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RESEARCH ARTICLE

GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY AMONG DIFFERENT FACULTIES OF EASTERN UNIVERSITY: TRANSFORMING UNIVERSITY EDUCATION TO COPE WITH MARKET DEMANDS.

T. Baskaran.

Department of Academic Affairs, Eastern University, Sri Lanka.

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Abstract

Universities are expected to function to contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training. University education is the core of the higher education. Since unemployment rate is a key macroeconomic indicator, with low unemployment rate taken to indicate a healthy economy, this study focused on the employability of graduates of different faculties of Eastern University. The study included four faculties viz., Agriculture, Commerce & Management, Health-Care Sciences and Science. Questionnaire survey was done among 207 graduates who had completed their degrees after 2011 from Eastern University to find out their employability. Discussions and telephone conversations with higher officials in government and private sectors was done to validate the study. Results revealed that percent employed was highest (92.6%) for the faculty of Health Care Sciences, while the lowest (70.6%) was for the Agriculture. median expected monthly salary of the graduands was between Rs. 30,000-40,000 for all the faculty graduands. And the preference level for different sector varies from faculty to faculty. All the faculty graduands faced several obstacles to get a job. It is recommended that courses should be designed to face the current job market.

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Background of the problem:-

The greatest challenge for graduates in this new era will be to develop themselves to become employable. The new world of work requires new skills such as negotiating, networking, problem solving, and skills to manage process rather than functional skills (Harvey, Moon, & Geall, 2009). Employability is the propensity of graduates to secure a job and progress in their career, it is not just about getting a job, it is about developing attributes, techniques, or experience for life (Harvey, 2005: 13).

Universities are expected to function to contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training. University education is the core of the higher education. Universities are supposed to be social institutions which provide facilities for higher intellectual needs of a community as regards both academic knowledge and professional training. Therefore, it has to respond to the social aspirations for higher education and be responsive to social changes according to the Economic Review (1983). 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).

Corresponding Author:- T. Baskaran.

Address:- Department of Academic Affairs, Eastern University, Sri Lanka.

However, many students, who are fortunate to enter the universities, have to face numerous challenges especially at the end of the graduation in seeking suitable employments. The recent experience reveals that even talented graduates have to wait for a long time to be employed after the graduation.

This study is critical because unemployment rate is a key macroeconomic indicator, with low unemployment rate taken to indicate a healthy economy; unemployment represents a waste of resources since unused labour could be used to increase output growth. Within this context, this study focused on the employability of graduates of different faculties of Eastern University.

Methodology:-

Secondary data from the Examination branch of Eastern University was collected. Graduands from all four selected faculties of Eastern University were in the population.. Questionnaire survey was done among 207 graduates who had completed their degrees after 2011 from Eastern University to find out their employability. Discussions and telephone conversations with higher officials in government and private sectors was done to validate the study. Collected data was analysed through SPSS statistical software.

Results and Discussion:-

Response rates from different Faculties:-

The census of the graduands included four faculties viz., Agriculture, Commerce & Management, Health-Care Sciences and Science. As it could be seen from the table below, the response rates were pretty somewhat high (greater than 80%) among all faculties except Science. The highest response rate (96.3%) was from the faculty of Health care Sciences, while the lowest (26.3%) was from the faculty of Science.

Table 1:- Response rates from different Faculties.

Faculty	Number Graduated	Questionnaires Received	Response Rate
Agriculture	27	24	88.9%
Commerce & Management	96	81	84.3%
Health-Care Sciences	27	26	96.3%
Science	57	12	26.3%

Employment status by Faculty:-

The employment status of graduands were calculated and presented in the table below. If an employed graduand’s salary was less than Rs 10,000, then they were considered to be under employed. Percent employed was highest (92.6%) for the faculty of Health Care Sciences, while the lowest (70.6%) was for the Agriculture

Table 2:- Employment status by different Faculty.

Faculty	Employed	Under Employed	Unemployed	No response
Agriculture	70.6%	16.4%	13.0%	0.0%
Commerce & Management	87.4%	10.3%	2.3%	0.0%
Health-Care Sciences	92.6%	3.7%	3.7%	0.0%
Science	75.0%	8.3%	16.7%	0.0%

