

# Resources File

The readings for this module appear in the following order below:

- 1 Gunawardena, G., et al. 2002 'Employment of university graduates in Sri Lanka: the demand-supply nexus.' *Annual Academic Sessions 2002: Abstracts*, Nugegoda: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, The Open University of Sri Lanka (extract pp 1-11)
- 2 Bell, J. 1999 *Doing your own research project*, Buckingham: Open University (extract pp 92-95)

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## INDIVIDUAL PROPOSALS

### PROJECT 01

**Title of the Project:**

Employment of University Graduates in Sri Lanka: The Demand -  
Supply Nexus

**Applying University:**

Open University of Sri Lanka  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

**Project Coordinator and Principal Investigator:**

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**Co-operating Institution:**

Details are being arranged with the faculty of Education of University of Stockholm. (Details are given in page 06)

## Proposal to Establish a Research Fund (SIDA)

### Research Team and Responsibilities

<i>Member</i>	<i>Functions and time allocations</i>
<b>Prof. G.I.C.Gunawardena</b> Senior Professor of Education Principal Investigator Project coordinator	20 % of full-time work (approximately 08 hours a day) available for planning, training, supervision and coordination of activities and writing the report
<b>Mr. Upali Vidanapathirana</b> Dean/ Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Team member	10% of full-time work (approximately 04 hours a day) available for planning, training and supervision of activities
<b>Dr. N.G.Kularatne</b> Senior Lecturer, Gr. I Team member	10% of full-time work (approximately 04 hours a day) available for planning, training and supervision of activities
<b>Dr. H.V.M.Ratwatte</b> Senior Lecturer, Gr. II Head/ Dept. of Language Studies Team member	10% of full-time work (approximately 04 hours a day) available for planning, training and supervision activities

### Abstract:

The study seeks to investigate the factors affecting graduate employment in Sri Lanka in order to determine whether 'mismatch' between education and employment exists or whether a process of 'achievement suppression' is operating in Sri Lanka. The study will examine the background characteristics, the recruitment of university and secondary school graduates, their conditions of service, and performance on the job from employers in 200 organizations.

The research will identify manner in which the background characteristics such as gender, socio-economic status, etc. influence the development of attributes desired by employers and examine the education-employment relationship from both equity and quality perspectives.

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The study will contribute to the growing body of literature in the area and also provide insights to government policy makers, educational planners and employers on reform of policies on university education, economic planning, employment generation and recruitment to employment.

#### **Rationale:**

##### ***Background***

For more than half a century, Sri Lanka showed a great commitment to education. Education was espoused for its supposed potentialities to achieve social justice and social efficiency (Govt. of Sri Lanka, 1943). Progressive policies implemented since the 1940s such as free education up to university level, the change over to the mother tongue as the medium of instruction, the ' expansion of the education system and incentives such as scholarships, free textbooks and free mid-day meals have effected a widening of access to education. More recently, on several occasions, education was reformed with the aim of improving its capability to 'contribute to the solutions in a rapidly and a continually changing society.

As rising expectations of social mobility centered around education, more university places were created by establishing new universities and new campuses and by increasing the intake. Despite these measures, the percentage of the age group that gains entry to university education is restricted to a mere 2 per cent.

In late 1980s, social unrest led to a closure of universities for prolonged periods resulting in delays in university admissions. The prevalence of the war in the North and the East also had adverse consequences on resourcing of universities and as a consequence, the quality of university education has also deteriorated rapidly. Those who are selected for university have long periods' of waiting to commence their studies as well as similar long periods of waiting after graduation to obtain employment.

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The insufficiency of places at the top rung of the educational ladder and the deteriorating quality of university education, have in recent times led to the emergence of an alternative structure of private higher education, parallel to state higher education. This move has been facilitated by the acceptance of open economic policies that permitted educational institutions to be established as BOI (Board of Investment) companies and the welcome extended to foreign investment in Sri Lanka. Restriction of funding of universities in developed countries such as United Kingdom and Australia also has enabled private higher education institutions to establish links with recognized foreign universities and thus offer more valued degrees than those offered by Sri Lankan state universities.

