



Norwegian University of Life  
Sciences

The Department of International  
Environment and Development  
Studies, Noragric

Master Thesis 2014

30 Credits

**Employment Opportunities and Upward Mobility for  
Graduates of the Faculty of Arts, University of  
Colombo, Sri Lanka**

Dewruk Eksath Hasala Rajapakse



**Employment Opportunities and Upward  
Mobility for Graduates of the Faculty of Arts,  
University of Colombo, Sri Lanka**



**Dewruk E H Rajapakse**

International Development Studies, Noragic

Norwegian University of Life Sciences,

Ås, Norway

[dewruk@gmail.com](mailto:dewruk@gmail.com)

The Department of International Environment and Development Studies, Noragric, is the international gateway for the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU). Eight departments, associated research institutions and the Norwegian College of Veterinary Medicine in Oslo. Established in 1986, Noragric's contribution to international development lies in the interface between research, education (Bachelor, Master and PhD programmes) and assignments.

The Noragric Master thesis are the final theses submitted by students in order to fulfil the requirements under the Noragric Master programme "International Environmental Studies", "International Development Studies" and "International Relations".

The findings in this thesis do not necessarily reflect the views of Noragric. Extracts from this publication may only be reproduced after prior consultation with the author and on condition that the source is indicated. For rights of reproduction or translation contact Noragric.

© Dewruk Eksath Hasala Rajapakse, October 2014  
dewruk@gmail.com

Noragric  
Department of International Environment and Development Studies  
P.O. Box 5003  
N-1432 Ås  
Norway  
Tel.: +47 64 96 52 00  
Fax: +47 64 96 52 01  
Internet: <http://www.nmbu.no/noragric>

Declaration

I, Dewruk Eksath Hasala Rajapakse, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature: .....

Date: .....

*To my dearest parents and both elder brothers  
who support my every move.*

## **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to explore and understand the current condition of employment opportunities and upward mobility for General Degree Arts graduates of the University of Colombo and identify the prevailing issues and challenges that these graduates experience. Furthermore this paper attempts to identify comprehensive solutions and strategies that would help to overcome such challenges for future General Degree Arts graduates and enhance their career opportunities both in Sri Lanka and internationally. Primary data was collected through a series of in-depth qualitative interviews with four groups of stakeholders: General Degree Arts graduates from 2010, education experts, politicians, and potential employers. Interviews were conducted with the help of semi-structured questionnaires. Scenario planning tools were used to help design the research process.

The study identified inadequate employment orientation in rural school education as the key reason for General Degree Arts graduates having a lower level of employability. Lack of English proficiency, IT knowledge and communication skills have similarly restricted their employment opportunities and upward mobility. Furthermore, the absence of practical course work is a concern, due to lack of reflective and instrumental knowledge that is provided by university education. This could potentially affect graduates performance in terms of critical thinking and problem solving skills. For these reasons, in recruitment processes employers have a dilemma and subsequently a prejudice against General Degree Arts graduates. The study also recognized the over-politicization of the Arts stream in Sri Lanka, where many of the decisions were not taken by an expert panel but by politicians. As a result of a declining budget share for education, many rural schools only offer Arts and Humanities for Advance Levels and have limited facilities for extra-curricular activities. With the government being the key player in policy making and funding, it is necessary to re-evaluate the entire education system in Sri Lanka and to do so soon, in order to create a better future for Arts and Humanities graduates.

**Keywords:** Employability, Opportunity, Upward mobility, General Degree, Arts graduates, Scenario planning





# CONTENTS

<b>ACRONYMS</b> .....	x
<b>TABLES AND FIGURES</b> .....	xii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	xiii
<b>01. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	01
I. Chapter overview .....	01
II. Sri Lanka: An overview .....	01
III. Problem statement .....	01
IV. Justification, and specific research objectives .....	02
V. Research questions .....	03
<b>02. RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODOLOGY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS</b> .....	04
I. Chapter overview .....	04
II. Research design .....	04
III. Grounded theory .....	05
IV. Thematic analysis .....	06
V. Theoretical sampling .....	06
VI. Stakeholder analysis .....	06
VII. Gender consideration .....	08
VIII. Research methodologies .....	08
IX. In-depth, semi-structured and non-structured interviews .....	09
X. Observation .....	09
XI. Ethical considerations .....	09
XII. Political issues .....	10
XIII. Scope, limitations and challenges .....	10
XIV. Scenario planning .....	14
<b>03. BACKGROUND</b> .....	15
I. Chapter overview .....	15

II.	Economy of Sri Lanka .....	15
III.	Human capital .....	16
IV.	Human development in Sri Lanka .....	17
V.	Higher education (university) system in Sri Lanka .....	18
VI.	Crisis in education and higher education .....	22
	I. Low public expenditure .....	22
	II. Increased class segregation in education .....	24
VII.	Unemployment Issue .....	25
VIII.	Educated but unemployed .....	25
IX.	Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka .....	27
X.	Employability of Arts and Humanities graduates .....	29
<b>04.</b>	<b>LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>30</b>
	I. Chapter overview .....	30
	II. Employability .....	30
	III. Social mobility .....	32
	IV. Education and social mobility .....	33
	V. Employability in the case of Sri Lanka .....	34
	VI. Reasons for low graduate employment in Sri Lanka .....	39
<b>05.</b>	<b>RESULTS .....</b>	<b>41</b>
	I. Chapter overview .....	41
	II. Interviews: Experts .....	41
	III. Interviews: Employers .....	55
	IV. Interviews of Politicians .....	61
	V. Graduates' interviews .....	75
	I. Motivation behind selection and satisfaction – contradictory responses	78
	II. Issues and challenges in Arts stream .....	78
	III. Solutions for the issue .....	80
	IV. Privatizing the higher education .....	81
	VI. Some observations .....	82

<b>06. DISCUSSION</b> .....	83
I. Chapter overview .....	83
II. Reasons for selecting Arts and Humanities .....	83
III. Restricted choice in field of education for low-income demographic groups .....	84
IV. Potential for employment opportunities in Sri Lanka for Arts graduates .....	84
I. Issues with the university learning process .....	85
II. Poorly functioning career center .....	87
III. Politicization of the Arts stream and other issues .....	87
V. Criticism of Arts graduates .....	91
I. Low government expenditure on education and poor (rural) school infrastructure .....	91
II. Structural and administrative issues within the University that impact on the Arts stream.....	92
III. Job market issues .....	93
VI. Violent political activities on campus .....	94
VII. Dependency of Arts graduates on state employment .....	95
VIII. Level of satisfaction upon the completion of the Arts General Degree .....	96
IX. Status of private universities .....	96
X. Gender and unemployment of Arts graduates .....	98
XI. Accuracy of unemployment statistics .....	98
XII. The future of education in Sri Lanka .....	99
XIII. The nexus between an increasing social gap and regulation of private education.....	100
XIV. Improving the Arts stream .....	101
I. Increasing the budget share for education .....	101
II. Enhancement of employment prospects .....	101
III. Improving the quality of education at university level .....	102
IV. Creating an expert panel to make decisions on the Arts and Humanities program ...	102
V. Strengthening disciplinary protocols and procedures in the Arts program .....	103
VI. Creating realistic expectations about employment amongst undergraduates .....	103

<b>07. CONCLUSION AND THE WAY FORWARD</b> .....	102
I. Conclusion .....	102
II. Way forward .....	107
<b>08. REFERENCES</b> .....	109
<b>09. APPENDICES</b> .....	116
I. Alternative approaches for addressing graduate unemployment .....	116
II. Suggestions for a future study .....	118

## ACRONYMS

ADB: Asian Development Bank  
A/l: Advance Level  
ASP: Assistant superintendent Police  
BA: Bachelor of Arts  
BOI: Board of Investment  
BSc: Bachelor of Science  
CEO: Chief Executive Officer  
CIMA: Chartered Institute of Management Accountants  
CSE: Colombo Stock Exchange  
FDI: Foreign Direct Investments  
GCE A/l's: General Certificate of Advanced Levels  
GDP: Gross Domestic Production  
GDI: Gender-related Development Index  
GOSL: Government of Sri Lanka  
HD: Human Development  
HEIs: Higher Education Institutes  
HETC: Higher Education for the Twenty First Century  
HPI: Human Poverty Index  
ICT: Information and Communications Technology  
ILO: International Labor Organization  
IMF: International Monetary Fund  
LLB: The Bachelor of Laws  
LMIC: Lower Middle Income country  
MBA: Master of Business Administration  
MP: Member of Parliament  
MIC: Middle Income Country  
N/A.: Not available  
OUSL: Open University Sri Lanka  
R.Qs: Research Questions

RRA: The Theory of Relative Risk Aversion

SLAS: Sri Lanka Administrative Service

SLEAS: Sri Lanka Education Administrative Service

UGC: University Grants Commission

UN: United Nations

UNP: United National Party

THE: Times Higher Education

WEFORUM: The World Economic Forum

## **TABLES AND FIGURES**

### **List of Tables**

Table 01: University enrollment statistics

Table 02: Information about the education sector in Sri Lanka

Table 03: Number of candidates qualifying and admitted to undergraduate Arts Degree courses of the higher educational institutions in Sri Lanka

Table 04: Government expenditure on education in Sri Lanka

Table 05: Education expenditure of Sri Lanka in comparison to other countries

Table 06: University degree program, enrollment by discipline, in Sri Lanka, 2011

Table 08: High growth scenario - employment demand of medium-term output growth

Table 09: Basic information about the graduate interviewees

Table 10: Key findings from the Arts graduates

Table 12: Suggestions to overcome unemployment among Degree Arts Graduates

### **List of Figures**

Figure 01: Case study design

Figure 02: Research stakeholders

Figure 03: Snowball sampling technique: how the graduates were interviewed

Figure 04: Human capital according to Aviant Group

Figure 05: Location of universities in Sri Lanka

Figure 06: An educational timeline of an average Sri Lankan

Figure 07: Composition of student numbers eligible to enter higher education and admitted to educational institutes (for academic year 2009/10, 2011/12)

Figure 08: Unemployment rates in Sri Lanka by gender, age and discipline

Figure 09: Demography – graduate residence and employment

Figure 10: Pathways to graduate employment

Figure 11: The USEM account of employability

Figure 12: Graduate job market analysis

Figure 13: Possible suggestions for the improvement of the Arts stream

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost I wish to thank my supervisor, Professor Nadarajah Shanmugaratnam, for the invaluable support, guidance, encouragement and endless wisdom you provided from the beginning, in deciding on the research topic and from there onwards, throughout the research which has culminated in this thesis. The advice and support of my co-supervisor, Associate Professor Darley Jose Kjosavik, was also equally helpful, from beginning to end, in making this research happen. Professor W.S.Warner's academic writing lessons and material helped too in shaping my writing.

Furthermore my heartiest thanks go out to all my informants who helped me with hearts filled with kindness, openness, honesty and trust when I was in need of assistance in the field. Without your friendship and enthusiasm this research would not have been possible. Special thanks also go to Dr Iresha Karunaratne from the University of Colombo and the University Grants Commission Chairperson, Professor Kshanika Hirimburegama, for assisting me in Sri Lanka.

I would also like to make this an opportunity to thank my friends, from different parts of the world, who supported me throughout my research work. In choosing the topic, in a time of uncertainty and indecision, my friend Abda Khalid (Pakistan) advised me a lot. On learning of the field where my research interests lay, my friend Abraham Degu Yeshalem (Ethiopia), helped me to make the scope of research. My dearest friend, Saroj Koirala (Nepal), has also been there with me from the beginning, giving endless advice, guidance and support. Nicole Tørnes (Scotland/ Norway), Mevan Dissanayake (Sri Lanka/ USA) and my flatmate, Maritza Ilich Mauseth (Australia/ Norway), are also three dear friends who helped me in editing my paper, from the first to the final draft. Furthermore, four of my college-mates and dear friends: Mewan Gunasekera (Sri Lanka/ USA), Chamathka Gamage (Sri Lanka/ Japan) Ransirini De Silva (Sri Lanka) and Kunal Amalean (Sri Lanka/ Indonesia) also helped in editing the English. Thank you for being lovely friends, for backing and helping me. I'd also like to thank my flatmate Tord Ståle Storbækken (Norway) who became my study buddy during the many sleepless nights we spent writing our Masters theses together at Sørhellinga, NMBU – Ås, Norway.



I am also grateful to Noragric, NMBU, Ås and to Norway for accepting me as an international student and for giving me the opportunity to study, tuition-free, a Master's in International Development Studies. Ingunn Bohmann, thanks for always helping in work at Noragric. You were a wonderful resource for me and for all the other students.

Last but not least, my wonderful mom (Kausha Rajapakse), dad (C.V.Rajapakse) and both my elder brothers (Sahan Rajapakse and Purindu Rajapakse) are not forgotten. Your endless love and support, strength and backing, helped me realize this opportunity and every other opportunity in my life. Special thanks go to my dad for his efforts in getting me appointments to meet various informants in this research. Dad, thank you for being so supportive of me. Your own and mom's advice has always been a light in the life of my brothers and myself. Thank you for all you have done to make our lives better. We three brothers are truly blessed to have you both with us in our lives. Dear mom and dad, thank you again for being with us and for making our lives wonderful.

# 01. INTRODUCTION

## **Chapter overview**

This study aims to explore the employment opportunities and upward mobility of General Degree Arts graduates' at the Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. This chapter will provide a brief introduction to Sri Lanka, a problem statement and the justification of this research. The specific research objectives and research questions are presented in the chapter.

## **Sri Lanka: An overview**

Sri Lanka is an island nation located at the Southern tip of the Indian subcontinent. Though the country is small by size (65,610 sq. km), it has a population of over 20 million people (CBSL, 2013). Sri Lanka ranks 56<sup>th</sup> most densely populated country out of 193 countries, having 805.70 people in a square mile (Worldatlas, 2014). The Sri Lankan population is made up of five major ethnic groups; Sinhalese 74.9%, Sri Lankan Tamils 11.2%, Indian Tamils 4.2%, Moors (Muslims) 9.2% and others 0.5% (CBSL, 2013).

The country has gone through a series of shocks. A tsunami hit Sri Lanka in 2004, which killed over 35,000 Sri Lankans around coastal areas. Sri Lanka has also suffered from a 26 year long armed conflict that ended in May 2009. The worst hurdle for the country's growth was the prolonged armed conflict. However, with the end of war, changes are taking place in almost all sectors of the country's socio-economic activity. Thus, some say Sri Lanka is facing a transitional phase at the moment.

## **Problem statement**

Although many students are qualified for entry into university, only a few get the chance to enjoy higher education for free, due to limited number of places in local state universities. From the large pool of qualified students, it is only the cream of the crop that are selected to pursue education in the prestigious state universities. However, having graduated with recognized degrees from a national university, it is the Arts and Humanities graduates that still continue to

have a great difficulty in getting a job. They have been restricted from opportunities due to many reasons. Notably this issue has been in discussion for decades which increases the intensity with time. Every now and then there are media reports of Art & Humanities graduates protesting and demanding for adequate jobs from the state. Though this situation has been ongoing for decades, it seems that there have not been any meaningful steps taken to address this issue. This study will focus on understanding the employment opportunities and upward mobility for General Degree Arts graduates at University of Colombo. It will look into the perceptions of recent General Degree Arts graduates and attempt to better understand the situation. Diverse perspectives will be explored from decision making personnel, experts from the state education sector, employers from both the private and public sector and also from recent General Degree Arts graduates. The data collected from these four different groups of stakeholders will be considered in order to identify the risks and the threats students are facing. Having analyzed the situation – key reasons for the issue will be identified, analyzed and recommendations will be presented.

### **Justification and the specific research objectives**

Due to the timely importance of the issue, this study makes an investigation of the case of unemployment of General Degree Arts graduates. The research is conducted with a limited sized-qualitative study (see Chapter 02 – Methodology).

There are four objectives for the researcher to investigate this topic:

01. To get a better understanding of the unemployment issue among General Degree Arts graduates in University of Colombo.
02. To understand the perceptions of different stakeholders (recent graduates, experts of the Arts field, decision makers and employers).
03. To come up with comprehensive solutions, which are both practical and applicable for the context of contemporary Sri Lankan higher education system.
04. To help strengthen the General Arts program which is offered at the University of Colombo and to further guide the policy makers in understanding the issue and possible solutions.

**Research questions (R.Qs)**

**Main R.Qs:** (01). What are the prospects for employment and upward career mobility for General Degree Arts graduates, from the University of Colombo? (02). How do their graduates perceive experiences of finding employment and opportunities for upward mobility?

**Sub R.Qs:** *(a guide for the questionnaire)*

01. What factors determine students' choice about the field of study?
02. How does the field of study affect the potential for employment in Sri Lanka?
03. Why are Arts graduates more dependent on state employment?
04. Did the Arts graduates meet the expectations they had prior to joining university?
05. Opinion about private universities?
06. How could we make Arts stream better for future students?

## 02. RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODOLOGY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### Chapter overview

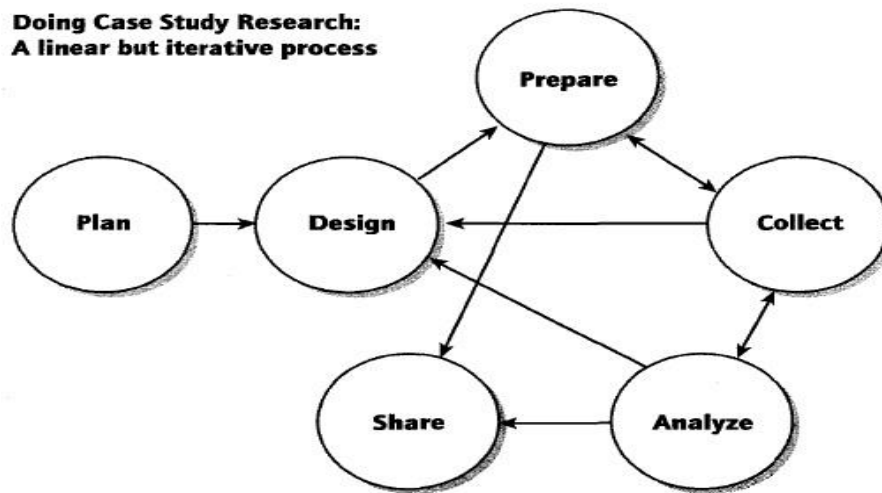
This chapter presents an insight into the methods and tools used during data collection and processing for this research. First, an overview of the methodology section will be presented in the research design section, and the research tools used for sampling and data collection will be explained in respective sections. This chapter furthermore includes sections for consideration of gender, the ethical consideration, scope and limitations of the study.

### Research design

This research is done as according to norms of a ‘case study design’. According to Bromley (1990), a case study is a “systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest” (Zucker, 2009). Case studies are done in ‘a form of qualitative descriptive research’ (CSU, 2014). A case study will help to get an in-depth understanding of the subject of research; which favors research on a single case, rather than multiple cases to discover a larger phenomenon (Anderson, 2011). Yin (2009) says, “The case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events-such as individual life cycles, small group behavior, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood change, school performance, international relations, and the maturation of industries” (Yin, 2009). The following diagram (**Figure 01**) shows basic steps of a case study design presented by Yin (2009).

According to Yin (2009), one of the first steps that determines the type of research for a case-study is if it includes ‘*how and why?*’ questions for contemporary events in order to answer the research questions and the objectives (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Referring to research questions and objectives which were presented in Chapter One of this study, this research fits perfectly with Yin’s approach for case studies; “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the

boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009). Another feature of a case study is that case studies are often related to a geographical location in Bryman, (2004) (Anderson, 2011). This research has been conducted within the context of General Degree Arts graduates from University of Colombo, Sri Lanka, batch 2010.



**Figure 01:** Case study design

Source: (Yin, 2009)

### **Grounded theory**

Glaser and Strauss (1967) founded the ‘Grounded Theory’. Grounded theory is ‘the notion of generating new theory from data’, which has become increasingly popular in qualitative research (Briks & Mills, 2010). In qualitative research, grounded theory uses ‘systematic inductive methods aimed toward theory development’. The word ‘grounded’ refers to two meanings: ‘(i) a method consisting of flexible methodological strategies and (ii) the products of this type of inquiry’ (Charmaz, 17). However, as referred according to Corbin (2008), the evolved grounded theory similarly mentions the importance of literature review in research methodology, something that didn’t exist in the notion of traditional grounded theory (Anderson, 2011). The logic behind this stage could be referred to the ease for the researcher for getting to know more of the previous studies that were done on times related to the researcher’s topic which could potentially broaden the perspective of the idea of research. Also it could help to understand the

field research design, in particular to understand the challenges which could face and what precautionary actions the researcher should do in advance.

### **Thematic analysis (TA)**

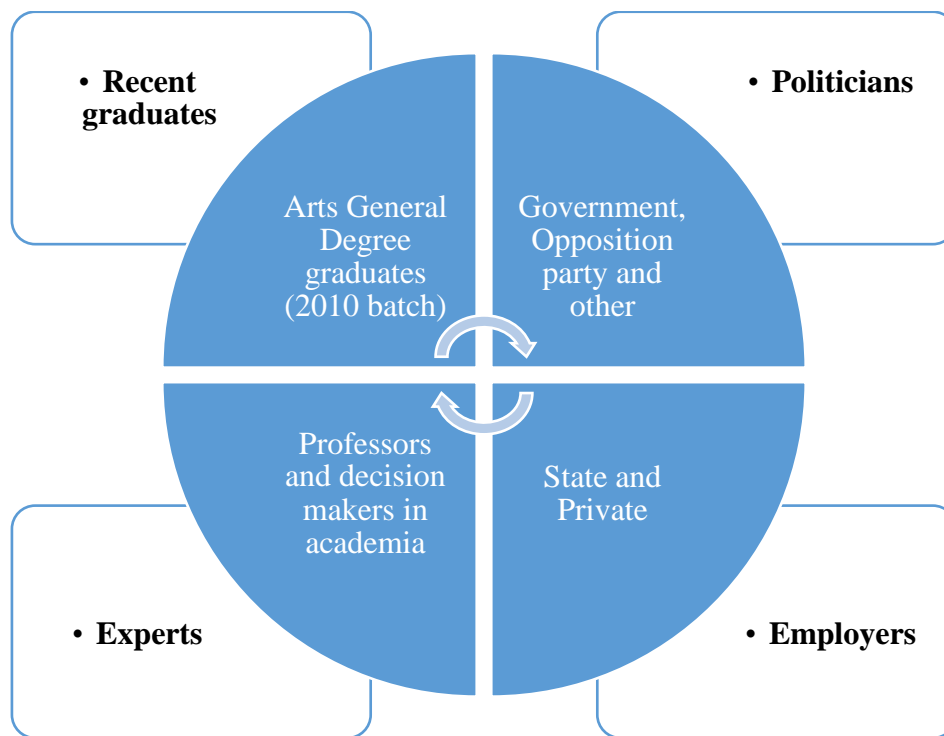
“TA is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (theses) across a data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2012). According Braun and Clarke (2012), by looking into meanings across a data set, TA helps the researcher to grasp the collective or shared meanings and experiences. Some argue the similarity of grounded theory and thematic analysis, but noting that TA allows the researcher to “move beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focus on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data, that is, themes” (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). In this research, one of the stakeholders’ (General Degree Arts graduates’ batch 2010) data was processed with the help of Thematic Analysis and presented in the form of a table (**Table 10**) in Results chapter, which is discussed later in both the Results chapter as well as in the Discussion Chapter.

### **Theoretical sampling**

This qualitative research uses theoretical (or purposive) sampling method, as defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as “the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop theory as it emerges” (Calman, 2014). In this study, earlier theories were used to create the ‘new selective samples’ which were identified to examine and elaborate the research objectives. Noting that the aim of a qualitative study is “to provide an in-depth understanding of the world as seen through the eyes of the people being studied” (Wilmot, 2005). The research participants in this study were not selected in a random fashion. Stakeholders of this study were chosen on a ‘purposive sampling’ process as previously explained in order to understand the major themes, perceptions and perspectives about the General Degree Arts graduates’ unemployment issue. Thus, the conclusions of this study, are only applicable to the graduates of the University of Colombo, rather than all Arts graduates from Sri Lankan higher education institutions.

## Stakeholder analysis

The topic was studied with the help of literature reviewed from earlier studies and identified four major groups of stake-holders (interested parties) that could be particularly useful to include in this research. Stakeholder analysis is explained as: “a process of systematically gathering and analyzing qualitative information to determine whose interests should be taken into account when developing and/or implementing a policy or program” (Schmeer, 2001). The following diagram (**Figure 02**) shows the stakeholders that were useful for the study.



**Figure 02:** Research stakeholders

- (i) **Recent graduates (8):** Recent graduates, being the core of the study was chosen from the Arts (General) Degree category. 8 graduates from the year 2010 batch were interviewed. The first student was found with the help of an ‘expert’ that was interviewed and following that interview, the rest were found by snowball-sampling.



- (ii) **Politicians (3):** Politicians were chosen by considering their involvement with the interest of this research. Prior to the selection of the politicians, a study was done in national news and the interviews in newspapers. Politicians were chosen from: the government, an allied-party of the government and from the main opposition for the interview.
- (iii) **Experts (6):** Experts were chosen by recognizing the bureaucracy that governs the system of higher education in Sri Lanka. Furthermore some of the academic staff and other ‘academically qualified’ personnel were interviewed.
- (iv) **Employers (2):** Employers were chosen from both the government and the private sector. The state official was chosen with the help of one expert that the researcher interviewed, following snow-ball sampling technique.

### **Gender consideration**

Considering gender aspect is essential in producing less-biased and valid results in research (EC, 2014). The research population was decided as it was explained earlier by theoretical sampling. However, the core of this study being considered was the General Degree Arts graduates and in picking them to interview, only four male and four female graduates were interviewed to ensure a balanced representation. Even with the rest of the stakeholders the researcher has tried to ensure the equality of the gender aspect, although it wasn’t always a success since experts, politicians and employers were primarily chosen based on the extent of their involvement in a particular field.

### **Research methodologies**

Qualitative research is the method of choice when the researcher is interested in the understanding of processes, events and connections in accordance with the context of the social and cultural situation (Ebrahim, 2014). The aim of qualitative research is to produce ‘factual descriptions’ based on the knowledge that is gathered face-to-face with individuals or groups in their natural settings. Ebrahim (2014) further states that qualitative research is even important in cases where the researcher needs an in-depth understanding about an issue or a social problem. The very first step prior to conducting in-depth interviews is to identify the stakeholders (Boyce & Neale, 2006), as demonstrated in the previous stage of the study. As a result, interview

questions will have clarity and focus, qualities which will support the formulation of accurate conclusions, as well as assisting in the identification of areas for further study. Having identified the stakeholders, step two is to develop the instruments that will be employed to gather data. In this research, the main method of data collection in-field was ‘face-to-face’ in-depth interviews.

### **In-depth, semi-structured and non-structured interviews**

In-depth interviews are conducted in a manner that is open-ended, and discovery oriented method, where interviewer allows the respondent to express feelings and perspectives freely on a subject (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2001). In this study ‘semi-structured interviews’ as well as ‘non-structured interviews’ were employed. Semi-structured interviews are done with the help of a ‘questionnaire guide’ where some researchers note the questions in a methodical manner, which includes the key points to be covered in the interview (OU, 2014). Semi-structured interviews are conversational type, which goes according to the flow with ‘open-ended questions’ from the previous response. ‘Semi-structured interviews are useful for examining your assumptions or gathering new knowledge about the informants’ beliefs and values’ (INNOUTOUR, 2014). Most of the time interviews are voice reordered with written (key) notes (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2001). Non-structured interviews are done without any aid of a questionnaire or key notes list. In a non-structured interview “the interview may be like a conversation, with the interviewer responding to the interviewee and letting them speak freely” (OU, 2014).

