

# Private University Graduates' Perception towards Soft Skills as an Employability Factor

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**Abstract:** Research evidences and statistics prove that the unemployment rate is gradually decreasing in Sri Lanka. However, there is still a high degree of unemployment among youth; especially among the educated youth. Thus, it indicates that the employability among the educated youth is significantly low which lead to many adverse consequences. The reasons for the low employability among graduates are in many folds. Many past researchers have identified the mismatch between the skills acquired by the graduates and the skills expected by the employers as one of the main and significant reasons for this. Meanwhile, mainly due to the limited admissions of government universities, many students now move towards private higher education institutions to pursue higher education. Nonetheless, not much attention is paid up until now, to understand the role played by these private higher education institutions in higher education sector and the employability rate and the degree of employability of the graduates of these private higher education institutions. Hence, this research tries to address this research problem. The main objectives of this research is to select the most important soft skill(s) as an employability factor, from the perspective of graduates of private higher education institution, at the point of getting their first employment and to identify the relationships between the selected perspectives of soft skill(s), with the employability of graduates of private higher education institution. The research findings indicate that there is a significant relationship between the level of interpersonal skills possessed by the time of applying for the first job and the type of the first job and also with the waiting time to get the first job. Moreover, there is a significant relationship between the level of verbal communication skills perceived as ideal to be possessed by the time of applying for the first job and the type of the first job and the waiting time to get the first job. Furthermore, there is a significant relationship between the level of verbal communication skills possessed by the time of applying for the first job and the type of the first job and also there is a significant relationship between the level of verbal communication skills possessed by the time of applying for the first job and the waiting time to get the first job. There is no significant relationship between the level of importance given to listening skills during the undergraduate degree programme and the type of the first job and the waiting time to get the first job and with the waiting time to get the first job.

**Keywords:** Employability of graduates, Perspective of the graduates, Soft skills, Private higher education institutes

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the Study

The current condition of labour market in relation to the employability is a topic of discussion in many local and international forums. Sri Lanka, as a country is taking solid initiatives to enhance the employability of its citizen through various policies and regulations. To point out the characteristic of the employability of Sri Lankan citizens, the economic performances of Sri Lanka should be discussed first.

Sri Lanka is having a gradual increase in the economic growth and it has been among the fastest in South Asia in recent years. Growth averaged 6.3 percent between 2002 and 2013, with Gross Domestic Product per capita, rising from US\$ 859 in 2000 to US\$ 3256 in 2013 [12].

The unemployment rates have gone down with the accelerating economic growth in Sri Lanka. The unemployment rate in Sri Lanka was 4.7 percent in first quarter in 2015 [10], [11]. Comparing to Bangladesh, Maldives and Pakistan, Sri Lanka is having lower level of unemployment rate. Nevertheless, this rate of unemployment is extremely high compared to that of Afghanistan, Bhutan, India and Nepal: the countries in the South Asian region.

Moreover, even though the unemployment rate in Sri Lanka has been gradually decreasing over the past few years,

unemployment among the youth, women and the more educated is drastically high in Sri Lanka. In the first quarter in 2015, 30.4 percent of total unemployed are under 29 years of age. 21.7 percent of unemployment reported in the age group of 15 – 24 years old and 8.7 percent of unemployment in the age group of 25-29 years old. Also 10.1 percent of unemployment rate is reported from the G.C.E. (A/L) and above group in the first quarter in 2015 where 5.3 percent and 14.3 percent for males and females respectively. Female unemployment rates are higher than those of males in all levels of education [10], [11].

These statistics indicate the low level of employability among the educated youth in Sri Lanka. The high rate of unemployment and the lower level of employability among youth in Sri Lanka is a serious socio-political and economic problem. With that, the problem arises to find the reasons as to why the employability among the educated youth is very low in Sri Lanka. Even among the youth, unemployment is drastically high among the youth who pursue higher education. Despite many initiatives taken to improve the quality of human capital through effective education and skills development, the employability of the educated youth in Sri Lanka still remains comparatively less.

### 1.2 Significance of the Study

In Sri Lanka, the number of students who obtain the opportunities to get eligible to pursue tertiary education in government universities are very limited. In 2015, it was only 17.14 percent out of the total percentage eligible for

university admissions which was 60.46 percent. Thus, there is a huge gap between the number of students who are getting eligible and actually getting the admission for universities; 43.32 percent gap [15], [16]. The graduates of these universities are outputs of very rigorous selection procedure. Yet, the unemployment of these graduates is high. Hence the employability among them is very much low which indicate some problems lurking under the curtain. Many previous studies have focused on the same issue and come up with many underlining reasons for the low employability rate of the educated youth in Sri Lanka.

Since, the capacity of the state universities is limited, many students now enroll with private higher education institutions. There are sixteen such private higher education institutions which are registered under the University Grant Commission Sri Lanka which have the power to award degrees [15], [16]. There are considerable numbers of students getting graduated annually from these institutions. Therefore, the contribution of these institutions in higher education sector is also very significant. Thus, the focus of this study mainly is to understand the degree of employability of the graduates of private higher education institutions from the perspective of the graduates of these private higher education institutions. A very little of studies have focused on this area thus far.

Moreover, lower rate of employability and higher degree of unemployment among the educated youth does create adverse socio-political and economic impact on a country. Majority of these tertiary education pursuers get graduated in their prime youth. Therefore, it is natural for them to find an income source as soon as possible. So longer the period it takes them to find jobs, it creates unrest among these groups which lead to various anti-social predicaments.

Thus, it is very much pragmatic and practical and theoretically valuable to do further research on the topic. The practical and theoretical value of the topic motivated the researcher to choose the topic. Moreover, it is very much evident that the selected research area is very much relevant in the contemporary society and its necessity for scientific investigation.

### 1.3 Statement of the Problem

The world is changing at a rapid pace and the future is highly volatile with unthinkable and unbelievable changes to be expected. Thus, initiatives should be taken to develop human resource who can survive and thrive in highly vulnerable environment.