Parallel to the above developments in higher education, free market policies had a significant impact on recruitment of graduates for employment. The public sector which had absorbed the majority of university graduates in the past had shrunk to 21.5 per cent in 1990 and to 13.6 per cent in 2000. A large number of small scale business enterprises have sprung up, especially in the garments industry, which recruit graduates at executive level but it is doubtful whether a significant expansion in numbers recruited has occurred.

In the private sector, often described as the engine of growth, English is emerging as the *de facto* language used in spite of *Sinhala* and *Tamil* being continued as the media of instruction up to university level. Surveys of employers of university graduates have led to consistent findings: employers look for more than mere educational credentials. They expect an education in the broader sense, where learning is not limited to sheer book learning but entails the development of higher cognitive abilities and applicable transferable skills and personal development in which competency in English language is a prime tool. There is a widespread belief that selection for employment is not purely governed by objective criteria described above but is also influenced by family or personal contacts which is considered as closely related to the commitment of an employee to the organization. Moreover, concern is being expressed about a discernible shift from university graduate level to secondary level recruits for employment in the private sector, the justification given being the ease with which the latter can be molded to fit in with the organization's needs.

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**Review of Pertinent Literature**

Numerous studies have probed into the effect of education on social mobility. They have shown how as greater democratization of education occurs, particularistic criteria are given priority over educational achievement. Thus consideration of such criteria as kinship or friendship (Hallak and Calloids, 1980), institutional links (Dore, 1977), political affiliation (Finlay et al, 1968; Gunawardena, 1980) or caste (Hommes and Trivedi, 1970) tends to reduce the effect of educational achievement on occupational status. In Sri Lanka, gender has often been cited as a factor-causing disadvantage in obtaining employment (SLFUW, 1980 and Jayaweera and Sanmugam, 2001). Nan and Yauger (1975) referred to this phenomenon as *achievement suppression*.

Achievement suppression can also occur when additional criteria are incorporated into the selection mechanisms. Employers normally use characteristics of schooling such as length of schooling and examination grades as proxy indicators of productivity. However, in situations where a stagnant economy lacks the ability to absorb larger contingents of school or university graduates who have acquired educational credentials, employers tend to look for additional skills and competencies to fill the few vacancies that exist (Gunawardena, 1993).

Other interpretations of the emerging relationship between education and employment were also being put forward during this time. The mismatch between education and employment was put forward first by Dudley Seers in 1971. The Seers report (ILO, 1971) on Matching Education to Employment argued that unemployment among the educated had partly resulted from their high aspirations on entering white-collar employment and a desire for academic education. Subsequent studies (World Bank, 1991) on employer expectations indicate that employers were critical of the quality of the products of Sri Lankan secondary schools and universities. Gunawardena's study (1991) showed that employers listed communication skills, personality, interpersonal skills and general transferable skills such as adaptability, decision-making ability and organizational skills as important requirements from university graduates, which graduates lacked. These findings are confirmed by Vidanapathirana (1997).

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A recent survey (Chamber of Commerce, 1999) also identified more or less the same attributes as the earlier studies. Additional attributes mentioned were the ability to head a team and achieve results in a short period, ability to prioritize/organize time productively, an open, positive, practical mind set, willingness to learn from a cross-section of people, general knowledge including world affairs, wide interests and dress sense, personal grooming and business etiquette. Specific mention is made of private business owners and managers who have difficulty in employing young graduates due to the latter's low English proficiency, inadequate practical experience and very often negative attitudes to work Lakshman (2001) also affirmed that a mismatch exists (a) between existing labour skills and the needs of the employers as well as (b) between aspirations of those waiting for jobs and employment opportunities that are available.

Vidanapathirana (2001) however argues that more than deficiencies that occur in the quality of the graduates produced by the Universities (the supply), the basic problem lies in the demand sector, in the stagnant economy which does not create a demand for highly educated manpower.