### **Observation**

Another way of collecting useful data for a research is by observation. Observatory data collection is done by watching behavior, events, or noting physical characteristics in their natural settings (CDC, 2008). Prior to conducting any interview, a background search was done by the researcher to understand the physical structure and the surroundings of Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo.

### **Ethical considerations**

As a researcher who visited Sri Lanka for field research from a Norwegian University, there were several ethical issues to be considered. From the initial stages of this research, starting with the research proposal, these issues were considered in all stages. The key points that are respected and practiced in this research are (i) All informants were counted in with the informed and voluntary consent, (ii) Researcher similarly kept anonymity and confidentiality of all research participants in-order to protect their identity, (iii) Similarly assurance on beneficence or no harm on any participants on this research and (iv) All the information that is gathered via interviews is not shared in any place other than researcher's personal storage, which is accessible only for researcher. All informants are confidential and their names or any identity texts, voice records and any such record that were included have been taken off, considering the anonymity, (v) Interview recording was only done with permission, and denials were respected and researcher skipped recording their interviews and took only notes to have a record of the interview.

### **Political issues and interview techniques**

The research topic of 'Arts graduates' has been in media and discussion for decades. As many political parties and politicians have become involved in the subject, some of the respondents were skeptical about expressing their opinions, fearful that it could possibly harm their career. In consideration of the context and Sri Lankan culture, the researcher created an atmosphere of confidence, which included explaining the anonymous nature of the reporting. This resulted in respondents openly expressing their opinions.

### **Scope, limitations and challenges**

This research identifies the views of four groups of stakeholders (recent Arts graduates, experts, employers and politicians) who are inter-connected in many ways with the General Degree Arts program. The results and findings of this research could be used by all stakeholders that were involved in the study, and may be found useful especially during policy making within the education and higher education sector.

There were a lot of challenges faced during this research:

01. Establishing and confirming appointments to meet and interview the pre-planned personnel for the study (experts, especially the politicians) was difficult. Using personal connections, the researcher finally managed to meet them.
02. Meeting the first General Degree Arts graduate from the 2010 batch was difficult. In the beginning the researcher made a formal request with an explanation about the research to the Dean of The Arts Faculty at Colombo University, but he and his office rejected releasing contacts of graduates. Having failed that, with the assistance of one of the experts interviewed from the Arts Faculty, University of Colombo, the researcher found the first contact of one Special Degree Arts graduate from 2010 batch, who directed the researcher to another graduate who did an Arts General Degree from the same batch, 2010. Starting from that graduate, the researcher used a 'snowball' sampling technique and found the rest of the 7 General Degree Arts graduates. The process of snowball sampling is also shown in **Figure 03**.
03. In selecting General Degree Arts graduates from the 2010 batch to interview for this study, the researcher did not analyze their backgrounds (e.g. employment status). However, as the researcher found them via a snowball technique, with reference from a previous interviewee, the researcher mainly considered: gender, distance from where researcher lived and availability/ approachability of the interviewees.
04. In the process of interviewing, two participants did not want the researcher to record what they said. Therefore, the researcher had to make quick notes, which is another limitation since some of them gave their opinions at a rapid speed, making it difficult to keep a track on, particularly when the researcher did not want to distract them or disrupt the flow while they were expressing themselves.
05. The 2010 batch of General Degree Arts graduates experienced a special case in university enrollment. Students who were supposed to enter university in 2006 and 2007 were enrolled in the same year (2007) as a 'double batch.' Therefore the number of students was double the size of a normal batch and yet they had to share the normal amount of resources (lecture rooms, tutors and teaching assistants) during their studies. In this respect, the opinions of these graduates may differ from other batches.

06. The University of Colombo is ranked the highest on employment for General Degree Arts graduates in Sri Lanka, in comparison to other universities. Thus, General Degree Arts graduates from other Sri Lankan universities may have different views about the issue that are not presented in this study. Furthermore this study's population was chosen on the basis of 'purposive sampling.' Therefore, one cannot generalize the results among all General Degree Arts graduates in Sri Lanka.
07. One interview with a General Degree Arts graduate was done via the phone. The interviewee was disabled and lived a considerable distance from where the researcher was located. Since the commute was difficult and time-consuming, and due to the researcher's time constraints, the researcher obtained the consent of the interviewee to conduct the interview over the phone. (His participation was via a referral by a previous interviewee, as explained in the snowball sampling section).
08. The researcher had to transcribe and translate several interviews to English and there could have been words which researcher used that doesn't mean the same as what interviewees meant.
09. The researcher is not a native English speaker. The words and phrasings he used in this research might confuse some groups who are not from familiar backgrounds.
10. There were contradicting statistics about the unemployment numbers and percentages of General Degree Arts graduates from different sources. In addition, the public expenditure on University education in Sri Lanka was not specified in reports, since the budget share for education is presented as a total of the combined expenditure on school education and university education.
11. The researcher is from Sri Lanka. His writings and opinions might carry biases while representing subject matter and there can be emotions mixed in his opinions.



**Figure 03:** Snowball sampling technique:  
How the graduates were interviewed

## **Scenario planning**

On top of the 'case study' design, another tool that helped to sharpen the structure of this research was the concept of 'scenario planning' which has helped in strategic management. Scenario planning is an approach which is used in 'integrated risk management process' which involves in scenario development, exposure identification, formulating risk management responses and implementation steps (Miller & Waller, 2003). The steps outlined by Miller & Waller (2003) for Scenario Planning are mentioned below, which helped to sketch the design for this research, during the implementation process. However, in this study, only steps 1-5 were used;

1. Frame the issue
2. Identify the participants and solicit input
3. Draw a picture of what is known
4. Add uncertainties to the picture
5. Sketch possible paths
6. Test for plausibility
7. Anticipate interactive dynamics
8. Formulate strategies

## **03. BACKGROUND**

### **Chapter overview**

This chapter will provide background information about the economy of Sri Lanka, comprising: the latest statistics on Human capital, Human development and related data about the country; information about the higher education system (universities) in Sri Lanka; statistics for public expenditure on education, as well as enrollment numbers at universities; and general challenges facing higher education in Sri Lanka. The youth unemployment issue is also discussed with attention to those ‘educated but unemployed.’ Furthermore this chapter provides information about the Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo and the employability rates of General Degree Arts graduates.

### **Economy of Sri Lanka**

One of the key events that took place after the war was when Sri Lanka became classified as a Lower Middle Income country (LMIC) (The World Bank , 2014). The Sri Lankan Center for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) claims that poverty head count percentages of Sri Lanka has shown a remarkable drop after the war. According to CEPA the poverty level was at 15.2% in 2006/7, which subsequently dropped to 8.9% in 2009/10 (CEPA, 20013). However, one could still question the level of inequality and the disparities among groups of people, particularly the differences seen in the wealth creation and wealth distribution between provinces. According to the Central Bank of Sri Lanka in 2009/2010, the Gini coefficient of household income in Sri Lanka is 0.49 (where zero represents an equal distribution of income and 1 signifies the highest level of inequality) (CBSL, 2013). Thus, confirming the existence of a considerable amount of social inequality in Sri Lanka. However, the overall income level of the country has risen after the war. According to the economists’ viewpoint, it is a good sign of economic development for a post-conflict economy. Currently Sri Lanka’s growth rate of GDP (Gross Domestic Production) is 7.3% (CBSL, 2014) and according to CBSL per-capita income of a Sri Lanka is \$ 3,280 in 2013. Notably the country’s GDP is composed of three main sectors; Agriculture 11.2%, Industry 29.3% and Services 59.5% (CBSL, 2013).



## **Human capital**

*'Labor is prior to, and independent of, capital. Capital is only the fruit of labor, and could never have existed if labor had not first existed. Labor is the superior of capital, and deserves much the higher consideration'*

*-Abraham Lincoln*

*'People are the real wealth of a nation'*

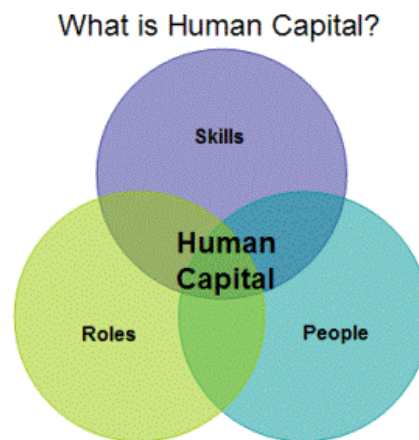
*-UNDP*

According to The World Economic Forum (WEFORUM) (2014), the skills and capacities that people can use for productive use is recognized as a nation's Human capital endowment. WEFORUM also consider Human development as a key determinant on the long term economic success of a nation and stress the importance of further collaboration for the development of Human capital by the business world, governments and civil societies. WEFORUM has created a Human capital Index which measures a given country's ability to develop and deploy healthy, educated and able workers through four distinct pillars: Education, Health and Wellness, Workforce and Employment and Enabling Environment. According to the Human capital Index 2013 report, Sri Lanka ranks 50<sup>th</sup> in world rank, where Switzerland being 1<sup>st</sup> and Nigeria being 114<sup>th</sup> (the last) (WEFORUM, 2013).

Human capital is defined in Britannica (2014) as: "intangible collective resources possessed by individuals and groups within a given population. These resources include all the knowledge, talents, skills, abilities, experience, intelligence, training, judgment, and wisdom possessed individually and collectively, the cumulative total of which represents a form of wealth available to nations and organizations to accomplish their goals." According to Oxford dictionary (2014) human capital is, "the skills, knowledge, and experience possessed by an individual or population, viewed in terms of their value or cost to an organization or country (Oxford, 2014)". To generate material wealth for an economy or any company, human capital needs to be developed and managed (Britannica, 2014 ). Therefore, it is crucially important to understand the human capital of a country or in a given context for economists and policy makers when making development strategies ( Liu & Grecker, 2009).

Human capital is defined by the World Bank (2014) as the knowledge, skills, and experience of people that make them economically productive. According to World Bank, human capital can be improved by investment in education, health care, and job training (World Bank , 2014).

The following figure illustrates an example on how human capital is viewed in to the corporate world.



**Figure 04:** Human capital according to Aviant Group.

**Source** (Aviant Group, 2007)

### **Human development of Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka is well known for its record of Human Development (HD). Since independence from the British Empire in 1948, all of the subsequent Sri Lankan governments have managed to provide free education and free health care for all citizens. As a result, the country is ranked among one of the best for human development amongst developing countries. With Sri Lanka having a Human Development Index value of 0.715 in 2012 and South Asia HDI value of 0.558 in the same period, Sri Lanka remains one of the leaders in the region. Note neighboring countries such as India and Pakistan have 0.554 & 0.515 of HDI values respectively (UNDP, 2014). Furthermore Sri Lanka has also managed to maintain a high literacy rate, even during the period of war, which is exceptional when compared with many other war states. The youth (15-24 years) literacy rate for male and female Sri Lankans was recently valued at 97.7% and 98.6% respectively (UNICEF, 2013). However, notably there are critiques on the HDI as well (Sagar, 1998). HDI gives a numeric value based on quantities but the quality of how accurate the

measure is in capturing what it means to be ‘developed’ is still a question, which is in itself a limitation.

According to Amartya Sen “social arrangements should be primarily evaluated according to the extent of freedom people have to promote or achieve functionings they value” (Alkire, 2011). Sen’s concern is more about advancing the richness of human life, rather than the economic value of human beings lives, which he only considers to be a part of the whole (UNDP, About Human Development , 2013). Many also mention the capability approach when discussing Human development in relation to ‘development as freedom’ through capability expansion which is explained by Sen (1998) (Shanmugaratnam N. , 2011). As Shanmugaratnam (2001) argues HDI, Human Poverty Index (HPI), Gender-related development index (GDI) and quantifiable indicators “are helpful in forming an overview of trends in human development. However, they say practically nothing about intra-national differences in quality of health care and education and the substantive political freedoms and personal security enjoyed by diverse groups and individuals” (Shanmugaratnam N. , 2001).

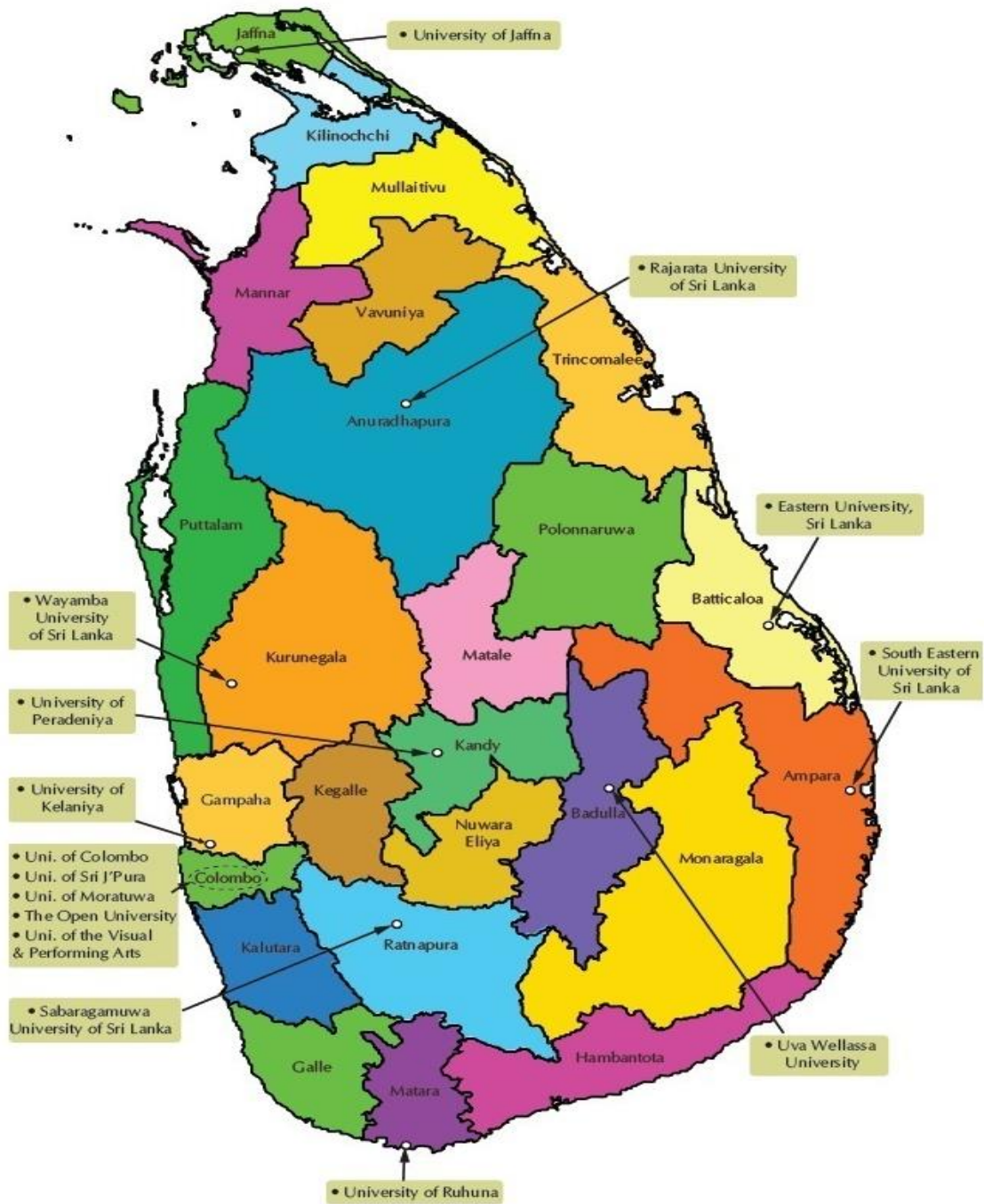
### **Higher education (University) system in Sri Lanka**

As of 2014, Sri Lanka has 15 Universities and all are state owned, public universities (UGC, 2014). The University Grants Commission (UGC) manages the Universities, which is under control of the Higher Education Ministry of Sri Lanka.

UGC’s functions are as follows:

- Planning and coordination of university education,
- Allocation of funds to Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs),
- Maintenance of academic standards,
- Regulation of the administration of HEIs and regulation of admission of students to HEIs.

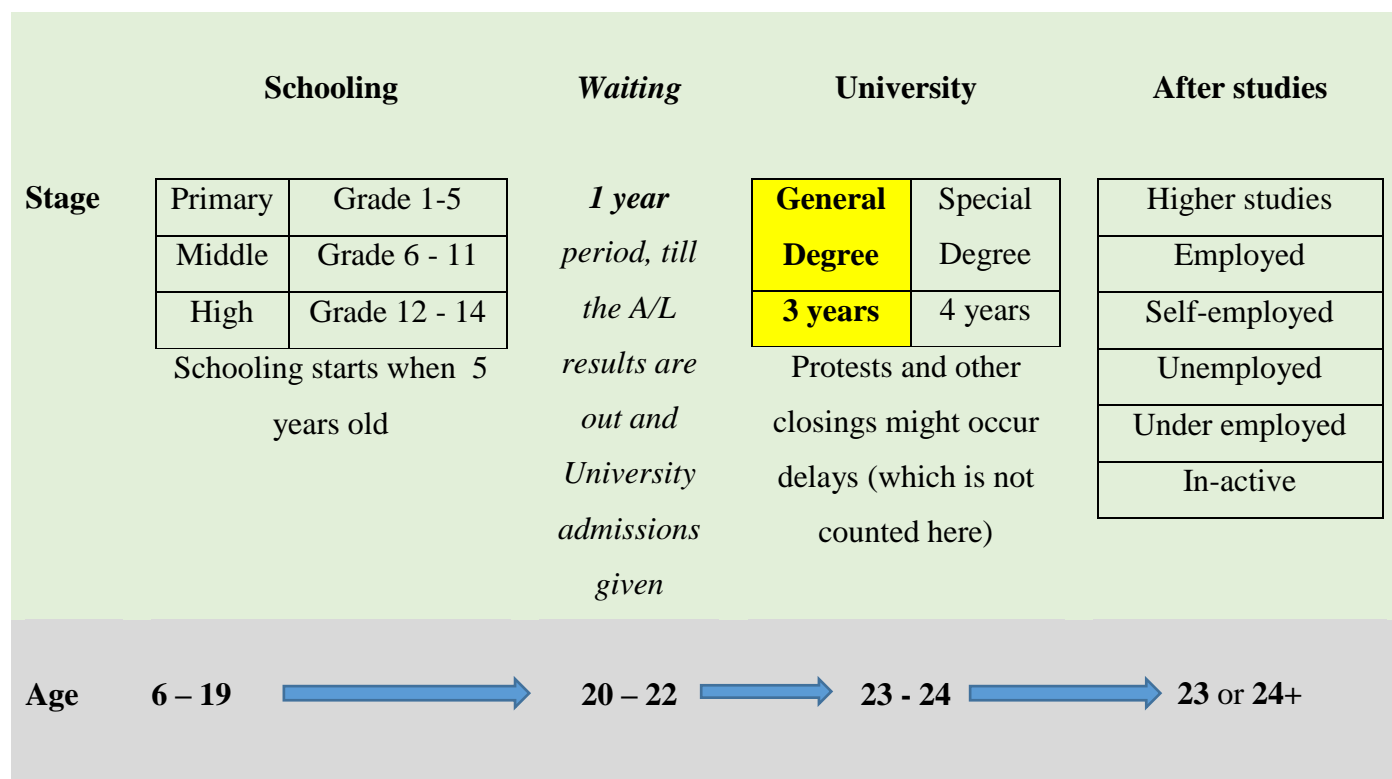
## Location of Universities in Sri Lanka



**Figure 05:** Location of Universities in Sri Lanka

Source: (UGC, 2013)

The following chart shows a timeline of an average Sri Lankan student's academic events leading up to graduation at university.



**Figure 06:** An educational timeline of an average Sri Lankan

University Education is free for all undergraduate students in Sri Lanka. However, due to the limited availability of places, University selection exams (called General Certificate of Advanced Levels (G.C.E A/L's)) are very competitive.

University Education Government	2012	2013
Universities (No.)	15	15
Students (No.)	70,222	78,442
Lecturers (No.)	5,176	5,457
Number Graduated	11,614	n.a
New Admissions for Bachelor's Degrees (No.)	28,908	24,299

**Table 01:** University enrollment statistics

Source: (CBSL, 2014)

University Education, adopted from CBSL 2013 report.

• Student/teacher ratio number	18
• Age specific enrolment ratio (age 20-24 years)	5%
Progression to university from GCE (A/L)	
• Eligible for university admission	63.0%
• Admission as a percentage of eligible	16.8%

**Table 02:** Information about the education sector in Sri Lanka

**Source:** (CBSL, 2014)

A recent study says that annually 220,000 students take university exams for 23,000 seats in state Universities (Economist, January, 2014).

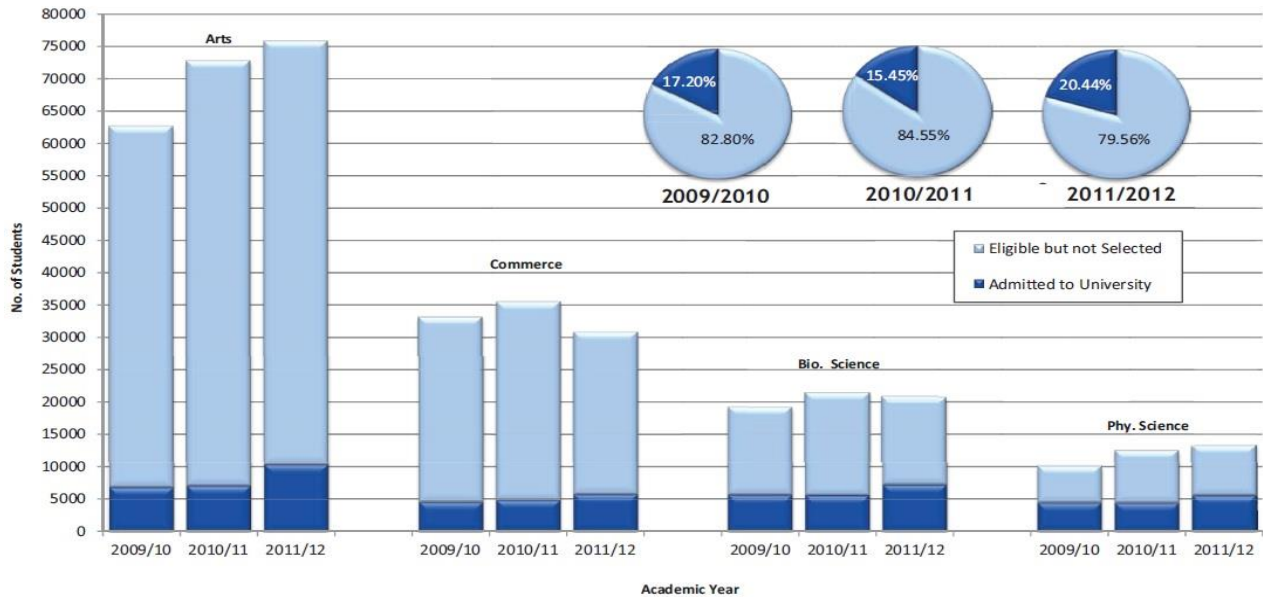
Year of A/L	Year of admission	No. Qualified (Arts)		No. Admitted (Arts)		Percentage (Arts)	
		Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female
2008	2008/2009	65235	47956	6693	5179	10.26	10.80
2009	2009/2010	62676	46246	6841	5360	10.91	11.59
2010	2010/ 2011	72800	54282	7064	5587	9.70	10.29
2011	2011/2012	75838	56020	10297	8222	13.58	14.68

**Table 03:** Number of candidates qualifying and admitted to undergraduate Arts Degree courses of the higher educational institutions in Sri Lanka

**Source:** (UGC, 2014)

According to the same study done by UGC (2014), there were 141,411 qualified students for university admissions to all disciplines in the academic year 2011/2012. However, only 28,906 students were admitted to universities. As a percentage only, 20.44% have got admission from the total number of qualified students. Among those admissions, only 19.44% were made to female candidates.

**COMPOSITION OF STUDENT NUMBER ELIGIBLE TO ENTER AND ADMITTED TO HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS  
(Academic Year 2009/10 - 2011/12)**



**Figure 07:** Composition of student numbers eligible to enter higher education and admitted to educational institutes (for academic year 2009/10, 2011/12)

Source: (UGC, 2014)

**Crisis in education and higher education**

**(i) Low public expenditure**

Sri Lanka's amount of public expenditure on Education as percentage of GDP has been declining over the years. The following **Table 04** shows the gradual decline of allocated budget share (per capita expense on education each year as a percentage of the GDP).

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
<b>Gov* expenditure on Education as % of GDP</b>	2.59	2.27	2.08	1.86%	1.86%	1.80%

**Table 04:** Government expenditure on education in Sri Lanka

Gov\*: Government

Source: (CBSL, 2013)

According to a study done by Education International, Belgium (2012) out of the percentage of funds that are allocated for all education expenses, the proportion allocated for university education has fallen from 0.52% of GDP in 2005 to 0.27% GDP in 2012 (EI, 2012).

The following chart will also give a clear picture about education expenditure of Sri Lanka in comparison to other countries. A comparison between public education spending (as a percentage of GDP) with many Asian countries and others is provided. Note that the numbers are adopted for analysis from the World Bank data that was retrieved in 2010 or the closest year according to Aturupane (2012).

Country	Public Education Spending as a Percentage of GDP	Public Education Spending as a Percentage of Government Spending	Education Recurrent Expenditure per Student as a Share of GDP per Capita
Sri Lanka	1.9	7.3	9.1
Malaysia	4.7	25.2	15.0
Thailand	4.0	20.9	18.3
South Korea	4.2	15.3	17.8
Singapore	3.3	10.3	na
Argentina	4.9	13.5	16.5
Brazil	5.1	16.1	18.1
Bolivia	6.3	18.1	na
Costa Rica	5.0	22.8	18.8
Colombia	4.8	14.9	16.6
Russia	3.9	12.9	18.0
India	3.2	10.7	12.3
Bangladesh	2.4	14.0	13.6
Pakistan	2.9	11.2	11.4
Nepal	3.8	14.9	na
South Asia	2.9	14.9	na
Low and Middle Income	4.0	na	na
Upper Middle Income	4.6	14.0	na

**Table 05:** Education expenditure of Sri Lanka in comparison to other countries

**Source:** (Aturupane, 2012)



As a result of the gradual decline in government's expenditure on education as percentage of GDP, there has been a lot of tensions between both students and teachers with the government. Their demand is to increase the annual public expenditure for education (for schools education and higher education).

**(ii) Increased class segregation in education**

A debate that has been on the table for years is whether or not to introduce private Universities in Sri Lanka. However, due to strong protests by state university graduates and undergraduates', there are still no private universities within the country. However, there is an increasing trend of opening new private 'international' schools and other higher education institutes all around Sri Lanka. Private schools are now available from kindergarten level, primary school, secondary school and tertiary (high) school. Private higher education institutes offer a variety of disciplines that are also available in both undergraduate level and graduate level as well. Most of these foreign affiliated and non-affiliated higher education institutes are established either as Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) or under BOI (Board of Investment) Sri Lanka. These have no link with Education and Higher Education Ministry, but governed by the Ministry of Investment promotion and Ministry of Economic Development in Sri Lanka.

The majority of the students who study in these private schools and private institutes are from rich family backgrounds (lower middle class and above). In government schools education is free; whereas private schools offer education at a cost. In these private schools' education is mostly conducted in English, following foreign education syllabuses with foreign registered exams. They prepare students to go abroad after school education or to study further in Sri Lankan private higher education institutes.