Research evidences and statistics provided show that the unemployment rate is gradually decreasing in Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, there is still a high degree of unemployment among youth; especially among the educated youth. The unemployment among the G.C.E. (A/L) and above group was 10.1 percent in the first quarter in 2015[10], [11]. Thus, it indicates that the employability among the educated youth is significantly low which lead to many adverse consequences.

The reasons for the low employability among graduates are in many folds. Many past researchers have identified the mismatch between skills acquired by the graduates and skill expected by the employers as one of the main and significant reasons for this [4], [14], [17]. Plus, the expectations and aspirations of the graduates are another reason for the low employability among the higher education pursuers. Moreover, it is also observed that the private sector is heavily relies on the non-graduates with certain experience or technical and professional qualifications; especially in the fields of management [7].

Mainly due to the limited admissions of government universities, many students now move towards private higher education institutions to pursue higher education. Nevertheless, not much attention is paid thus far, to understand the role played by these private higher education institutions in higher education sector and the employability rate and the degree of employability of the graduates of these private higher education institutions. Hence, this research tries to address this research problem.

### 1.4 Objectives of the Study

This research study expected to achieve the following objectives;

- 1) To select the most important soft skill(s) as an employability factor, from the perspective of graduates of private higher education institution, at the point of getting their first employment.
- 2) To identify the relationships between the selected perspectives of soft skill(s), with the employability of graduates of private higher education institution

## 2. Literature Review

Dearing (1997) explains employability as the ability of an individual to obtain an employment appropriate to his or her educational standard [2]. Hillage and Pollard (1998) describe employability as the ability to obtain the first employment, maintain employment and get new employment. Hillage and Pollard (1998) also highlight that the employability of an individual depends upon the knowledge, skills and attitudes of that individual, the way these features are used and deployed by them, how good the individual is in presenting these attributes to the potential employers and the context within which the individual works (Hillage and Pollard 1999) [8].

Belt, Drake and Chapman (2010) have mentioned that the employability relates to the ability to be in employment. They further elaborate that the ability to secure employment or the ability to sustain employment and to progress within the work as employability [1].

Gunatilaka, Mayer and Vodopivec (2010) have identified main theories of educational youth unemployment. Thus, the study identifies three broad hypotheses; skills mismatch hypothesis, queuing hypothesis and institutional hypothesis (slow job creation hypothesis), concerning imbalances in the labor market which explain the high youth unemployment in Sri Lanka [4].

Since this study is mainly about the employability of graduates, the researcher pays more attention to the skill mismatch of the graduates of private higher education institution here. Through the literature survey, the researcher has identified the most suitable employability factors, which can bridge the skill mismatch between the graduates and potential employers. Hence, the researcher tries to identify the relationships between the selected employability factors and the level of employability of graduates of private higher education institute.

Senarathand Patabendige (2014) have identified that there is an education mismatch among the graduates in Sri Lanka job market. Based on the research findings, the researchers are emphasizing that the vertical mismatch is not a very strong problem among Sri Lanka graduates compared with other countries especially as in Europe. Researchers state that the Sri Lanka graduates face a formal mismatch rather than a real mismatch; that may be a temporary situation in the graduate labour market due to the information dissemination irregularity and lack of experience. Moreover, Senarathand Patabendige (2014) also say that there is a positive correlation between horizontal mismatch and skill underutilization. Accordingly, researcher claims that the horizontal mismatch is the real mismatch among the graduates. Therefore, the higher education authorities should concern more on this issue. The researchers further say the higher education system in Sri Lanka does not comply with the job market requirements. Especially, with regards to the graduates in the management field, though there are plenty of job opportunities available for the graduates who followed the management degree program, they find it hard to find job opportunities which are most relevant for their field of study which make them unable to utilize their expertise and skills they have acquired from the learning process[14].

Vidanapathirana (2001) has suggested that people are unemployed because of unemployment mismatch. The author identified four main parties, who are involving in this process, in the model developed by him as employers, candidates (graduates), state (government) and institutions (university). The Researcher mentions that the graduates, do not have the required competencies, knowledge, skills and experience; the employers believe that the graduates have failed to fill requirements and core potencies of the employers; the educational institute and the entire system has not accommodated the volume and variety of students demand, high unit cost arising from unproductive overheads, inflexible curricula and teaching methods, and, lack of research output and eventually the government should involve finding solution to the problem[17]. The researcher also has found that the employability concept currently considers factors as achievements, competencies, attitudes and social-economic backgrounds, which most of the private sector use in making selection decisions. Achievements include results, graduate rank, winning university colors and the age of candidate. Competencies include communication, decision making, leadership and team work. Attitudes cover values, orientations and outlook of candidates. Socio economic statuses deal with affiliations, family status [17].

Harvey et al. (2002) presented the simplistic model of employability called "the magic bullet model". Accordingly, students are somehow given the employability as a result of their having been a student, which leads them to being employed.

After considering all the parties involving in this process and all important employability factors, Harvey et al. (2002) has developed another model which point out the significance of networking all factors together with all parties involving the process to develop graduate attributes. Three main parties involved in the process are graduates, higher education institutions and employers. Graduates having liability to select and engage with the employability development opportunities provided by higher education institutions and they also can use their extracurricular experiences to enhance these skills. Harvey et al. (2002) identify the employability development activities as the development of employability attributes, work experience, the development of self-promotional and career management skills and a willingness to learn and reflect on learning [5].

In the report developed by OECD and The World Bank (2013) for the human resource development pillar of the G20 multi-year action plan on development, the authors have proposed a conceptual framework to identify a set of potential skills indicators. Accordingly, five broad indicator domains are identified. There are a range of contextual factors driving both supply of skills, skill acquisition, demand for skills and skill requirements. These factors will also have an impact on how well skills obtained through education and training are matched to skills required in the labour market, matching which in turn will have an impact on economic performance, labour market outcomes and social outcomes such as health [12].