#### **Outcomes of the Study**

The study would make a significant contribution to the existing knowledge on the interface between education and employment in this country. It will lead to a better understanding among the stakeholders (state, employers and university educators) of the interplay of different forces that operate in the employment market and enable them to make informed policy decisions regarding educational reform, recruitment procedures and expansion of employment opportunities.

#### **Capacity Objectives**

The project envisages using the services of several junior academics from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences as research assistants for the study. The project will contribute to the capacity building of these academics through development of their research

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skills in interviewing, analysis and interpretation data and also by enhancing their motivation for research by collaboration with senior researchers. As a result of collaboration with Swedish universities, it is expected to provide the junior academics with the much-needed exposure to a research culture.

### Research Objectives

The research objectives are specified in the form of research questions.

1. How many university graduates on an average per year have been recruited by different organizations during the period of last five years? How does this number compare with the number of secondary school graduates recruited by each of these organizations?
2. What is the profile of these recruits- university graduates and secondary school graduates in respect of:
  - (i) University/higher education Institutes/ School attended?
  - (ii) Field of study
  - (iii) Competency in English language
  - (iv) Socio-economic background
  - (v) Gender
3. What is the evaluation of employers on the quality of these recruits university and secondary school graduates regarding their
  - (i) Commitment to the organization in terms of period of service, work attitudes, inter-personal skills etc.
  - (ii) Competency to produce the desired output related to work norms
4. What are the inducements given to these new recruits within the organization since joining, such as



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- (i) Pay rises, and other perquisites,
- (ii) Promotions and
- (iii) Access to foreign and local training, new experiences etc.

### Framework of Analysis

The study will examine the applicability of three main theoretical perspectives related to the education-employment relationship: *Human Capital Theory* which postulates that investment in education leads to economic advancement both for individuals and society; *Mismatch Theory* which argues that unemployability is a direct result of the lack of desirable attributes in the employees; and the *Reproduction Theory* which explains inequity in relation to outcomes in education as a result of the operation of extraneous factors other than education, which factors suppress achievement.

The review of existing pertinent literature and the analysis of the situation prevailing in the employment market in Sri Lanka leads us to hypothesize that the theory which is most applicable to the Sri Lanka situation is the Reproduction Theory and not the other two theories.

### Expected Results

1. It is expected that the study would arrive at significant findings which will demonstrate a clearer understanding of the education-employment relationship as operating in Sri Lanka.
2. These findings can be communicated to employer associations such as the Chambers of commerce to re-examine their recruitment policies in the light of the findings.
  - (i) The findings can indicate to the university authorities the areas of reform that are imperative in curricula and teaching methodology and for improving the quality of higher education.
  - (ii) The findings can be communicated to university students at counselling to

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indicate to them the expectations of employers.

- (iii) The findings can be used by national level planners in devising economic and employment planning to articulate education to employment effectively.

## **Methodology**

### *Sample*

As this study would effectively complement the study undertaken by the Marga Institute for the World Bank in 1991 (Gunawardena, 1991), it is envisaged to include the organizations (93 in number) in the original study. The 93 employers interviewed for the earlier study was drawn from among 25 public sector organizations, 25 semi-government organizations and 50 private sector organizations. An additional sample of 100 small business enterprises will also be included in the sample. It is expected that these employers would extend their cooperation for the proposed study also. Any who request to be left out would be substituted by new organizations from the same sector.

A purposive sample of approximately 500 employees employed in these organizations will be selected for the interview sample.

### *Methods of Data Collection and Analysis*

The major method used for data collection would be interviews, using a semi-structured interview schedule focusing on the research questions outlined above. Where necessary, relevant documents pertaining to employment will be perused.

As the research data is primarily qualitative, methods of analyzing qualitative data such as using the *ethnograph* will be used. Additionally, frequencies and cross-tabulations will be used to bring out variations that occur in recruitment practices of employers from different types of organizations and their perceptions, requirements and evaluations.