A critique that is made against this growing trend is the 'lack of quality control' in private education system (mostly, in these international schools). Since these schools are not registered under the education ministry, but under BOI, the government has less power over them. Furthermore in many of these private schools, students are not taught local languages (Sinhala and Tamil), history and culture of Sri Lanka, nor religion as subjects. Thus, some heavily criticize this growing tendency. According to experts, the lack of government intervention in

quality control of private (international) schools' education has caused a widening of the gap between the rich and the poor (Ratnayake, 2004). They argue that this growing disparity is due to the differences in both the structure and content of the education received by each demographic. Students of public schools are mostly taught about the culture and history, while students from international schools (private schools) are getting less education on those fields. This potentially could be a barrier for a well-integrated society. Another potential challenge that is seen apart from class segregation is brain drain. Since the majority of the students who study in private schools leave Sri Lanka, it is also a challenge for the country to function the economic machine without well-equipped youth.

### **Unemployment Issue**

Sri Lanka has a low unemployment rate in comparison to many other developing nations. Sri Lanka's overall unemployment rate is 4.4 % (CBSL, 2014); but the youth unemployment (ages 15-24) is at around 17.3%. Notably there is a low female labor force participation; which is at about 30% (The World Bank , 2014).

### **Educated but unemployed**

In total and inclusive of all S.L HEIs (Higher Education Institutes), Sri Lanka is estimated to annually produce around 25,000 graduates (Chandrakumara, 2014). This number continually increases each year and accordingly, the unemployment rate too rises, due to fluctuations of demand for certain disciplinary streams; mainly for Arts and Humanities graduates. The following chart shows the total number of enrolled students in 2011 for different disciplines.

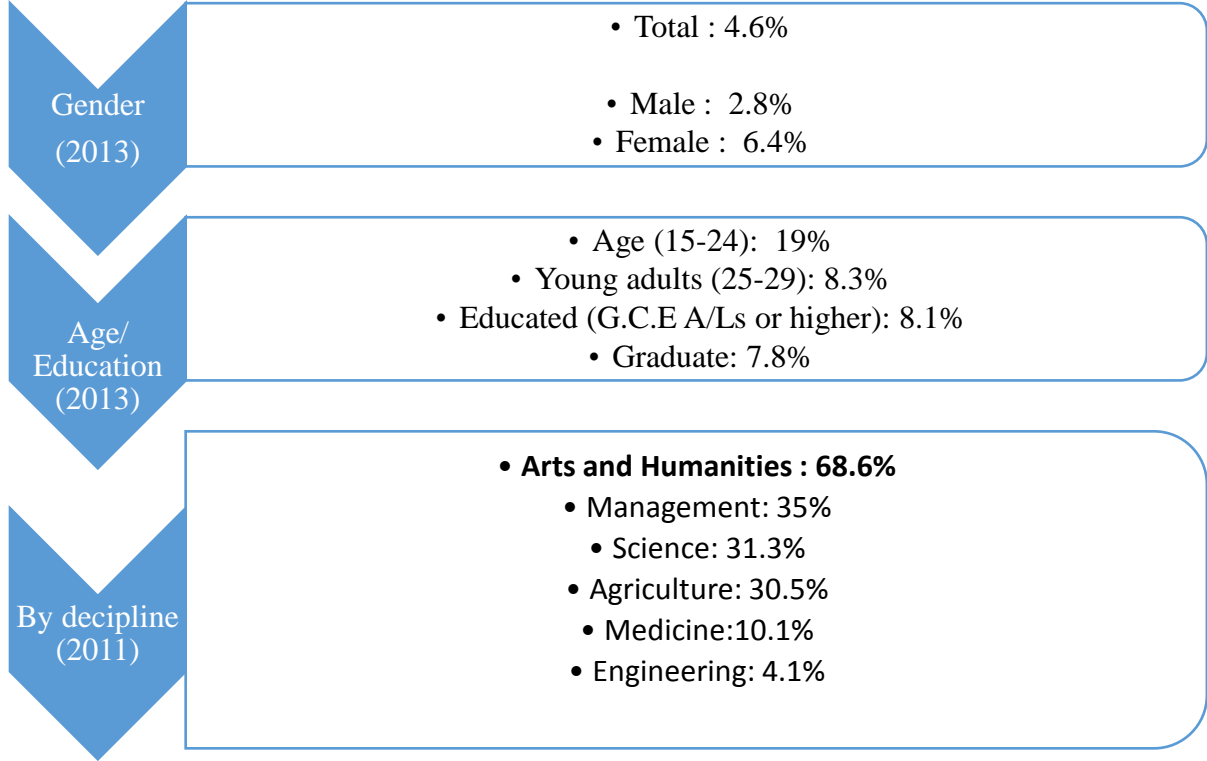
<b><u>Discipline</u></b>	<b><u>Enrollment</u></b>
Education	7,851
<b>Humanities and Arts</b>	<b>122,875</b>
Business and law	41,691
Science	29,060
Agriculture	4,251
Health and Welfare	13,844

**Table 06:** University degree program, enrollment by discipline, in Sri Lanka (2011)

**Source:** (Economist, January, 2014)

The same study also states that Sri Lanka has about a 7.8% unemployment rate of graduates in the year of 2012, while the country’s total unemployment was 4.6% (Economist, January, 2014).. Among the graduates that are unemployed, the majority are found to be Arts and Humanities graduates. The results of the Higher Education Ministry’s survey in 2013 stated that unemployment rate for Arts and Humanities graduates was 68.5%.

The following chart summarizes and categorizes the unemployment rates in Sri Lanka. The first cell shows unemployment by gender, the second cell shows unemployment by age categories with education and the last cell shows the unemployed persons by educational discipline in Sri Lanka as at 2011.



**Figure 08:** Unemployment rates in Sri Lanka by gender (2013), age (2013) and discipline (2011)

**Sources:** Gender and Age / Education: (Ministry of Finance and Planning, 2013), by discipline (Economist, January, 2014)

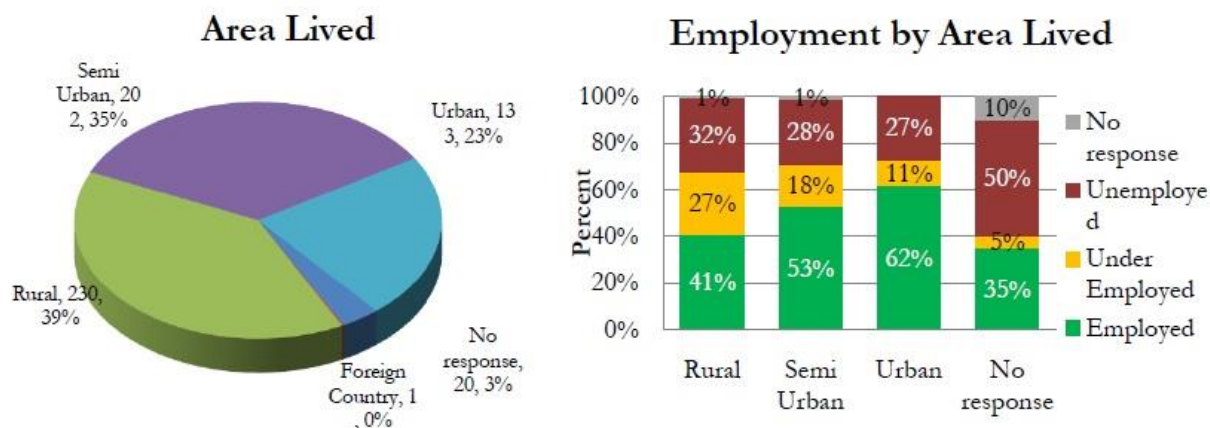
**Note:** *There are different studies which were conducted by both private and public sectors. However, the numbers have slight differences ± 0.5 ... in statistics of unemployment rates.*

## **Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka**

The Faculty of Arts has the highest number of enrolments in University of Colombo. Studies are conducted in Sinhala and some modules/classes are also offered in English/Tamil (Ramanayake, 2012). It consists of 8 departments (Demography, Economics, English, Geography, History, Political Science and Public Policy, Sinhala, Sociology and International Relations) (University of Colombo, 2014). The Faculty of Arts also offers the following degrees for Undergraduates (UGC, 2014).

1. Bachelor of Arts (General)
2. Bachelor of Arts (Special) in Demography
3. Bachelor of Arts (Special) in Economics
4. Bachelor of Arts (Special) in English
5. Bachelor of Arts (Special) in Geography
6. Bachelor of Arts (Special) in History
7. Bachelor of Arts (Special) in International Relations
8. Bachelor of Arts (Special) in Political Science
9. Bachelor of Arts (Special) in Sinhala
10. Bachelor of Arts (Special) in Sociology

The majority of Arts and Humanities students proceed with a Bachelor of Arts General Degree, which has duration of 3 years. According to a 2012 HETC (Higher Education for the Twenty First Century) report in University of Colombo, 49.5% of graduates from the class of 2012 were employed while 19.3% were under-employed (salary is less than Sri Lanka Rupees 10,000) and 30.2% were unemployed. Out of all graduates 75.1% are female and 84% are Sinhala, 5% Tamil and 10% Muslim by ethnicity. The following graphs show where graduates have come to University from.



**Figure 09:** Demography – graduate residence and employment

**Source:** HETC 2012 Report (Ramanayake, 2012)

As indicated above, 39% of the graduates are from rural areas, 35% are from semi-urban areas and 23% have urban backgrounds. However, whilst 62% of all urban background graduates were employed, this was the case for only 41% of graduates with a rural background.

According to HETC (2012) report, 55% of the graduates have done A/L's in National Schools, 29% at Provincial Schools and only 1% had attended private schools. The study also found that graduates who had 'good' computer literacy were likely to be employed and also among the graduates who had a 'very good' English proficiency - 85% were employed. The graduates with 'very poor' English proficiency were mostly under employed.

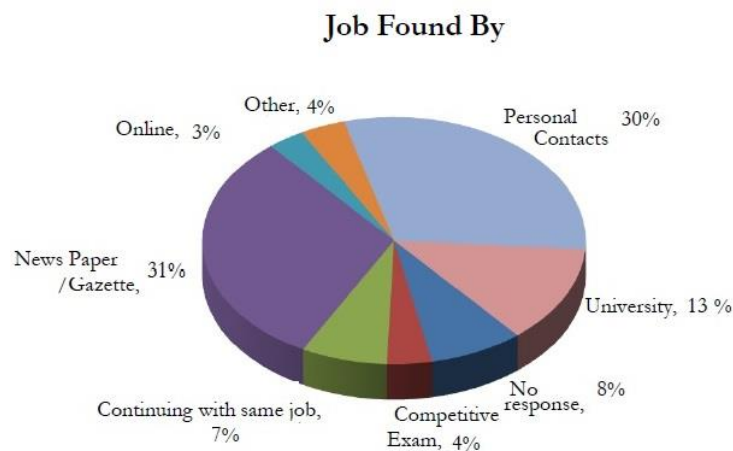
Furthermore the HETC (2012) study additionally found that 59% of the graduates prefer government employment while 13% preferred private sector employment. 44.9% of the graduates have 'tried hard' to find employment but 56% of the unemployed and 53% of under employed have 'tried hard' to find employment. HETC (2012) report also states that 61% of the graduates were also in a process to find a job (or a better job), 11% were planning to migrate and 51% wanted to migrate.

### Employability of Arts and Humanities graduates

The lowest employed among all other graduates were Arts and Humanities graduates. Only 39% were employed earning Rs. 20,000 -30,000, 21% were under-employed and 39% were unemployed according the HETC (2012) report. Among all Arts and Humanities graduates, 93% of those who did the English Special Degree were employed, while only 39% of General Degree Arts graduates gained employment. The General Degree Arts graduates had overall the lowest level of employment among all Arts and Humanities graduates.

For those Arts graduates with employment, 44% were in employed in the public sector (19% in teaching, 25% in non-teaching positions) and 36% in private sector. Among urban graduates who were employed from Arts stream, 52 % were employed in private sector while 13 % in public sector. Also 36% of the semi-urban graduates were employed in private sector and 28% of them were employed in public service. HETC (2012) also found out that 26% of the rural graduates that were employed were in private sector and 33% in public sector.

The following diagram (**Figure 10**) shows, how the Arts and Humanities graduates found jobs. 31% by newspaper advertisements, 30% has found via personal contacts, 13 % by the university and other means are also shown in the diagram.



**Figure 10:** Pathways to graduate employment

**Source:** HETC 2012 Report (Ramanayake, 2012)

## **04. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Chapter overview**

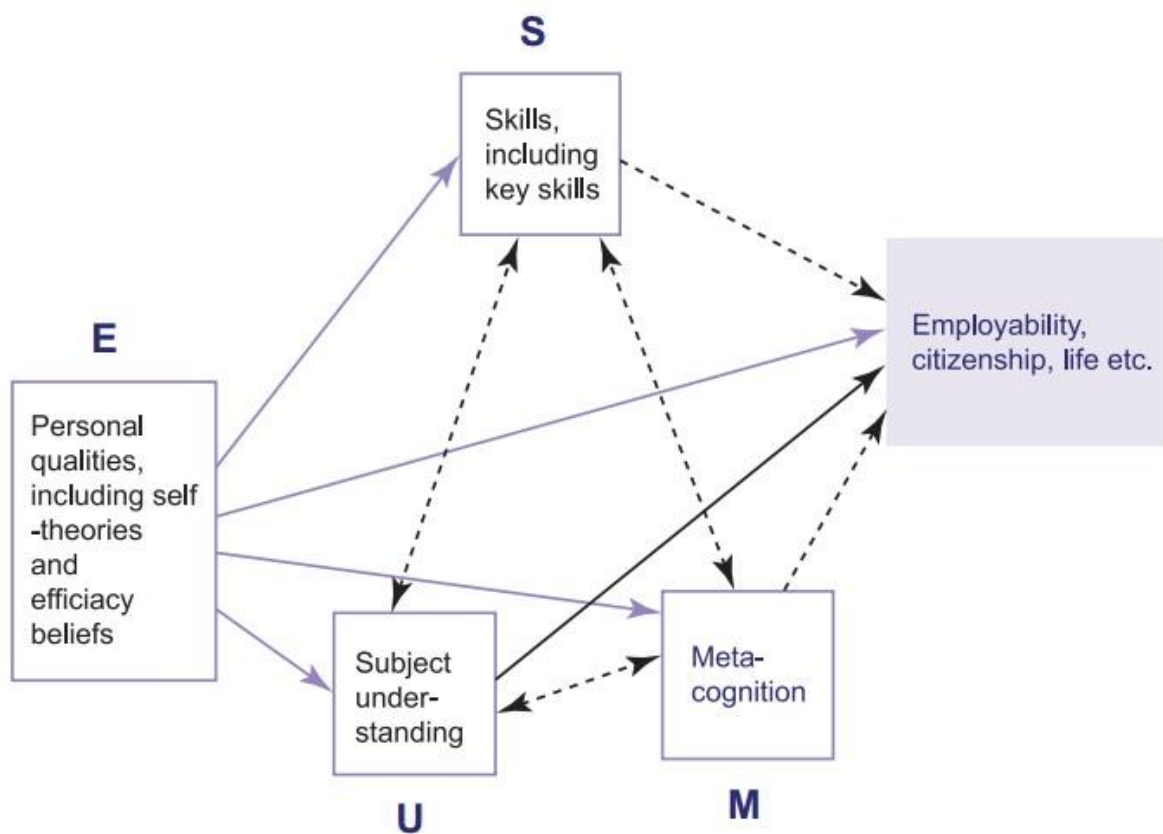
This chapter will conceptualize the topic presented (employability, opportunity and upward mobility) and give an overview of the research interest presented in brief with reference to other literature done on similar studies. The latter part of the study will also speak about the case of Sri Lanka and graduate employability.

### **Employability**

Education and employability are two determinants which indicate a modern country's growth and prosperity. If a country's population has a relatively high education level and sufficient employment opportunities for those graduates, then that country will be considered to be a developing nation which will progress through to higher levels of development. Employability of graduates is a concern which every country and every educational institute face. However, different researchers have given different explanations as to why graduates are not employed and as to what should be developed in order for graduates to gain employment.

The word 'employability' is given different definitions by different authors. According to Yorke (2006): employability is "a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy" and Harvey (2003) says "employability is not just about getting a job. Conversely, just because a student is on a vocational course does not mean that somehow employability is automatic. Employability is more than about developing attributes, techniques or experience just to enable a student to get a job, or to progress within a current career. It is about learning and the emphasis is less on 'employ' and more on 'ability'. In essence, the emphasis is on developing critical, reflective abilities, with a view to empowering and enhancing the learner" (Ann Pegg, 2012).

Another study done by York and Knight (2006) states “employability refers to the potential a graduate has for obtaining, and succeeding in, graduate-level positions. There is a need to recognize that the co- and extra-curricular achievements of students contribute to a graduate’s employability”. It further claims that employability has a complex structure which connects a range of discourses from both ‘*academic intelligence*’ and ‘*practical intelligence*’. The study reports that employability can be illustrated with four components (U-S-E-M) which inter-relate. USEM stands for Understanding, Skills, Efficacy and Metacognition (Yorke & Knight, 2006). Following diagram (**Figure 11**) shows how USEM works for employability.



**Figure 11:** The USEM account of employability

Source: (Yorke & Knight, 2006)

According to York and Knight (2006) U-S-E-M is explained as follows. ‘U’ for Understanding is explained as the key outcome of higher education, which is also related to ‘subject knowledge’.



‘S’ for Skills is used to explain the ‘skilled practices’ or ‘skillful practice’ which is referred to the awareness and responsiveness in dealing with tasks at different contexts. ‘E’ for Efficacy is related to beliefs, students’ self-theories and personal qualities which is of critical importance is the extent to which students feel that they might ‘be able to make a difference’ – not every time, but in a probabilistic way.” ‘M’ stands for Metacognition, which is explained as a student’s ability to reflect in and for action the learnings with self-awareness (Yorke & Knight, 2006).

In this study, the definition of employability is referred to as the chance of a graduate securing a relevant job that could satisfy his/her desires (salary, social status and mental happiness) with regard to level of his/her education level. In this case, General Degree Arts graduates from the Faculty of Arts at the University of Colombo in Sri Lanka are researched in terms of employability. Specifically the terms ‘employability’ and ‘opportunity’ in this study are defined as follows:

- **Employability** indicates the ability of getting a relevant and an adequate job for the level of education of a General Degree Arts graduate, from University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. It also includes the ability of an Arts graduate to choose the most preferred job from available alternatives.
- **Opportunity** is defined in the Oxford dictionary, “as a time or set of circumstances that makes it possible to do something” (Oxford, 2014). It is additionally defined as “the chance to do something, or a situation in which it is easy for you to do something” (Macmillan, 2014)

### **Social mobility**

In social mobility, movements of people or groups of people are seen in different dimensions. Migration of people from one country to another country is seen as one important aspect in social mobility. Another way of looking into social mobility is the inter changes that take place within a societal system. Many view these movements’ in terms of a system of social hierarchy or stratification. A movement that considers being something that change one’s social class to a better one, can be considered as upward mobility (Britannica, 2014).

Two other definitions for **upward mobility** are,

01. Movement from one social level to a higher one (upward mobility) (Dictionary.com, 2014).
02. The capacity or facility for rising to a higher social or economic position (Merriam-Webster, 2014).

### **Education and social mobility**

Many researchers have done studies to find out what determines social class and what facilitates mobility. A study done by Plewis and Bartley (2013) found that the level of education of both parents and children as one of the key determinants which affects their social mobility (Plewis & Bartleyb, 2013). The same study has also found that “children whose parents are upwardly mobile gain higher educational qualifications than their peers in their class of origin, but obtain lower qualifications than their peers in their class of destination. The reverse pattern is observed for the downwardly mobile.”

Explanations are also presented for the relationship between social position and education by Breen and Goldthorpe (1997) and Goldthorpe (1996) in a framework of understanding entitled ‘rational action theory’ (Plewis & Bartleyb, 2013). According to rational action theory, “costs, benefits and perceived chances of success are important predictors of educational choice and contribute to class differences” (Fekjær, 2009). A study done by Kim and Sherraden (2010) further states that parental assets and wealth have an association with children’s later educational attainment (high school completion and college attendance) (Kim & Sherraden, 2010). According to The Theory of Relative Risk Aversion (RRA) decisions are made in educational affairs in order to minimize the risk of downward social mobility (Jæger & Holm, 2011).

However, in this research, upward mobility is considered as how the General Degree Arts students’ social and economic status changes after leaving the university as graduates. This study specifically looks into their experience in lifestyle and living conditions, and to explore whether there had been any changes in social mobility in relation to and recognition upon the completion of General Arts Degree from the Faculty of Arts at the University of Colombo.

## **Employability in the case of Sri Lanka**

There are numerous studies which have been conducted about the employability of Sri Lankan graduates. Different researchers have offered different opinions with regard to employability. Some studies have specifically focused on certain fields of studies, such as the employability of business graduates in Sri Lanka or the employability of management graduates in Sri Lanka. However, statistics show that it is the Arts graduates that have the lowest level of employment amongst all graduates of Sri Lankan state universities. Thus, one could also review studies which investigate the employability of graduates from other fields and investigate whether some of those reasons for lack of employability also apply to Arts graduates.

Another study carried out identifies that Sri Lanka has a huge mismatch in the graduates produced and the actual demand for jobs. One of the key findings in Ariyawansa (2008) is that social sciences and humanities are producing a large number of students annually, which has created a lesser chance in getting employed and lesser opportunities in society too. The study also finds out that gaining both training and/or work experience while studying is one of the key pre-requisites demanded within the job market, alongside English proficiency. Furthermore, the research emphasizes the importance of having IT skills, leadership qualities, analytical ability, team work and interpersonal relations of graduates that are leaving Sri Lankan universities. The study highlights that IT skills and English proficiency should not be the responsibility of universities, but it is something that has to be accumulated prior to entering universities, skills which could be improved further during university education. When students enter universities with basic IT skills and English proficiency, the university could train students in capacity development, which will increase their employability horizons. The study further points out the importance of the expansion of the Sri Lankan economy, which will eventually create more jobs for Social Sciences graduates and states that Sri Lankan universities do not evaluate degree programs through the use of quality assurance procedures (Ariyawansa, 2008).

A study done at the University of Colombo, Faculty of Arts about employer satisfaction on Business graduates in Sri Lanka, has interesting findings based on Employers' perspectives. The study reports that the Sri Lankan private sector favors hiring professionals than local graduates from state universities, since professionals are more qualified, skillful and more work oriented

than business graduates originating from state universities. According to the study the graduates from state universities lack skills; especially ICT skills, English language proficiency and the applicability of practical knowledge. The reasons for the lower demand for state university graduates are presented as follows: (a) relatively poor skills in graduates in general, (b) perception about business graduates qualities of attitudes and skills needed for efficiently in private sector, (c) poor relationship between industry and universities, (d) outdated curricular of study programs which doesn't meet employers expectations. The study further stresses the importance of improving essential skills, attitudes and qualities of Sri Lankan business graduates to increase their demand for jobs (Ranasinghe & Hearth , 2011).

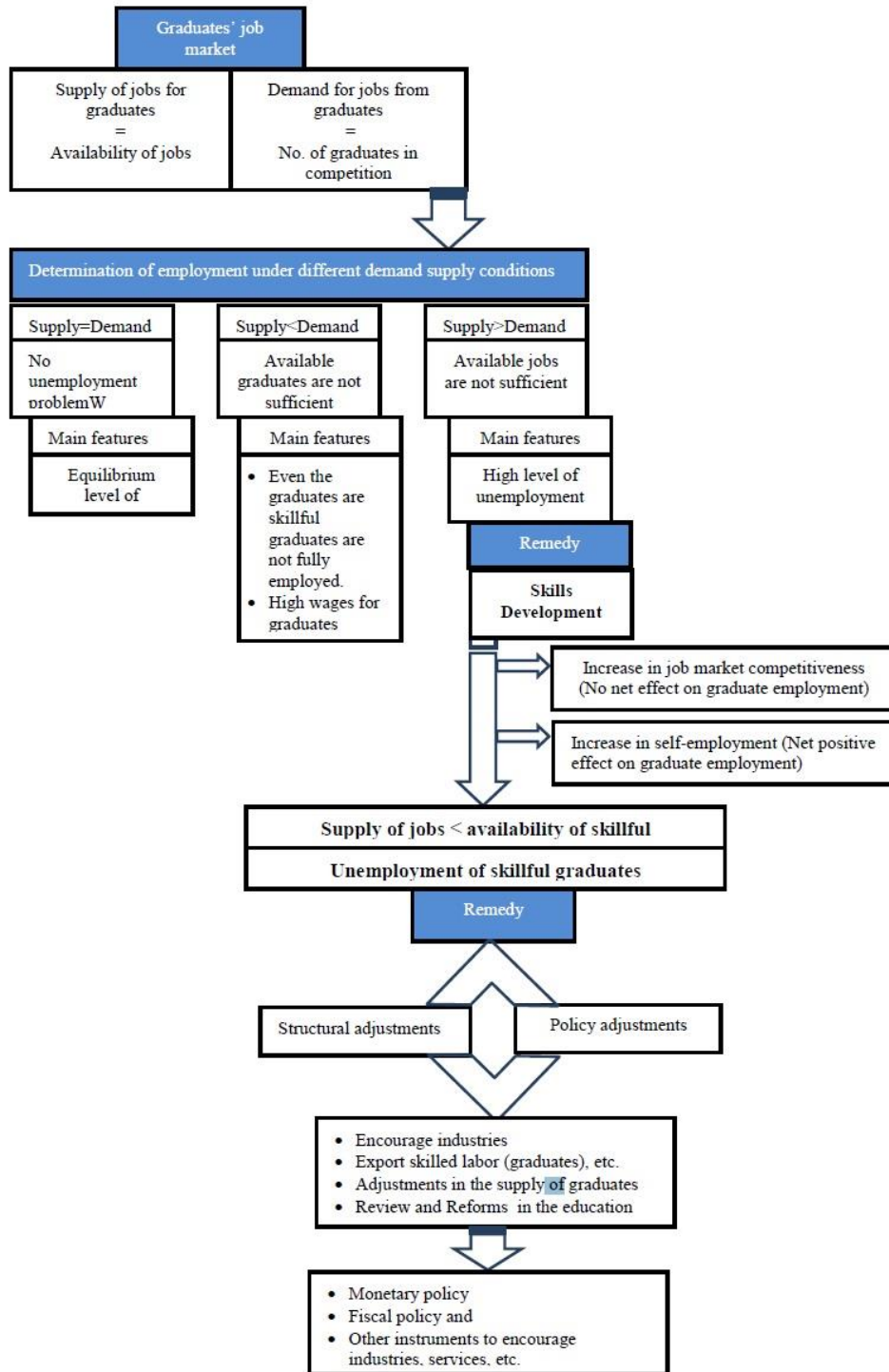
Out of many other attributes, importance of having 'English' knowledge for employability has been identified in many studies. A study done by Wijewardene, Yong and Chinna, (2014) was particularly looking at 'English for employability'. The study states that competency in English plays a pivotal role in the growth of Sri Lanka, due its large market share in the service industry. The study further notes that graduates with spoken and written English skills are not just getting more opportunities in Sri Lanka, but internationally, since English is recognized as the '*lingua franca*' in almost all free market economies of the world. The study identifies that Sri Lankan state university graduates' readiness in subject knowledge, but the lack of competency in English leaves a 'Hobson's choice', ultimately making the private university graduates more competent and attractive in securing good employment both in and outside of Sri Lanka. The study discusses the causality of addressing this issue together with all the concerned groups: students, employers, university authorities, teachers of language teaching and curriculum designers. By addressing the issue with long-term plans which will help in raising the performance of industry both locally and globally, it will also hopefully help to lower graduates' unemployment statistics in Sri Lanka. (Wijewardene, Yong, & Chinna, 2014).