Belt, Drake and Chapman (2010) have identified the employability skills in their research. In the model developed by the researchers, the generic skills of literacy, language, numeracy and basic IT skills are defined as fundamental and underpinning employability skills. Furthermore, researchers emphasize that the additional knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours are required. Thus, researchers emphasize that the specific employability skills are needed to gain employment, to maintain employment and to progress in sustainable employment. The study says that although a core set of skills and attributes are required, what makes up employability will vary greatly across sectors and occupations as different employers look for a different balance of qualities and attributes. The researchers outline in detail the potential elements for both developing and delivering successful employability programs as employer involvement, leadership and resources and program design and delivery [1].

Herath and Ranasinghe (2011) state that employers in Sri Lanka always prefer to recruit more qualified employees to their organizations. Thus, employers often select professionals than graduates, since they believe with their experience that professionals are more qualified, skillful and more work oriented than business graduates. The researchers further explain that this problem appears to be caused by several factors including the relatively poor skills in



graduates in general, a perception among many private sector employers that business graduates lack the qualities of attitudes and skills needed to work efficiently in the private sector, poor relationship between the industry and the universities and outdated curricula of study programs which cannot meet the employers expectations [7].

Herath and Ranasinghe (2011) emphasize that even if the situation is favorable for the business graduates there is no any guarantee for them to be recruited. It basically depends on employers' needs and expectations and also on the quality and skills of business graduates. Researchers say business graduates have more or less the necessary skills and qualities needed to work in private sector work places. But those skills and qualities are not up to the standard expected by the private sector employers. Hence the business graduates of Sri Lanka should improve the essential skills, attitudes and qualities, especially English language proficiency and ICT skills, in order to create a good demand for them in the available job market and to complete with other professionally qualified personnel [7].

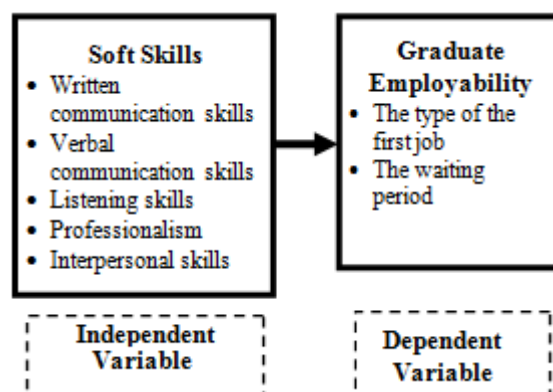
McQuaid, Green and Danson (2006) have developed a 'holistic' definition which can be used to identify the full range of factors that determine an individual's employability. The researchers capture three components; individual factors, personal circumstances and demand factors. By this the researchers have identified the basic or generic skills and attitudinal or behavioural characteristics that are believed to be essential for individuals to secure and sustain employment and also to progress in the workplace [9].

The model developed by Pool and Sewell (2007) depicts the essential components of employability. Accordingly, it suggests the direction of collaboration between the different factors. Pool and Sewell (2007) suggest that if students are provided with the opportunities to access and develop career development learning, experience, degree subject knowledge, understanding and skills, generic skills and emotional intelligence, it will result in development of higher levels of self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem which lead to employability [13].

Finch et. al. (2013) have identified five main factors which affect the undergraduate employability. Under those five factors, they have identified seventeen other factors which determine the employability of undergraduates [3].

The author of the current study has concluded this model as the most suitable framework to be used in this study. The researchers have identified these skills through a rigorous literature survey and further confirmed the significance of the skills through their own analysis. Finch et. al. (2013) claim that when hiring new graduates, employers place the highest importance on soft-skills and the lowest importance on academic reputation. These skills represent wide range of factors which give an individual a high rate of flexibility in the work place thus the highest chances to be successful in been employed. Moreover, the degree of generalization of these factors captured by the researches is very high [3]. Therefore these factors will be used as the basis for this research study.

### 3. Conceptual framework



The variables in the conceptual framework can be graphically represented as above. Finch et al. (2013) have identified five main factors which affect the undergraduate employability; soft skills, problem solving skills, functional skills, pre-graduate skills and academic reputation [3]. This study considers only soft skills out of those five factors for further studies.

Finch et al. (2013) have identified that when hiring new graduates, employers place the highest importance on soft-skills. Thus, they have identified written communication skills, verbal communication skills, listening skills, professionalism and interpersonal skills as the most significant soft skills [3]. Those five soft skills are considered as constructs for the independent variable of soft skills in the operationalization. The measurements are designed based on the research methodology adopted by Wickramasinghe and Perera (2010) [18]. Dependent variable is undergraduate employability which is measured by the type of job which is based on the measurements mentioned by Harvey et. al (2001) [5].

### 4. Research Methodology

#### 4.1 Population, sample and sample method

The population is the graduates of the four faculties; Faculty of Computing, Faculty of Business and Faculty of Engineering of the selected private higher education institute. Sample group consists of 70 graduates of the Faculty of Business of the selected private higher education institute. Sampling method is non-probability, purposive sampling.

#### 4.2 Techniques and procedures

Primary data was gathered through the instrument of structured questionnaires. Secondary data was gathered through the past research studies and other related publications.

#### 4.3 Reliability and validity

The reliability and validity of the items for the data set of this study have been tested using the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients and Inter-Item Correlation Matrix.

#### 4.4 Time horizons

The study was conducted at a particular time. Thus, this research is a cross sectional study. This study gives a 'snapshot' at a selected point of time. The data was collected in year 2015 and the findings were drawn based on those data.

#### 4.5 Research strategy

The research strategy in this study is the survey method. Hence, answers to the research questions and objectives were given accordingly. Structured questionnaires were developed. This method was selected since, it is convenient to collect data from a sizable audience and using of standardized questions allowed for easy comparison.