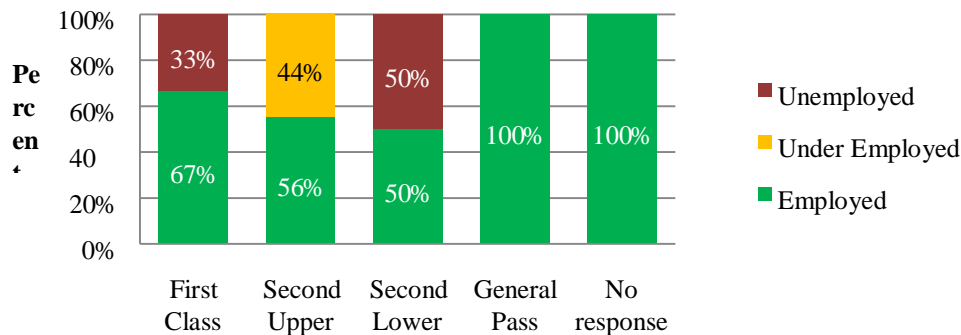


Figure 1:- Employment by Class Received in the faculty of Agriculture

Above figure gives the percent employment by the classes obtained for the Faculty of Agriculture. The graduands with second lowers were less likely to be employed than the others. All the general pass graduands were employed.

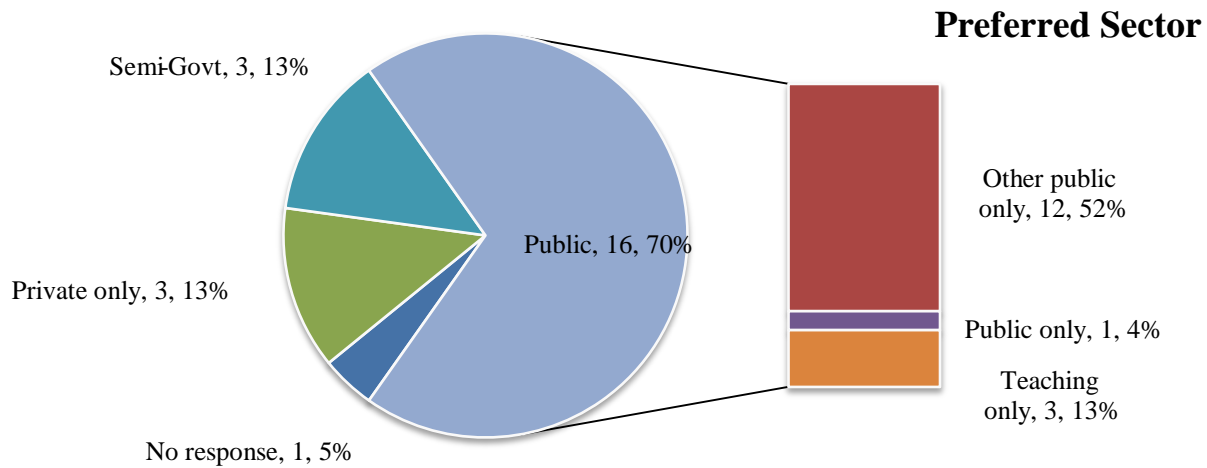


Figure 2:- Employment by preferred sector in the faculty of Agriculture.

The figure above gives the sector that the Agriculture graduands preferred to be employed in. Among the 23, majority of the graduands (70%) preferred to work only in the public sector, while 13% preferred to work in private sector. Furthermore, only 3% of the graduands indicated they preferred in semi government sector.

The Faculty of Commerce and management offers programmes leading to a four years undergraduate degree in Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA), Bachelor of Commerce (B. Com), and Bachelor of Economics (B. Econ). Only 6% of the graduands who got Second lower were underemployed in the faculty of Commerce and management and 18% with general pass were underemployed. The rest of the graduands from the faculty were employed.

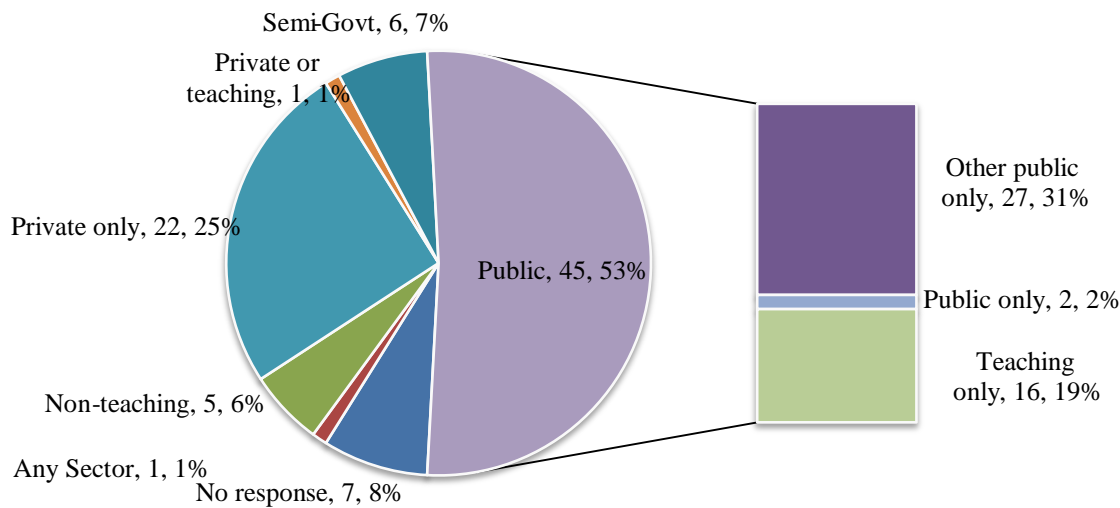


Figure 2:- Employment by preferred sector in the faculty of Commerce and management.