A study done by Chandrakumara (2014) identifies determinants of employability of new graduates in Sri Lanka as follows: degree type, soft skills and social capital, efforts made by graduates in applying for jobs, and additional professional qualifications that graduates have earned. In conclusion, the study says in the case of the graduate job market in Sri Lanka, there will still be a problem for Arts graduates, even with the improved soft skills and other skills.

According to him the university enrollment should be adjusted according to the availability of jobs for any discipline. He also states that the ‘employability problem’ could be further reduced by diverting students towards professional courses. In the end, he emphasizes that soft skills, professional qualifications and other determinants for employability will only increase the competitiveness in the labor market, but not provide any solution for the unemployment issue of graduates in Sri Lanka. Furthermore he suggests that the unemployment issue could be solved by doing sectorial adjustments in the economy which could absorb more graduates and a larger proportion of the labor force (Chandrakumara, 2014). As implications for policy development he suggests with respect to Sri Lanka’s needs:

01. A rethink on university intakes from different fields of study and simultaneously diverting a proportion of students from academically oriented studies to more professional kinds of programs before the students graduate;
02. Provide more training along with professional qualifications;
03. Training students for enthusiasm, that will build positive attitudes in order to face challenges;
04. Instead of training students for employers’ needs, train students for society’s needs.

Determining the employability of graduates in the job market summarized as shown below:



**Figure 12:** Graduate job market analysis

**Source:** (Chandrakumara, 2014)

Another study done by Dolage and Hearth (2013) speaks about the soft skill competency of Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) Graduates for employability. The study was done according to the perspectives of four types of stakeholders namely employers, academics, graduates and current students. In conclusion, five most sought after soft skills were identified: interpersonal, leadership, oral communication, decision making and team work. The study also found out that students at OUSL poorly performed in aforesaid soft skills relative to foreign graduates and Sri Lankan HEI graduates. The study further suggested the importance of having courses which are more focused in improving oral communication and teamwork skills (Dolage & Hearth , 2013).

A literature review about graduates' employability skills by Weligamage (2009) relates the findings within the context of Sri Lanka. The study said Sri Lankan universities have to identify the skill sets that will best serve the future labor market in the country by doing an Employers' skill requirement survey to identify real needs, and suggests aligning programs accordingly to meet those needs. The study also identifies the importance of having practical experience, such as internships for graduates, which mutually benefits both the employer and student. Weligamage (2009) suggests conducting a study on how the teaching process helps to include the key skills that employers are seeking such as: communication, teamwork, problem solving, planning and organizing, technology, self-management and initiative enterprise skills. Weligamage (2009) ultimately identifies a core set of desirable attributes that graduates should have to enhance employability, which are: communication skills, interpersonal skills and team working, problem solving, analytical, critical and reflective abilities, a willingness to learn and to engage in life-long learning, flexibility and adaptability, risk-taking and self-skills (Weligamage S. , 2009).

## **Reasons for low graduate employment in Sri Lanka**

Having analyzed the university education system of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, the following reasons are given for low graduate employment in Sri Lanka (Economist, January, 2014).

### 01. Quality of education is low:

According to Times Higher Education (THE) there is no South Asian university ranked among the top 100 universities in the world. Furthermore, according to the study it indicates the lack of qualified teachers for students in Sri Lanka. This is often attributed to the low wages of qualified teacher.

### 02. Skills shortage: High growth, low demand

Economic development plans for the country and the graduates that are produced from state universities have a skills mismatch. For example, although Mahinda Chinthana identifies the key growth sectors for skills relevant to the GOSL's National development plan as construction, ICT, apparel manufacturing, tourism and education services. Yet in contrast the proportion of Arts students' enrollment has increased. In 1992 it was 10% of the total enrollment, while in 2010 it has rose to 45% of the entire university enrollment (Economist, January, 2014).

The same study by The Economist – Intelligence unit stresses that the education sector has to identify the labor force needs of the particular country and the education that is connected with such employment. This could be done in a way that creates mutual benefits for both the employer and the student by offering a student an internship, work placement or paid position.

Another argument that is made in the Economist study (2014) is that Sri Lanka has implemented a National Development Plan, with a focus on core areas, as well as ensuring that the educational system can enact the requisite changes. Sri Lanka's National Development Plan is 'Mahinda Chinthanaya': a vision for a 'New Sri Lanka'. A ten year horizon development framework 2006-2016 discussion paper was subsequently prepared. This identified the following key growth areas for skills: construction, ICT, apparel manufacturing, tourism, education services.



A study done by Abeyratne (2010) forecasts how the employment rates will change for graduates with respect to their field of studies. He has used CBSL data and come up with the changing processes of employment accordingly, as presented in **Table 08**. According to the Mahinda Chinthanaya National Development Plan, the vision for Sri Lanka is to transform the economy into a ‘dynamic global hub’ in the areas of shipping, aviation, commerce, energy and knowledge. For that, ‘greater connectivity’ and ‘global competitiveness’ is necessary and in order to achieve these goals, an open economy, as realized through market-oriented policy and regulatory reform, is essential. Although Sri Lanka’s economy is relatively open, further deregulation is necessary in order to achieve these aims.

	Employment ('00s)			Change over 2010(%)	
	2010	2015	2020	2015	2020
Manufacturing	1270	1423	1593	12.0	25.4
Construction, mining and quarrying, electricity, gas and water	507	608	730	20.0	44.0
Wholesale and retail trade	986	1094	1214	11.0	23.1
Hotels and restaurants	139	160	184	15.1	32.4
Transport, storage and communications	463	609	803	31.7	73.6
Financial intermediation and real estate	256	345	465	34.8	81.6
Government services	1178	1222	1269	3.8	7.8
Total	4798	6462	6258	13.8	30.4

**Table 08:** High growth scenario - employment demand of medium-term output growth

**Source:** (Abeyratne, 2012)

However, according to UGC, the government of Sri Lanka is planning to open 25 new technical universities and university colleges. It will also announce a new Bachelor of Technology degree to meet the future demands of the country.

## 05. RESULTS

### Chapter overview

This chapter will present the findings of the interviews that were conducted in the field. Earlier in the Methods chapter, it was explained that the four groups of stakeholders that were interviewed ‘in-depth’ in this study were: (i) Experts, (ii) Employers (iii) Politicians and (iv) Recent graduates. Wherein, the first portion of this chapter will summarize the interviews from these three categories of stakeholders. Recent graduates’ interviews will also be summarized, using the ‘thematic approach’ whereby the key findings of the interviews will be presented in a table. Ultimately, this chapter will give an overview of the observations made by the researcher at the Arts Faculty of Colombo Campus.

### Interviews of Experts

#### Expert 01:

*‘In Sri Lanka you cannot even breathe without politics. It is not the cause, it is a symptom.’*

Known for his extensive academic experience in Sri Lanka, Expert 01 is an Academic staff member of the Arts Faculty at the University of Colombo. Primarily, Expert 01 is a Professor in Economics and he expressed his opinion about the ‘unemployment’ issue of Arts and Humanities graduates. On this topic, he started the discussion by stating that *‘a university can’t make graduates employable and it is not the university’s responsibility. Universities are there to provide quality education, where knowledge is rich’*. Next, he said, *‘many argue that IT and English are skills that make graduates employable, which is never tested in Sri Lanka, and so those cannot be the only determinants of the employability of Arts graduates.’* Notably, his point raised a strong argument as to whether one should consider if the labor market can absorb these graduates in a ‘stagnating economy’. According to Expert 01, there is a mismatch between the education and the labor market needs. In recent years the importance of quality in the higher education system of Sri Lanka has been ignored, and the focus has been more on quantity (recruiting more students). Whilst other countries have been shifting their concerns into creating

an innovative, mixed education system that utilizes technological advances, Sri Lanka lags behind other nations because of its conformity to the traditional framework of education, since Sri Lanka is still a country that produces mostly primary products.

Expert 01 said, *'one cannot just look at the present context of the Arts stream and draw conclusions about the unemployment issue'*. He emphasized the importance of understanding the roots of the issue. He said,

*'We have to first look at the start. In 1945 free education started which paved the way for 'non-elites' to also get higher education, and studying in the 'Sinhala' stream became very popular.*

*In the 1950's there was a boom of students, and we have to recognize three things: (i) unexpected number of graduate enrollment to universities, (ii) a shift from elites to non-elites in University education and (iii) labor market performances changed: graduates were redundant and a lot of teaching appointments were made. In 1977 as the economy was liberalized, the state even lost more of its controlling power and having reduced the state activity, there were no more places to fill Arts graduates in the government. As the public sector reduced its presence, then the focus was the private sector, which couldn't absorb the amount of graduates that were produced by state universities, and youth insurgencies also started.'*

According to him, the current government gives Rs. 5,000 to 10,000 as the starting salary for graduates, which he claims to be 'under-paid jobs' (since the payments are less than Rs. 10, 000). He claims that such jobs are non-productive jobs for an economy, since jobs are assigned with 'no work' with 'no chair'. He further stated that this is to address the unemployment issue by numbers, but it is not a long-term solution for the unemployed. Expert 01 said that, there's a well-known political reason behind this issue whereby the government is increasing student recruitment to Arts studies'. Quoting Expert 01, *'there's almost a 100% increment of undergraduates' enrollment from last year (now they are in first year)'*. The *'government just dumps students'* to university without thinking of creating job opportunities for them, which makes an over production of graduates in the country, resulting in high numbers of unemployment. Furthermore he stated that *'in every other faculty (medical, engineering, law) there's a governing body which decides the future plans and such but when it comes to Arts*

*there's no such system. We cannot decide anything, we are controlled'* by which he meant that politicians were heavily involved in decision making for the Arts Faculty.

Expert 01 also believes that there's a conspiracy surrounding certain entrance exams for government bodies. According to him, the jobs that are supposed to be given to Arts and Humanities graduates are reserved for others and foreign graduates. An example he took was 'Central Bank' job recruitment. As he said, *'Central Bank only offers jobs for science graduates (from agricultural faculty and such), where higher percentages of the work which is supposed to be done by sociologists, economists. Even in media, there's a cut down for arts graduates. Arts students have failed in competing- but why? Soft skills, various language requirements, IT, interpersonal skills they say... but above all there's a stigma associated with an Arts degree. Now it has become a competition between BA (Bachelor of Arts) versus BSc (Bachelor of Science)'*. He furthermore mentioned that to exclude Arts and Humanities students from applying to such places, many employers have intentionally added Mathematics and statistics in jobs that don't require such competence. Pointing the finger at the private sector he argues that English and IT are two prerequisites which many employers include to reduce the 'recruitment cost' so that they can easily shortlist applicants. He stated that jobs in the private sector are still under the control of an elite class in Sri Lanka which maintains a system which favors according to Social Background.

Expert 01 also made a critique about the students who join university. His argument was that those students who join university are inferior in skill level and poor in English language proficiency. Thus, he called them a 'less capable input.' According to him, the majority of the students who enroll as Arts Faculty undergraduates come from rural areas, where schools have minimum facilities such as: poor standard computer labs, no proper English education, schools that have no extracurricular activities (sports, scouting, and cadetting) and such. He infers that most of the undergraduates' who come to university from rural areas also have poor parents who could not afford to pay for private lessons to learn such skills. He stated *'once we get these kinds of students who lack basic skills, it is really hard for us to give (them) all the skills that are needed in the job market in three years. University also has a curriculum and an allocated number of credit hours for each subject. Therefore, it is really hard to fulfil all of their*

*expectations, which result in them being 'less competitive' in the market, especially in the private sector. So we have to firstly treat the root cause, and then everything will be fine, even at university level.'*

When the researcher inquired Expert 01 regarding the high levels of absence of students during the evening classes on campus, he said, *'there's no research facility in the University of Colombo, Arts Faculty. So after 4pm there's no necessity for them to hang around campus. So they leave.'*

Lastly, his opinion about the 'privatization' of higher education was explored. He stated, *'Privatization of higher education will not be a solution for the issue of unemployment of Arts graduates. The capable and the elite will join those universities, creating another bulk of Arts graduates in Sri Lanka'.*

## **Expert 02**

Expert 02 was also from the Faculty of Arts. Speaking about the unemployment issue of Arts and Humanities graduates in Sri Lanka, she stated that she was 'very disappointed' and started the conversation describing the situation of the current Education system of Sri Lanka as 'pathetic'. According to Expert 02, *'A student spends a 'competitive life' of 13 years in school and 'the cream of the brightest' gets selected to University education. However, after three to four years in the university they go out without the 'right skills'.* According to her, even after joining the university, undergraduates are incapable of developing the right skills due to the continuation of (i) the culture of competitiveness and (ii) the culture of memorization.

She said when students were asked for references on their research work, most of it came from considerably old references (publications from the 1970's or older), and no other efforts were made to find information beyond what other students had used in previous years. She also noted problems with the available resources within the university. Poor quality libraries and limited access to resources were key issues according to her. She further noted that even the meager resources available in the university have not been fully used by the students. For example, she described an incident that occurred with one of her students from a previous year. *'One of my*

*students had to submit an essay which I requested to be type-written. Eventually, she only managed to submit a hand-written essay. I called her and inquired why she didn't respect the course rule. The student replied that she didn't know how to use a computer.'* According to Expert 02, the computer facilities need to be improved urgently.

Expert 02 also mentioned the phrase 'right competence' and explained the importance of developing related skills which are demanded by the market, in order to make one's self employable. Language barriers were also highlighted in this discussion. On campus, for sociology students, only some classes are offered in English and many are still taught only in Sinhala. All undergraduate courses in the sociology program are in Sinhala medium and only graduate level courses are offered in English. She stated that, '*The National Development Policy, 'Mahinda Chinthanaya', promotes the mother tongue, but not English (written or spoken)'*'.

Following the same issue, Expert 02 also mentioned that financial issues are another major constraint to the level of involvement of undergraduate students in their studies. She said, '*The students have to learn how to make the best out of what is available to them. Even if the university offers English or any other programs, students are unable to take part in them. Most of them try to earn some money'*. She explained the importance of English. '*Look at the newspapers. All the companies require English proficiency in order to work'*. Even for a trainee position they ask for English. Therefore, parallel to an individual's mother tongue, also improving English skills by building the right infrastructure is critically important.

Expert 02 additionally raised the issue of 'team spirit' among Arts and Humanities undergraduates. According to her, undergraduates bring the culture of competitiveness to the university, which negatively affects undergraduate studies. She has observed this when she assigns group work to undergraduates. According to her in Arts studies, group-work is really low in classes and she thus stressed the importance of having more group work (assignments, activities in classes etc.) which will help in creating dynamic people who upon graduation could face the real world with the attitude desired by potential employers.

Continuing the same discussion, she further explained the similarities in what an employer and a teacher expect out of a new recruit. *‘Commitment, ability to work effectively and efficiently at both individual and group levels, in situations such as meeting deadlines for assignments’*. However, then she said *‘Students hardly respect and commit themselves to deadlines’*. She said most students seek for extensions of deadlines due to various reasons, which has now become commonplace in the Arts Faculty.

Having discussed the deadline issue, I asked her what her opinion was on the quality of submissions by undergraduates at the Arts Faculty, University of Colombo. She went on to explain the issue of plagiarism. According to her, there is no system to check whether the work of a student is genuine. She said, *‘If it is an assignment in the English language, it can be checked for plagiarism as long as it is an electronic copy. But if the assignments are typed in Sinhala, there is no way to check this besides through memorization of the other students’ submissions. Typically, assignments are not submitted electronically, but are usually hard copies’*.

Among many other suggestions, she also stressed the importance of having Sociology as a subject in the A/L (Advance Level) curriculum of Sri Lanka. According to her, the inclusion of Sociology as an A/L subject will benefit Arts students a great deal, since the subject will be introduced to them at an early stage for students.

Also with regard to the issue of unemployment within Arts graduates, Expert 02 expressed that a problem of attitude exists collectively within the community of Arts graduates. She stated, *‘Many of the students here live in their own bubble. They believe that getting a BA will resolve all of their problems. This is not true. They have to look outside the campus and understand the real world and real needs.’* Conversely, she also expressed that teachers also have an important role in curbing this attitude. When it comes to deadlines, she expressed the importance of teachers being strict by stating, *‘Some teachers expect honors, such as ‘most popular teacher of the academic year’ and so forth, while some others have questionable qualifications when it comes to teaching courses.’*

On the topic of private universities, Expert 02 said, *‘The establishment of private universities in Sri Lanka will not become a serious threat to the state university system. However, it will not address the unemployment issue of General Degree Arts graduates either. State universities have the best of everything when it comes to staff, infrastructure, facilities, and environment’*. Furthermore she stressed the importance of improving the standards and the quality of education in the state university system, which she believes is the only solution for the issue of unemployment of Arts graduates. Concluding the discussion, she stated, *‘If policies are implemented with proper rules and regulations, the existence of groups that riot and get involved in violence, will subside, and will in turn help students become productive individuals’*.

### **Expert 03**

Expert 03 is a Professor, from the UGC (University Grants commission). Speaking in regards to the unemployment issue, she noted that overall the average employment rate of Arts and Humanities graduates in Sri Lanka is about 30%, with the University of Colombo topping the list for individual universities, at a rate between 50 to 60%. According to her, the primary causes behind this issue are:

- The lack of communication and IT skills
- An education system centered around teachers, as opposed to students

She further noted that the UGC has studied this issue extensively and identified the expected attributes of a successful Arts Faculty graduate. This information is then used to educate personnel within the university system through training sessions and lectures conducted by the UGC and the Higher Education Ministry. The main goal of these training sessions is to promote the importance of student centered teaching through the explanation of the encouragement of the aforementioned graduate attributes.

According to Expert 03, a large portion of incoming students (approximately 50%) select Arts as their A/L study stream. Furthermore, she stated that most of the students from rural backgrounds, having no better option due to the lack of facilities in their schools, select Arts as well. As a solution to this, she said that there is a strategy being put in place to reduce the future number of Arts and Humanities students enrolled. According to Expert 03, the Education ministry plans on



introducing a 'Technology stream' in 2016, thus providing students with an extra option. This new stream is expected to attract a large number of students and consequently reduce the number of students that resort to the Arts. The new Technology stream will not teach in-depth sciences, but rather a more fundamental background that is required in dealing with modern industrial affairs, such as IT, electronics, mechanics, construction, and maintenance, all being courses that are currently in high demand in Sri Lanka.

When the researcher inquired Expert 03 regarding her opinion on the establishment of private universities, she said that it can be an important resource to Sri Lanka's academic options, considering the current demand in the general public for such institutions. She went on to say that it is the responsibility of the UGC to create a quality council that monitors the education standards provided by both state and non-state institutions.

#### **Expert 04**

Expert 04 is a senior Professor of Philosophy and a renowned author, with almost four decades of teaching experiences in both local and international institutions. Expert 04 took two approaches in addressing the unemployment issue of General Degree Arts graduates. The first approach deals with the policies regarding this issue. The second approach addresses the role played by the private sector in this issue and the insufficiency of jobs in the market. He further elaborated that women are the majority of all unemployed Arts and Humanities graduates, thus highlighting the importance of the policy makers considering the factors created by gender in this matter.

One of the key factors that he pointed out regarding this issue was lack of training received by the graduates through the university system, and the handicapped position it leaves these students in when it comes to practically dealing with their problems in life. External Arts and Humanities graduates (those who study in accredited private institutions, and sit for state universities examinations) have particularly poor practical skills according to him.

Another prevailing issue he sees in Arts and Humanities graduates is the weak English competency, which not only makes graduates less in demand in the local labor market, but also

abroad. According to Expert 04, most Arts and Humanities graduates in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Philippines have good English proficiency. Hence those graduates are open to more opportunities all around the world. Expert 04 said, *‘Our graduates really lag behind the rest of the world in English and yet they all expect white collar jobs. There are plenty of jobs in the market, but not many of these white collar jobs are available (such as office and administrative level jobs they desire to have) for the number of graduates we produce each year’*. To demonstrate this further, he highlighted that the issue of unemployment was largely unheard of amongst Science, Medicine, Management, Agriculture and Veterinary science faculties. He believed this was due to courses belonging to those faculties being taught in English. He further stressed *‘Students study in Sinhala medium: history, mass-communication, sociology, Buddhism, Buddhist culture and Sinhala. Therefore, they should question as to how many of these subjects are actually useful towards finding jobs in Sri Lanka.’*, thus validating his argument on the limitation in the job market for such subjects.

Expert 04 said most Arts and Humanities graduates heavily rely on finding government jobs. According to him, *‘Even within the government these positions are filled out only after a specific training assignment. No organization desires to hire these Arts and Humanities graduates without any training, because they lack English proficiency and a reasonable level of commitment and enthusiasm towards the work’*. He further stated that the private sector, which is the largest employer of Sri Lanka’s service industry, is understandably uninterested in state university Arts and Humanities graduates because, according to Expert 04, *‘You need to have education in IT, English, Sports, and display a strong level of commitment to be employed in such an environment’*. However, once you work for the government for 10 years you are entitled to a pension and since there is a greater degree of job security, Expert 04 believes it is only natural that graduates to aim for these jobs.

When the question was raised regarding the possible improvements that could be made to the Arts stream, he stressed on the responsibility of teachers and the university staff in improving the situation. He mentioned that it was important having a new system of education in the Arts stream that is practical, and to have a revised syllabus for these courses that will cater to the social needs of modern society, as well as the employment market. The vital changes he

suggested included: improving language proficiency (English), and the inclusion of Human Resource Management skills, Personality development, IT, communication and social ethics in the newly revised syllabuses. According to him, if these changes are made, this will create more opportunities for Arts and Humanities graduates abroad, as well as in Sri Lanka.

### **Expert 05**

Expert 05 is a Professor of Political Science and an expert on the Sri Lankan constitution. He has an excellent background in international relations, and has led few of the nation's leading policy making committees. When the researcher inquired him about the unemployment issue of Arts and Humanities graduates, he began by saying *'Unemployment is not only confined to arts graduates but also for management, science and many other graduates.* He continued to express his opinion through a historical example.

*'Traditionally, the public sector used to create the jobs, typically for Arts graduates. Even medical, engineering and all graduates used to be employed in the public sector in the past. Arts graduates were recruited mainly as teachers or as employees of state corporations. So, what happened was, after structural adjustment was implemented in Sri Lanka in the 1980s and in the late 1970s (after economic liberalization,), the state was no longer the main provider of jobs for graduates. The private sector was expected to provide all graduates except medical graduates.'*

He mentioned that, soon after the liberalization in the 1980's, the civil war started and the expansion of the private sector was restricted in 1980- 1990's, which limited job generation. Having said that, he further expressed his opinion about the private sector. According to Expert 05, there was a different attitude displayed towards Arts and Humanities (government) graduates by the private sector. *'Because most of the Arts graduates came from either 'rural backgrounds and having a distinctive vernacular (speaking Sinhala or Tamil language only) background; the private sector still maintains this prejudice today. If you ask any private company about Arts graduates, they will just say Arts that graduates are unemployable. The notion of employability came from the private sector.'* According to Expert 05, in Sri Lanka, the typical candidates that received employment in the private sector came from urban, English-speaking, top-tier school

educated and high social classes. He said that it was important to democratize the recruitment process of the private sector.

According to Expert 05, Arts and Humanities graduates are employable. His key argument is that the issue of ‘employability’ only came into question after the introduction of Structural Adjustment program. Expert 05 went on to criticize the World Bank, government ministers and bureaucrats: *‘According to the World Bank, politicians and bureaucrats; Social sciences and Humanities are useless, forgetting where they came from. These graduates are unemployable, because the state sector is no longer the major source of employment for anybody in Sri Lanka.’*

To a question regarding the HETC 2012 report, which says only 32.1% of Arts graduates were employed at the time of graduation in 2012, Expert 05 responded *‘Arts students also tend to be self-employed. I wonder whether the survey took this into consideration, as it is something that could change the overview presented through this study. Employment could also be defined specifically as ‘having a government job’. If they don’t have a government job, they are classified as unemployed.’*

Expert 05 went on to further express his opinion on the private sector by stating that, even though the private sector offers higher salaries, there are numerous reasons for state graduates not to join private sector.

1. Cultural Factor: which is extremely different from most graduates’ social background
2. No job security: employees could get fired easily
3. Jobs are mostly non-transferable : cannot get a job somewhere close to their hometowns

And again Expert 05 went back and critiqued the private sector. His question was,

*‘What are the reasons for the private sector for not recruiting Arts graduates? You always have to be reminded of the historical reasons, as I mentioned before. Private sector emerged very much as an urban phenomenon, and it is with British colonial legacies upon the foot, and they recruit only people with background in English, who could work with English, urban family backgrounds and obviously there was a class prejudice. We have to note the class factor; middle,*

*or little higher than that they favored. Now we have a globalized private sector in Sri Lanka. In a globalized private sector, the employment of lower social class people is limited to forms of labor. University graduates do not want to be employed as laborers. They want white collar jobs, which is not possible in the private sector.'*

Having heard the criticisms about the private sector, the researcher asked Expert 05 what his suggestions were to correct this system's social injustice against Arts and Humanities graduates. The first solution he suggested was the opening up of the Sri Lankan economy. He explained, *'This will enable educated, young people who come from lower class, rural backgrounds to be employed equally.'* Furthermore he said there has to be changes made to the education process as well. He was concerned over the school education system, mentioning that, at school level, all students should be taught English, IT and other such skills that are useful in the private sector. He opposed the current plans of parliamentary ministers and politicians, who favor employment orientation within the university system. He expressed that letting universities teach all such skills is an ill-advised idea and would result in failure. His reasoning being, *'When students start out in universities they are already adults, To effectively change the mind sets of students it needs to be done at an age where they are still young and impressionable, which would be during pre-university education'*

Regarding the quality of computer labs, Expert 05 stated that he was content with the computer facilities offered in universities, but not quite so in regards to libraries. He said that there is a large wealth of information in the many publications found in libraries, which are unfortunately not used by the students, because most of the books are in English. He further stated that, what is offered in libraries are not suitable for the students on campus, and mentioned the importance of having good English teachers in the school system, all around the country. He specifically mentioned the importance of deploying teachers, who are equipped with good English knowledge and special training and, to rural parts of the country in order to teach English starting from grade 3 and upwards. He observed that, English teachers who are currently being sent to rural schools do not have a thorough proficiency of the language, nor an adequate knowledge of teaching techniques to teach these classes. Another method he suggested to aid the improvement of English standards of Sri Lankan students was to introduce an intensive English course for all

students graduating out of school, either through the Education Ministry or Higher Education Ministry. He said that all students stay at home after A/L's for almost one year, wasting time that could be spent doing productive things that would benefit their lives in the long run.

He went on to explain how easy it is now, in comparison to the earlier times, to educate students, irrespective of the field. He mentioned that, there are plenty of mediums, such as TV, mobile phones, and radios that can be used to innovate the education system and lessen the problems currently faced in this field. He added *'The government should stop blaming universities. Unemployability begins in the school education system.'*

Finally, the researcher sought Expert 05's opinion on privatization of universities. Expert 05 argued that, it is a myth that there will be competition between public and private universities and that *'it will only serve a small percentage of the society, only the elite once again.'* According to Expert 05, there is no way to mediate a private education system due to it being operated on a basis of financial profit. He stated, *'Not only should the government allow private universities to be operated within the country, they must also strengthen the state university system'*. He further stated that the facilities of state universities are still located within buildings that have rarely been renovated since their original construction.

