

# CONTRIBUTION OF FACULTY OF COMMERCE AND MANAGEMENT, EASTERN UNIVERSITY, SRI LANKA TOWARD THE ENHANCEMENT OF GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY

*Thiruchelvi.J<sup>1</sup> Victor.L.D<sup>1</sup> and Andrew.A<sup>1</sup>*

## ABSTRACT

There is a growing awareness in Sri Lanka of the importance of higher education in providing the innovation and creativity for the development of a knowledge-based economy in an increasingly competitive global market. Both higher education and the graduate labour market are changing rapidly. The student intake is becoming more diverse, in age, background, previous educational experience and interests and ambitions, although the government's effort to broaden the social base of the undergraduate population has recently been characterized as a limited success.

Increasingly, widening participation issues have moved forward through the student experience from access, to support and retention to successful completion and towards job acquisition. Meanwhile, the emphasis of employability has shifted from job-market intelligence and job-getting techniques to developing a range of attributes through the learning process, with some institutions taking a holistic strategic approach. There is a growing emphasis on enabling students and empowering them to take advantage of their educational experience.

The Faculty of Commerce and Management Eastern University Sri Lanka offers programmes designed to provide students with a sound understanding of the functions of Business and their inter-relationships. This study aims to find "How far the courses offered by the Faculty of Commerce and Management, Eastern University Sri Lanka enhance graduate employability". The study tends to find out the extent of training, IT and language development, transferable skills and course structure.

The results show that the Contribution of the faculty of Commerce and Management, Eastern University, Sri Lanka to enhancement the Graduate Employability" is in moderate level.

**Key words:** Training, IT and language development, Transferable skills and Course structure

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Faculty of Commerce and Management consists of three major departments, namely, Department of Management, Department of Commerce, and Department of Economics. Each departments of the faculty has specialized in relevant disciplines to provide various specialized study programmes. The faculty offers several courses of study in the field of Business Administration, Commerce and Economics. At present, the faculty conducts six programmes<sup>1</sup>.

The Faculty of Commerce and Management (FCM) offers courses to students to have a sound understanding of the functions of Business and their inter-relationships. All businesses and economic activities, whether in the private or public sector, utilize the functions to plan, organize, administer, control, produce market and distribute goods and services. As

corporations grow larger and more complex, as government regulations become more pervasive and national and international firms compete for markets, the principles and techniques in business become more critical for success. The FCM strives to develop in its students an understanding of modern businesses necessary competencies including an awareness of emerging business opportunities, and the constraints within those opportunities. It requires students to apply the analytical skills developed in the study of general education to a real business situation.

## 2. IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM

Nowadays unemployment problem is a serious issue in Sri Lanka. Another problem is unsatisfactory level

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<sup>1</sup> Marketing, Human Resource Management, Enterprise Development, Accountancy & Finance, Business Economics, Development Economics

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Management, Faculty of Commerce and Management, Eastern University, Sri Lanka. (jthiruchelvi@yahoo.com; vldila@yahoo.com; andrewsa1965@yahoo.com.au)

of skills of graduates. Based on these following research questions are arise to be answered from this study.

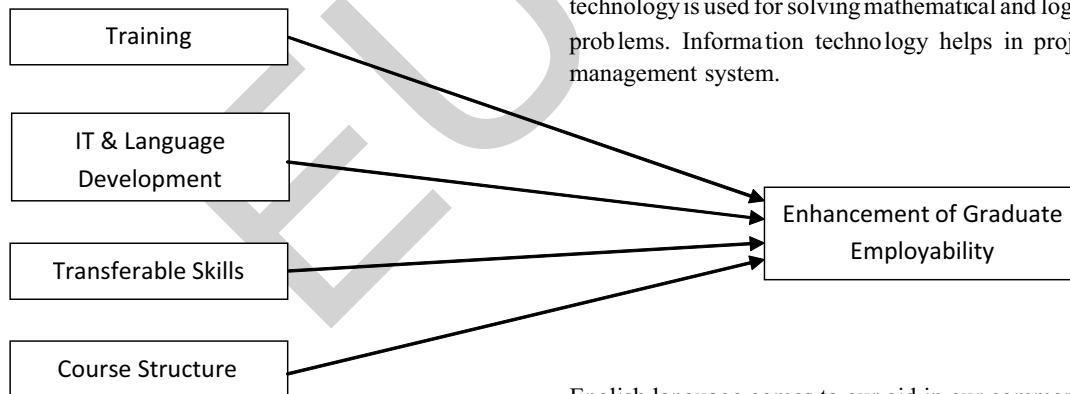
- To what extent FCM contributes to enhance of graduate employability?
- In which areas they need more attention?
- How the FCM help to undergraduates to enhance their employability opportunities?
- What are the actions needed to be taken by FCM as well as students to enhance their skills.