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**Time Frame**

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Time Frame</i>
i. Planning Sessions	January 2003
ii. Inception Seminar	February 2003
ii. Development of Instruments, Piloting and Finalization	February-March, 2003
iv. Interviews with HRM Directors	March-July, 2003
v. Focus group discussions with employees	August, 2003
vi. Data Analysis	September- October, 2003
vii. Interim Seminar	December, 2003
viii. Submission of the Final Report	January, 2004

**Budget - 2003***Applying Institution*

<i>Fieldwork Costs</i>	<i>Local SEK</i>
1. Minor Equipment	3,000
2. Consumables	6,000
3. Allowances	53,500
4. Travel	20,000
5. Unforeseen	7,500
Subtotal	90,000

*Cooperating Institution*

<i>Fieldwork Costs</i>	<i>Local SEK</i>
1. Minor equipment	9,000
2. Consumables	3,500
3. Travel	25,000
4. Salaries	15,000
5. Overheads	7,500
Sub-total	60,000
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>150,000</b>

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### **Gender Considerations**

The research team is very much gender sensitive and will ensure that gender equity is maintained in selecting the senior as well as the junior researchers. In fact, the effect of gender on employment opportunities is one of the characteristics that is being studied.

### **Environmental Considerations**

The research study will not have any adverse environmental effects.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The subjects for the study are all persons with a considerable level of education who understand the value of research and the positive impact the study can have on future development of the country. The objectives of the study will be clearly explained to them before getting their concurrence for participation. They will also be assured that the information obtained from them will be treated with utmost confidentiality. As the research team consists of senior researchers with long experience in undertaking research, no problems in this regard are envisaged.

### **Risk Analysis**

The only risk factor, which can be foreseen at this juncture, is the inability of one or more team members to participate in the study due to some unavoidable circumstance. Even this factor would not have a significant bearing on the conduct of the study as the research team has worked on the proposal as a team and have sufficient experience. It is possible in such an event, to invite another research from the Faculty to substitute him/her.

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in which you may be able to draw on the work of other researchers to support or refute your own arguments and conclusions.

### The critical review of the literature

An extensive study of the literature will be required in most cases for a PhD and a critical review of what has been written on the topic produced in the final thesis. A project lasting two or three months will not require anything so ambitious. You may decide to omit an initial review altogether if your reading has not been sufficiently extensive to warrant its inclusion, but if you decide to produce a review, it is important to remember that only relevant works are mentioned and that the review is more than a list of what I have read.

Writing literature reviews can be a demanding exercise. Haywood and Wragg comment wryly that critical reviews are more often than not uncritical reviews — what they describe as

the furniture sale catalogue, in which everything merits a one-paragraph entry no matter how skilfully it has been conducted: Bloggs (1975) found this, Smith (1976) found that, Jones (1977) found the other, Bloggs, Smith and Jones (1978) found happiness in heaven.

(Haywood and Wragg 1982: 2)

Blaxter *et al.* (1996b: 115) provide us with useful reminders about the uses and abuses of references. They suggest that you should use references to:

- justify and support your arguments;
- allow you to make comparisons with other research;
- express matters better than you could have done;
- demonstrate your familiarity with your field of research.

They also suggest that you should not use references to:

- impress your readers with the scope of your reading;
- litter your writing with names and quotations;

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- replace the need for you to express your own thoughts;
- misrepresent other authors.

(Blaxter *et al.* 1996b: 115)

It requires discipline to produce a critical review which demonstrates 'that the writer has studied existing work in the field with insight' (Haywood and Wragg 1982: 2), but the main point to bear in mind is that a review should provide the reader with a picture, albeit limited in a short project, of the state of knowledge and of major questions in the subject area being investigated.

Consider the following introduction to a study by Alan Wood-ley (1985) entitled 'Taking account of mature students'. You may not be familiar with this field of study, but does the introduction put you in the picture? Does it give you some idea of the work that has been done already and does it prepare you for what is to follow?