*'These graduates live lives characterized by poverty and malnourishment. It is seen clearly when you go to a hostel, the living conditions are absolutely appalling!'*

He also stated that university students must be treated with dignity by the university administration and politicians, and ended the discussion with the following statement.

*'Ministers call university students 'meeharak' (buffalos), some of them even treat university students as children. They defend their actions by stating motives of parental love towards students, but they have to be treated as grown adults with rights and responsibilities. University students have to be treated with due respect, not as school children. This whole attitude has to be changed. The majority of the university population is not culturally backward but the*

*government can't see it. University academics and students have to be treated with due respect and dignity. In modern times, they have been treated as a source of problem.'*

### **Expert 06**

Expert 06 is a Professor in Economics, an advisor for many economics and finance related organizations and also currently acting as the chair of one of the biggest educational institutes in Sri Lanka that helps in policy designing and conducting programs for labor education and training. At the start of the discussion, the researcher asked Expert 06 his opinion on the unemployment issue of Arts and Humanities graduates. His answer was,

*'There is no such thing as an unemployment issue of arts graduates. There is no problem with the bachelor's degree, besides the degree holder himself. It is all about the attitude. The degree, unless if it is a professional qualification, should not be recognized as the only qualification towards employment. Yet, in Sri Lanka, the general idea has been that every single degree holder should be provided employment through state or private sector organizations. In most cases, when it comes to Arts graduates, the most common employer has been the state. So many believe that, when they get a degree they also receive a guarantees of a job.'*

Due to this reason, many students started joining Arts and Humanities programs both as internal and external students, which was a huge factor towards creating a large list of unemployed graduates. According to Expert 06, there is nothing wrong in having a degree, but joining the 'unemployed graduates list' has become a burden and a serious issue for the government. He said that, in 2005 about 45,000 young men and women with General Science and General Arts Degrees were unemployed, and he blamed this solely on their attitudes. He raised his argument stating, 'They were not ready to engage in a challenging career.' Therefore, they waited till the state provided them with jobs as public servants.

Expert 06's views were questioned as how this situation could be changed. He answered, '*There is no point in changing the curriculum. The change must be cultivated in the attitude*'. He explained that there can be segments from outside the subject itself can be added to the same curriculum. Also Expert 06 observed that the private sector disfavors much of state Arts and

Humanities graduates because of the lack of real world knowledge (*'about employment opportunities, entrepreneurship'*). His view was that there is no point in teaching subjects such as Indian History, Sri Lankan history, Buddhist civilizations, and Sinhala language which will only develop subject-specific knowledge. He emphasized the importance of developing an understanding beyond subject knowledge, and more broadly about the world.

Expert 06 said, *'It is totally up to University personnel to design and implement useful policies. He also stated that Sri Lankan universities still operate in a backwardly traditional manner, which creates within graduates a mentality of employment entitlement, , and this is something that should be changed.'*

According to him, the attitude universities should instill in students should be one that follows the motto 'Wishwaya jaya gamu' ('Master the universe'), and also one that builds a sense of national pride and broad-minded thought. His thoughts on the popular concept of 'muda *nogath pradasha*' (unsalvageable areas) affirmed that this is just an abstract concept created through narrow-mindedness, not due to the unemployment problem.

Finally, the researcher inquired Expert 06 on his opinion on the level of IT and English literacy among graduates of the Arts faculty. His reply was, 'English and IT are not sufficient in attaining a job. These skills are comparable to a bride's jewelry. If the bride is not beautiful, the amount of jewelry used to decorate her can only do so much. If only English and IT is sufficient for jobs, then we can shut down all the universities and just focus on creating English and IT institutes. This idea is simply a marketing ploy. Our goal is to focus on changing the bride, the attitude of the graduates, not her jewelry'.

## **Interviews of Employers**

### **Employer 01** (Government sector)

Employer 01 is from state sector. He is a medical doctor and is also the head of one of his hospital's departments. He also works as a supervisor of the administration division of the Health Department of Sri Lanka.



As an opening question, the researcher asked Employer 01 about his opinion regarding the issue of Arts and Humanities graduates. According to him,

*'The Health Ministry receives many Arts graduates as employees, with a majority of them being 'External General Degree Arts graduates'. They come to our institutions and departments, where we assign them specific tasks which are expected to be completed as per our protocol. These tasks are not complicated or serious, and some of these tasks are performed even by non-graduates from other fields of study, who were employed through the results of various examinations. Compared to the non-graduates performing, the Arts graduates do not show any superior level of skill, in fact I may even be tempted to rate their skills inferior.'*

He further said that when he inquired from Arts and Humanities graduates why they are unable to perform even the simplest of tasks, those graduates respond with answers such as, 'We didn't expect to perform this type of work as employees'. However, Employer 01 mentioned that many of the Arts and Humanities graduates always expect a higher position in the government sector, and even as beginners they are unwilling to perform menial jobs, which he believes an issue of attitude. *'When you're assigned some tasks you need to not only be knowledgeable enough to successfully perform it, but also most importantly, you must have an open and willing attitude. Most of these graduates lack these invaluable qualities.* He further mentioned that many of these graduates have no orientation of work culture, and being further affected by their poor attitudes, many of them fail to adapt to the work environment.

Based on his experience, he said that many graduates expect higher positions such as assistant directorships based on their qualifications. He criticized this thought stating, *'In the real world, you do not become a director based on your degree, but on your performance. This idea is not instilled in most of them, resulting in poor attitudes, which is one of the reasons arts graduates perform so poorly in the government sector'*.

Similarly he mentioned that there are three key issues with Arts and Humanities graduates: 01. Mismatch of programs (necessary programs are not taught), 02. Weak Attitude, 03. Lack of Skills.

He also mentioned an example of one Arts and Humanities graduate he taught;

*‘A girl in new recruitment did not even know how to operate a computer, for data entry work. She refused simply because she couldn’t operate a computer. So a person from my minor staff had to do it. I wanted the graduate to do what was done by a minor staff person. The lack of skill is a real problem.’*

He particularly highlighted the mismatch between the supply and demand of graduates (in terms of subject) in Sri Lanka. According to Employer 01, the problem is not only that General Degree Arts graduates that have studied an insignificant subject, but that they have also failed in applying what they have been taught in academia to the employment world. He called this a ‘failure in adaptation’. Moreover, Employer 01 said that it is ‘hard for employers to make them understand something’, and said that ‘Arts graduates have very rigid characteristics in the public sector.’

Employer 01 further elaborated as to why Arts and Humanities graduates only seek government employment?

*‘I can imagine. If they go to the private sector, with such attitudes and lack of skills, they will not survive in that world. So they expect employment in the public sector, where they can be idle, and have an assured pension, simply because they don’t want to face competition. They can’t stand it. The sad part is that there can be a portion of graduates capable of rising up to this challenge, but we only see the majority with poor attitudes, seeking government jobs: which shows that you produce people that are unnecessary for the growth of the country. In order to meet our country’s needs some serious changes that would ensure the production of functioning graduates of the employment world, need to be implemented.’*

Employer 01 also spoke about the outdated curriculum of the Arts stream. He said that the curriculum today could be the same as it was when his mother was also an Arts student in the university system several decades ago, and needs to be considered for a serious revision.

According to Employer 01, there are *'so many opportunities in our country'* in both the private and public sector *'for good skilled people with the right attitude.'* Mentioning that, he raised the question, *'If universities can't produce these people who could fill this void? That's the situation today. I am sure private sector is also experiencing a similar dilemma.'*

Employer 01 had a strong critique on the government's trend of mass scale recruitment. He pointed that once a person is employed in the state sector, it is really hard to terminate them, even if they are not performing their duties up to standard. Whereas, in private sector, there is a system designed to eliminate unproductive employees. According to Employer 01, in mass scale government recruitment, not enough candidate screening is performed prior to the recruitment process. This entails the absence of checking the candidate's skills and knowledge. Instead, a head count is performed and the new recruits are divided into random departments. He said that he encountered difficulties when delegating tasks out to employee due to these deficiencies. He also said that, in government system, new recruits can also successfully request to be transferred to jobs in other departments, where they can continue their *'lethargic conduct,'* if their current position demands a work commitment which is beyond their comfort zone. Employer 01 stated that this was a great hindrance to the country's development.

According to Employer 01,

*'The main problem ultimately is not the dis-functionality of our graduates, but of our system. We are not developing and training them for our purposes. Not developing skills and inspiring the right attitudes. In regards to the government recruitment criteria, the mass recruitment is not an effective system. Candidates must at least be subject to an interview before being recruited. Currently, a separate department performs the recruitment process and sends new hires to other departments, causing confusion and lack of purpose within them. This has been a common trend*

*in all government departments, and the lack of interest caused by this process is a big reason for the poor functioning of these departments.'*

Having critiqued the government's mass scale recruitment process, he explained his difficulty in performing tasks with employees that are Arts and Humanities graduates. According to him, his superiors expect him to perform well; or in his own words '*with useless fellows, but expected to perform.*' He presented another example.

*'Recently, there was a recruitment scheme proposed that targeted 50,000 graduates. From each batch three to four graduates were sent to my department and they felt that they could not work in my department, so I allowed them to transfer to other departments. After the same thing occurring with the next three batches of new recruits, I found two employees with reasonable background that I kept in my department. Another one came and she is still here. She is pregnant as well, and I cannot ask her to go home or anything, but in the private sector this would be a different story.'*

When Employer 01's views were questioned about the university system, he stated that, his belief is that there should be a change in the overall university system: both within the scope of the education system and the curriculum itself. His idea was to study the job market's needs and employment opportunities' and design an educational program that accommodates them. For that, he said that we could look into the operation model of private universities and professional institutes and see how they function. He mentioned the CIMA programs in Sri Lanka as an exemplary program because it caters to actual industry demands. Also he spoke of having a choice of study fields, which suit the demands of today and said that Arts and Humanities graduates should not be blamed for these failures because they are products of a system that is faulty.

He also emphasized the importance of teaching proper English (both written and spoken) for Arts and Humanities graduates. He accused student unions for implanting a philosophy within the students that only suits life within the university environment and also discourages learning the English language. He took an example from his university days, 15 years ago in Kelaniya

University. He said that back then student unions in Kelaniya University presented the ideals of Japanese and Indian thinking that discouraged students from learning English. He condemned this saying that in India even the street cleaners and other commoners speak English. He said that this system of misleading, that still exists, has to be stopped. He said that authorities have to act in order to get rid of the ‘tunnel view’ that most university students have and explained that it was important to guide students responsibly. He also stated that, universities can offer skills that qualify as professional qualifications, which will also help their chances in the job market.

According to him, in the current system, undergraduates only see the opportunities available to them once they have escaped their reach.

**Employer 02** (private sector)

Employer 02 is an owner of a diverse group of companies, who also invests in share market, real-estate, construction, and import and export markets. The conversation with Employer 02 was very short, as their company was not interested in recruiting state educated Arts and Humanities graduates:

*‘We don’t want to hire trouble makers in our company when we can have graduates from private institutes. Why invite trouble? Don’t you see the riots, protests and all the violence in state universities, especially in the Arts faculties?’*

He brought up his prior experience of having issues with the skill level and attitude of the Arts and Humanities graduates. According to him Arts graduates have very poor skills in IT, English language and in communication; all of which are essential for the day to day activities of private companies.

## Interviews of Politicians

### Politician 01

Politician 01 is a prominent politician in Sri Lanka who is a member of the ruling party. He is presently a Cabinet Minister, who graduated from a state university in Sri Lanka. He expressed many of his viewpoints regarding the issue of unemployment in Sri Lanka.

Politician 01 was questioned about his opinion on the issue of unemployment within the Arts and Humanities graduates demographic. According to him,

*‘There’s no such unemployment issue of Arts graduates in general, besides for Swabasha (native language) Arts Graduates. Any Arts graduate who studies in English or any other foreign language usually manages to find a jobs within the country. The problem with finding jobs for Arts graduates only occurs with Tamil and Sinhala medium graduates. In our country we have about 25,000 university students each year. Out of this, about 8,000 students join universities as Humanities and Social Sciences (Arts) students. Up till 2010, all of these students studied in either Sinhala or Tamil mediums. Therefore, there’s no demand for them in the private Sector.’*

He then mentioned that, at the moment the employment rate of Arts and Humanities graduates is approximately 30%; all through employment within the state sector. According to him every 2-3 years, the government creates a ‘graduate scheme’ where graduates are recruited. He said:

*‘I don’t think they are doing any fruitful work for anyone, according to my belief. Since they need a job, the government offers something. They take it. The graduates know at some point in time, they will get some sort of job. Therefore, these graduates are ‘not serious’. They are not interested in developing their language and IT skills to become more qualified and employable.’*

According to Politician 01, approximately 400,000 students sit for the A/L examination and about 150,000 pass it. Furthermore, about 25,000 of the eligible get selected to campus and of this number only 8,000 Arts and Humanities students graduate each year.

He also elaborated on a connection between External Degree Arts and Humanities graduates and unemployment. According to him, not many of the internal Arts graduates are unemployed, while many of the External Arts graduates are. Politician 01 said university academicians have made a business out of creating External Degree programs and also through providing private tuition, where they reveal 25-30 questions of exam questions to the private students. He went on to accuse these academicians of also providing the private students with exam papers that are somewhat similar to the official exams. Politician 01 expressed his views on External Arts graduates,

*‘The knowledge of External students is even lower than that of A/L students. We always conduct exams during the recruitment of new teachers who were External General Arts graduates. In this exam, which was in the difficulty level of a standard A/L test, only about 10% of the external graduates scored 40 marks or above? This goes on to show that these so called graduates don’t have knowledge worthy of the degree they received.’*

According to what he said, up till the 1970’s, external students’ ranked top in government entrance exams, which were open and very competitive. These exams were used to select employees for positions in the administrative service, labor service, planning service, or even for assistant superintendent of police (ASP), income tax assessor and other positions as well. He also mentioned that up till the 1980’s, it was difficult to get into external programs, which are now operated more similarly to businesses, due to their maintaining of high standards. He stated that this was an extremely dangerous situation. As an example he talked about the time when, in the Northern and Eastern provinces there were only 300 internal students to about 1,300 external students. *‘And then they all get appointment jobs in the government. This started spreading like a virus’.*

Politician 01 also said that since 2010 the government has been in the process of converting Arts and Humanities subjects to the English medium. According to him there will be a point in time in the future when all subjects will be offered in English on campus, regardless of the student’s school background. He went on to say, *‘for geography, political science, philosophy and such courses, we will force them to do them in English’.* Furthermore, he stated that in the Northern

and Eastern provinces the teachers were having difficulties teaching in English, a problem which has since been solved through the awarding of special post-graduate diplomas in English for these teachers which helped them develop their English language skills. According to him, almost 60% to 70% of the courses in Arts program are now in English.

Politician 01 also expressed his views on introducing new majors for Arts and Humanities graduates, such as: a trilingual special degree, tourism, and IT. He also said that the government is working on reintroducing some of the degrees that currently being offered in Sinhala in English as well. According to him, with the option of the English programs in addition to the ‘Swabhasha’ (mother tongue) education in universities, the issues of unemployment of Arts and Humanities graduates will diminish in the future. He also said that universities are gaining affiliation with the Chartered Accountants Institute, CIMA and other such professional programs, so that students could earn professional qualifications on campus, which will help create a demand for them after graduation.

Politician 01 furthermore mentioned that the current unemployment rate in Sri Lanka is almost less than 5%, which is almost negligible in terms of a national economy. He also said that there’s a shortage of labor in Sri Lanka, but this has not affected the Arts and Humanities graduates. According to him, for every 400,000 awaiting state employment, there are about 700,000 – 800,000 job vacancies in the market, which according to him, are mostly in the agrarian industry (tea, rubber, cinnamon, garment industry and such). He also said, private sector is currently attempting to import labor, due to the labor shortages in supermarkets, hotels, and the defense services. He further explained that for almost 6 years, Sri Lanka is currently in a transition period where the economic development rate is at about 8%, and if this trend continues, Sri Lanka could become a middle income country (MIC) soon.

In an attempt to understand the situation of large numbers of unemployed external program graduates, the researcher questioned Politician 01 about the quality of these degree programs. He answered saying that this trend has been slowed down by the government and is nearly completely stopped. According to new laws, those who are employed in either the private or state sectors can join any external degrees programs, while the unemployed are restricted from



doing so and have to resort to enrolling in technical, higher technical and vocational schools or Open Universities.

Politician 01 was then asked on his opinion on the involvement of university student unions in class policies (e.g. asking for deadlines extensions). According to his response, such requests made by student unions are not honored at all. He went on to give his account on the history of the involvement of student unions in Sri Lanka.

*‘We have expelled such students for 5 years in Peradeniya University for trying to go against the system. We don’t listen to them. Therefore, university will not change policies according to the requests made by student groups and unions. In the mid-1980’s students tried to take university administration into their own hands.*

*In the South, students connected to the JVP killed two vice chancellors and 200 – 300 students, and in the North, students connected to the LTTE also killed two vice chancellors and 500 – 600 students. And that’s what happened when a university’s powers were taken by two student groups. So, for some time, a proper university administration could not be established. But now, the case is not that. Some Professors might still listen to them, but these are people who still live with the mentality from those days.’*

The researcher presented Politician 01 with his personal observation and asked him for his opinion on it. When the researcher visited the University of Colombo, during the afternoon and later times, he barely saw any students on campus. The researcher went on to inquire why students do not socialize on the campus premises. Politician 01 said, *‘There’s no campus gym around the Arts department, also there is no swimming pool in the Colombo Campus. But we have developed a library facility, language center, IT center and also provided access to WiFi networks, so that students can now stay longer.’*

He also mentioned that, due to the competitive lifestyle of students, most students don’t get involved in outdoor and/or external activities that are not pertaining to studies. This has become a huge challenge for the university education process, especially when students graduate and seek employment. Due to this, the government has introduced a new leadership training program

held at the Army camps, prior to entrance to the university. This has helped in disciplining students. Politician 01 said, almost all students who join university have never lived outside of their homes prior to enrollment. According to him, many of them don't even know how to perform essential day to day tasks, and these students are provided this training in this leadership training course.

*'These students do not have a time table for their daily routines. During the leadership training course, students must wake up at 4.30am and follow of timetable that includes activities such as exercise, cleaning, laundry and several other things. There are also activities that promote group work. All students must perform community service in a school or religious establishment in a nearby village. Getting students involved in such activities teaches them about team spirit. Originally, about 93% of students didn't take part in external activities such as sports, but since the beginning of this program about 25 – 30% of the student population is involved in the sports program in the university.'*

As the final question, the researcher inquired about the issue of plagiarism. However, his opinion was simply that citations are normal in any research program. He said that, referencing should be promoted in a way that improves the learning methods of students.

## **Politician 02**

*'University is not just a place where you get a degree, it is also a place that builds you as a person. The distinguishing factor that creates a person, with the ability to deliver and understand a question. Break up the problem and come up with solutions.'*

Politician 02 is an economist with a doctorate degree from USA. He has experiences with being an employee, employer, visiting lecturer, and now a Member of the Sri Lankan Parliament (MP) of the main opposition. He also has teaching experience in both USA and Sri Lanka. Furthermore, he is a prominent member of parliament who has appeared in many televised economic and financial discussions in the Sri Lankan media.

In the beginning of the discussion, the researcher asked him what his opinion was on the issue of unemployment of Arts and Humanities graduates. He said that he would answer this question in the perspectives of an employee, employer and active policy maker.

*‘As an employee: when I was first employed by a large Sri Lankan bank, they were looking for people who could think on their own, who could analyze a problem and come up with alternate solutions. I think that that’s what they were looking for. I don’t think that they were looking for candidates with a particular degree from a particular university. It really didn’t matter to them.’*

Politician 02 said that for the same position that he had applied for at this bank, there was one other applicant, who had a PhD from Sorbonne University, France. He said that he eventually ended up getting the position, while the other person is now an academic at the Faculty of Arts, Colombo. After joining the bank, he said that many project officers, who studied in engineering programs, were also employed by the bank. He wanted to make note of the fact that, this company was listed as the number one entity with the highest amount of capital in the Colombo Stock Exchange (CSE). Furthermore, this company had won the award for the best managed company several years around this time (20 years ago). The point Politician 02 wanted to make was that, the companies were not seeking for particular degree-holders, but particular personalities.

*‘Dealing with issues, thinking independently, teamwork and English was obviously a crucial requirement. They were not looking at the theoretical knowledge of the candidates. They were looking for capable, young men and women.’*

As an employer, he said that he would also look for the same qualities in applicants, just as the bank he was employed at did. He sold his market research company, which at the time had a staff of about 100 (which included about 40 graduates), and is now the biggest company in Sri Lanka in its field. He said he that at times he has interviewed entire batches of local university students and ended up not recruiting any of them. He then told the researcher about a success story of a student that he did hire from the Jayewardenepura University, who is now a company director.

*I hired a person straight out of Sri Jayewardenepura University, had an Economics Degree. The guy had good subject knowledge. As a matter of fact, he had published a book on economics.*

*Highly motivated, bubbling with enthusiasm, but couldn't speak English at all. I was in a dilemma. I wanted to hire him, but I couldn't, because he had no knowledge of English. What I did in the end was, I hired him. I said I will hire you, but only if you attend extra English classes, for which I will pay. You have to communicate in English.'*

Politician 02 then said that, knowing subject knowledge is merely a prerequisite, as subject knowledge wasn't what got him into his first job. According to him, there will always be many people with book knowledge. *'What makes an individual unique, and appealing to the employer, is not just to be unique at that level, but to be able to distinguish yourself from the rest of them.* He further elaborated saying that, for his company, local graduates were employed only as entry-level employees, where interactions with clients and making presentations is not required. He said that when he hired graduates, he didn't care which program, university or country the candidate studied in. The only important characteristic, as considered in the private sector in general, is the ability to deliver.

As a politician, and also as a MP, Politician 02 said that he looks at the issue of Arts and Humanities graduates on a mediatory basis, with the important question being, *'How can people with the ability to deliver be created?'* He took examples from USA, UK, saying that there were plenty of Social Science and Humanities graduates who had excelled by becoming bankers and chief executive officers (CEOs) of multinational companies.

*'The main point I keep coming back to is, how can individuals be created with the ability to understand a question, analyze it in a number of different ways, solve it, and present the solutions to the problem.'*

Then he went on to explain the importance of university education,

*'You know, whether you have a theoretical background in Mathematics, Sociology, Engineering, History, or Management really doesn't matter in my view. Because university is not just a place*

*where you get a degree, it is also a place that builds you as a person. It grows you from a boy to a man. You learn how to handle responsibilities, work with deadlines, balance social life and work life.'*

Politician 02 also expressed his opinion on the issue as a teacher. He had served as a visiting faculty member in two Sri Lankan institutions; PIM and University of Moratuwa for Master of Business Administration (MBA) students. He said the biggest difference he saw between the two was the engagement level of the students. *'I don't see the level of engagement that I see in a 3<sup>rd</sup> year undergraduate class in the US, even in a MBA class here. So that's the difference.'*

Furthermore, Politician 02 talked about the culture of memorization in the Sri Lankan education system. As a teacher, he explained what mattered to him the most,

*'The important thing is the level of responsibility given to the students and the expected return from students, besides simply memorizing something. The amount of original thoughts that have gone into the student's work at the end of the program and also the amount of analytical questions that get thrown at the student are very important. It does not matter what the actual subject is; whether it be History, Politics, Sociology, Economics, these are all Arts streams, and all of these can be put through an analytical thought process. And that's I think is the distinguishing factor that creates a person, with the ability to deliver and understand a question, and everything else I said. Break up the problem and come up with solutions.'*

Politician 02 similarly discussed the importance of having the right attitude. Graduates shouldn't have the mindset of unwarranted self-superiority. Many think that, *'I've made it to university, therefore, I am.'* Then he said that, just because one makes it into a university to study some courses, that doesn't immediately qualify that person above others. The work that is done in university is what matters. He also spoke about over-politicization within the university system; in particular, within the Arts stream, at both student and faculty level. He said that today, some local universities have become 'breeding grounds for destructive political activity'.

And again he mentioned the importance of creating graduates with ‘the ability to deliver’. He said ‘*in a market economy, a competitive, competition is the order of the day*’. When one is a student one must study in order to perfect one’s knowledge based on the criteria of the examination board, and upon completion of the studies, one must hone their skills based on the criteria of the employer. So in his view, the responsibility lies in the hands of the policy makers and faculty, as much as it does in the hands of the student. He stated that, the objectives of a nation’s education system should be aligned with its economic plan for the future. Once the economic plan is in place, the incentive structure must be there in order to create individuals that are capable of fueling the engine of economic growth.

*‘I mean, you can’t run a BMW by putting in kerosene oil in it, can we? For a BMW to run at an efficient level you have to put in either 95 octane petrol or whatever that’s required. The proper inputs must be provided in order to receive the proper output. We are always talking about the output, but where is the input for that output? So that input is also an output of a different process. So the processes must be aligned. One process is here that creates an output, which is an input of another process. Everything works in an almost a sequential equation.’*

The researcher asked Politician 02 about his or his party’s view on the current allocated budget for higher education. His reply was that the allocated amount was completely inadequate for both lower and higher education.

According to him, the top priority of a typical Sri Lankan family is to educate their children, and this is something which they are willing to do at any cost. Selling properties, taking out loans, and mortgaging their ancestral home are things commonly seen in lower to middle class families, in the pursuit of educating one’s children.

*‘So if you look at a purely economic standpoint, your private utilities and social utilities, society is putting poor, living in city, rural area but this is what cuts across all segments of society. Then why is education is such a low priority for society? There’s a social contradiction there. You see my point.’*

Politician 02 also said that this is an unstable equilibrium, because what society wants as individuals does not match up with the needs of a society as a whole. He condemned the government, by stating that they were wasting money on unimportant matters. According to him the fundamental areas of policy of the UNP (United National Party) prioritizes on quadrupling the current outlay on education which would increase our GDP to 6%. He said,

*‘We believe that education is our number one priority as a country. There’s nothing more important to consider over education, therefore education be fashioned, in fact it will be interesting. Research on successful models of education from countries such as Norway, Finland must be implemented, in order to improve our Sri Lankan Education system.’*

Politician 02 said, it was his party that first introduced the free education system to Sri Lanka, and this is something his party has vowed to protect and finance accordingly. He also mentioned that, UNP will liberalize Sri Lankan education at the same time, saying *‘Having a complete education through primary school to tertiary education should be a right of every person, and it is the government’s fundamental obligation to provide that education to young people.’*

He also shared one of his personal views on the changes that he believes should happen to the education system. He suggested a tripartite responsibility for education, with the three parties being: state, parents, and students. The incentives will have to be structured in a way such that all three groups of these people will have a responsibility in educating each young person. Depending on the economic status and income level of the parent, the state would be able to financially aid each family. He said,

*‘So, if your parents are driving BMWs and living in Colombo 07, should their children be given completely free education? There has to be some sort of means of testing this. Depending on the means of the parents, the state would fund a portion of the student’s educational expenses, accordingly. What we are saying is, if ever there’s a student that and also funding, the funding will more likely be diverted through the student to the institution; instead of, through the institution to the student. So the center of the focus becomes the student, not the institute. The student can choose, if he goes to University A, B, or C.’*

He also said that, as long as universities A, B, and C are in the tripartite arrangement, there will never be a situation where a deserving student would be deprived of a good, quality tertiary education. According to him, this system would create opportunities for such students to attain a high paying job that will drive the development of the nation forward, while at the same time placing the ideal candidate for the position. He concluded by saying, *‘These are all out-of-the-box thoughts!’*

### **Politician 03**

*‘In rural villages students have no choice but to join the Arts and Humanities stream in universities, which would be the only thing they qualify for’*

Politician 03 is from the government (from a political party allied with the government) and a MP. He is also a graduate from the Sri Lankan state education system with an Arts and Humanities Degree, who has got involved in many discussions on the unemployment issue of Arts students.

