

A STUDY ON THE EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND AND FUTURE ASPIRATIONS OF THE ART FACULTY STUDENTS IN A STATE UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA

D. T. H. Ananda^{*1}, C.A.D. Nahallage¹ and K. Rodrigo²

*¹Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,
University of Sri Jayewardenepura,*

²Faculty of Graduate Studies University of Ruhuna

**Corresponding author (email: tharakaananda@sjp.ac.lk)*

Introduction

The current educational system in Sri Lanka comprises of two main examinations that measure the eligibility of students for higher education; namely the General Certificate of Education in Ordinary Level (O/L) examination and the Advanced Level (A/L) examination. Students are given the opportunity to select their A/L subject stream according to their O/L results. It is the major turning point of the students' life as it determines their future career as well. Many argue that the students who select Art stream subjects for their higher education is because they do not get qualified for other disciplines such as Bio Science and Mathematics from their O/L results. Thus according to the general arguments Art students are unqualified students who were unable to study science or commerce subjects. Further, many researchers in Sri Lanka have claimed that Art students have no considerable English knowledge who ultimately becomes a social issue of unemployment [1].

Thus, the present study was aimed to find out the key reasons for selecting Art subjects by the Art undergraduate students for their A/L's and their level of satisfaction of being an Art student in the University as well as their future aspirations. In addition, it was expected to find out their secondary educational background (O/L and A/L) and other qualifications they pursue as an extra qualification for their future vocations.

Materials and Methods

Students who have registered for the Bachelor of Art Degree at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura were selected for the study through purposive sampling method. Two hundred (n=200) students from 1st year and three hundred (n=300) students from other study years were selected (100 from each study year-from 2nd, 3rd and 4th year). The total sample size was five hundred (n=500).

Structured questionnaire was used for data collection; the educational background of the students as well as their future aspirations on voluntary basis. Data were analyzed through SPSS data analyzing package using its analytical methods such as select cases and split cases under descriptive statistical methods. The study was conducted from January 2016 to May 2016.

Results and Discussion

The students represented 19 districts, and the majority was from the Galle (17%), Rathnapura (14%), Kalutara (12%) and Matara (8%) districts. Of the five hundred students, 392 (78%) of the sample were females and 108 (22%) were males.

When the availability of the A/L subject streams in their respective schools was considered, Commerce, Mathematics and Science streams were available for 57%, 45% and 47% respectively (generated through multiple response analysis). Even though the students were eligible to pursue other disciplines of study from their O/L results, they had to transfer to a new school should they choose Science or Commerce stream for A/L's, thus retained in the Art stream.

Fifty percent (249) of the students were qualified to enter to the university at their first attempt and 40% (200) have succeeded in their second attempt, 10% (51) in their third attempt. Majority of the female students (53%) were qualified to enter to the University at their 1st attempt and 62% of the male students have tried twice or thrice to get qualified.

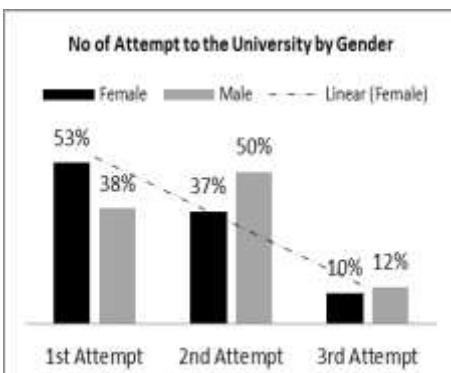


Figure 1: No of Attempt to the University by Gender

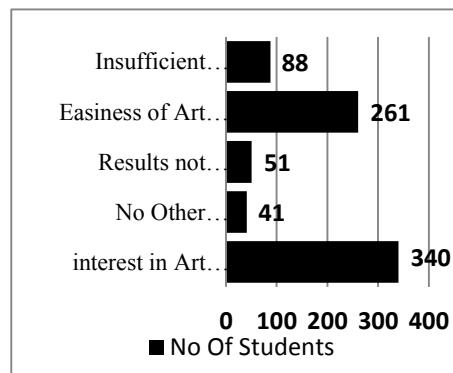


Figure 2: Reason for the Selection of Art Stream for Higher Studies

Reasons for the students to select Art subjects for their higher studies were ascertained through multiple response analysis. 73% of the students have chosen Art subjects primarily because of their interest in the subjects and 56% of them because of the easiness of getting qualified to the university. 19% of the students have chosen Art subjects due to the monetary constraints they face when select other disciplines. 11% of the students had not got O/L results sufficient to pursue other disciplines and 9% of students were unable because of the absence of other disciplines in their respective schools.

The major qualification for the selection of the subject stream for higher education is the O/L results. According to the O/L results of students from 10 subjects, only female students had "A" grade for 5-10 of their O/L subjects. Male students had "A" grade for 1-7 subjects. 6% of the female students and 20% of the male students had not received "A" grade for any of their O/L subjects. According to the O/L results,

their English proficiency is not in satisfactory level. Out of 500 students only 26 (5%) students had "A" pass for English. One hundred and eighty six (37%) students had "S" and 60 (12%) had "F" passes for English in their O/L's.