#### 4.6 Analytical techniques

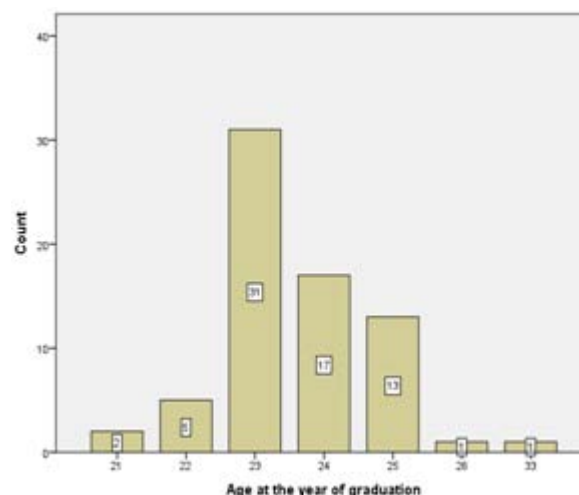
IBM SPSS Statistics version 21 software was used to statistically analyze the data. The interpretations and discussion were done accordingly. The discussion and analysis mainly consists with the description of the sample and the statistical analysis. The statistical analysis consists mainly with 'Factor Analysis' and 'Chi-Square Test'. The interpretations were done to the data analyzed accordingly. The conclusions of the 'Factor Analysis' were drawn based on the highest correlation factor to each component and the conclusion of the 'Chi-Square Tests' were made considering the relationships to be statistically significant where 95% of the observed relationship will hold true and only 5% (0.05) chance that the relationship will not be detected.

### 5. Analysis and Discussion

This section mainly consists of the analysis of the findings of the research. The 'Likert Scales' with five item were used throughout the analysis. The results are explained in an elaborative manner.

The discussion and analysis mainly consists with the description of the sample and the statistical analysis. The statistical analysis consists with 'Factor Analysis' and 'Chi-Square Test'. Factor analysis was done in order to select the most important employability factors from the perspective of graduates of private higher education institution, out of the total pool of perceptions developed. Hypotheses were developed based on the selected factors. Chi-square test was then done to identify the relationships between the selected employability factors with the level of employability of graduates of private higher education institution. Main objectives of the study were achieved likewise.

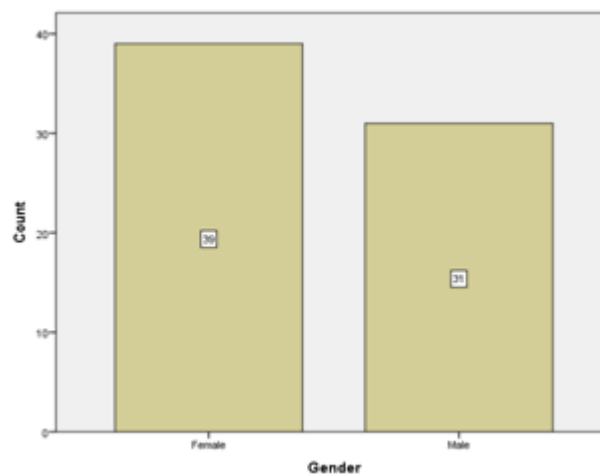
#### 5.1 Description of the sample



**Figure 5.1: Age at the year of graduation**

The age of the respondents' at the time of graduation is discussed in Figure 5.1. Accordingly, majority of the graduates are 23 years old at the time of graduation. It depicts the majority of the graduates enters to the job market at quite young age, in the prime youth of their life. It gives them more opportunities to find jobs and being employed.

According to the Figure 5.2, the majority of the respondents are female graduates. This further proves that the females pursue higher education than the males and their education attainment is high. Nevertheless, unemployment among the female higher education pursuers is higher than the male, indicating the low employability of these female graduates



**Figure 5.2: Gender**

According to Figure 5.3, majority (nearly 59%) of the graduates have landed on the trainee level jobs at their first employment. Seventeen graduates (24%) have only obtained internships even after their graduation as the first employment. Only twelve respondents (17%) have obtained executive level jobs and none of them have gained managerial level job in their first employment. This indicates that even though these graduates manage to enter the labour market in their young age, their ability to secure a job which need graduate level skills is very much less.

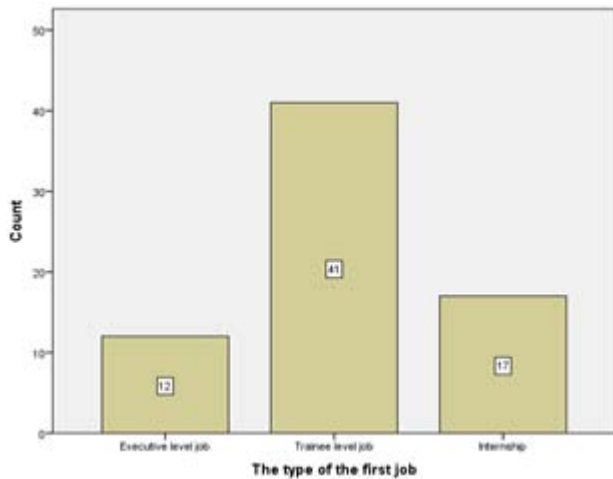


Figure 5.3: The type of the first job

Figure 5.4 depicts that the most of the graduates (nearly 43%) have given high level of importance to the written communication skills during their undergraduate life. These undergraduates have identified the importance of enhancing the written communication.

Figure 5.5 shows that even-though, many graduates have given high level of importance to the written communication, they have not given high level of attention to actually improve their writing skills. Therefore, 47% of the graduates think they have only possessed an average level of written communication by the time of applying for the first job. It indicates that in spite of their understanding of the importance of the written communication as a skill to be possessed, they have not taken adequate initiatives to actually improve their written communication during the course of reading for the degree.