The researcher asked Politician 03 what his views were on the unemployment problem of Arts and Humanities graduates. According to him, there are two reasons for the unemployment of Arts and Humanities graduates.

01. Development and educational systems are not aligned with the country’s economic development
02. Vocational education and national education systems are not balanced ; education is not practical

He further stated that there isn’t any proper planning done by the government. That is the main cause for unemployment issue.

*‘Not only in Arts, even in Sciences has the problem existed. We have a very high standard of education. For example: we have engineers with the highest capabilities. But construction is done by Indians or Chinese. The problem is our economy works with foreign loans. So we have*



*to respect their conditions. And we have to use their material, technology and most labor. It is happening as if it happens in Africa.'*

And he said, doors are not open for the local people, due to the aforementioned reasons.

Furthermore, he said most of the Arts and Humanities undergraduates coming from rural village areas, and have poor knowledge of Mathematics and Science. According to him, the number of facilities for rural students is very scarce. In rural villages, the schools don't have qualified teachers, laboratories and equipment for science classes. So students have no choice but to join the Arts and Humanities stream in universities, which would be the only thing they qualify for. According to him, having a proper vision for the future of the Arts stream and reducing the numbers of enrollment in the stream is of utmost importance.

Politician 03 further said that language and history are solely cultural subjects which need to be updated in terms of curriculum. According to him, Economics, Political Science, Geography, Archeology and other Social Science subjects have scientific reasoning. He spoke about Archaeology as an example by explaining how it is currently one of the most popular subjects. Therefore, updating the degree program to include updates from present times would make it more appealing. Also according to him, History is another subject that has ties with the Sri Lankan culture and can be used to promote the tourism industry as well.

Politician 03 stated that in Sri Lanka, the media industry currently has only a few Arts and Humanities graduates, whereas there's a great potential for employment in that field. He also believes that, all the aesthetic subjects (language, literature, and music) should be offered to all disciplines across the university system along with subjects such as history. His point is, by offering these classes for all the students, the demand for teachers would increase, and this could be another potential source of employment for current Arts and Humanities graduates. Also in his view point, undergraduates should be able to undergo vocational training for subjects like Political Science, thus creating similar opportunities in the administrative services industry of the country.

When the researcher inquired why this issue has persisted for Arts and Humanities graduates since the 1980's, Politician 03 answered that this was a regional problem that included south Asian countries such as India, Nepal, and Bangladesh as well. He said that without extensive economic reform, there will be no answer to this question.

He further said that, in order to make future Arts and Humanities graduates employable, the following needs to be implemented;

01. Reducing the enrollment for Arts and Humanities program
02. Offering vocational training for students after grade 8

According to him, about 15% of students drop out of school by grade 08, and around 50% drop out after O/L examinations, and for them the most common option is working as laborers. He also said that, some form of training that would be able to replace A/L's for such people and get them involved in an occupation that would be productive for the nation as a whole should be implemented. Creating technical diploma awarding centers all over the country was another one of his suggestions.

Similarly he said that the development of the Agriculture sector could create potential jobs with decent salary ranges in the agrarian system. He specifically mentioned, if anyone offers an acceptable job with a decent salary, graduates will have no problems in choosing them. However, the issue of attitude was also mentioned to which he replied saying that the schooling system needs to be changed into a vocational training facility. If the finances are provided, anything would be feasible.

Following this the researcher asked Politician 03 what his opinion was on the share of GDP for higher education in Sri Lanka. His reply was,

1. GDP %, in a country is not the amount of money owned by it– what we have to do is making use it for the fullest from the amount that is allocated.
2. Anyway we have to increase the GDP up to 2% to 3%. It is an investment to have education and good vocational training centers, the present share for education is not enough.

Regarding private universities, he said for engineering, medicine and subjects that have an economic value, while the private sector would invest in them; they would not for Arts and Humanities education. There's attitude problem which also has to be changed, but for Arts Degree holders– English is the only problem. The degree program itself is good in Sri Lanka, and there is a value in this degree. The only problem is that communication and media is a problem. Therefore, adding English is of utmost importance.

Regarding student unions and campus politics, his opinion was,

*‘Being involved in politics is a human right. We create humans. Maybe in other countries, politics is prohibited on campus, but they are making animals. Probably parts for a factory. Internal politics, it should continue. We cannot stop students from politics.’*

He concluded by saying that, university is a place where the problems of the country are reflected. He said that if problems are reduced in the country, then the university students will stop causing conflicts on campus premises as well.



- All are Sinhala (ethnicity).

The **Table 10** includes following questions and the most common findings are also included below.

**Q1:** Interviewees' motivation and expectation behind choosing Arts stream?

Most common answer was 'easy' access to the university system.

**Q2:** Interviewees' satisfaction over their education?

Main: All were satisfied and many believed that they succeeded in their goals.

**Q3:** Reason & challenges of unemployment among arts graduates?

Most common answers were: way more theory focus with no practical aspects in education, lack of competencies introduced, the attitude issue of graduates and the production of too many external graduates.

**Q4:** Possible ways to make it better?

Many expect to have better computer labs, improved and effective teaching.

**Q5:** Opinion about privatization of higher education?

Privatization of higher education was not seen as a solution for Arts graduates' unemployment issue. Instead strengthening the state education system was seen as the option.

Q: question

Grads: Graduates

I: interviewee

SLAS: Sri Lanka Administrative Service

BA: Bachelor of Arts

SLES: Sri Lanka Education Services

Unis: universities

NA: Not asked

	<b>Q1: Why Arts?</b>	<b>Q2: Satisfaction?</b>	<b>Q3: Challenges? Why unemployment?</b>	<b>Q4: Solutions to make it better?</b>	<b>Q5: Private Universities?</b>
<b>I 01</b>	Liked the subjects. Wanted to join the government.	Satisfied.	Arts have no technical competency. More freedom on campus. Less field work & way too big tute classes.	Update: Courses, Computer labs. Offer more of practical aspects. Improve teaching methods.	Against...
<b>I 02</b>	Childhood dream. Timely subjects that help to think in a new way.	Happy for studying. Proud of being a graduate.	Too much memorizing. No help to find jobs. 'Jealousy' towards state graduates.	Teaching has to be more effective. Course contents update & include more practical studies and such.	Against. Devotion and knowledge of state students will be underestimated by the money of the rich.
<b>I 03</b>	Missed entrance to law Faculty. BA is the shortest to get into Law College, Colombo.	I got where I want to go. So I am happy.	Language barrier. Campus Politics ( <i>private companies are scared of us</i> ). Over estimation in minds as 'degree holders'.	Changing mentality. Giving a tough degree program. Offer Human Resources Management courses.	Against. The poor & the brightest will have no future. Okay with regulated Semi- government universities.
<b>I 04</b>	Easy. Incapable of doing science	Very happy. 'Learnt a lot.'	Bad reputation of the state graduates in society. Violent student Unions. External degrees.	Offer subjects & skills which private sector needs. Reduce the enrollment numbers.	Okay, with very high standards. Have to monitor well.
<b>I 05</b>	Like Arts. Can Enjoy life.	Extremely happy. Goal achieved.	Attitude problem. All need 'white collar jobs'. Only memorizing. No extracurricular activities.	Introduce: 'Human development' courses. Change attitudes to service oriented Arts graduates.	NA
<b>I 06</b>	Freedom. Can do LLB on side. Aim SLSA.	Okay: just a paper qualification only.	No practical side. Too many external graduates with minimum or no qualifications.	Teach the service which graduates can do to country. Update courses. Introduce Strict discipline.	Against. Private universities will not help in any way for state Arts grads.
<b>I 07</b>	To get into University 'easily'.	Happy. Became a teacher.	Only theories taught. Didn't get proper advises and help in picking courses. Minimum computer facilities.	Introduce 'research programs' Teaching methods.	NA
<b>I 08</b>	Easiest way to go to University	Happy for succeeding. Got dream job: teacher.	Nothing practical. Old teaching methods. Less career guidance.	Make English & IT pre-requisites for exams.	Against. Increase enrollment of state universities & expand it.

**Table 10:** Key findings from the General Degree Arts graduates (2010)

('Q' stands for questions accordingly listed above and 'I' stands for the interviewee number.)

### **i. Motivation behind selection and satisfaction – contradictory responses**

Many graduates had similar perceptions on the Arts stream with regard to the entrance process. That is, many held the belief that the entrance to university for the A/L Arts stream was easy' in comparison to other university entrance programs. Furthermore many thought that the Arts stream would have much more freedom even after entering to university. Interviewee 06 said, *'I picked Arts as my stream because I love aesthetic side of studies. Since there's not much pressure, with the freedom I get in the university; I can continue doing stage drama. Also in the meantime I can continue doing a LLB too.'*

It was also evident that many graduates undertake a BA as a prerequisite for SLSA (Sri Lanka Administrative Service) and SLEA (Sri Lanka Education Administrative Service). It was further stated that being in an administrative level job in the government is seen 'as a prestige' according to the society. Quoting interviewee 02, *'my parents, especially my mother (the only retired government servant in our family) really wanted me to get into a government job. There's more acceptance in society. Also I have got though BA. Now my plan is to sit for SLAS exams and one day to go to the top of SLAS. I will be the only person in our family that works for the government, which will make me special'*. Interviewee 03 similarly said *'I have friends who work in private companies. They earn way more than me. But I know, when we go to society, it is the government servant who gets more status and respect'*.

With all the above mentioned, it is evident that there is a high level of satisfaction amongst graduates. The interviewees were very happy with their achievements and they were being humbly proud about their current status in society, which also reflects their inner (mental) happiness. Nonetheless almost all complained about their monthly salary being very low.

### **ii. Issues and challenges in Arts stream**

Out of numerous issues that were discussed with regard to unemployment of Arts graduates, the key issue which was mentioned by graduates was the lack of practical aspects in their studies. According to General Degree Arts graduates, the Arts undergraduates are taught a lot of theories, but less practical course work, and end of the semester students are compelled to answer

questions by memorizing, which has become 'the culture & the style' of Arts stream. This has created immense difficulty for Arts graduates in working in the real world after the graduation. Interviewee 07 mentioned that, *'we were taught how to do research in classes (research design, sampling, methods and such). But we never had any chance to practice those skills which we learnt on paper, in our academic life in practice. We have never heard any such research that's going on with Arts department of Colombo University either, that welcomes General Degree Arts undergraduates. If we had that opportunity, we would have learnt a lot more, which we could have applied in work after graduation'*. Following this issue, it was also mentioned by many of the teachers that were interviewed (Interviewee 05, 07 and 08), the problem of teaching skills of lecturers. These three interviewees being teachers now, said that *'many of the lecturers teaching techniques which are used are outdated, ineffective and this has caused students to loosen the interest on many subjects in the university'*.

When it was inquired about library facilities, interviewees said that libraries are in good condition, but the Computer labs were not in a satisfactory level. Following interviews further, the graduates complained that lack of Technical Competency and English proficiency in General Degree Arts graduates. According to them the lack of these skills has disfavored them a lot in private sector. Interviewee 02 said *'I didn't even apply for private companies. I know many of my friends also don't even try. We know that we are not going to get it. Not even for an interview.'* He further stated that their level of competency is not up to the level, which private sector demands.

Another challenge discovered from the interviews is about the issue of attitude of Arts graduates, which has resulted in creating an 'over dependency on the government' for jobs. Quoting interviewee 06, *'these Arts graduates believe that government should provide them jobs, just as they've got free education, they also think government will give them jobs. They don't expect normal jobs, but white collar jobs'*. He further said *'if attitudes can be changed, there are plenty of jobs out there in the market.'* He furthermore mentioned, since government provides 'better job security and a pension scheme' after 10 years on permanent government service, General Degree Arts graduates have more interest on getting state employed. Continuing with the 'attitude' issue that was mentioned, Interviewee 08 said, *'many Arts graduates have also haven't*



*recognized their abilities. We have no help in career guidance. There is a unit available on campus, but many are not aware of it and it is a real challenge for Arts graduates in discovering opportunities.'*

Another possible factor for less demand in private sector for General Degree Arts graduates was 'violent student politics.' As Interviewee 04 said, *'before students join the campus, they are serious people who were disciplined and studied hard. But once they join, they get into this new culture and get involved in student politics and work for unions' destructive activities. Because of it, private sector is afraid of recruiting us. When I went to one interview in private sector (with the help of a known person), I was asked if I got involved in on-campus union activities. And they further said 'if I have got involved in any such, it should not come into the company and you cannot have the campus mentality here in our company'.*

Moreover 'external graduates' were seen as problem for the ongoing unemployment issue as well. Interviewee 02 said, Peradeniya, Kelaniya and Jayewardenepura universities offer 'external degrees' via private institutes, which are not properly quality controlled and the quantity too, adding that Jayewardenepura University issuing an 'unlimited' number of seats for external General Arts degrees. According to her, *'this has produced a lot of extra, and non-talented graduates, which also have made a bad impact on society, generalizing that all Arts graduates (including internal university graduates) are non-talented, which is of course wrong and bad for our careers'.*

### **iii. Solutions for the issue**

When it was discussed for solutions from their point of view, as how to make Arts graduates more employable, several suggestions were done with regard to the challenges they stated, mentioning that those challenges should be answered with a proper and an effective mechanism by authorities. Among the top most popular solutions graduates mentioned were, updating the on campus computer labs, providing teachers some courses to improve their teaching abilities, offering job-oriented jobs courses, quality controlling courses and controlling the quantity for external degrees were also mentioned. Interviewee 08 said, *'attendances on classes are taken, but it isn't considered when it comes to exams. If campus make a certain percentage compulsory*

*in attendance, that would make a huge impact on student involvement in classes. The same way, authorities can introduce advance IT courses too, which they should make compulsory to take as a prerequisite before semester exams, which will force students to improve more skills, which present job market demands’.*

Another point that was raised in discussions was having strict rules and discipline in order to maintain the quality of education. Interviewee 07 mentioned, *‘many students submit their first assignment after enrolling campus on time, but with time they forget doing it and keep getting extensions. So they become weak in adjusting to a competitive life style, which is necessary in work’*. So having deadlines and strict rules would help to address some of these issues according to her.

One last solution which was discussed over and over again is changing the ‘attitude’ of General Degree Arts graduates have. According to interviewee 05 (a teacher), *‘the teaching system has to impose the right attitude to our graduates. They should teach that Arts stream is not a job oriented field, but a service oriented field. So graduates will look into a broader extent when they are choosing jobs, rather than sticking for government job openings and state graduate employment schemes’*. He furthermore said, if the attitude is fixed in General Degree Arts graduates, Sri Lanka will never hear an unemployment issue again, since graduates will be content with a service that they could provide for the betterment of Sri Lanka.

#### **iv. Privatizing the higher education**

There were a lot of opinions which opposed privatization of higher education. The belief that many General Degree Arts graduates have is privatization of higher education will affect the quality of ‘Arts Degree’ very badly. Since today’s state higher education is delivered service based, but private universities will always work on ‘profit based’ and also with the tuition fees they impose on studies, many of the rich will get seats without the consideration of their educational qualification, while the poor and the brightest will be excluded from the system. According to Interviewee 08, *‘privatization will undermine the value of passing A/L’s, which is competitive and high standard’*. As she explained, privatization will not be a solution in creating competition with state universities or better positions in job market, but further exclusion of

groups of people in the society who are poor. Her argument was '*expanding state universities with quality and increasing enrollment, provided enough facilities will be fair for all. It will be fair for all who go through A/L's*'. However interviewee 03 explained that having 'semi-government' universities is acceptable, but it has to be highly regulated by UGC of Sri Lanka to maintain the standards and quality of education.

Interviewee 03 and Interviewee 04 thanked researcher for studying this issue. They both said they are grateful for studying this prevailing issue, considering the opinions from the General Degree Arts graduates who got out from the same system.

### **Some observations**

In June 2013, researcher first visited Arts Faculty of Colombo University, Sri Lanka. Researcher took several trips on several days to meet several personnel from University and also to make appointments for interviews. Researcher made his observations from the entrance of the campus to the buildings inside to get an understanding about the surrounding of the campus. The following are the observations:

Facilities and appearance of the place: from sanitary facilities to structures' outer appearance were poorly maintained. However, there was lot of space for students to hangout and to do campus activities freely.

Posters and notices: Researcher spotted plenty of advertisements of 'Spoken English' and 'Written English' private tuition classes, which were advertised in many of the notice boards and on walls on campus. Furthermore private computer classes too were advertised. There were similarly many posters asking students to join different demonstration by student unions. Those posters were printed in yellow, black, red and white. When researcher visited the Faculty of Arts in November 2013 and the beginning of 2014, buildings were color washed and the notice boards were cleared.

## 06. DISCUSSION

### **Chapter overview**

This chapter will provide a critical analysis of the results found from all four groups of stakeholders including literature review as well as researcher's observations. The Discussion includes, perceptions about why students choose to study Arts and Humanities, potential employment opportunities, views of the researcher which narrates Arts graduates as victims due an unjust education system, Arts graduates dependency on state employment, Arts graduates level of satisfaction over the study program, their opinion about establishing private universities in Sri Lanka, gender and how Arts female graduates being disadvantaged, Sri Lankan unemployment numbers and contradictions, the future of education in Sri Lanka, other issues related to the General Degree Arts program, socio-economic gap due to unequal educational opportunities and facilities in state and private institutes, and an analysis as to how the Arts program can be made better for future students.

### **Reasons for selecting Arts and Humanities**

The most likely reason for students to have picked Arts and Humanities to study is because they enjoyed it during their childhood days. However, there is also a belief that doing Arts would be the shortest and the easiest way to join government universities with less effort. Another common opinion they had was that there would be a certain level of freedom they could enjoy while studying in Arts stream. Some students also wanted to follow additional study courses while doing Arts, such as professional qualifications: law, Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA) and aesthetic courses (drama, music). Another determinant was the desire to join government service after graduation. Students believe that having an Arts Degree paves the way easily to join the state sector for employment. Furthermore some students had difficulty in applied sciences and mathematics courses which made them pick Arts as the choice of study. Some students pick Arts, when they fail to enter their desired field of study, e.g.: Interviewee (I 03), chose Arts stream because he missed the Law Faculty entrance.

### **Restricted choice in field of education for low-income demographic groups**

In contrast to the above views, according to many experts, employers and politicians views; students are doing Arts because of their lack of choice, or no choice in rural schools. Expert 01 said many of the Arts students come from schools which have minimum facilities. He also said that majority of the Arts undergraduates are kids from underprivileged backgrounds, who have limited choices.

It is furthermore evident that rural schools don't have the infrastructure to accommodate science courses. Rural schools lack laboratories which could offer the practical aspect of science courses, forcing many students to do Arts. Most of the Arts graduates are from rural areas and from lower middle class families. Parents cannot afford to send students to cities to give education in Sciences either. As a result they attend rural schools with fewer facilities and for most; Arts has been a good choice to study looking at the availability of resources such as: available text books, past students who studied in the same field who still live in areas where they live that could offer help and experienced teachers in Arts and Humanities in rural schools.

Most of the Arts graduates have at least one of their parents or a close family member who served the government which has motivated them to join the government. Employer 01 said that some students continue with the Arts stream because, that is what their parents have done, and due to further parental encouragement. This statement matches with Graduate I02's view, who pursued Arts because of parents influence. Expert 02 said students are as well encouraged to do Arts because Arts is offered from beginning till the end in mother tongue (Sinhala and Tamil).

### **Potential for employment opportunities in Sri Lanka for Arts Graduates**

Arts and Humanities graduates face many challenges with regard to employment and opportunities in Sri Lanka. They believe that there isn't much demand in the market for state educated Arts graduates due to a number of reasons. Two of the key issues graduates mentioned were; (i) The lack of technical (IT) competency and (ii) The lack of English knowledge. On top of the mentioned issues, study found that they also lack practical skills for which they are not trained at university, due to the theoretical study content. Graduates said, theories have been

taught, but they never got to practice those theories outside class. For example: I 07 mentioned that, though she learnt how to do research, but there was no such activity included in the Arts program to practice. This was a similar issue with all graduates interviewed, as the absence of problem solving knowledge in Arts programs has adversely affected Arts graduates' value in the real world. They all stated that, when they look at job advertisements, all were asking for experience. The question was; how could they apply for such jobs, when graduates did not even have practical experience through studies. One graduate stated that he did not bother applying to private sector, since he knows that he is not going to get a call for an interview.

#### **i. Issues with the university learning process**

It was found that there's a question about the practicality of the Arts programs. Being a stream that explores societal behavior and social sciences, the lack of a practical aspect is a big loss for this program.

However, the analysis of graduates' opinions can similarly be related to the opinions that were expressed by the potential employers. According to the employers, Arts graduates were incapable of performing certain tasks. As a result of a minimal level of practical elements within the Arts program, graduates have developed into undesirable candidates in the eyes of prospective employers. With an evident lack of group activities in class and/or research out with class, many students have poor reflective skills and struggle with problem solving scenarios at work.

According to Moon (1999) 'reflection' is a "process with purpose and/or outcome in which manipulation of meaning is applied to relatively complicated or unstructured ideas in learning or to problems for which there is no obvious solution." Dewey (1933) says reflection "is closely related to critical thinking; it is the turning over of a subject in the mind and giving it serious and consecutive consideration." According to Immel (1992) 'reflective practice', "is a mode that integrates or links thought and action with reflection. It involves thinking about and critically analyzing one's actions with the goal of improving one's professional practice. Engaging in reflective practice requires individuals to assume the perspective of an external observer to identify the assumptions and feelings underlying their practice and then to speculate about how

these assumptions and feelings affect practice” (Roessger, 2013).

These reflective practices could help develop critical thinking of students. For that the quality of knowledge that is provided within higher education has to be evaluated and improved. To understand the quality of education given by the University of Colombo Arts faculty one should look at the course work and its inclusion of practices in knowledge starting with ‘instrumental learning.’ According to Mezirow (2011) in instrumental learning, “we engage in task-orientated problem solving - how to do something or how to perform - we are engaged in instrumental learning; reflection is significantly involved when we look back on content or procedural assumptions guiding the problem-solving process to reassess the efficacy of the strategies and tactics used.” The problem-solving process for instrumental learning is a familiar one. Changes are measured in this process of problem solving in terms of productivity, performance, or behavior. “Essentially, it is the method of problem solving, canonized by the natural sciences, that we all use or misuse in learning how to do things” (Mezirow, 2011).

As explained above, reflective and instrumental skills which are essential for problem solving at work, seems to be missing in the syllabus that is provided by the University of Colombo, Arts faculty. Learning process need to be a combination of reflective and problem solving knowledge. Employers always seek to recruit the graduates that are capable of handling different situations, effectively and efficiently in a given period of time. For that, many skills: technical competency, English, communication skill and critical thinking are needed to be utilized in problem solving amongst the subject knowledge.

The learning process has to be a combination of understanding theories and applications which aid the self-development of students, whereby, one would be able to identify problems. By the use of both accumulated subject knowledge and class practice, different levels of problem solving is possible at an acceptable capacity. However, if the education doesn’t offer such knowledge, there’s a legitimate issue one could raise on the quality of the provided education and the capacity of the teachers at University of Colombo Arts Faculty.

However, in contrast with aforementioned difficulties, some graduates mentioned that there are

still plenty of jobs available in the market. But due to the attitude that Arts graduates have they only seek white collar jobs. The biggest challenge after graduation is to change these students' attitudes, both in their understanding of the job markets needs and their ability and views on how to adapt to the job market. Some graduates also mentioned that there's a question about the standards and quality of education provided in the university, which could again be referred to the earlier argument about the capacity of the teachers at the Faculty of Arts and the standards of the programs offered. The three arguments made were, (i) the bad reputation of Arts faculty due to violent politics, (ii) the memorizing culture and the absence of practicality in studies as well as no involvement of the students in extracurricular activities and (iii) the complaints regarding outdated syllabuses with old teaching methods. Due to these three factors, there's an unfavorable view on Arts graduates in society, which has adversely affected their possible job placements and opportunities. However, it could also be linked to another question relating to the adaptability to different environments. If the Arts graduates were trained in a manner at the university learning process to build the capacity of adaptation, this problem could be minimized.

#### **ii. Poorly functioning career center**

Graduates moreover mentioned the weak position of the career center of the Faculty of Arts. Some graduates did not know that it existed on campus. Similarly others stated that although there's a career guidance unit available, there isn't much help, as it is functioning at a minimum level. In other Sri Lankan private higher education institutions and many other state universities, career guidance units play an important role. It should have the potential to help undergraduates and graduates for career guidance by linking university students with outside world. However, it has not been the case for Faculty of Arts, Colombo University. Almost all graduates said since they have completed the Bachelor of Arts Degree, that now they can sit for SLAS, SLES and such exams and go up in the ladder in government services, with no help by career unit on campus.

#### **iii. Politicization of the Arts stream and other issues**

Experts had diverse views on employment opportunities for Arts graduates at University of Colombo. According to Expert 01 in a stagnating economy, there are not many opportunities available for all graduates in Sri Lanka. Expert 04 condemned the private sector for failing to create enough jobs in a liberalized economy. Furthermore as Expert 01 explained that due to the



politicization of the Arts stream there's no control in enrollments, which result an over production of Arts graduates. Expert 01 also accused both private and public sector for creating a stigma around the Arts degree (BSc vs. BA) and systematically hindering Arts graduates from obtaining jobs. He said in some places they add mathematics, statistics and such subjects for Arts related jobs, which will automatically disqualify Arts graduates from applying to those jobs. Also according to Expert 05 there's a class system which governs the job flow in market in Sri Lanka. His belief is that the private sector favors: urban, English speaking students, who have certain (upper middle class) family backgrounds, which has caused a huge employment barrier for the graduates educated in Sinhala and Tamil medium.

The argument made by Expert 01 and Expert 04 about the low level of expansion of the economy and its performance as a reason for Arts graduates to be restricted in employment opportunities, is questionable. Since the end of the war, it is evident that the country's GDP is increasing each year. After the war, Sri Lanka moved from a third world country to a lower middle income country according to the World Bank. However, the question is whether this growth of the Sri Lankan economy has benefitted the citizens of the country, especially in the generation of more employment opportunities. One could question if this is a 'jobless growth?' Expert 01's view about the stigma around Arts graduates is also another point to be argued. One could question University of Colombo's Arts programs' level of adaptability according to the country's need? If the employers and the market are requiring basic statistics, basic mathematics and general IT skills as requirements for employment, it is questionable as to why the Arts program couldn't change what it offers with time and adapt according to the needs of the job market.

Similar views were expressed by the experts about the qualities that lack in students who join the university. According to them students continue those qualities from school stage which badly affects them when they go to work in the outside world. One of the initial points mentioned was the 'competitive school culture' they bring in to campus. This results in very poor team work according to Expert 02, which eventually would not be good for work life as well. Another challenge the faculty face is the unacceptable discipline of students upon submissions. Expert 02 said many students have made a habit of submitting their assignments late, which shows their

poor dedication and commitment to work on time. According to her, when employers get to know such qualities of students, they re-think whether or not to hire Arts graduates from state universities. Punctuality and ability to meet deadlines are highly desired in the job-world. If a group of students are labelled for failing in efficiency like the students at the University of Colombo Arts faculty, it is possible to get the bad reputation from the whole of the employment system.

