ABSTRACT

Tertiary education is not like secondary education because students have more opportunities to study while they are working somewhere as permanent or temporary workers. According to the foreign studies a higher level of employment can be seen among the undergraduates of foreign countries. Sri Lankan educational context is different from the educational context of certain other foreign countries. The major higher education provider in Sri Lanka is state conventional universities. This study focuses on finding out the willingness of undergraduates for employment in government, private or self-employment sectors and the nature of undergraduates’ employment according to their family income as well as the obstacles faced by them. As a whole undergraduates employment level was very low. Sri Lankan undergraduates prefer to work in the private sector. The major obstacles faced by the undergraduates with regard to their job expectations are the lack of knowledge of English. Students’ family monthly income was not an important factor for one to be engaged in employment. A significant amount of students were employed in the private sector. They worked as clerks, cashiers and teachers in permanent employments and Individual or group private tuition classes were the major forms of temporary employment among them. The university career guidance unit should play a major role in meeting the students’ needs with regard to their job expectations.

Keywords: Employment; Sri Lankan; Conventional University; Undergraduates

INTRODUCTION

Everybody in the world should do something to live and earn money. The majority go for trade training programmes or employment (government / private / self employment) soon after completing their secondary education, if they were unable to go for the higher education (tertiary education). Tertiary education is unlike secondary education since students have more opportunities to study while they are working somewhere as a permanent or a temporary worker. Even though undergraduates do not work while they are studying in the higher educational institutions, they have to find a job or some other way to earn money. According to foreign studies a higher level of employment can be seen among the undergraduates of foreign countries. Even though it is difficult to work while pursuing studies in a higher educational institution this will be a good experience for them to find a good employment opportunity in the future. In addition to that they will be able to find their own expenses other than depend on somebody else.

Sri Lankan educational context is different from that of certain other foreign countries in the context of education. The state conventional universities are the major higher education provider in Sri Lanka. In these universities free education is implemented (only up to undergraduate level). Moreover many Sri Lankan undergraduates are given scholarships such as Mahapola or Bursary by the government. In addition to this most of them are given financial support by their parents/relations. As such it seems that our undergraduates do not try to engage in an employment even though they come form low income families. The context of the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) is differing from the
conventional universities. Even though OUSL is a government university, undergraduates have to pay for their programmes while a considerable number of students are employed. In addition to this numerous foreign affiliated private higher educational institutions also involved among the higher education providers. This research focuses on conventional state universities as they still are the major higher education providers in the Sri Lanka.

The government of Sri Lanka provides a lot of job opportunities to graduates annually. In addition to this private sector also provides a considerable amount of job opportunities. Furthermore it seems that graduates are not willing to take to self employment. As such it is important to inquire into the undergraduates’ willingness to be employed in the above categories and reasons for same. It seems that most graduates had no adequate skills and competencies to be employed in most reputed forms of employment. Therefore it is very important for one to have working experiences as an undergraduate.

It is difficult to find research on undergraduates’ employment in Sri Lanka. Hence it is important to look at the undergraduates’ employment, Faculty- wise as well as whether they are employment in a permanent or a temporary position. Based on this information undergraduates can be directed for better employment opportunities.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This section is devoted to the review of relevant literature. The review indicated that there were a limited number of studies conducted in Sri Lanka with regard to the undergraduates employment. Nevertheless many researches were conducted abroad related to this study. It has provided an insight to the development and completion of the present study successfully.

A study was conducted by Cornnor et al, in 2001 among the undergraduates in England. It focused on their social classes, higher education issues and how these factors effected the participation in higher education of the low social class groups. It has given special attention to the issues raised with regard to the low participation in higher education of low social class groups. One of the findings of the research was around half of the full-time students who came from low social class backgrounds employed in part time jobs. Furthermore it mentioned that they work nearly 13 to 14 hours a week. Another longitudinal study was conducted by the Bozick (2007) with regard to the post secondary students’ paid work, work experiences and living arrangements in the first year of their college. This research revealed that students who came from low-income families were more likely to work to cover their education related expenses. Some students worked around 20 hours a week. Furthermore it was revealed that the drop out was higher in the students who worked more than 20 hours a week and stayed at home than among the students who work 20 hours or less a per week and stayed at the campus.