Seventy five percent of the students have enlisted to English courses to develop their English language ability during the university period. Further, the students follow courses such as Computer (76%), Counseling (8.1%), Human Resource Management (14%), Tamil (13%) and other courses (4%) in order to get qualified for a better vocation in their future. Sixteen percent of the students were not following any of these courses. Only 1% of them are enlisted to all courses. Twenty six percent of the students were following English and Computer courses at the same time.

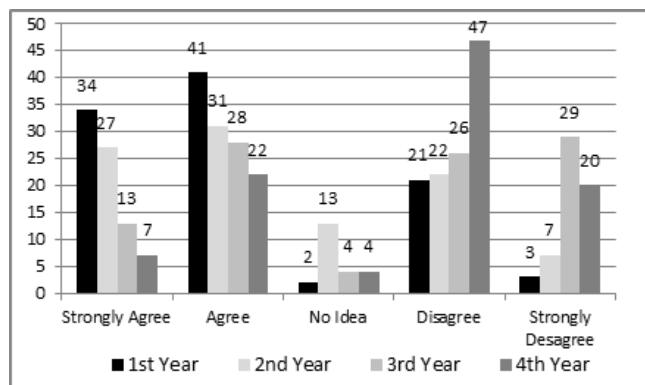


Figure 3: Responses of the students for the statement "I am satisfied with the degree that I am pursuing"

Level of satisfaction on the Art degree seems to vary with study year of the students. Seventy five percent of the 1st year students are satisfied about their degree. However, 55% of the 3rd year students and 67% of the 4th year students are not satisfied about their degree. Significant difference was observed about the students' satisfaction on their degree among the students in different study years ($p<0.000$). First year students are satisfied with their degree, however the satisfaction decreases through the years and 4th year students have the lowest satisfaction.

Surprisingly 94% of the students are in the opinion that their Art degree is not catering to vocations. Most of the 3rd and 4th year students' future aspirations were to become a teacher or an administrative officer. Thirty three percent of the 1st year students are willing to become a lecturer while students of other years have no interest in it (results were generated according to study year). In the first year, future aspirations of the students were in preferable level. But when they moving to next study years these aspirations have changed to general vocations such as teaching and as they have claimed 'any of government vocation'. It is because students have to confront many of practical problems such as English language skills, Computer skills, and consistency of the graduated discipline with the vocation etc. in the process of getting qualified for other vocations. Also they have to compete with

other different degree holders, which is the most difficult task for them. Thus above stated vocations were famous among Art Faculty students. Finally, it was apparent that Art degree students were habituated to satisfy with such government vocations.

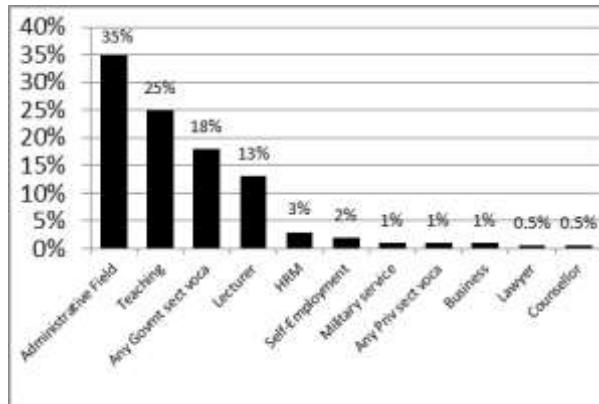


Figure 4: Future Vocational Aspirations of the Art Faculty Students

Based on overall results on future vocational aspirations, ninety three percent of the students hope to work in a government department. Only 3% of the students were hoping to start their own business and to engage in self-employments. Art students have confined to few vocations without understanding the availability of opportunities in the field of performing art, design, spatial design, fine art, arranging, display, writing etc. which are suitable for their skills.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The key reasons of students of Arts Faculty to select Art subjects for their secondary higher education were their interest in that field and easiness to get access to universities. Nevertheless majority of the Art faculty students have not shown higher performances in their O/L's. Thus, 50% of the students have not gained required qualifications to follow other subjects for A/L's. At the beginning of the university education, most of the students seems to be satisfied with their degree and are in the hopes of getting a high status vocation. But when they are moving in to 3rd and 4th years in their university education, they seem to be more aware about the contemporary social issues associated with the Art degree. A consequence of this is their tendency of thinking about the impossibility of the degree in supplying them with better vocations. On average, 61% of the third and final year students have stated that they are not satisfied with their degree. Because the O/L English proficiency level of students were not at a satisfactory level, 85% of the students have enlisted to courses to develop their extra qualifications in order to receive a better vocation in future. Nevertheless, though they get extra qualifications, many of their Art degree subjects are not befitting to the existing vocations of the country. According to students, the Art degree subjects in the University are not job oriented. In the year 2012, the unemployment among the students graduated from the

Faculty of Arts of this State University was 61.3%, thus the discrimination of the Art degree is not the only action that we can get for this issue [2]. Therefore, it is high time to consider revisions to the existing curricular to match with the current market demand to increase the employability of the graduates.

References

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- [2] Graduand Employment Census, Ministry of Higher Education, Sri Lanka. 2012.