All experts have identified the lack of communication and IT skills as a disadvantage for Arts graduates in job market. Continuously, the attitude problem was mentioned over and over again even by many experts as well. According to experts, graduates still believe that they deserve to get white collar jobs. Expert 06 said there's no such unemployable issue. But an attitude issue which has kept them away from jobs. Furthermore he condemned the current system of higher education, which only teaches the subject knowledge, but not about the real world. So, career guidance should take place either at end of school level or in the beginning of the university level for students to get to know the realities of the world, before it is too late according to Expert 06. However, this study also recognizes the importance of starting employment orientation from school level for all students who are a part of the public education system in Sri Lanka.

Employers (both private and public) generally had negative perceptions about Arts graduates and about their level of employability. State employer whom researcher interviewed was very critical on Arts graduates, due to bad experiences faced by him at work. According to him, even non-degree staff (minor staff), can perform simple tasks, which Arts graduates cannot do. From basic computer tasks to day-to-day normal activities, General Degree Arts graduates have failed in performing. Employers similarly have seen the attitude problem in both public and private sector. Due to the attitude that Arts graduates have, employers believe they are not interested in contributing to tasks that have to be delivered and some employers see them as a group of people with 'rigid characters' who don't want to adapt to new environments. Employers were concerned over the employment of Arts graduates as there was a miss-match of study programs, weak attitude and lack of skills.

Politicians' opinions were shaped according to their political party. The Politician 01, who is a government cabinet Minister, said there's a shortage of labor in the job market. He specifically mentioned that there's no such employment problem for Arts graduates, but for those who only studied in their mother tongue (either Sinhala or Tamil). He also believes that employment issues arose due to Arts External Degree programs, which failed in maintaining the quality and standards of education. Politician 02 who is an ally of the government stated that the issue of Arts graduates unemployment was due to poor planning by government. According to him, in Sri Lanka development and education are not aligned, education is not practical and the Arts stream's high enrollment has caused an issue when graduates seek employment.

However, the Politician 02 who represents the main opposition, said government hasn't spent enough on education and higher education. Due to this reason, rural schools doesn't have enough teachers and facilities and as a result students have not been taught properly in schools. Politician has previously been an employer and a lecturer as well, and he has seen several qualities that lack in Arts graduates, which disadvantageous to them when they seek employment opportunities. Those are: the memorizing culture, attitude problem, lack of English and IT and poor engagement level in work, which results many of the Arts graduates in failing to have original thoughts and thus, inability to deliver work.

Arts graduates have fewer employment opportunities in Sri Lanka due to various reasons, which were mentioned in **Table 10** in the Results chapter. According to many, Arts graduates are lacking in most of the basic skills as to what the market is expecting. With a curriculum that is not updated and with primitive facilities in university premises, one could argue the quality of education and the standards of the products as well. Politician 01 mentioned that for teachers' entrance exams, when an open exam was kept for Arts graduates with Advance Level's standards, only 10% of the graduates have scored more than 40/100 which really questions the standard of education. Unsuccessful quality control of Arts External General Degrees have given a very bad image in society, which could too be a possible reason why many employers don't desire to employ Arts graduates in private sector.

### **Criticism of Arts graduates**

Amongst the aforementioned factors for the challenges faced by General Degree Arts graduates in potential employment opportunities, a trend of blame on Arts graduates for being incompetent in the job market due to the mismatch of skills, the practice of violent politics on campus and for maintaining unsuitable attitudes. Regardless of the amount of criticism made against the Arts graduates, this study recognizes that these graduates are products of a system which is created and regulated by the state, and has been functioning for decades. Thus, one could pose the counterargument that, it is wrong to blame the graduates for the low levels of employment opportunities, as it is necessary to understand the deeper causes of the high unemployment and under-employment rates of Arts graduates.

Considering the issues that were discussed earlier about the graduates, it appears that today Arts graduates have had criticisms aimed at them unjustly, when they should have been directed at the structural problems of the system. It seems that Arts graduates are blamed for studying the sub-par material offered by the state. Key reasons for the unemployment of General Degree Arts graduates could be categorized as follows, based on levels of priority:

**i. Low government expenditure on education and poor (rural) school infrastructure**

Majority of the General Degree Arts graduates are from rural schools. Due to minimum facilities available in these schools, students do not have many options when selecting a field of study for their A/L's. For example, they don't have the choice to pick from Business studies, Sciences (Mathematics, Chemistry, and Biology) or Humanities and Social Sciences. Due to the lack of facilities available, rural schools also produce students with a lack of technical competencies (basic IT knowledge) with language barriers (lack of both written and spoken English). Similarly due to limited funds available for schools, a wide variety of extracurricular activities are also not available for students. This prevents students from gaining experience in group activities such as: sports, scouting, cadetting etc. Due to these series of issues, even though schools are the starting point where employment orientation should take place, they have failed this task. However, after completing school education, with fewer skills and underdeveloped capabilities (IT, English)

some students follow further education by joining state universities to pursue General Degree Arts degrees.

**ii. Structural and administrative issues within the University that impact on the Arts stream**

Ever since its inclusion in the state university system, the Arts and Humanities program has faced criticism. The main cause being the issues related to the learning process in the Arts stream, first would be the absence of practical aspects in the course content of the General Degree Arts program as mentioned earlier. This has negatively affected the quality of knowledge that graduates receive from the program. As a result, General Degree Arts graduates lack ‘problem solving’ skills which are essential for employment. Moreover the outdated course curriculum, with shallow content, has similarly discouraged students from improving their creativity and critical thinking. Instead it has entrenched a culture of rote learning and memorization, something which has also been the case in school education. Some argue that because of these reasons undergraduates are not becoming efficient and effective in dealing with different tasks at work. This could also potentially affect the General Degree Arts graduates’ personal lives negatively as well, since they are not getting used to a structured university education program. Furthermore the freedom which they have in the program has encouraged involvement in other activities such as: violent student politics and riots (see **iv**. Violent political activities in university in the Discussion chapter), creating a negative image of Art graduates in society as trouble makers, especially among employers.

Lack of English and technical competency education in the university curriculum has similarly placed the graduates at a disadvantage, as they are unable to develop these skills which are necessary for employment in modern society. Therefore, they are unable to migrate, study abroad or even find a job in the private sector in Sri Lanka. As a result Art graduates are forced to get lower paid jobs that do not fit into their level of studies.

It was also seen that Art stream being highly politicized both at administrative level and students’ level, as decisions are adopted mostly according to politicians’ interests. Absence of an expertise panel to make decisions on Arts graduates programs, just like in other faculties

(Medical Faculty, Engineering Faculty, Law faculty) has resulted in a series of problems in the system, including issues in enrolment and quality maintenance of the program.

Observations of the researcher made it evident that the Arts faculty is poorly equipped with regards to physical infrastructure. Facilities such as computer labs were in poor conditions as well as the maintenance and sanitary conditions of the buildings. It was evident however that the Arts Faculty has poorly adapted with the changing environment of the world. Thus, the faculty has failed to create a welcoming atmosphere for students to study and be involved in campus activities. This exposes the shortage of resources available for the university system negatively affecting the 'good name' of the institution as well.

General Degree Arts graduates have also not been directed by the career guidance unit as it should be, to understand the available employment opportunities in the world. Some graduates do not know the existence of a career unit, which could be considered as another reason for their high rates of unemployment.

The 'wrong attitude' (failure to adopt in different environments and the belief of a superiority to others) of the majority of General Degree Arts graduates was correspondingly recognized by all stake holders as one key reasons for these graduates being disfavored in employment. In Sri Lanka there's a deficit in job market. However, those jobs can only be grasped by those who are skilled and capable in performing tasks. Most importantly, the employers favor graduates with the right attitude (those who are friendly, willing to learn and adopt according to different environments); where General Degree Arts graduates have failed in grasping it. However, it has to be something that should develop in Arts graduates by the education system. If the education system let the students explore outside world and realities, one could argue that these kind of problems could be minimized as they understand more about the realities of the world.

### **iii. Job market issues**

There is a stigma about the Arts Degree graduates in the market which has led to a systematic exclusion in employment opportunities for them in Sri Lanka. This is done in a less obvious

manner by including non-arts related subjects in entrance exams for Arts related jobs in both public and private sector.

The prejudice maintained by private sector against rural, vernacular General Degree Arts graduates who seek employment was also seen as a challenge, which is not under the control of Arts graduates. It seems that favoritisms still occur for urban, English speaking graduates coming from elite schools and social backgrounds, when employment is awarded for administrative positions, while workers positions (considered to be lower level) are given for state university educated General Degree Arts graduates. Since the liberalization of the Sri Lankan economy, private sector was supposed to create sufficient jobs. However, there is a lack of jobs in the market for General Degree Arts graduates, even though the post-war economy is expanding and the GDP is increasing.

#### **iv. Violent political activities in university**

Violent conduct and behavior is something that is unacceptable within a civilized society. However, one must understand why these violent activities constantly occur with Arts graduates and undergraduates. Some say that a university represents a country within a global standard. If students are treated equally and given fair rights, violent events are unlikely to occur at the university level. Similarly, we could equally distribute the Sri Lanka's unbalanced resources of the rural and urban school systems, and how Arts students react when they feel that they are insecure about the future and threatened by state with less rights. It was also recognized that some Arts graduates having the feeling that they are not been treated with due respect by politicians when they call graduates' by the names of animals such as 'buffalos' (*meeharak*). With a declining budget for education one could expect more and more protests by the students since many of their groups always expect the improvement of the education system in Sri Lanka. If the system of discriminatory and unequal social structure changes (provided with quality education and facilities from school level till the end of university education) Arts graduates will also most likely end their violent actions against any government. Considering all aforesaid points, one could conclude that in Sri Lanka today, General Degree Arts graduates have unfortunately become victims of structural deficiencies and social prejudice.

### **Dependency of Arts graduates on state employment**

Research found that Art graduates prefer joining government jobs due to various factors such as job security, similarity in working culture with their social backgrounds, transferability of jobs and the pension scheme. These were among the top reasons for their desire to gain government jobs. Furthermore it was seen that society considers government jobs with a higher status than working for the private sector, even though the salaries in government sector are relatively low.

In the sample of interviewees, out of eight, seven were full time government employees and one was teaching in a semi-government school. According to what graduates said, most of them had parents (at least one) who worked for the government. Therefore they have chosen to do an Arts General Degree and then join the government. One graduate stated that, (I 02) her mother asked her to join government. The reason she has asked is because of the 'status' you get in the society. According to graduates, if you're state employed it is considered as a higher status in society. Similarly graduates were happy with the job security and the benefits they will get by working for the government.

In contrast, experts had mixed opinions; the attitude that is built in many of the Art graduates, the thinking that they should be 'provided' with jobs by the government, can similarly be considered as a reason for this dependency. According to experts, it was seen that many of the Arts graduates think the government must offer them a job, just as they were offered free education. Thinking about a government job, which they'd get at some point, most of the graduates also are not developing their employability skills. The private sectors' dissatisfaction over skill-mismatch in General Degree Arts graduates due to their inability to perform tasks demanded by the private sector is also considered a reason that has created a heavy dependency on government jobs.

Furthermore expert 05 said, after liberalization in 1970's private sector was supposed to create jobs, which they've failed and now the government has got the burden. The undemocratic process of private sector (favoring the urban, English speaking, upper social class family members) has forced the Arts graduates only to look into government jobs. Few of the other points which were mentioned was, government jobs have job security, similar cultural factor which is familiar for Arts graduates and the transferability to their village or home town area.



However, employer 01 said private sector's need and the Arts graduates skills have a miss match which has made the Arts graduates be concerned mostly on government jobs. Moreover he said in government jobs people can idle and stay without doing much productive work, which has similarly been a reason for many Arts graduates to join government positions. This could correspondingly be related with a study done by Gallup (2013). According to the study done by Gallup (2013), the employee engagement in Sri Lanka is 13%, while 62% are not engaged and 24% are actively disengaged (GALLUP, 2013).

### **Level of satisfaction upon the completion of the Arts General Degree**

All the graduates that the researcher interviewed were happy with their achievement with the graduation with an Arts General Degree. They said they have become what they aspired to be in their childhood dreams and that they felt very proud looking back at the challenges faced and where they stand at present. However, I 06 said for him it was only a paper qualification, which paved the way to sit for another exam and therefore he is happy too. I 08 too stated that her dream in life came true; becoming a teacher.

Though the General Degree Arts graduates are restricted in employment opportunities, even with the lower wages in comparison to private sector employees, they seem to be happy with the program they studied in. One of the key reasons for this is the Sri Lankan view of government servants as a higher status group within the social strata. It appears that in Sri Lanka, there is a correlation with the level of acceptance and social recognition with the place you are employed with. Private sector employees earn more in salary, in comparison to state sector employees but government employees are considered more important and recognized in society.

### **Status of private universities**

Establishment of private universities is a debate in Sri Lanka. However it was not observed as a good decision by most of the graduates. By establishing private universities, the knowledge and the devotion of A/L students will be underestimated by the money of the rich. Graduate I 02 said, starting private universities will underestimate the devotion and knowledge of the students who pass A/L's and join government universities after a hard competition. Supporting the same,

experts mentioned that private universities will be profit oriented and there will be no fair service, and 'no one will be able to democratize the system'. Private university graduates will similarly cause discrimination toward state graduates when it comes to employment opportunities, since private sector employers will favor private university graduates. This will limit opportunities for the intelligent poor, resulting in the lack of a bright future for them. Graduate I 03 mentioned that for the poor and the brightest will have no future, since the rich and the capable will get a degree from the private university and similarly get all the jobs too which are available in the market. Graduate I 08 suggested instead of letting private universities come in; expanding the state universities is a notion that she supports.

However, in contrast, semi-government universities, which are highly regulated by UGC, were considered more acceptable instead of External General Degree Arts programs. One graduate stated that private universities could be a better option than having External Degree Arts programs, if those private universities are highly regulated and quality controlled. Some experts made their concerns as well and stated that before letting private universities come in to Sri Lanka, the government has to modernize the state university system. Otherwise, the competition which governments expect to have with private universities will not be there with the primitive facilities available in government universities. Some experts and Politician 02 (from the main opposition) was in favor for private universities; only if state funding is increased for government universities.

The research identifies that just as much as private universities can bring in foreign revenue to Sri Lanka by bringing in International students to the country; it is also possible for them to widen the gap between the rich and the poor in Sri Lanka. The function of the private (international) school system and its adverse effects can be an example for that argument where decisions have to be made carefully. However, Sri Lanka can study the higher education system of neighboring India. India has a well-functioning state university system and in addition, numerous private universities. We can take India as an example and adopt such policies accordingly in Sri Lanka as well. However, if UGC can quality control the standards of the education provided in private universities, Sri Lanka might benefit in several areas by establishing private universities. In the present context, only the richest parents can afford to

send their kids abroad for university education. Due to this trend, a lot of foreign reserves are flowing out of the country. This could be saved in Sri Lanka if the government allows private universities to be introduced. Similarly, another advantage for students would be that they will have a freedom of choice in choosing a university from private/public. Currently, students have no choice but to join the state universities for higher education or private higher education institutes, which are neither quality controlled by UGC nor the Higher Education Ministry. If private universities are established within Sri Lanka (which are quality controlled by UGC), then the students will also get the freedom of choice as to where they pursue higher education, along with a choice amongst multiple disciplines to study. Another possible benefit of the establishment of private universities is to give Sri Lankan students an opportunity to experience a diversity of international students. When the Sri Lankan students get the chance to study and interact with international students, they will get a chance to understand other cultures and the differences of diversity outside of Sri Lanka. This will benefit the students in future employment and in their whole lives, as they are exposed to a more internationalized environment. However, the decision for the establishment of private universities has to be taken soon with a proper plan under the control of UGC for quality assurance.

### **Gender and unemployment of Arts graduates**

One other important complication with unemployed Arts graduates is the link between gender and the amount of Arts graduates. According to UGC (2014), for the year of 2010, there had been 7064 undergraduates admitted to the Sri Lankan state university system for Arts and Humanities. Among them 5587 were female. As a percentage, the 2010 intake had 79.09% of female admissions. There are similar numbers which count for more than 70% of female admissions for Arts and Humanities in recent years. Thus, one could also argue that the most vulnerable group of the problem are women. It could also be considered as female Arts graduates are an under-utilized resource in Sri Lanka that could be particularly well-placed for the drive of development of Sri Lanka.

### **Accuracy of unemployment statistics**

Sri Lanka has a low unemployment rate compared to many other developing countries. According to Economist (2014) Sri Lanka's total unemployment rate is 4.6%. This low number

of unemployment rate is also one of the key arguments most of the politicians use in arguments to defend that the condition in Sri Lanka is acceptable for employment for youth and for all groups. However, it is important to note that unemployment rate for Arts and Humanities graduates still remains 68.5% in Sri Lanka (Economist, 2014).

One of the key reasons for this low level of unemployment rate is migration. Sri Lanka has over 1.8 million workers abroad and 7% of the GDP is also made by the remittances sent by these workers (Australian Government, 2014). Since the liberalization of the economy, majority of the skilled and educated youth migrates to the West or oil rich developed nations (Gunasekera, 2006). This has also threatened the country's development process due to the increasing trend of brain drain. According to Department of Statistics of GOSL, majority of the migrant workers are males aged from 25-29 in year of 2009 (GOSL, 2010). It is also estimated that "the annual outflow of migrant workers is approximately 250,000 people. Whilst one fourth of the Sri Lankan workforce (24%) works abroad, one third of Sri Lankan families depend on remittances from them. Most migrant workers support the basic needs of their dependents back home" (RCP, 2014). The study by RCP (2014) further states that in Sri Lanka the majority of migrant workers are still low-skilled or semi-skilled. As a result, the unemployment rate in Sri Lanka is at a low level, which could hardly narrate with the employment opportunities in Sri Lanka, though politicians argue.

### **The future of education in Sri Lanka**

Similarly, some politicians refer to the high Human Development Index and the Human Capital Index rankings in debates to show Sri Lanka's growth and Human Development. However, considering the findings within this research there is a legitimate question about the 'quality' of education provided in Sri Lanka. Though statistics show high percentage of literacy rates in Sri Lanka considering the availability of schools, teachers, students and completion of the level of education; now it is a question of the quality of the education that is provided. Majority of Sri Lankans are not living in urban areas. The majority still lives in rural and sub-urban areas. It is evident that these areas are not provided with 'modernized' schools. Students in rural areas are still going to traditional schools with primitive facilities, where mostly Arts and Humanities are taught for Advanced Level exams. The research results raise an important question, whether the

majority of Sri Lankan youth and children enjoy free and a quality system of education which equally benefits all Sri Lankans.

A number of factors have contributed to the crisis in education in Sri Lanka. First being the continuous budget cuts for education by the government which has neither benefitted the school education system, nor the state university education. As a result, students are left with no choice, but to study Arts and Humanities. Similarly in university level, the quality of education is questionable. Undergraduates who study Arts and Humanities are supposed to learn about the society. To know the realities of the society, one should leave the classroom and get involved in research and hands on practical work, which will not only give an understanding about the real situation post-graduation, but the quality of knowledge will also increase. Graduates will have both reflective and instrumental knowledge which can be used in problem solving. Problem solving is one of the key expectations by an employer from the employee which is missing in the education that is provided today.

However, it seems the future of education in Sri Lanka is challenged today. One should not just look at HDI and Human Capital Index numbers that are presented by different organizations to make a general idea about the level of education in a country. This research raises the question about the numbers that are presented in both HDI and in Human Capital Index. It appears though that these indices are based on quantity, while the quality of education provided has been ignored and is not represented in statistics. Therefore, when politicians and pro-government experts make arguments relating to these numbers, it is important to challenge and see the root causes which still exist within Sri Lanka with the unequal education system.

### **The nexus between an increasing social gap and regulation of private education**

Another argument to be considered is the increasing social gap among groups of the rich and the poor due to privatization of education in both the secondary and tertiary education level. Though it is said that there are no private universities in Sri Lanka, there are private higher education institutes which award degrees (Bachelor level and Master level) that are not regulated by UGC or Higher Education Ministry. Similarly the private (international) schools are not quality controlled by the Education Ministry. Most of the students that study in those private schools are

not being taught the history of Sri Lanka or Sri Lankan culture and some state that in some international schools' students are not even taught the mother tongue. This can be a potential threat for the increasing social gap of the rich and the poor, since the two groups of students' backgrounds are not similar at all. Through the gap it creates in the society, it is important to consider the consequences which will take place in the job market as well. The privileged students who attended private schools with an English background will have a better chance in getting employed in the private sector. With their privileged backgrounds, they may have the capability to go abroad and get educated and they return to contribute towards the growth of Sri Lanka, or it can also be that the majority of private educated students may not return to Sri Lanka, due to the high salaries they receive abroad. This increased tendency of brain drain is considered to be a potential threat for the sustainable development of Sri Lanka, as Sri Lanka needs more skilled and qualified people to build the country.

### **Improving the Arts stream**

Considering the challenges which General Degree Arts Graduates face, one could perceive what could be done in order to improve the system.

#### **(i.) Increasing the budget share for education**

As the opposition Member of Parliament (MP) pointed, to do most of the things mentioned, it requires money. It is as well evident that Sri Lanka is one of the lowest among all Asian countries on public expenditure on education (as a percentage that is allocated for entire education from GDP per year). More of the budget should be allocated to develop rural school infrastructure and university education. For that the government has to take action and spend more by allocating a better percentage from budget to implement the suggestions in order to betterment both the education and higher education system, which will eventually help to secure the General Degree Arts graduates' future as well.

#### **(ii.) Enhancement of the employability**

It is very important to understand that the skills, language proficiency and capabilities have to be developed at an earlier stage of life. We can take developed nations as an example. Their schools and education systems are filled with IT courses and IT related work, language learning, group

work, community work, volunteering, sports and such ‘team oriented’ collective activities, which they have made compulsory along with subject work. Developed nations have identified its importance of developing these qualities in students at an earlier stage of life, before entering adulthood. This is essential for Sri Lanka to learn and adopt in our education system. Those who also go out to work soon after school education will be benefitted if the education system includes these kinds of activities at school level. Therefore, it is clear that prior to joining the university, employment orientation should start out from School level. As Expert 01 and Politician 02 said, a university cannot do all work by itself. It should work as a sequence of a series. Therefore, school system has to be improved with computer labs, facilities for extracurricular activities and with a qualified team of English teachers, who could literate students with a proper command of English that can speak and write good English.

### **(iii.) Improving the quality of education at university level**

Both the graduates and experts mentioned updating the current courses to offer English and IT for undergraduates to improve skills. In addition they expect to have a variety of more new courses, including Human Development and ICT. Improving facilities for students such as scientific laboratories, computer labs and libraries with both new Sinhala and English books is one suggestion that was made. Graduates also expected the teachers to improve their teaching abilities, and have more effective teaching skills that could grasp the attention of students. The authorities have to include practical studies in courses, where students could practice their skills they learnt as theories. Eventually, it will increase the quality of knowledge they receive: both reflective and instrumental knowledge that is useful in problem solving.

### **(iv.) Creating an expert panel to make decisions on the Arts and Humanities program**

As politician 03 said, it is important to have a proper plan for Arts stream, which decides the course curriculums and enrollment numbers and all sort of decision on behalf of Arts stream, with a panel of experts. Politician 02, who is from opposition said Sri Lanka could study ‘successful stories’ from Finland, Norway, Denmark and such countries and make a plan for university education to make it better. Studying other countries’ successful models and adopting it in the context of Sri Lanka accordingly, could be a faster way to improve the existing Arts and Humanities stream. For that one should note the importance of having an independent expert

panel for decision making for Arts stream.

**(v.) Strengthening disciplinary protocols and procedures in the Arts program**

Strict rules and quality control in education are important to consider. Graduate 07 said though the university takes attendance, the attendance is not a must for undergraduates. So if university makes attendance compulsory (a certain percentage) as a condition to take exams, that could make students more involved in classes. The university can make new rules and make all submissions ‘electronic only.’ This will force students to learn computer skills. As some experts mentioned, university has enough facilities, but the students haven’t used it to the maximum. Once the submissions are made to be electronic (in any language), it is similarly important to introduce the plagiarism software. Arts Faculty can also make compulsory English and ICT exams prior semester exams as graduates mentioned, which will force them to learn such skills.

**(vi.) Creating realistic expectations about employment amongst undergraduates**

Changing the attitude of the way Arts graduates think will be a challenge. For that, faculty and all staff will have to put an effort to show Arts undergraduates, as what they would face upon their graduation, if they don’t develop the right skills. Though the Expert 06 said it is solely university’s responsibility to make changes in undergraduate level, it is important to pay attention at school level as well, and to create a positive attitude on students before entering the university. Furthermore as the graduates mentioned, strengthening the career guidance units will similarly help Arts undergraduates to get guidance about the employment opportunities.



## **07. CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD**

### **Conclusion**

As Nelson Mandela said, “the power of education extends beyond the development of skills we need for economic success. It can contribute to nation-building and reconciliation” (Mandela, 1997). This is also the need for Sri Lanka, in a post-war setting. A commitment to access to free, fair and a quality education needs to be an essential element of those government policies which are intended to underpin the growth of Sri Lanka, both economically and socially. However, this is not the present situation and inequality in the standards of education is still a major concern and one which has to be addressed as early as possible.

This research explored the challenges encountered by General Degree Arts graduates of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka in employment opportunities and upward mobility. All four groups of stakeholders that were interviewed (recent General Degree Arts graduates, experts in Arts and Humanities, politicians, and potential employers) contributed extensive and diverse perspectives regarding the long-running unemployment issue, one which has caused a plethora of problems for many General Degree Arts and Humanities graduates. The group most affected is that composed of External General Degree Arts graduates, of which more than 70% are women. The remainder of the General Degree Arts graduates face immense challenges as well.

Due to the private sector’s refusal to recruit General Degree Arts graduates, those from state universities have a growing dependency on state employment. There are two contributing factors towards this dependency. The first is the prejudice of the private sector toward General Degree Arts graduates from lower class family backgrounds, who are distinguishable in speech by their distinctive vernacular. It was mentioned that graduates from urban, wealthy backgrounds that have had training in spoken English are favored in the private sector during job recruitment. The second factor is the perception that General Degree Arts graduates produced through the state university system lack the skills required to be successful employees, in comparison to their counterparts. However, this study views General Degree Arts graduates as victims of a system

that is socially unequal due to structural issues of the education system which is not under the control of graduates.

General Degree Arts graduates are commonly from underprivileged families, most commonly from rural areas in the country. Since the schools in their areas did not provide the option of Advanced Level (A/L) education and in many cases due to the fact that their parents could not afford to educate them in larger schools, these students had no choice, but to major in the Arts and Humanities. While some of these students have enthusiasm and a genuine interest in the Arts, most of them do not consider it as a serious field of study, but rather as an easy route of admission into the state university system.

The main reason for General Degree Arts graduates having restricted employment opportunities, to locally and internationally, is the sub-par education system in rural parts of Sri Lanka. The quality of this system continues to decline due to the decrease in government expenditure on education. Consequently, rural schools have a minimum of facilities such as: scientific laboratories, computer labs, English teachers and facilities for extra-curricular and recreational activities.

In order to improve the Applied General Arts Degree program the enactment of appropriate measures is required. The most important message that needs to be conveyed in this remediation process is the understanding that employment orientation is a vital part of education. This needs to be provided to students starting at the school level before they reach adulthood. With an allocation of a bigger budget share for the rural school system, schools could be equipped with scientific laboratories and IT facilities. This would make it possible to provide a real choice for students selecting their A/L's stream. Furthermore it is essential to deploy qualified English teachers to build English proficiency. Extracurricular activities such as sports, cadetting and scouting ought to be included in the schooling system. These activities can assist in building a sense of team spirit among students, a key component in the development of energetic and dynamic students capable of dealing with the future challenges that a young adult is expected to face in the world outside these institutions.