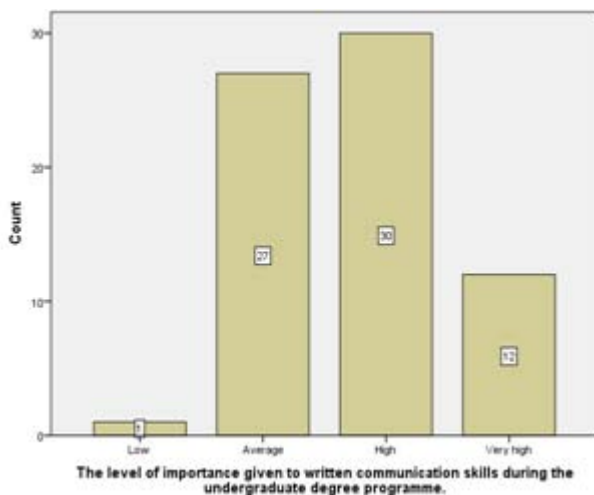


Figure 5.4: The level of importance given to written communication

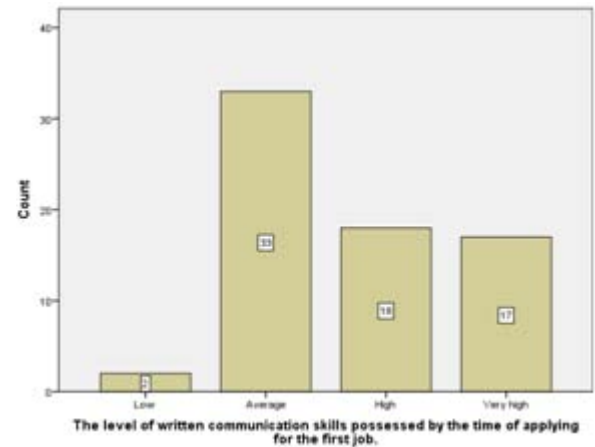


Figure 5.5: The level of written communication skills possessed

Figure 5.6 shows that the majority (50%) of the graduates perceived the written communication skill as average ideal type of skill to be possessed by the time of applying for the first job. Only 9% of the graduates perceived written communication skill as very high ideal type of skill to be possessed by the time of applying for the first job.

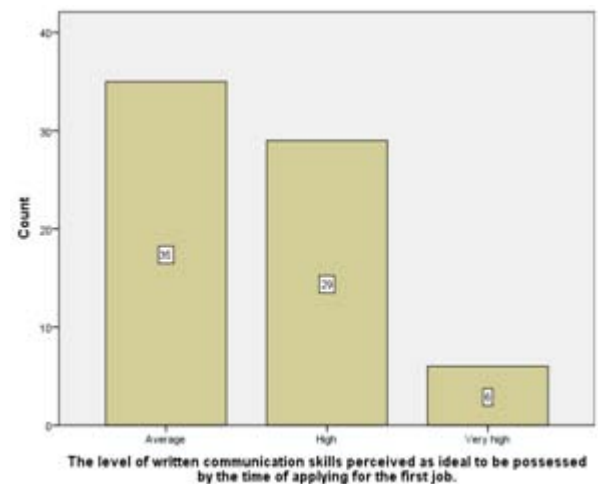
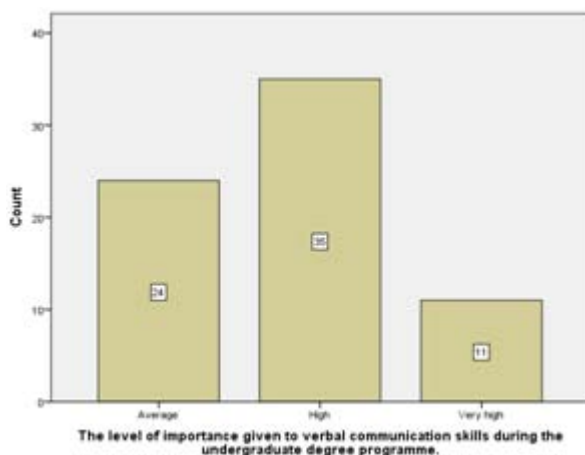


Figure 5.6: The level of written communication skills perceived as ideal

Thus, the perception of the graduates regarding the written communication skill is contradictory. During the undergraduate degree program, they have given high level of importance to written communication. Contradictory, they have possessed average level of written communication skills by the time of applying for the job and they perceive written communication as average ideal type of skill to be possessed by the time of applying for the first job. The graduates probably have changed their perception towards the level of written communication that they initially had during the course of the degree program, since they could not gain high level of written communication by the time of graduation. Thus, they might have simply changed their perception rather than trying their best to improve the skill. However, the actual reason to this is ambiguous and not covered under the current study.

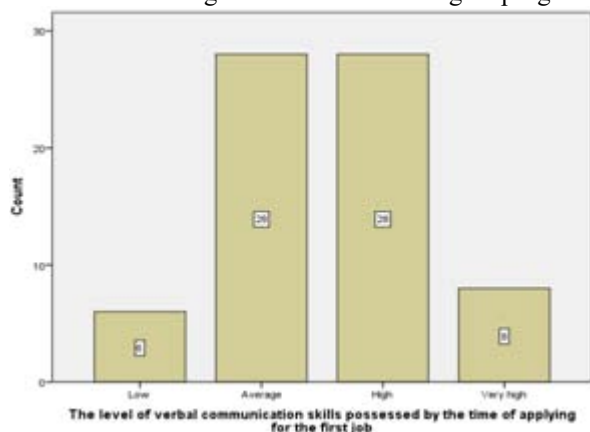
Figure 5.7 describes that many graduates (50%) have given high level of importance to the verbal communication skills during the undergraduate degree programme.

According to Figure 5.8, 80% of the graduates think they have possessed high and average (40% each) level of verbal skills possessed by the time of applying for the first job.



