

Determinants of Graduates' Employability in Sri Lanka: How can the Employability of Graduates be Increased?

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In Sri Lanka, current education sector, particularly the higher education sector faces critical situation with regard to the employability of graduates. Unemployed and underemployed graduates have been widely criticized in the higher education sector. This situation is more serious in case of some graduates, particularly in the field of social sciences.

This paper discusses key factors that influence graduates' employability. Main objective of this study is to identify the expected requirements of graduates in the job market. Discussions with managers in government sector, private sector and non-government organizations, interviews with recently passed out graduates and examining newspaper advertisements regarding jobs for graduates were used as methods of primary data collection. Research reports of the University Grants Commission, other institutions etc are mainly used as secondary data sources.

It is argued that the degree programmes have been confined to conventional subject areas and conventional teaching-learning methods. Furthermore, the graduates' incompetence is the fact that makes graduates less attractive. Also, without having a proper sense of the needs and wants of the job market, mere producing of graduates has intensified the problem. In a fast dynamic and globalized society, having only paper qualifications, which is highly limited to theoretical knowledge, is not adequate.

Private sector, NGOs and even public sector are more concerned on skills and attitudes rather than knowledge possessed by graduates. This study identified that the graduates' practical knowledge, analytical ability, dedication to work, communication and IT skills, management skills and positive attitudes are among the highly concerned factors of the employers. Yet, study programmes are still paying more attention on knowledge components. In fact, changing attitudes and developing skills, which are highly needed, have become great challenges.

Key words: Higher education; Graduates; Employability; Job market

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