### 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- Identify the level of contribution of FCM toward the enhancement of graduate employability. That is the main objective for this study.
- Secondary objective is to find constrains and to recommend some solutions to the faculty as well as to students to enhance their skills to satisfy the employers' expectations.

### 4. CONCEPTUALIZATION

The conceptual frame work is developed using four variables to assess the contribution of the FCM in enhancing graduate employability.



(Source: Developed for this study)

#### 4.1 Employability

Employability refers to a person's capability of gaining initial employment, maintaining employment, and obtaining new employment if required. In simple terms, employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work. More comprehensively, employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realize potential through sustainable employment. For individuals, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSA's)

they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers, and the context (e.g. personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they seek work.

(Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Employability>) environment)

#### 4.2 Training

The term training refers to the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies as a result of the teaching of vocational or practical skills and knowledge that relate to specific useful competencies. It forms the core of apprenticeships and provides the backbone of content at institutes of technology. In addition to the basic training required for a trade, occupation or profession, observers of the labor-market recognize today the need to continue training beyond initial qualifications: to maintain, upgrade and update skills throughout working life.

(Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Training>)

#### 4.3 Information Technology and Language Development

Information Technology can be defined as the use of computer (hardware and software) to manage information. In business establishments, information technology is used for solving mathematical and logical problems. Information technology helps in project management system.

English language comes to our aid in our commercial transactions throughout the globe. English is the language of the latest business management in the world and proficiency in English has brought laurels to many business managers. English is a means not only for international commerce; it has become increasingly essential for inter-state commerce and communication.

(Source: <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/why-is-information-technology-important.html> and <http://www.usingenglish.com/teachers/articles/importance-english-language.html>)

#### 4.4 Transferable skills

Transferable skills are those “generic capabilities which allow people to succeed in a wide range of different tasks and jobs”

(Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/transferableskills>)

#### 4.5 Course structure

Course structure gives the student an idea of how the learning process is organized, including the schedule, communication modes, types of activities, and assessments. A statement of the course structure may be found in the course syllabus, orientation module or course overview.

The following items may be included in either a course syllabus or an orientation - or both.

- Course description, course goals.
- Structure and content of course, methods of instruction, objectives and outcomes.
- Required and recommended course materials.
- Deadlines, examinations, final exam dates.
- Procedures and grading scale or criteria.
- Submission of exercises and assignments.

(Source: <http://vudat.msu.edu/structure/>)

### 5. RESEARCH DESIGN

#### 5.1. Data

For this research 200 samples were randomly selected from last five years passed out students.

**Table 1: Sampling Frameworks**

No	Convocation Date	No of Students	Sample size
1.	2004	82	37
2.	2005	120	55
3.	2006	84	38
4.	2007	64	29
5.	2009	89	41
	Total	439	200

(Source: Convocation Books, Eastern University Sri Lanka, 2004, 05, 06, 07, 09)

#### 5.2. Responses choices and measurement

The spectrum of possible answers is provided to the respondent, the questions/statements are closed. Closed questions / statements of a respondent’s choice of preference in a set of argument to respond.

In this study, one of the ordinal measures called 5 point rating likert’s scale is used to assess scales or scores and indicators are answers of a respondent.

- |                        |     |
|------------------------|-----|
| 1. Strongly Disagree   | = 1 |
| 2. Reasonably Disagree | = 2 |
| 3. No opinion          | = 3 |
| 4. Reasonably Agree    | = 4 |
| 5. Strongly Agree      | = 5 |

#### 5.3. Data collection

The study selected passed out students to interview and issue the questionnaires. A total of 186 responses were received, four were eliminated because of incomplete information. The data collected from these sources are not in order. So that information is ordered in a format and analyzed to get the results. The study only considers the perception of passed out students in the test five years and this becomes the major limitation of the study.

This study issued a questionnaire consisting of 30 study related statements. The questionnaire consists of three sections. Section 1 questionnaire is designed to collect personal data, and in the second, there are 20 statements. The respondent is requested to rank their level of preference for a particular statement.

#### 5.4. Data Analysis and Evaluation

Univariate method was adapted to data analysis and evaluation. Univariate analysis consists of mean, median, mode, standard deviation etc. Based on the results of Univariate analysis, the establishments of each variable in the conceptual framework have been derived. Three types of attributes can be derived from the responses indicated in the questionnaires as follows.