**Figure 5.7:** The level of importance given to verbal communication

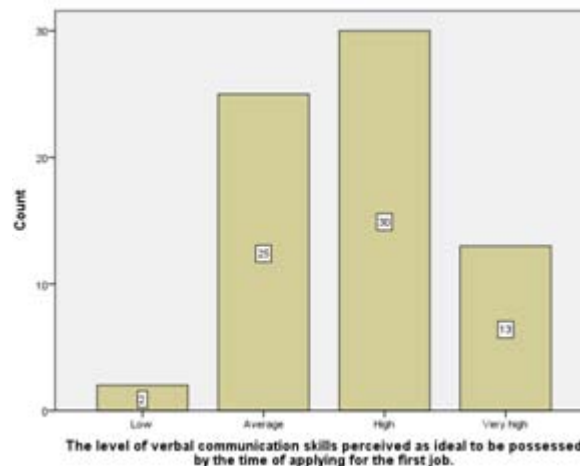
This is quite contrasting to the written communication skills. It indicates that the graduates have put much emphasis on gaining verbal communication than the written communication during the course of their degree program.



**Figure 5.8:** The level of verbal communication possessed

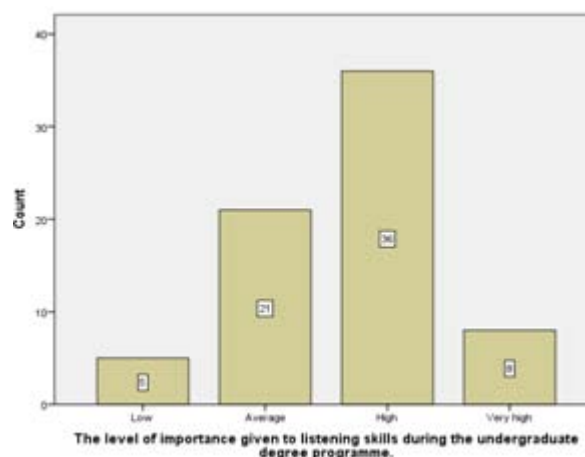
This may be due to the high focus, the degree program and the private higher education institution gives to improve the verbal communication skills in the graduate rather than the written communication, or the English speaking culture of the institute itself or anything else. The actual reason for the so called perception of the graduate once again is not precisely identified and out of the core focus of the current study.

Figure 5.9 illustrates that majority (nearly 43%) of the graduates have perceived verbal communication as high ideal type of skill to be possessed by the time of applying for the first job. This might be the reason for the graduate to put much emphasis on gaining verbal communication skills during their degree program.



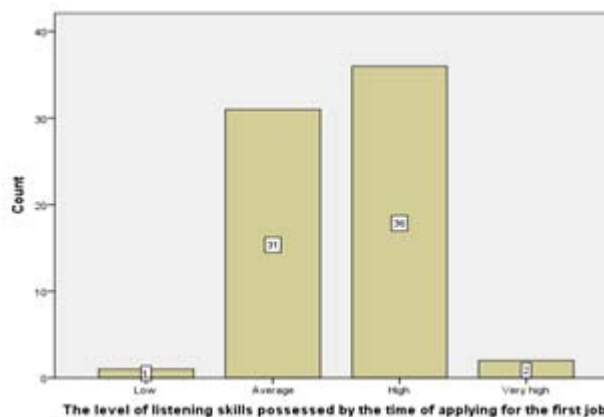
**Figure 5.9:** The level of verbal communication skills perceived as ideal

Figure 5.10 gives importance given to the listening skills during the undergraduate degree program. Many of the graduates (51%) have given high level of importance to listening skills during the undergraduate degree program.



**Figure 5.10:** The level of importance given to listening skills

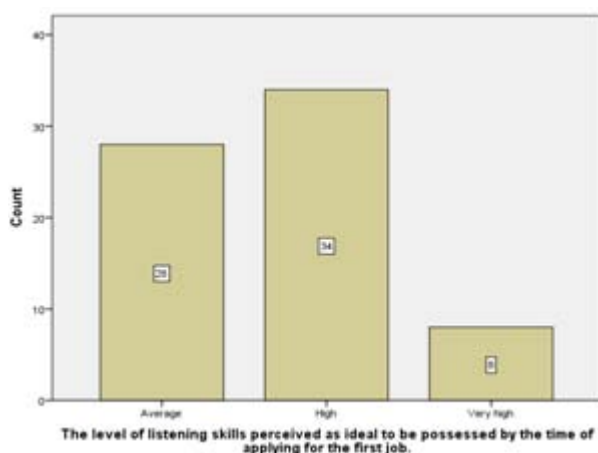
According to the figure 5.11, nearly 43% of graduates claim that they have possessed high level of listening skills by the time of applying for the first job.



**Figure 5.11:** The level of listening skills possessed



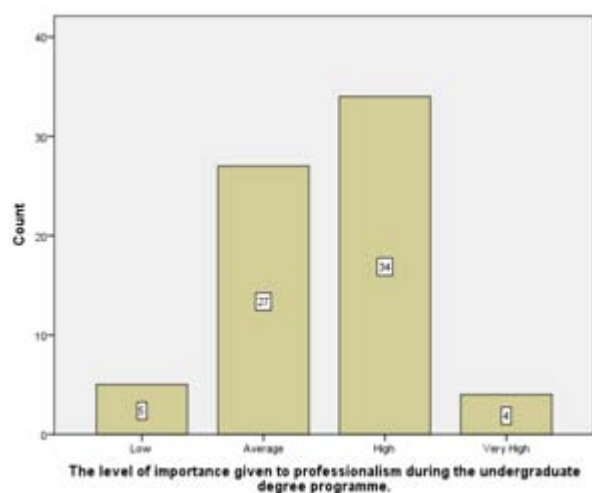
Figure 5.12 reveals that the graduates perceived listening skills to be high ideal type of skill to be possessed by the time of applying for the job.