The figure above gives the sector that the graduands of The Faculty of Commerce and management preferred to be employed in. Among the respondents, majority of the graduands (53%) preferred to work only in the public sector, while 25% preferred to work in private sector. Furthermore, only 6.7% of the graduands indicated they preferred in semi government sector

The percent of males was slightly higher (59.3%) in the faculty than females in the faculty of Health care sciences. All of the graduands were Tamil. First classes were awarded only to 7.4% of the graduands. Majority

of the graduands (51.9%) were awarded second lowers while 11.1% of the graduands were awarded seconds uppers. Furthermore 29.6% of the graduands were not awarded a class. 92% percent of the graduands of the faculty of Health care sciences. were employed, while only 4% were under employed or unemployed. Majority (96%) of graduands from the faculty had attended a national school for their GCE A/L education, while only 4% had attended provincial schools.

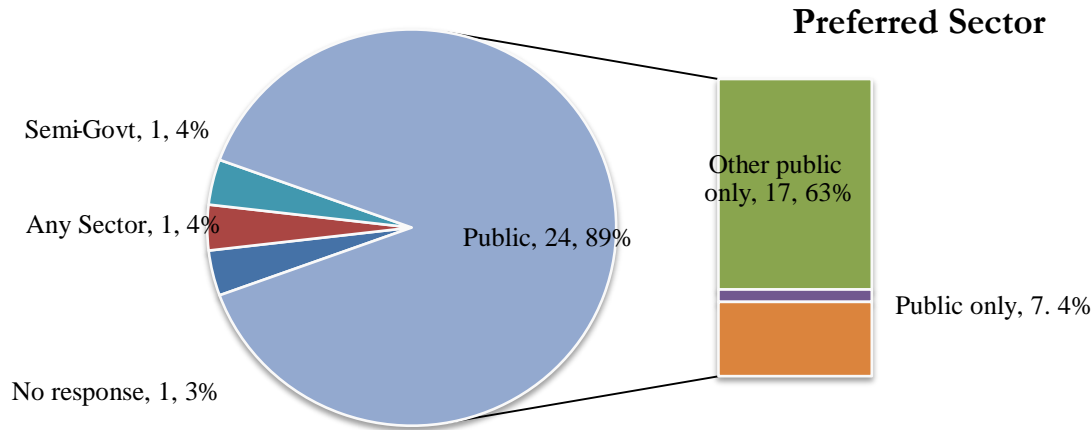


Figure 3:- Employment by preferred sector in the faculty of Healthcare sciences.

The figure above gives the sector that the graduands preferred to be employed in. Among the 27, majority of the graduands (89%) preferred to work only in the public sector, while none of the graduands preferred to work in private sector. Furthermore only one graduand indicated they preferred in any sector.

Two B.Sc. degree programmes based on course credit system were offered by the Faculty of Science, namely, general degree programme of three years duration and the special degree programme of four years duration.

Among the respondents 50% were male. Majority of the graduands (11, 92%) were Tamil and 1 was Muslim. Majority of the graduands (58.3%) were not awarded a class. While 25% were awarded second uppers, only 16.7% of the graduands were awarded seconds lowers. None of the respondents were obtained a first class. 75% of the Science graduands were employed, while only 8% were under employed and the rest were unemployed. While all the graduands from urban areas were employed, 67% of the rural graduands were employed. Among the respondents, majority of the graduands (92%) from the Faculty of Science, preferred to work only in the public sector; 58% teaching and 34% non-teaching. Furthermore, only one graduand indicated they preferred to work in semi government sector.

The median expected monthly salary of the graduands was between Rs. 30,000-40,000 for all the faculty graduands. High competition, Lack of government jobs, Lack of working experience, Lack of general knowledge, Degree type, age limit were some of the obstacles faced by the graduands of all the faculties to get the job.

Conclusion:-

The results of the study revealed that percent employed was highest (92.6%) for the faculty of Health Care Sciences, while the lowest (70.6%) was for the Agriculture. And the median expected monthly salary of the graduands was between Rs. 30,000-40,000 for all the faculty graduands. And the preference level for different sector varies from faculty to faculty. It is recommended that courses should be designed to face the current job market.

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