It is clear that students who came from low social class families were more likely to be employed while learning in higher educational institutions. Employment could be a reason for the students’ drop out from their higher educational institutions. Ismail, 1997 conducted a research focusing on the drop-out undergraduates of the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL). According to Ismail there were three factors for the drop-out of the OUSL students from their programmes. Namely institutional factors, home and working environment were these three. Hence the working environment was one of the factors which influenced student drop-out.

Taylor, (2007) conducted a study with regard to the sciences and engineering students with special attention on life sciences students. The study was focuses on the students’ willingness regarding the type of work and salary expectations as well as how far they match with that of the real job market. The study was revealed that, students were willing to work in a variety of institutional settings upon graduation. The salary expectation of the undergraduates was similar to the salary of new graduates in the job market. In addition to this racial and gender differences also influenced workplace preferences and salary expectations. Another study conducted by the Letkiewiez based on the Ohio students’ financial well being survey in 2010. Study revealed that 25% of students planned to take their first degree spending more than four years. Furthermore the college environment and personal financial
characteristics were identified as the factors in determining time to degree. It showed the importance of having financial counseling for the students who faced financial difficulties. According to the above findings basically undergraduates were compelled to find a job due to the financial factors. In addition to this they were benefited by other ways also. According to the Passaretta and Triventi (2015) in some Europien countries especially in Spain, work activities during tertiary education are associated with better labour market positions after graduation Furthermore they mention that any type of work experience increases employability and reduces the risk of unemployment.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To find out the undergraduates‘ willingness for employment in government, private or self employment sectors,
2. To identify the obstacles faced by the undergraduates with regard to their employment expectation
3. To find out the types of undergraduates employment,
4. To find out Faculty-wise undergraduates‘ permanent and temporary employment
5. To investigate the relationship of undergraduates‘ employment and their monthly family income

METHODOLOGY

Survey design was the research methodology of this research. The population was the undergraduates of conventional Sri Lankan state universities. The sample was selected using the stratified random sampling method. Three Faculties of three universities, namely University of Kelaniya - Faculty of Arts, University of Moratuwa- Faculty of Engineering and University of Sri Jayewardhanapura – Faculty of Management. Two hundred students were selected form each Faculty (n=600) and data were collected from them using a questionnaire. Twenty students were interviewed form each Faculty (n=60). The interview was designed as a structured interview. Quantitative data were tabulated and percentages were calculated and descriptive data analyzing method also used accordingly.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tables 1 and 2 below were prepared according to the data was collected through the questionnaires. These data were tabulated and percentages were calculated for easy use in this study.

Table 1. Job expected sectors and obstacle factors to them for the Engineering, Management and Arts Faculty undergraduates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculties</th>
<th>Job expected sectors</th>
<th>Obstacle factors for the job expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering Percentage</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Percentage</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts Percentage</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to table No. 01, a majority of management (80%) and engineering (62%) Faculty undergraduates expected to work in the private sector while a majority of arts Faculty (84%) undergraduates expected to work in the government sector. Even though as a whole a majority of undergraduates (from all the three Faculties) expected to work in the private sector (71%). A few undergraduates (2%) expected to work in self employments from all the three Faculties. It is clear that a majority of Sri Lankan undergraduates are expecting to work in the private sector and they have little interest in self employment.
Through the interviews reasons could for the job expectations of undergraduates. Undergraduates who expected private sector jobs said that with a high salary a capable person could move forward/higher position, with little or no political interference, greater opportunity from training and learning with regard to the relevant field and other benefits (medical, vehicle and fuel or transport facilities). Undergraduates who expected to work in the government sector stated that, job security and reputation, pension scheme and minimum tension were the major reasons to expect a job in the government sector.

The questionnaire found out about the obstacles faced by the undergraduates with regard to their job expectation. The major obstacle faced by the management (80%) and arts (56%) Faculty undergraduates were lack of English. In addition to this lack of trade training also was an obstacle, 28% of the undergraduates from all three faculties faced this obstacle. Under the other obstacle the undergraduates mentioned that: parents’ expectations (did not match undergraduate expectations), inability to fulfill the required qualifications (to do a special degree/ select degree programme or subjects) and they did not have sufficient money to peruse extra courses related to their job expectations other than the degree programme.

