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Employment and Employability Skills of Graduates from Three Universities of Economics

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Abstract

This study identifies graduates' employability level and their skills after graduation from Yangon/ Monywa/ Meikhtilar University of Economics. It studied the respondents' employment, perception of employability skills perceived by the respondents by using both qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods. The secondary data used in the study were collected from the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Department of Students Affairs of Yangon / Monywa / Meikhtila University of Economics in mid-2017. In relation to study the employment level of the respondents, most graduates were found to be employed in their first jobs within 3 to 12 months after graduation. Regarding employability skills, their highest perception of personal skills were only concerned with how they could improve social network and soft skill necessarily required for their working environment around the University of Economics that they had attended. The core skills perceived as the highest benefit to them was their critical thinking and strategic thinking obtained from attending the training classes before going into the workplaces. Concerning the process skills perceived, their feeling that they understand more about the business ethics that should have been practiced and held in market was the highest mean value perceived by each graduate. It could be found that the graduates' employment level after graduation from Three Universities of Economics was not be longer their time of waiting for getting fresher job where they could apply and utilize their employability skills they learnt in the universities than that of other waiting list of degree holders for employment in the Myanmar Labor Market.

Keywords: Graduates, Employment, Employability Skills

1. Introduction

Critically, university graduates employed at the respective workplaces should possess appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes to survive everyday problems and grow in their career lives. Universities are now facing a great deal of both national and international pressures and challenges to adapt to more economical aims and to promote graduates' employability. It has therefore become a central developmental priority in any developing countries to boost the short- and long-term employability potential of their young people.

It is critical that graduates entering into the new workplace with the appropriate skills not only survive but also better their career (Richard James Rateau, 2011). Then, employers want the hired graduates to become leaders qualified for the top level management of the country in the future. (Peter Murphy and David Gawthorpe, 2013). Therefore, perfect outcomes (graduates) of universities with higher education must be qualified inputs or resources for the industries or employers.

Not all young students entered and passed through higher education are orientated to pursue their future and their careers in similar ways and, therefore, can be disposed towards employability in different ways (O'Regan, 2009). One of the main reasons why people apply to higher education is to enhance their career prospects, so career progression is a key driver for many graduates (Peter Murphy and David Gawthorpe, 2013). University graduates occupy an

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interesting position in the economy and there are still competing interpretations about the outcomes of graduates when they enter the labor market (Elias & Purcell, 2004; Brown and Hesketh, 2004). When graduates are entering with various skills into the labour market, employers are more satisfied with graduates who possess skills such as critical and creative thinking, interpersonal, and leadership skills than those who simply possess skills specific to their vocation (Paranto & Kelkar, 1999). Employability means the development of skills and adaptable workforces in which all those capable of work are encouraged to develop the skills, knowledge, technology and adaptability to enable them to enter and remain in employment throughout their working lives (HM Treasury, 1997). But some graduates do not know how to utilize their knowledge and skills, or how to acquire the needed skills for success in their workplace. Consequently, there are expectation gaps between the employers and the employees, and then employers are facing many challenges about human resources (HR) section in an increasingly competitive marketplace. To diminish those gaps, educators and employers need to work together to prepare students for the complexities they will encounter as they leave school and enter the work place (Evers, Rush & Bedrow, 1998).

2. Theoretical Background

Employability is centered on the assumed transposition of skills and competences from the educational context into the workplace (Holmes 2000). Moreover, the graduate can accept the challenge, learn from it and shape his or her identity in their workplaces accordingly by employing the skills and attributes he or she has acquired at university. The employability of graduates has become an aim that governments around the world have, to varying extents, imposed on national higher education systems. This interest in employability reflects an acceptance of human capital theory (Becker, 1975). Under human capital theory, the task of a government is to foster conditions that encourage growth in the stock of human capital, since this is seen as vital to the performance of knowledge-based economies in a globalized society. The higher education system is subject to governmental steer in giving an emphasis to the enhancement of the employability of new graduates. Sometimes, some people get confused about the difference of these two words of “Employment” and “Employability” and mostly those two were interchangeably used and interpreted even in labor markets. In reality, employability is not the same as employment at all. Getting a graduate job has been for sometimes, an irregular and sometimes slow process. However, employability implies something about the capacity of the graduate to function in a job, and is not to be confused with the acquisition of a job, whether a graduate job or otherwise. Some scholars denied that employability of graduates stem from the curricular system for a specific degree program in a particular field of study in higher education institutions. Holmes (2001) analyzed “graduates’ employability” by using graduate identity approach to point out that the enhancement of an undergraduate curriculum in universities leads to increase employability of those graduates of the business school, University of North London. Employability is a consequential effect of a curriculum designed in universities. Therefore, Mantz Yorke (2010) argued that the curricular process has to facilitate the development of prerequisites appropriate to employment but does not guarantee it. Hence it is inappropriate to assume that university students are highly employable on the basis of curricular provision alone.

It may be a good harbinger but it is not an assurance of employability. Employability derives from the ways in which the student learns from his or her experiences.