**Figure 5.12:** The level of listening skills perceived as ideal

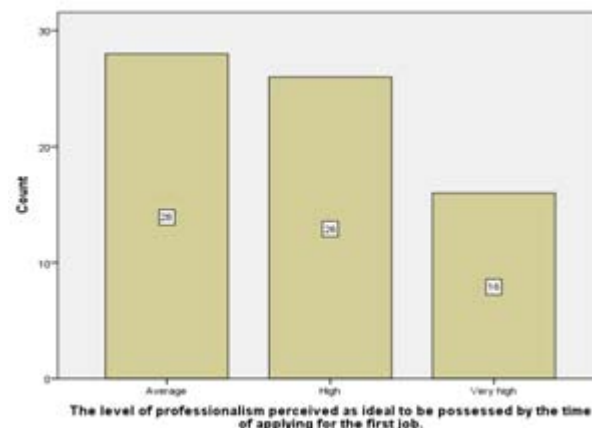
According to Figure 5.13, 49% of graduates have given high level of importance to the professionalism during the undergraduate degree program.

Even though, graduates have given high importance to professionalism during the undergraduate programme, majority of them (47%) say they have average level of professionalism by the time applying for the first job. It indicates that they have been not given or they have not taken correct initiatives to obtain high level of professionalism during the course of the degree program.



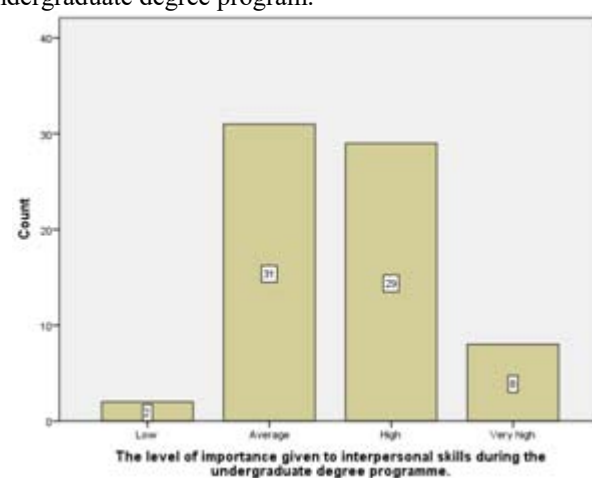
**Figure 5.13:** The level of importance given to professionalism

Figure 5.14 says that the majority of the graduates (40%) are perceiving professionalism as average ideal type of skill to be possessed by the time of applying for the first job. Nonetheless, 37% and 23% of graduates perceived professionalism to be high and very high respectively ideal type of skill to be possessed by the time of applying for the first job.



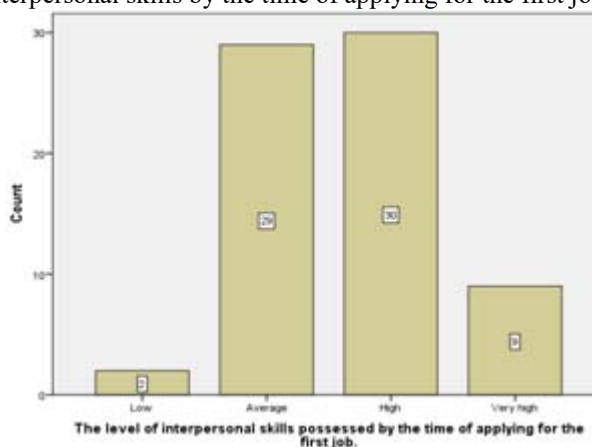
**Figure 5.14:** The level of professionalism perceived as ideal

According to the Figure 5.15, 44% of graduates have given average level of importance to interpersonal skills during the undergraduate degree program.



**Figure 5.15:** The level of importance given to interpersonal skills

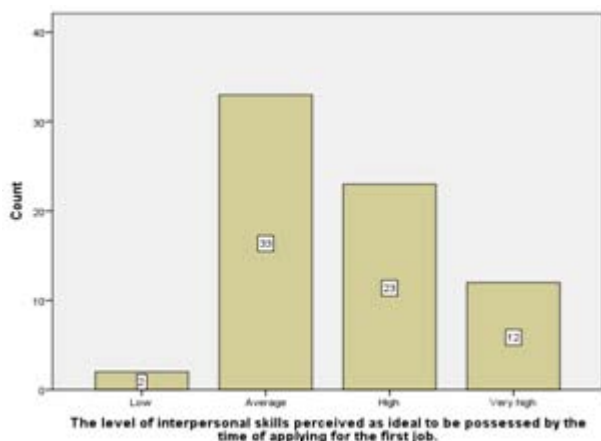
Figure 5.16, even though graduates have given average level of importance to interpersonal skills during the undergraduate degree program, the majority of them (nearly 43%) have claimed they have obtained high level of interpersonal skills by the time of applying for the first job.



**Figure 5.16:** The level of interpersonal skills possessed

Figure 5.17 depicts that 47% of graduates perceived interpersonal skills as average ideal type of skill to be possessed by the time of applying for the first job.





**Figure 5.17:** The level of interpersonal skills perceived as ideal

## 5.2 The selection of the most important soft skill from the perspective of the graduates

Factor analysis has been done to identify the most important perspective of the graduates regarding soft skills, at their first employment. The total number of 14 such perceptions considered. Factor analysis has thus been conducted to the reduction of insignificant perspectives regarding soft skills of the graduates of the private higher education institute. Out of fourteen perception factors, the selected five components are as bellow;

- 1) The first component is most highly correlated with the level of interpersonal skills possessed by the time of applying for the first job.
- 2) The second component is most highly correlated with the level of verbal communication skills perceived as ideal to be possessed by the time of applying for the first job.
- 3) The third component is most highly correlated with the level of importance given to listening skills during the undergraduate degree programme.
- 4) The fourth component is most highly correlated with the level of verbal communication skills possessed by the time of applying for the first job.
- 5) The fifth component is most highly correlated with the level of importance given to verbal communication skills during the undergraduate degree programme.

Thus, these factors are identified and selected as the most important perception of the graduates regarding the soft skills as the most important employability factor.