According to table No.02, employments of the undergraduates’ were divided into two sections as permanent and temporary. Data was presented according to the Faculties as well as under the undergraduates’ monthly family income levels. So that it would be is easy to understand the relationship between monthly family income and employment of undergraduates. According to the above table, employments of the undergraduates’ of all three Faculties were of a low level in both sections permanent and temporary.

Table 2. Faculty-wise Permanent and temporary employment of Sri Lankan undergraduates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monthly income Rs.</th>
<th>Faculty of Engineering</th>
<th>Faculty of Management</th>
<th>Faculty of Arts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Temporary Jobs</td>
<td>Permanent Jobs</td>
<td>Temporary Jobs</td>
<td>Permanent Jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5000 - 9999</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10000 - 14999</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15000 - 29999</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30000 - 49999</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50000 - 79999</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80000 - 99999</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100000 - 199999</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200000 &lt;</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A majority among the employed (9%) undergraduates of the Faculty of Engineering worked as permanent employees while 1% of them worked in temporary employees. Only 10% of undergraduates were employed from the Faculty of Engineering. Four percent of undergraduates’ monthly family income was less than Rs.50,000/= and 6% of students’ monthly family income was more than Rs. 50,000/= among the employed of the Faculty of Engineering.

Employment among the undergraduates of the Faculty of Management was of a low level (6%). Among the employed only 3% was engaged in temporary employment. Their monthly family income was less than Rs. 30,000=/. There were only 3% of undergraduates who were engaged in permanent employment and their family monthly income level was over Rs. 100,000=/. Only 6% of the undergraduates were employed from the Faculty of Arts. Only 2% of undergraduates were engaged in temporary employments while 4% of them was engaged in permanent employment. Only 1% of the undergraduates engaged in an employment had a family monthly income of less than Rs.50,000/= and the rest of the employments (5%) family monthly income was more than Rs. 50,000=/.
among the Arts Faculty undergraduates. It is clear that the majority among the employments of the Faculty of Arts did not belong to the low income families.

The data were collected through the questionnaires were proven by the interview data. In addition to this the type of employments was found out through the interviews. Undergraduates’ major form of temporary employment was conducting tuitions classes for individuals or groups of undergraduates and as research assistants for data collection for research institutions or organizations. Especially in the private sector jobs like clerks, cashiers and teachers were identified as undergraduates’ permanent employments. Furthermore undergraduates said that it was really difficult to do a permanent job while leaning as they need 80% attendance to sit exams. And also as they need more time to write assignments and to do practical tests/exercises.

CONCLUSION

Sri Lankan undergraduates prefer to work in the private sector even though the undergraduates who studied at the arts Faculty prefer to work in the government sector. As a whole, Sri Lankan undergraduates are not interested in self employment. The major obstacle faced by undergraduates with regard to their job expectations was the lack of English and the lack of trade training also recognized as an obstacle.

Sri Lankan undergraduates were employed in permanent jobs other than temporary jobs. As a whole, undergraduates’ employment level was very low. Students’ monthly family income was not an important factor to be engaged in some form of employment. A significant number of undergraduates were employed in the private sector. They worked as clerks, cashiers and teachers in permanent employments and conducted individual or group private tuition classes as the major temporary form of employment among them.

SUGGESSIONS

Career guidance units of the universities need to have a proper mechanism to identify undergraduates’ job expectations and directed them to the correct path. Need surveys, counseling sessions, seminars can be used for this.

It is difficult to do a permanent job while learning in a university as an undergraduate. But undergraduates can be engaged in a temporary job, not only to earn money but also to gain experience which they need in their future. The university should take necessary measures to motivate and direct their undergraduates towards temporary jobs. For instance, undergraduates can be directed for temporary jobs as a practical part of a subject.

The university career guidance unit should provide necessary information to their undergraduates about suitable temporary job opportunities. In addition to that it should find the job opportunities and play role of the coordinator between undergraduates and employers.

REFERENCE