2. Objective of the Study

Myanmar's economy growth has led to the appearance of new local businesses and has affected businesses of all sizes. The government opens the policies and regulations that have led to an influx of international businesses and foreign investment. Therefore, lots of new jobs for educated youths are created. Some youths may be able to get jobs in their fields of study. There may be challenges for some young people to match their studies in university with job because of the more competition for a specific job, lack the necessary skills needed and/or demand higher salaries than employers are willing to provide, etc. Under these current labor market circumstances in Myanmar, the employability of graduates of the three Universities of Economics after their graduation was worth studying to find out their types of career motivation before graduation, perception of their employability and competencies that related to the current job and working fields. The main aims of this study are to examine how graduates specialized on academic field of Economics got their job career after their graduation and to identify their employability skills perceived by themselves as a knowledge learnt in the universities due to the impact of having different university entrance marks, taking different schooling time and learning courses by different curriculum of graduates between two groups their on employability skills of each respondent.

3. Background of the Study

There are 192 higher education institutions in Myanmar. Among them, only three Universities of Economics exist in Myanmar, namely Yangon University of Economics (YUEco) established since 1962, Monywa University of Economics (MUEco) opened in 1996, and Meiktila University of Economics (MEUEco) launched in 1999. Regarding the degrees offered by each university of economics, only Yangon University of Economics can offer eight kinds of bachelor degrees; Bachelor of Accounting, BAct, Bachelor of Business Administration, BBA, Bachelor of Commerce, BCom, Bachelor of Economics majoring in Economics, BEcon (Eco), Bachelor Economics majoring in Statistics, BEcon (Stats), Bachelor of Public Administration, BPA, Bachelor of Development Studies, BDevS, and Bachelor of Population Studies, BPS during academic years of 2010-2011 to 2015-2016. According to the survey data, there are (9,097) total number of graduates offered by each university of economics in academic year between 2010-2011 and 2012-2013 composing of (6,675) graduates offered in YUEco, (1,495) graduates delivered by MUEco, and (927) graduates conferred by MEUEco respectively. This graduates' number was assumed as Group I namely in the study. As Group II, there were (8,223) total number of graduates offered by each university of economics in academic year between 2013-2014 and 2015-2016 composing of (5,116) graduates offered in YUEco, (1,560) graduates delivered by MUEco, and (1,547) graduates conferred by MEUEco respectively. All responded graduates as population in the study could be divided into two groups in which the first group involved the graduates those who graduated between academic years of 2010-2011 and 2012-2013 and those who completed their learning within *three year schooling time and old curriculum system and learning design* in all universities. Another study group consisted of the

graduates those who completed between academic years of 2013-2014 and 2015-2016 and those who were treated and trained by the *new upgraded curriculum and degree courses designed within length of schooling time four year* to get their respective degrees. Therefore, total sample units of working graduates from Group I were (650) out of population (9,097) and from Group II were (620) out of population (8,223) were selected by using sample size calculator in raosoft.inc to get the minimum recommended size of the study.

4. Analysis of Demographic Figures of Graduates of the Study

This section includes three parts, the first one presenting the demographic data whereas the second one examining about their waiting time to get first job after graduation, types of working organization, functional area to be responsible at work, and their income level at the current and as well the final portion of this analysis is to investigate skills of their employability perceived by the selected respondents in the study.

By gender, it could be said that (70%) out of total sample units of each group of respondents are female and the rest are male (30%) of the total sample unit of the study. Regard to the marital status of respondents, it could be concluded that only (5%) out of total respondents got married while working at the respective job whereas the remaining (95%) are working as single. Moreover, two - third of the total respondents are female graduates and almost of them are taking the role as the more responsible persons at workplaces than those of male respondents. This finding concluded partly that the real socio-economic patterns of Myanmar educated working youth and their life style nowadays.

5. Analysis of Graduates' Employment of the Study

This section investigates how long the respondents waited for getting their first job after graduation, which types of organizations they were working, what functional field they were assigned to work based on their specific degree in the respective academic field at work. In regard to the number of graduates having experience of different waiting time for getting their first job after graduation, only 42 out of 1270 graduates got their first job within (3) months, 175 out of 1270 graduates within (6) months later, 546 out of 1270 sample graduates within (9) months later, 278 out of 1270 graduates within (1) year later, 192 out of 1270 graduates within (1.5) years later, only 37 out of 1270 graduates within more than (2) years later after their graduation respectively. It could be concluded that almost of responded graduates got their first job within (3) months and (12) months after graduation. Concerning the number of graduates working at the different types of organizations, more than (84%) of responded graduates are working in the private forms, (9%) of graduates responded are working at the Governmental Organizations as staff, (5.25 %) of graduates are working own businesses, and (1.3%) are working in the NGO. With respect to the number of graduates by management level of responsibility assigned to take part in the working activities, nearly 91% of total respondents were assigned to take part in the operations level of management whereas 8.3 % of total graduates were promoted to take part in the middle level of management at work places. Only 11 out of 1270 graduates are taking the responsibility of top management level in the study. It could be seen that all respondents have a specific degree in each six years ago from the university. Normally they all have to wait for one year in average to get their early job so that their skills required and working experiences are so far still lack to be assigned to the higher level of management rather than assigning to take part in the basic operations level of workplaces as fresher graduates for getting chance of doing by learning in their job. As exceptional case in the

study, some of the outstanding graduates were assigned and promoted to participate as managers or leaders of middle level and top level of management in their respective area.

