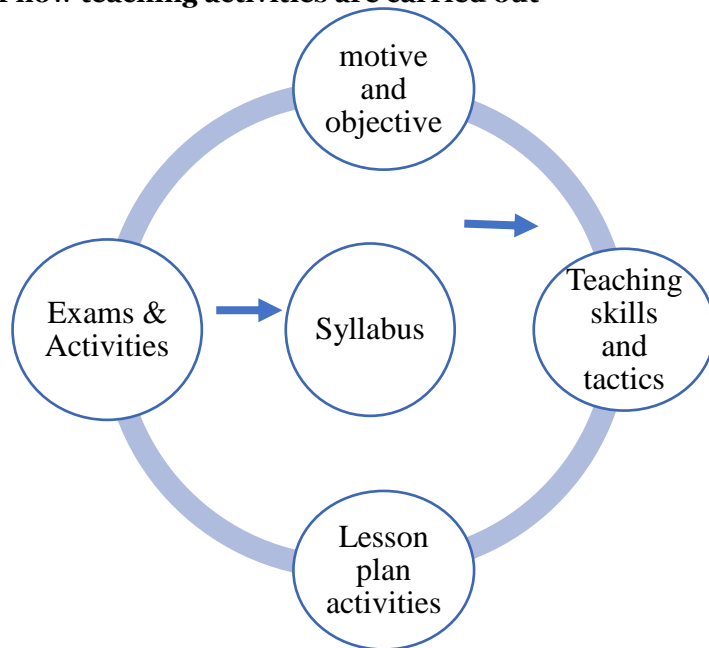
2.4 The standard of the University Degree Courses

The courses conducted in the Universities of Sri Lanka are designed in conformity with the International Standards. Just as, it is done in other countries, the teachings conducted in Sri Lanka are done according to an accepted methodology. In any country around the world the main objective of Higher Education is to impart to the minds of the children a very high standard of intelligence which is first and foremost and this is achieved by educating them with full knowledge in the chosen subject and exposing them for professional training.

But the main concern for the University Authorities is in a world moving rapidly with advance innovations the local Universities haven't progressed much to meet current global requirements. Actually, the education system should change to suit the needs of present day job requirements. The relevant subjects necessary to fulfil those job requirements, should begin at the University level.

University qualifications open the doors, to get selected for jobs as executives and other professions.

2.5 Figure of how teaching activities are carried out



3.0 ISSUES RELATED TO THE STANDARDS OF THE GRADUATES

When talking of the quality of a course, the important factors included in it should be the subject matter included in the syllabus the books available for reference, teaching skills and methodologies, class rooms, laboratories and libraries. The volume of these facilities, enables the outcome of the activities very successful. Majority of the students getting admitted to Government Universities are coming from village or urban social backgrounds. An opinion that had been embedded in their minds for generations is that jobs in the Government sector are for superior to that of the private sector. The main reasons are the pension entitlement and the leave available. Those who enter the Universities have this concept firmly rooted in their minds. Therefore, the University students expect jobs in the Government sector and acquiring professional skills to work elsewhere, is unimportant to them. They think that finding jobs for them is the responsibility of the Government.

But the problem arises, when those who have obtained Degree in medicine, Engineering and Law faculties, are found employment by the Government which is considered as compulsory, and only a certain percentage from Arts, Humanities, Economics and Management are absorbed to the Government Sector, the Government is not in a position to provide jobs for all the Degree holders. And the media spokesman for the unemployed Graduate Union, Mr. Dammika Munasinghe states, that as at 22 Nov. 2011 the total number of unemployed graduates has

reached 42,000 all them still awaiting for the jobs promised to them. Also there have been instances, where even when there were vacant positions the Government has failed to absorb them. It is difficult to identify the “mature knowledge explorer” which defines the term “Graduate” in the correct sense. The main reason for this is that the present day undergraduates are focusing only on the Degree Certificate. This is a very unfortunate and tragically situation and one may wonder whether any other country’s University system, has such an issue.

3.1 The Solution to the Graduate unemployment problem

The unemployment problem concerning Graduates is not something which came to the limelight in recent times. It had be existing as a social parasite over a long period of time. The child who goes to the carpentry shop or Chena to help in the work with the father or an elder after coming home from the school is not considered as a child who is receiving some education. But it is during this informal learning period the child first begins to adjust to the real world of the working people. The Scientist Thomas Alwa Edison when he was schooling his teachers thought he was a child who had no intelligence to continue studies and was terminated from school. But it was him who invented the Electric Bulb and surprised the entire world, in the field of electricity. He however received some education from his own mother and free education through social educational facilities. This Cleary shows the real knowledge and education is found outside the classrooms of the schools.

The Degree holder is not someone who runs after the Degree Certificate. For the unemployment problem of Graduates to ease and find a solution, standard of English should be improved. In addition to solve the unemployment issue, the following areas should be attended to.

1. To be suitable for the job one must acquire the relevant skills.
2. To give the proper training.
3. To restructure the Arts Courses
4. Organize workshops to improve learning skills.
5. To closely follow up short term Practical University Educational lesson plans.
6. The University lesson plan should align with job requirements.
7. Group studies based on Higher Education should be encouraged.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

4.1 Conclusion

It is observed that the number of students who pass the G.C.E. (A/L) Exam which is the most decisive one to pursue higher studies keeps increasing within Sri Lanka. But it is questionable whether those who graduate from these Universities gets the proper professional education to match the job they are targeting to do. This lack or uncertainty was observed not only among the new Graduates who have entered the job industry but it was an issue that had been prevailing for a long period among those who got employed in different fields. Another complicated problem is those graduates who got employment opportunities are now engaged in work that in no way is connected in areas where they are totally lost as they have no job knowledge at all.

Many are of the opinion that it's the responsibility of the University to impart to the student the proper skills to suit the job while others think when one starts a career he should be given an additional training. The research work conducted on the unemployment issues faced by the graduates reveal that it is not the standard of the University Curriculum that causes unemployment issues but it is the lack of skills on the part of the graduate applicant. When surveying the unemployment problem faced by the graduates of Sri Lanka's Universities it is necessary to identify the category of jobs they can apply and the exact training necessary for it. In addition after being aware of the real issues connected with the graduate unemployment problem it was discussed with employers to voice their point of view. What the employer feels is that the applicants lack sufficient skills to accept the particular job field.

4.2 Suggestions

The under graduate student's first objective should be to find what training and qualifications are needed to each particular profession. In our country the student gets selected to the University after or unusual completion. To compete the student should have sharp logical

knowledge on a number of subjects. A student endowed with such a vast amount of subject knowledge must select his or her chosen profession in line with the courses available to him. Also the student should attend lectures in English Language in comparison to the number of lectures he follows in Sinhala. It is suggested that certain courses has to be followed only in English and courses in English should be made compulsory. This way we can expect the University student to improve his English knowledge to an acceptable standard. And the students should be informed the following of Computer Courses as compulsory. Because ability to use the Computer has many advantages and there are a number of courses that could be followed through the computers also. Also as an employee one should be able to study a particular profession have leadership skills, ability to absorb and understand topics, work under different conditions and choosing the working environment.

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