**Table 2: Decision Range**

Range	Decision Attribute
$1 \leq x_i < 2.5$	Lower level contribution
$2.5 \leq x_i \leq 3.5$	Moderate level contribution
$3.5 < x_i \leq 5$	Higher level contribution

### 6. RESULTS

#### 6.1 Personal Information

The collected data shown that 56% of the respondents are male. Most of the respondents are the age range of 27 to 34. There are 58% of BBA and 42 % of B.Com graduates. Since the FCM had admitted more students for BBA degree rather than B.com degree, there are

most graduates completed their BBA degree. Results show that 89% of graduates are working. But in that 89%, about 63% are working in the private sector, since they faced a lot of difficulties in getting the government employment. The salary level is high in the private sector. Because of the increasing inflation, the students tend to find employment in the private sector for huge salaries to satisfy their requirements.

Most of the respondents said that they are on temporary service rather than permanent employment. They said that they waited only one year or lesser than one year to get the employment. The reason behind this is most of the NGOs are started their function after tsunami. So, these candidates were easily appointed in them. Among the graduates about 82% of the respondents said that they receive their employability because of their degree. But sometimes, they realized that their work is not related with their education. For example, we can say more graduates are appointed by the NGOs as field officers. But they can use the knowledge that they gained from degree in performing some duties, e.g. satisfying reporting and dealing with other staffs. But in later years, they received promotions or other jobs merely related to their education.

## 6.2 Research Information

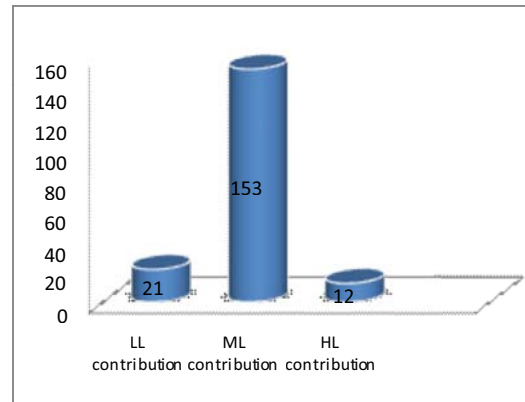
### 6.2.1 Training

The results show that the contribution of FCM in providing training is in moderate level. The mean value is 2.76. This value lies in the range of  $2.5 \leq x_i \leq 3.5$ . When we analyse the reason we found that it was introduced for only few batches of students, if also needs to be improved, because when they appoint a student for training in insurance or banking sector, the management's response is very poor. They are stating the reason for this training period is very less that is 03 months. They can't spend time and money for these people only for 03 months. The students can't gain sufficient knowledge within this shorter period, even in one task.

**Table 3: Training**

Range	Frequency
LL contribution	21
ML contribution	153
HL contribution	12
Total	186

(Source: Survey data)



**Figure 1: Training**

(Source: Survey data)

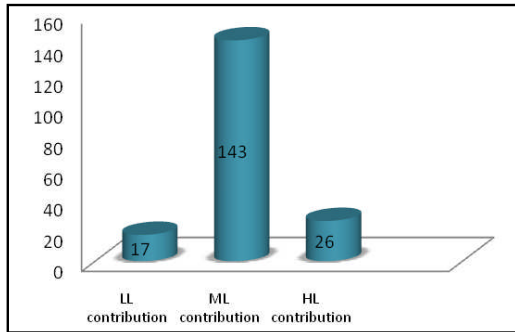
### 6.2.2 Information Technology (IT) and Language Development

The results indicate that the contribution of FCM in IT and language development is in moderate level, (Mean 2.89) and it lies in the range of  $2.5 < x_i \leq 3.5$ . Normally IT and Language development is supported by other units. IT can be supported by Centre for Information and Communication Technology and the language development can be supported by English Language Teaching Unit (ELTU). Notably most of the students are facing difficulty in language, especially in English when they were entering in to the university. So, they were regular to English classes in first year. Thereafter, they ignored the classes. Likewise, in IT, students just ignored the classes, because most of them followed the computer classes in vacations, i.e after A/L. So, if the IT units started its courses from basic, students other than who didn't follow the classes in outside, did not attend the classes. The curriculum design of ELTU and IT unit also needs to be developed to satisfy these types of students.