Just as much as school education has a responsibility towards the employment orientation of students, the university system also needs to play a key role. The study found that a lack of practical work and the poorly organized curriculum of the General Arts Degree programs are the two most important reasons for the poor performance of graduates in employment environments. Consequently, the reputation of these graduates is such that they are perceived as underqualified candidates for the employment world. As the study of society and its various trends is a study of the utmost importance, Arts and Humanities should not be ignored in the development of university curricula. The inclusion of research and dynamic group activities within and outside classrooms is instrumental in improving the critical thinking and problem solving abilities of students. In developed countries, basic mathematics and statistics courses are made compulsory for Arts and Humanities undergraduates, in order to develop these vital skills. This could be a laudable addition to the Sri Lankan education system.

One of the greatest concerns for the Faculty of Arts at Colombo University is their lack of a career counseling department. The efforts made by the faculty to create connections between academics and industry have been sparse, and have resulted in a paucity of employment opportunities for graduates. Undergraduates can be linked with companies and governmental departments for internships and co-operative employment positions that would help them gain crucial work experience before the completion of their program. This would provide graduates with invaluable opportunities to develop a professional network and to help them build a stronger résumé as prospective entry-level employees.

The high number of enrollments in the Arts faculty can also pose a problem in itself. This is mainly due to the presence of national political organizations within the campus that commonly target students of the Arts faculty for recruitment. The lack of a decision making panel has caused this issue to degenerate further. Unlike the other faculties on campus, the Arts faculty does not have a large administrative committee. The lack of an established decision-making expert panel has caused the Arts faculty to be prone to corruptive outside influences. Following the model of the other faculties in this regard could help dissipate the volatile environment within the Arts stream.

However, this issue cannot be handled by an increase in public expenditure on education infrastructure alone. This is an issue that can only be solved through a collective effort. The backing of the government is necessary in obtaining an allocation of a larger budget share for education. Not only does rural school infrastructure require immediate remediation, but also both the school and university systems, as a whole, must re-evaluate the possibilities towards building a practical education system in Arts and Humanities, where employment orientation starts at the school stage. The skills necessitated by the private sector, chiefly the proficiency of the English language with ICT knowledge, should be provided to students through the syllabus at the school level, and be further progressed at the university level. The contributions from international institutions, embassies, NGOs can also be garnered in order to facilitate the efforts of Sri Lanka's education system. Media can also play a vital role by focusing their resources towards the promotion of academic ideals. The moral and social responsibility of market institutions could also be a huge catalyst towards this cause. Recruitment processes of graduates on the basis of merit as opposed to social background would create a win-win situation for both market institutions and graduates alike.

If comprehensive plans are made and every entity performs their duties responsibly, the arduous task of creating a new generation of General Degree Arts graduates that can compete with graduates from other fields, could be a reality. The ultimate consequence of this would be a decline in the unemployment rate of General Degree Arts graduates in Sri Lanka, and the birth of a new generation of students with a free thinking attitude that would take them to the threshold of the globalized world.

### **Way forward**

This study has identified and discusses the challenges faced by General Degree Arts graduates from the Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo, in terms of accessing employment opportunities. In resolving this issue the researcher believes that the following actions are required:

- Policy intervention by the government to solve structural issues,

- End policy discrimination (against the poor) within the education system by increasing the budget share for education, in particular those portions which are allocated to rural school development, and research and development in the fields of Arts and Humanities,
- Immediate implementation of programs to empower the existing General Degree Arts graduates that are still unemployed or underemployed.

Some alternative approaches for addressing the Arts graduates' unemployment problem are presented in the Appendix. Suggestions for further research on the same topic are also presented in the Appendix under the 'Future study' section.

## 08. REFERENCES

1. Liu , G., & Greker, M. (2009, 12). *Measuring the stock of human capital for Norway*. Retrieved 06 25, 2014, from Statistics Norway/Research:  
[http://www.ssb.no/a/english/publikasjoner/pdf/doc\\_200912\\_en/doc\\_200912\\_en.pdf](http://www.ssb.no/a/english/publikasjoner/pdf/doc_200912_en/doc_200912_en.pdf)
2. Abeyratne, S. (2012). *Employment implications of the ‘Five - Hubs Strategy’ of Sri Lanka*. Geneva: International Labour Organization (ILO).
3. Alkire, S. (2011). *The Capability Approach and Human Development*. Retrieved 06 25, 2014, from University of Oxford: <http://www.ophi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/OPHI-HDCA-SS11-Intro-to-the-Capability-Approach-SA.pdf>
4. Anderson, S. J. (2011). *From Oslo with love: Remittances, Resistance and staying Tamil in Oslo and Batticaloa* . Ås: Department of International Environment and Development Studies, NMBU.
5. Ann Pegg, J. W.-I. (2012). *The Higher Education Academy* . Retrieved 05 08, 2014, from The Higher Education Academy :  
[http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/employability/pedagogy\\_for\\_employability\\_update\\_2012.pdf](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/employability/pedagogy_for_employability_update_2012.pdf)
6. Ariyawansa, R. G. (2008). *Employability of Graduates of Sri Lankan Universities* . Sri Jayawardenepura Kotte: Department of Estate Management and Valuation, University of Sri Jayawardenepura.
7. Aturupane, H. (2012). *Economic Benefits and Options for Financing Higher Education in Sri Lanka*. Retrieved 06 27, 2014, from Sri Lanka Journal of Advanced Social Studies :  
<http://www.sljol.info/index.php/SLJASS/article/view/5118>
8. Australian Government. (2014, 08 27). *Country Profile : Sri Lanka*. Retrieved from Australian Government - Department of Immigration and Border Protection:  
[http://www.immi.gov.au/media/statistics/country-profiles/\\_files/sri-lanka.pdf](http://www.immi.gov.au/media/statistics/country-profiles/_files/sri-lanka.pdf)
9. Aviant Group. (2007). *What is Human Capital?* Retrieved 06 25, 2014, from Aviant Group LLC:  
<http://aviantgroup.com/humancapital.asp>
10. Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008, 12 04). *Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers*. Retrieved 06 04, 2014, from The Qualitative Report Volume 13 : Nova Southeastern University: <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR13-4/baxter.pdf>

11. Boyce, C., & Neale, P. (2006, 05). *CONDUCTING IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS: A Guide for Designing and Conducting In-Depth Interviews for Evaluation Input*. Retrieved 06 06, 2014, from PATHFINDER INTERNATIONAL TOOL SERIES:  
[http://www.cpc.unc.edu/measure/training/materials/data-quality-portuguese/m\\_e\\_tool\\_series\\_indepth\\_interviews.pdf](http://www.cpc.unc.edu/measure/training/materials/data-quality-portuguese/m_e_tool_series_indepth_interviews.pdf)
12. Braun , V., & Clarke, V. (2012). *Thematic Analysis*. Retrieved 06 28, 2014, from Academia.edu:  
[http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/11735/2/thematic\\_analysis\\_revised...html](http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/11735/2/thematic_analysis_revised...html)
13. Briks, M., & Mills, J. (2010, 09 20). *Grounded Theory - A Practical Guide*. Retrieved 06 05, 2014, from SAGE Publications: [http://www.uk.sagepub.com/upm-data/36848\\_birks.pdf](http://www.uk.sagepub.com/upm-data/36848_birks.pdf)
14. Britannica. (2014 , 06 25). *Human Capital* . Retrieved 06 25, 2014, from Encyclopædia Britannica Online: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/275598/human-capital>
15. Britannica, I. E. (2014). *Britannica Academic Edition*. Retrieved 05 13, 2014, from In Encyclopaedia Britannica.: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/551322/social-mobility?anchor=ref141164>
16. Calman, L. (2014). *What is Grounded Theory?* . Retrieved 06 05, 2014, from The University of Manchester: <http://www.methods.manchester.ac.uk/events/whatis/gt.pdf>
17. CBSL. (2013, June). *Central Bank of Sri Lanka*. Retrieved 05 04, 2014, from Central Bank of Sri Lanka:  
[http://www.cbsl.gov.lk/pics\\_n\\_docs/10\\_pub/\\_docs/statistics/other/Socio\\_Econ\\_Data\\_2013\\_e.pdf](http://www.cbsl.gov.lk/pics_n_docs/10_pub/_docs/statistics/other/Socio_Econ_Data_2013_e.pdf)
18. CBSL. (2014). *Annual Report 2013*. Colombo: Central Bank of Sri Lanka. Retrieved from [http://www.cbsl.gov.lk/pics\\_n\\_docs/10\\_pub/\\_docs/efr/annual\\_report/AR2013/English/3\\_KEI.pdf](http://www.cbsl.gov.lk/pics_n_docs/10_pub/_docs/efr/annual_report/AR2013/English/3_KEI.pdf)
19. CDC. (2008, 12). *Data Collection Methods for Program Evaluation: Observation*. Retrieved 06 06, 2014, from Centers for Disease Control and Preventio, USA:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/evaluation/pdf/brief16.pdf>
20. CEPA. (20013). *The Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA)*. Retrieved 04 20, 2014, from The Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA): <http://www.cepa.lk/index.php/poverty-head-count-ratio-sri-lanka>
21. Chandrakumara, D. (2014). *Employability of New Graduates in Sri Lanka: Implications for Policy Development*. Nagoya: Graduate School of International Development, Nagoya University, Japan.

22. Charmaz, K. (17, 10 2013). *Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory* . Retrieved 06 05, 2014, from Temple University University Libraries: <http://guides.temple.edu/groundedtheory>
23. CSU. (2014). *Writing@CSU Guide*. Retrieved 06 04, 2014, from Colorado State University: <http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/guide.cfm?guideid=60>
24. Dictionary.com. (2014). *Dictionary.com, LLC*. Retrieved 05 13, 2014, from Dictionary.com, LLC: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/upward+mobility>
25. Dolage, D. A., & Hearth , C. N. (2013). *Soft Skills Competency among OUSL Graduates- Employer's Perspective* . Nugegoda: Journal of Engineering and Technology of The Open University of Sri Lanka (JET-OUSL).
26. Ebrahim, G. J. (2014). *Qualitative Field Research*. Retrieved 06 96, 2014, from Oxford Journals, Oxford University Press: [http://www.oxfordjournals.org/our\\_journals/tropej/online/ce\\_ch14.pdf](http://www.oxfordjournals.org/our_journals/tropej/online/ce_ch14.pdf)
27. EC. (2014, 11 03). *Role of gender in research*. Retrieved 06 28, 2014, from Research and Innovation - Science in Society, European Commission : <http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/index.cfm?fuseaction=public.topic&id=1283>
28. Economist, T. (January, 2014). *High university enrolment, low graduate employment : Analysing the paradox in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka*. London: The Economist, Intelligence Unit .
29. EI. (2012). *Education in Crisis - Sri Lanka* . Retrieved 06 27, 2014, from Education International, Belgium: <http://www.educationincrisis.net/country-profiles/asia-pacific/item/567-sri-lanka>
30. Fekjær, S. (2009, 04). *Education: A Rational Choice?* Retrieved 07 14, 2014, from Nordic Journals Online: [http://www.idunn.no/file/pdf/37007942/Utdanning\\_Et\\_rasjonelt\\_valg.pdf](http://www.idunn.no/file/pdf/37007942/Utdanning_Et_rasjonelt_valg.pdf)
31. GALLUP. (2013). *State of the Global Workplace: Employee Engagement Insights for Business Leaders Worldwide*. Retrieved from Gallup, Inc: <http://www.gallup.com/strategicconsulting/164735/state-global-workplace.aspx>
32. GOSL. (2010). *Bulletin of International Migration Statistics of Sri Lanka*. Retrieved from Department of Census and Statistics by Ministry of Finance & Planning: <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/Newsletters/Bulletin%20of%20International%20Migration.pdf>
33. Guest, G., MacQueen, K., & Namey, E. (2012). *Applied Thematic Analysis*. Retrieved 06 28, 2014, from SAGE Publications: [http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/44134\\_1.pdf](http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/44134_1.pdf)



34. Guion, L., Diehl, D., & McDonald, D. (2001, 10). *Conducting an In-depth Interview*. Retrieved 06 06, 2014, from University of Florida: <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy393>
35. Gunasekera, H. (2006, 11). *Development of international migration statistics in Sri Lanka*. Retrieved from UNITED NATIONS SECRETARIAT, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, :  
<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/meetings/egm/migrationegm06/DOC%2011%20Sri%20Lanka.pdf>
36. INNOTOUR. (2014). *Category A: Individual qualitative interviews. Semi-structured interviews*. Retrieved from University of Southern Denmark
37. Jæger, M., & Holm, A. (2011). *Relative Risk Aversion and Educational Decision Making: A Dynamic Model with Ability Updating and Heterogeneous RRA behavior*. Retrieved 07 14, 2014, from Institute for Social & Economic Research (ISER), University of Essex, UK:  
[https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/uploads/paper/document/38/rc28\\_jaeger\\_holm.pdf](https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/uploads/paper/document/38/rc28_jaeger_holm.pdf)
38. Kim , Y., & Sherraden, M. (2010). *Do Parental Assets Matter for Children's Educational Attainment?: Evidence from Mediation Tests*. Retrieved 07 14, 2014, from Center for Social Development - Washington University in St. Louis, USA:  
<http://csd.wustl.edu/Publications/Documents/WP10-40.pdf>
39. Macmillan. (2014). *Macmillan Publishers Limited*. Retrieved 05 14 , 2014, from Macmillan Publishers Limited: <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/opportunity>
40. Mandela, N. (1997, 12 22). *Address by President Nelson Mandela at the Education Africa Presidential and Premier Education Awards*. Retrieved from mandela.gov.za:  
[http://www.mandela.gov.za/mandela\\_speeches/1997/971122\\_educ.htm](http://www.mandela.gov.za/mandela_speeches/1997/971122_educ.htm)
41. Merriam-Webster. (2014). *Merriam-Webster*. Retrieved 05 13, 2014, from Merriam-Webster:  
<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/upward%20mobility>
42. Mezirow, J. (2011). *How Critical Reflection triggers Transformative Learning*. Retrieved from Lingnan University, Hong Kong :  
[http://www.ln.edu.hk/osl/conference2011/output/breakout/4.4%20\[ref\]How%20Critical%20Reflection%20triggers%20Transformative%20Learning%20-%20Mezirow.pdf](http://www.ln.edu.hk/osl/conference2011/output/breakout/4.4%20[ref]How%20Critical%20Reflection%20triggers%20Transformative%20Learning%20-%20Mezirow.pdf)
43. Miller, K., & Waller, G. (2003). *Scenarios, Real Options and Integrated Risk Management*. Pergamon.

44. Ministry of Finance and Planning, S. L. (2013). *Sri Lanka Labour Force Statistics Quarterly Bulletin*. Retrieved 04 23, 2014, from Department of Census & Statistics, Ministry of Finance and Planning:  
[http://www.statistics.gov.lk/samplesurvey/LFS\\_Q4\\_Bulletin\\_WEB\\_2013\\_final.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.lk/samplesurvey/LFS_Q4_Bulletin_WEB_2013_final.pdf)
45. OU. (2014). *Skills for OU study - Conducting an interview*. Retrieved 06 06, 2014, from The Open University, England: <http://www2.open.ac.uk/students/skillsforstudy/conducting-an-interview.php>
46. Oxford. (2014 ). *Oxford University Press*. Retrieved 05 13, 2014, from Oxford University Press:  
<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/opportunity>
47. Oxford. (2014). *Human Capital* . Retrieved 06 25, 2014, from Oxford University Press:  
<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/human-capital>
48. Plewis, I., & Bartleyb, M. (2013, 10 13). *Intra-generational social mobility and educational qualifications*. Retrieved 07 14, 2014, from Research in Social Stratification and Mobility 36 (2014) 1–11: [http://ac.els-cdn.com/S0276562413000401/1-s2.0-S0276562413000401-main.pdf?\\_tid=7bc63526-0b85-11e4-94b6-00000aab0f01&acdnat=1405363046\\_e1ab773fd842f500ea1e751f9900b7bb](http://ac.els-cdn.com/S0276562413000401/1-s2.0-S0276562413000401-main.pdf?_tid=7bc63526-0b85-11e4-94b6-00000aab0f01&acdnat=1405363046_e1ab773fd842f500ea1e751f9900b7bb)
49. Ramanayake, A. (2012). *HETC Employability Study of University Graduands of Sri Lanka (2012)*. Retrieved 05 10, 2014, from Ministry of Higher Education, Sri Lanka:  
[http://www.mohe.gov.lk/images/pdf/Overall\\_FINAL\\_report\\_2012.pdf](http://www.mohe.gov.lk/images/pdf/Overall_FINAL_report_2012.pdf)
50. Ranasinghe, A., & Hearth , H. M. (2011). *Employer Satisfaction towards Business Garduates in Sri Lanka*. Singapore : International Conference on Social Science and Humanity .
51. Ratnayake, K. (2004, 12 24). *Sri Lankan reports reveal widening social inequality*. Retrieved from World Socialist Web Site: <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2004/12/sril-d24.htmlRCP>. (2014). *Colombo Process* . Retrieved from Regional Consultative Process :  
[http://www.colomboprocess.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=60&Itemid=65](http://www.colomboprocess.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=60&Itemid=65)
52. Roessger, K. M. (2013, 08). *Investigating the Impact of Formal Reflective Activities on Skill Adaptation in a Work-Related Instrumental Learning Setting*. Retrieved from University of Wisconsin-Milwauke: <http://dc.uwm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1310&context=etd>

53. Sagar, A. D. (1998, 06). *The Human Development Index: A Critical Review*. Retrieved from Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University: [http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/536/human\\_development\\_index.html](http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/536/human_development_index.html)
54. Schmeer, K. (2001, 03 10). *Stakeholder Analysis Guidelines* . Retrieved 06 06, 2014, from Eestum Management - NL: [http://www.eestum.eu/voorbeelden/Stakeholders\\_analysis\\_guidelines.pdf](http://www.eestum.eu/voorbeelden/Stakeholders_analysis_guidelines.pdf)
55. Shanmugaratnam, N. (2001). *On the Meaning of Development: An exploration of the capability approach*. Retrieved from Forum for Development Studies: [http://www.umb.no/statisk/noragric/staff\\_cv/shanmugaratnam\\_development\\_theory\\_2011.pdf](http://www.umb.no/statisk/noragric/staff_cv/shanmugaratnam_development_theory_2011.pdf)
56. Shanmugaratnam, N. (2011). *Development theory in historical perspective & an overview of Development Studies*. Retrieved from UMB: [http://www.umb.no/statisk/noragric/staff\\_cv/shanmugaratnam\\_development\\_theory\\_2011.pdf](http://www.umb.no/statisk/noragric/staff_cv/shanmugaratnam_development_theory_2011.pdf)
57. The World Bank . (2014). *The World Bank*. Retrieved 04 22, 2014, from The World Bank: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/srilanka/overview>
58. UGC. (2013, 07). *UGC Sri Lanka*. Retrieved 05 04, 2014, from UGC Sri Lanka: [http://www.ugc.ac.lk/downloads/statistics/stat\\_2012/chapter1.pdf](http://www.ugc.ac.lk/downloads/statistics/stat_2012/chapter1.pdf)
59. UGC. (2014). *Sri Lanka University Statistics 2012* . Retrieved 06 27, 2014, from University Grants Commission - Sri Lanka: [http://www.ugc.ac.lk/downloads/statistics/stat\\_2012/chapter2.pdf](http://www.ugc.ac.lk/downloads/statistics/stat_2012/chapter2.pdf)
60. UGC. (2014). *Universities and Higher Educational Institutions*. Retrieved 04 23, 2014, from UGC: <http://www.ugc.ac.lk/en/universities-and-institutes/universities.html>
61. UNDP. (2013). *About Human Development* . Retrieved 06 25, 2014, from United Nations Development Programme: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/humandev>
62. UNDP. (2014). *Human Development Report 2013* . Retrieved 04 22, 2014, from UNDP Country Profiles : <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/Country-Profiles/LKA.pdf>
63. UNICEF. (2013, 12 31). *UNICEF*. Retrieved 04 22, 2014, from UNICEF: [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/sri\\_lanka\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/sri_lanka_statistics.html)
64. University of Colombo. (2014, 02 03). *Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo*. Retrieved 04 27, 2014, from Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo: <http://arts.cmb.ac.lk/?q=about-us>
65. WEFORUM. (2013). *Human Capital Report - 2013*. Retrieved 07 12, 2014, from The World Economic Forum: <http://www.weforum.org/reports/human-capital-report>

66. Weligamage, S. (2009). *Graduates' Employability Skills: Evidence from Literature Review*. Kelaniya: University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka.
67. Wijewardene, L., Yong, D., & Chinna, K. (2014). *English for Employability - the need of the hour for Sri Lankan graduates*. Cambridge and Sussex: British Journal of Arts and Social Sciences .
68. Wilmot, A. (2005). *Designing sampling strategies for qualitative social research: with particular reference to the Office for National Statistics' Qualitative Respondent Register* . Retrieved 06 06, 2014, from The Office for National Statistics (ONS) - UK:  
<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/general-methodology/data-collection-methodology/reports-and-publications/index.html?format=print>
69. World Bank . (2014). *The World Bank*. Retrieved 07 12, 2014, from The World Bank:  
<http://www.worldbank.org/depweb/beyond/global/glossary.html>
70. Worldatlas. (2014). *worldatlas*. Retrieved 04 27, 2014, from worldatlas:  
<http://www.worldatlas.com/aatlas/populations/ctypopls.htm>
71. Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case Study Research. Design and Methods, 4th edition*. Retrieved 06 04, 2014, from Sage Publications:  
<http://designstudiesdiscourses.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/yincasestudy.pdf>
72. Yorke, M., & Knight, P. T. (2006, 04). *Employability Initiative at Edinburgh*. Retrieved 05 08, 2014, from Employability Initiative at Edinburgh:  
[http://www.employability.ed.ac.uk/documents/Staff/HEABriefings/ESECT-3-Embedding\\_employability\\_into\\_curriculum.pdf](http://www.employability.ed.ac.uk/documents/Staff/HEABriefings/ESECT-3-Embedding_employability_into_curriculum.pdf)
73. Zucker, D. M. (2009). *How to Do Case Study Research*. Retrieved 06 04, 2014, from University of Massachusetts - AmherstScholarWorks@UMass Amherst:  
[http://scholarworks.umass.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=nursing\\_faculty\\_pubs](http://scholarworks.umass.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=nursing_faculty_pubs)

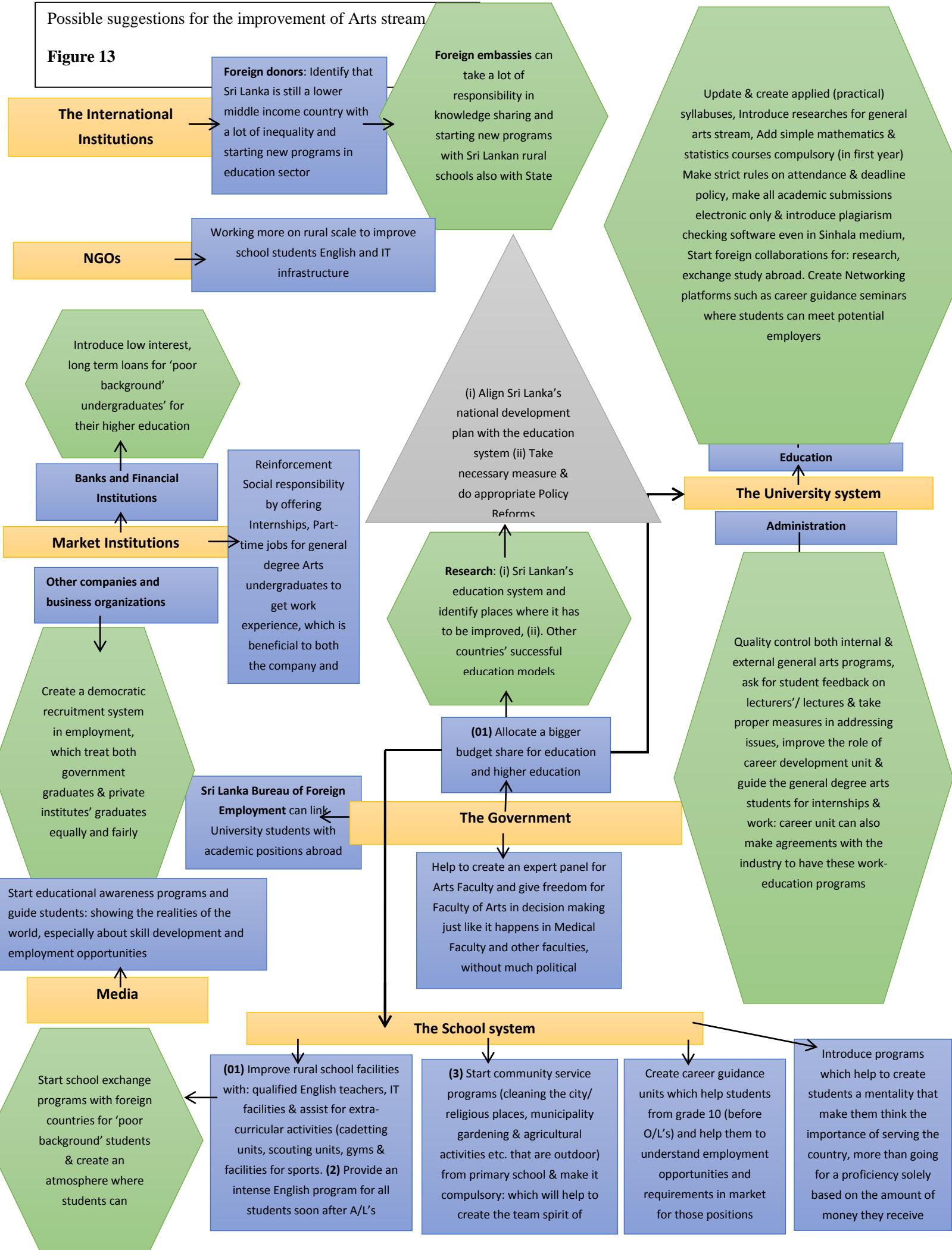
## **09. APPENDICES**

### **I. Alternative approaches for addressing graduate unemployment**

The figure below provides an overview of alternative approaches (as developed by the researcher) for addressing graduate unemployment amongst General Degree Arts graduates.

Possible suggestions for the improvement of Arts stream

Figure 13



## **II. Future study**

Further research on this topic needs to be performed in order to gain more insight into this issue, and to attain a better understanding about its dynamics. A future study could be conducted with mixed methods (using both quantitative and qualitative techniques), where the sample population consists of graduates and undergraduates from the Arts Faculties of every Sri Lankan university. For this future study, data from the following sets could be taken into consideration:

- Graduates of all ethnicities and religions.
- Graduates of External General Degree Arts programs.
- In the selection of interviewees: select according to hometown and social background, interviewing graduates from underprivileged, middle class and upper middle class social backgrounds.
- Interview all student union (student political) leaders from each University.
- Interview politicians from government and opposition parties.
- Select undergraduates and graduates from batches of different years.
- Interview senior journalists, senior civil servants from Sri Lanka administrative services, and the staff at job recruitment agencies.
- Focus on the increasing social gap between rich and poor due to private education.



Norwegian University  
of Life Sciences

Postboks 5003  
NO-1432 Ås, Norway  
+47 67 23 00 00  
[www.nmbu.no](http://www.nmbu.no)