Of the many who have looked at the relationship between age and performance in universities none has as yet produced a definite answer to the apparently simple question 'Do mature students do better or worse than younger students?'

Harris (1940) in the United States found evidence to suggest that younger students tended to obtain better degree results. Similar findings have been made in Britain by Malleon (1959), Howell (1962), Barnett and Lewis (1963), McCracken (1969) and Kapur (1972), in Australia by Flecker (1959) and Sanders (1961), in Canada by Fleming (1959), and in New Zealand by Small (1966). However, most of these studies were based on samples of students who were generally aged between seventeen and twenty-one and the correlation techniques employed meant that the relationships between age and performance really only concerned this narrow age band. As such, the results probably suggest that bright children admitted early to higher education fare better than those whose entry is delayed while they gain the necessary qualifications. This view is supported by Harris (1940) who discovered that the relationship between age and performance disappeared when he controlled for intelligence. Other studies have shown that those who gain the necessary

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qualifications and then delay entry for a year or two are more successful than those who enter directly from school (Thomas, Beeby and Oram 1939; Derbyshire Education Committee 1966).

Where studies have involved samples containing large numbers of older students the results have indicated that the relationship between age and performance is not a linear one. Philips and Cullen (1955), for instance, found that those aged twenty-four and over tended to do better than the eighteen and nineteen-year-old age group. Sanders (1961) showed that the university success rate fell until the age of twenty or twenty-one, then from about twenty-two onwards the success rate began to rise again. The problem with these two studies is that many of the older students were returning servicemen. They were often 'normal' entrants whose entry to university had been delayed by war and many had undergone some training in science or mathematics while in the armed forces. Also, while Eaton (1980) cites nine American studies which confirm the academic superiority of veterans, there is some contradictory British evidence. Mounford (1957) found that ex-service students who entered Liverpool University between 1947 and 1949 were more likely to have to spend an extra year or more on their courses and more likely to fail to complete their course.

Some studies have shown that whether mature students fare better or worse than younger students depends upon the subject being studied. Sanders (1963) has indicated that the maturity associated with increasing age and experience seems to be a positive predictor of success for some arts and social science courses. The general finding that older students do better in arts and social science and worse in science and maths is supported by Flecker (1959), Barnett, Holder and Lewis (1968), Fagin (1971) and Sharon (1971).

Walker's (1975) study of mature students at Warwick University represents the best British attempt to unravel the relationship between age and performance. He took 240 mature undergraduates who were admitted to the university between 1965 and 1971 and compared their progress with that of all undergraduates. This gave him a reasonably large

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sample to work with and the timing meant that the results were not distorted by any returning servicemen factor. His methodology showed certain other refinements. First, he excluded overseas students. Such students tend to be older than average and also to fare worse academically (Woodley 1979), thus influencing any age/performance relationship. Secondly, he used two measures of performance; the proportion leaving without obtaining a degree and the degree results of those taking final examinations. Finally he weighted the degree class obtained according to its rarity value in each faculty.

The following findings achieved statistical significance:

- (i) In total, mature students obtained better degrees than non-mature students.
- (ii) In the arts faculty mature students obtained better degrees than non-mature students.
- (iii) Mature students who did not satisfy the general entrance requirements obtained better degrees than all other students.
- (iv) The degree results of mature students aged twenty-six to thirty were better than those of all other mature students.

Several other differences were noted but they did not achieve statistical significance due to the small numbers involved. The mature student sample only contained thirty-three women, twenty-six science students and thirty-seven aged over thirty. The aim of the present study was to extend Walker's work to all British universities so that these and other relationships could be tested out on a much larger sample of mature students.

(Woodley 1985: 152-4)

This review is more thorough than would normally be required for small projects, but the approach is much the same, whatever the exercise. Alan Woodley selects from the extensive amount of literature relating to mature students. He groups certain categories and comments on features which are of particular interest. He