**Table 4: IT and Langue Development**

Range	Frequency
LL contribution	17
ML contribution	143
HL contribution	26
Total	186

(Source: Survey data)



**Figure 2 IT and Langue Development**  
(Source: Survey data)

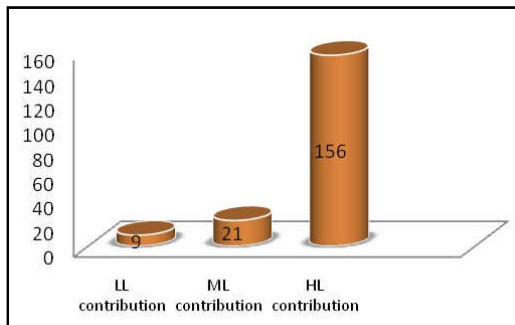
### 6.2.3 Transferable skills

The results show that the contribution of FCM toward the development of transferable skills is in high level (Mean 3.94), and it lies in the range of  $3.5 < x_i \leq 5$ . The teaching methods and assessments, especially presentations are helping to improve the communication ability. Seminars and outside visits also helped developing transferrable skills and gaining the knowledge in the Courses, like counseling, translation skills were very much helpful to develop the knowledge.

**Table 5: Transferable skills**

Range	Frequency
LL contribution	09
ML contribution	21
HL contribution	156
Total	186

(Source: Survey data)



**Figure 3: Transferable skills**  
(Source: Survey data)

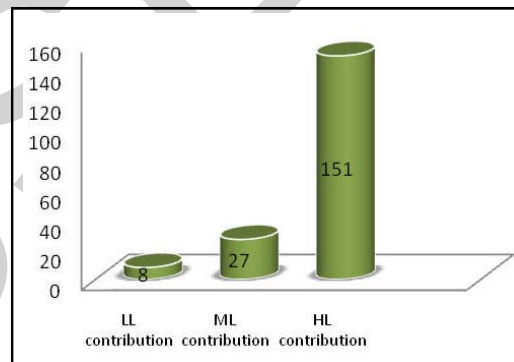
### 6.2.4 Course Structure:

The data shows that the contribution of FCM is in higher level in course structure (Mean 3.99) and it lies in the range of  $3.5 < x_i \leq 5$ . It is noted that subject and respective syllabus covered by FCM, consisted of all of the important aspects in their curriculum design, which is revised by a panel of experts annually for the last five years.

**Table: 6 Course structure**

Range	Frequency
LL contribution	08
ML contribution	27
HL contribution	151
Total	186

(Source: Survey data)



**Figure 4: Course structure**  
(Source: Survey data)

## 7. CONCLUSION

In formulating the conceptual frame work for this study, four variables such as training, IT and Language development, transferable skills and course structure were used to assess the contribution of the FCM in enhancing graduate employability. By considering the above factors, overall mean value for contribution of FCM is 3.33 and this lie between the range of  $2.5 \leq x_i \leq 3.5$ . This shows that the contribution of FCM is in moderate level in the enhancement of graduates' employability. As a recommendation, the employability strategy is too upgraded further to enhance opportunity for modern training, more interactive IT and language development, multi facilitates / functional transferable skills and innovative course structure to increase graduate employability.

## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS

### Training

- Training programme should be developed specifically during the course of studying to increase the performance.
- Training programme should be related to the field of study.
- Training programme should provide an increase assessment mechanism.
- The duration of the training should be increased more than one year.

### IT and Language development

- Different IT and language development programmes should be developed toward on the level of knowledge of the students.
- More time should be allocated to practical to improve interactive and communication skills.
- Developing communication skills in English, achieving academic excellence through continued English festivals. This activity is to use English language drama as a medium to develop the communication skills, achieve academic excellence.
- Current information on IT should be incorporated in the curriculum.

### Transferable skills

- When the faculty providing the transferable skills, it needs to consider not only to develop the skills, but also to change their attitudes.
- Needs to include some additional courses and entertainments to reduce the stress of students. It will increase their overall performance and results.
- Avenues should be provided to demonstrate transferable skills. (exhibitions, fair and etc)

### Course Structure

- Time to time it needs to be revised on a scheduled basis not only by inner university experts, but also by academics in other leading universities.
- Course structures and syllabus need to be developed by considering specific needs of the students and enhancements of skills.
- Most of the courses are only providing the theory knowledge, rather than practical knowledge. So it

needs to be revised to include the practical knowledge also.

- Also, course structure needs to be revised to encourage the students to search for knowledge, not only depending on the lecturers are only facilitators to students.

## 9. LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

This study only considered the graduates from Faculty of Commerce and Management. Only five batches are selected to collect the data. External candidates didn't consider in this research and the statistical accuracy is depends on the sample size and the fairness of the responses.

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