Regarding the number of respondents by function assigned to perform at their workplace, (60%) out of total graduates are responsible to perform the function of accounting & auditing, (11%) out of total respondents were assigned in office management/administration, (9%) out of total graduates are appointed as managers at the middle level of management, (7%) out of total graduates are responsible representatives for marketing and sales, (8%) out of respondents are taking part in negotiating, education, training, communication, customer services and public affairs respectively. It could be concluded that the majority of graduates finished from three Universities of Economics are taking part in the workplaces where they could deploy their employability skills, knowledge and experience acquired through learning and attending university. Concerning income level earned per month after joining their first job, the highest range of monthly income of working graduates was more than 400,000 MMKs and the lowest income level per month of graduates was less than and equal to 200,000 MMKs. It could be concluded that the income level for per month of respondents are getting more reasonably amount of income than those of other graduates in Myanmar.

6. Comparative Analysis of Employability Skills of Graduates

This section tested a hypothesis “Employability skills level perceived by selected graduates involved in Group II is higher than those of Group I”. Table (1) shows the test for normality by using Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test.

Table (1): Mean Value of Three Employability Skills by Respondents

No.	Skill	Group 1 Graduated in 3 years		Group 2 Graduated in 4 years	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1.	Personal Skill	3.66	0.45	4.10	0.83
2.	Core Skill	3.30	0.57	4.06	0.53
3.	Process Skill	3.70	0.78	3.95	0.45

Source: Survey Data (2017)

Table (2): Test for Normality of Each of Employability Skills by Graduates

Skills	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Personal Skill	.177	1270	.200*
Core Skill	.166	1270	.200*
Process Skill	.151	1270	.200*

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

Table (2) shows p values of the all test are 0.200 which is greater than 0.05. Hence, the data is distributed normal. Therefore, it can be concluded that normality can be assumed for those data set and provided t test assumption are satisfied; a parametric t test can be used.

Table (3): T test for Comparison of Personal Skill between Group I and II

Group	N	Mean	SD	Leven's Test	t	df	Sig
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				F	Sig.			
Graduated in 3 years	650	3.66	0.45	2.170	0.148	11.66	1268	.000
Graduate in 4 years	620	4.10	0.83					

Table (3) presents the “t” value for comparison of personal skill between graduated in 3 years and 4 years. The p value of the Leven’s Test for equality of variance is 0.148, which is more than 0.05. Hence, the assumption of equality of variances is met. The two tailed p value of the test is 0.00, which is less than 0.05. Thus, it was found that there was significant difference of personal skill between graduated in 3 years and 4 years.

Table (4): T test for Comparison of Core Skill between Group I and II

Group	N	Mean	SD	Leven’s Test		t	df	Sig
				F	Sig.			
Graduated in 3 years	650	3.30	0.57	2.254	0.618	24.209	1268	.000
Graduate in 4 years	620	4.06	0.53					

Table (4) shows the “t” value for comparison of core skill between graduated in 3 years and 4 years. The p value of the Leven’s Test for equality of variance is 0.618, which is more than 0.05. Hence, the assumption of equality of variances is met. The two tailed p value of the test is 0.00, which is less than 0.05. Thus, it was found that there was significant difference of core skill between graduated in 3 years and 4 years.

Table (5): T test for Comparison of Process Skill between Group I and II

Group	N	Mean	SD	Leven’s Test		t	df	Sig
				F	Sig.			
Graduated in 3 years	650	3.70	0.45	4.605	0.463	6.751	1268	.000
Graduate in 4 years	620	3.95	0.78					

Table (5) presents the “t” value for comparison of process skill between graduated in 3 years and 4 years. The p value of the Leven’s Test for equality of variance is 0.463, which is more than 0.05. Hence, the assumption of equality of variances is met. The two tailed p value of the test is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. Thus, it was found that there was significant difference between two group’s process skills. All results supported to prove the hypothesis proposed in the study.

7. Conclusion of the Study

Based on the graduates' perception of employability skills, and employability surveyed in the study, the majority of respondents were employed in their early jobs after waiting for 3 months at least and one year and 6 months at most. Almost the respondents agreed strongly that they got sufficiently skills of personal and core of employability already by taking part in the social networks and art and sports activities and study tours and being a university students if they had chance to stay hostels in the compound of the respective University with other students and teachers in 24 hours, they could get more chance to learn those personal and core skills. At the same time, they apologized commonly that only just attending the class regularly was not enough to gain process skills like technical ability that was required to perform best in the job so that they need to learn their studies by practical approaches and case studies and self-participation in presentation and discussion with their teachers inside or outside classes. In this way the graduates got fulfilled the necessary skills of processes. Therefore, it could be suggested if the students gained sufficiently the skills of employability such as personal, core and process for them highly in the class, they were employed faster than others in the respective workplace.

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