## 5.3 Identify the relationships between the selected soft skill from the perspective of the graduates with the employability of graduates

The first component is most highly correlated with the level of interpersonal skills possessed by the time of applying for the first job. There is a significant relationship, when considering about the association between the level of interpersonal skills possessed by the time of applying for the first job and the type of the first job, since the sig value is .001 and it is greater than 0.05. There is a significant relationship, when considering about the association between the level of interpersonal skills possessed by the time of applying for the first job and the waiting time to get

the first job, since the sig value is .000 and it is greater than 0.05.

Thus, there is a significant relationship between the level of interpersonal skills possessed by the time of applying for the first job and the type of the first job and also there is a significant relationship between the level of interpersonal skills possessed by the time of applying for the first job and the waiting time to get the first job.

The second component is most highly correlated with the level of verbal communication skills perceived as ideal to be possessed by the time of applying for the first job. There is a significant relationship, when considering about the association between the level of verbal communication skills perceived as ideal to be possessed by the time of applying for the first job and the type of the first job, since the sig value is .030 and it is greater than 0.05. There is a significant relationship, when considering about the association between the level of verbal communication skills perceived as ideal to be possessed by the time of applying for the first job and the waiting time to get the first job, since the sig value is .002 and it is greater than 0.05.

Hence, there is a significant relationship between the level of verbal communication skills perceived as ideal to be possessed by the time of applying for the first job and the type of the first job and the waiting time to get the first job as well.

Graduates of the private higher education institute have identified the importance of the verbal communication as a factor which gives them the highest degree of employability. As the findings indicate there is a significant relationship between these two factors.

The third component is most highly correlated with the level of importance given to listening skills during the undergraduate degree programme. There is no significant relationship, when considering about the association between the level of importance given to listening skills during the undergraduate degree programme and the type of the first job, since the sig value is .227 and it is less than 0.05. There is no significant relationship, when considering about the association between the level of importance given to listening skills during the undergraduate degree programme and the waiting time to get the first job, since the sig value is .719 and it is less than 0.05.

Therefore, there is no significant relationship between the level of importance given to listening skills during the undergraduate degree programme and the type of the first job and the waiting time to get the first job as well.

Most of the graduates have perceived listening skills to be highly important employability factor. But there is no significant relationship between the level of importance given to listening skills during the undergraduate degree program and their level of employability.

The fourth component is most highly correlated with the level of verbal communication skills possessed by the time of applying for the first job. There is a significant relationship, when considering about the association

between the level of verbal communication skills possessed by the time of applying for the first job and the type of the first job, since the sig value is .044 and it is less than 0.05. Similarly, there is a significant relationship, when considering about the association between the level of verbal communication skills possessed by the time of applying for the first job and the waiting time to get the first job, since the sig value is .043 and it is less than 0.05.

Consequently, there is a significant relationship between the level of verbal communication skills possessed by the time of applying for the first job and the type of the first job and also there is a significant relationship between the level of verbal communication skills possessed by the time of applying for the first job and the waiting time to get the first job.

The fifth component is most highly correlated with the level of importance given to verbal communication skills during the undergraduate degree programme. There is a significant relationship, when considering about the association between the level of importance given to verbal communication skills during the undergraduate degree programme and the type of the first job, since the sig value is .020 and it is less than 0.05. There is no significant relationship, when considering about the association between the level of importance given to verbal communication skills during the undergraduate degree programme and the waiting time to get the first job, since the sig value is .797 and it is less than 0.05.

Thus, there is a relationship between the level of importance given to verbal communication skills during the undergraduate degree programme and the type of the first job and the waiting time to get the first job.

## 6 Conclusion, limitations and suggestions for future research

The research findings indicate that graduates of private higher education institution perceive verbal communication, listening skills and interpersonal skills as the most important soft skills which give them the highest degree of employability, at the point of getting their first employment. Thus, the first objective of selecting the most important soft skill(s) as an employability factor, from the perspective of graduates of private higher education institution, at the point of getting their first employment is achieved. There is a significant relationship between the level of interpersonal skills possessed by the time of applying for the first job and the type of the first job and also with the waiting time to get the first job. Moreover, there is a significant relationship

between the level of verbal communication skills perceived as ideal to be possessed by the time of applying for the first job and the type of the first job and the waiting time to get the first job. Furthermore, there is a significant relationship between the level of verbal communication skills possessed by the time of applying for the first job and the type of the first job and also there is a significant relationship between the level of verbal communication skills possessed by the time of applying for the first job and the waiting time to get the first job. There is no significant relationship between the level of importance given to listening skills during the undergraduate degree programme and the type of the first job and the waiting time to get the first job and with the waiting time to get the first job. Thus, the second objective of identifying the relationships between the selected perspectives of soft skill(s), with the employability of graduates of private higher education institution is achieved.

Hillage and Pollard (1998) describe employability as the ability to obtain the first employment, maintain employment and get new employment. Thus, it captures three aspects of employment; obtain the first employment, maintain employment and get new employment. Nevertheless, the researcher has limited to consider only one aspect among the three aspects in the given definition. Thus the researcher has only looked at the graduates' ability to obtain the first employment. Moreover, even though, Wickramasinghe and Perera (2010) has considered the perspective of graduates, university lecturers and employers towards employability skills in their research, the researcher has considered only the graduates' aspect in this study. Thus, only the perspective of the graduates towards the employability is taken into consideration in this study. The perspective of the employers' and the private higher education institution on the employability is not focused in the current study.

Future researcher can conduct research to identify the perspective of the employers and lecturers of the private higher education institutes, since the current study considers only the perspective of the graduates of private higher education institutes. Additionally, current study focuses only on the business management graduates which can be expanded to other areas by future researchers. Moreover, future researchers can research about the employability skills which will be useful and influence the employees' ability to maintain and get a new employment; the employability skills which gives the highest degree of success for employee in their current employment and at the point of shifting from one employment to another. Furthermore, future researcher can conduct a research on the underemployment of the graduates as well.

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