

## 04

### HR Managers' Attitudes towards Management Graduates

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#### Abstract

*Attitudes of HR Managers towards the management undergraduates lead to significant impact of finding a job from the labour market in the current competitive environment. However, there is no research done in this area in Sri Lanka. The main focus of this study is to find the attitudes of HR Manager in Sri Lanka regarding the management graduates with special reference to the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Based on the available literature, researchers found few attitudes which are important in selecting the graduates for jobs in the labour market. 78 HR Managers from the apparel sector were used as the sample in this study and descriptive statistics were used in the analysis of the primary data. Major finding of the study was that attitudes of HR Managers towards the selected variables of undergraduates were either moderate or high, except with regard to undergraduate ragging. The main recommendation of the study is that university has to enrich the current academic system to enhance the different competencies of undergraduates.*

*Key words: HR Managers' attitudes, Management undergraduates*

#### Introduction

Organization's primary goals are survival and growth (Bothner, Kim and Lee, online). Organizational performance is the most important factor in order to achieve these goals (McNamara, online). There is no wonder that for any organization human resource is the most important factor due to the unique features it hold. However mere employees may not create any impact towards the organizational performance. Therefore, an organization should have a competent work force equipped with right knowledge, skills and attitudes. Recruitment policies should be closely supervised in order to recruit such kind of competent work force. These recruitment policies should be periodically reviewed to ensure the validity of these policies. Recruitment policies directly relate with the potential work force which the organization is likely to attract and have access to that labour market.

This article discusses about one of the aspects of the potential labour market. That is about the potential labour market for the undergraduates. Our area of academic study at the university relates to the field of Management. Thereby researchers selected Management undergraduates as the specific area for our discussion, in the perspective of potential employees who are in the labour market eagerly waiting for job opportunities which give the maximum return to their investments of human capital. Especially if we conduct an economic analysis regarding the human capital investment of undergraduates, along with the direct cost that they spend on studies, there is a huge

opportunity cost associated. Therefore they are seeking for a better job which gives a higher rate of return in order to recover their explicit and implicit costs of education. Nevertheless from the HR managers' point of view, there are so many factors which contribute to the decision of selecting the best employee in the potential labour market who fits to their job specifications. Management undergraduates are only one of the sources in potential labour market for them. There are many other sources such as professional institutions, related professional courses, private degree programs, diploma holders and other educational institutions. In many cases, there is a higher opportunity to the applicants who are from other sources to have relatively longer job experience than the undergraduates, since they spend three to four years on their academic studies. But this may not be the only factor for the preference of other sources. Also there is a discussion regarding the low job opportunities for undergraduates. Even though the percentage is small when compared with some other fields, it cannot be avoided since the increasing trend of the subject matter is still in existence.

This article is based on the study of the HR managers' attitudes towards the management of undergraduates when they are providing job opportunities. No research has focused on this area of study so far. But that doesn't under value the importance of the subject matter. Therefore as management undergraduates, our attempt is to carry out a specific study regarding the HR managers' attitudes towards management undergraduates.

### **Problem of the study**

Milkovich and Boudreau (2003) defined attitudes as the capabilities engage in some behavior. Abilities derive from knowledge (awareness of information, techniques, or facts), skills (proficiency at basic tasks necessary for achieving more complex behavior) and aptitudes (potential abilities that have yet been fully develop or applied) (Milkovich and Boudreau, 2003). However, Cascio (2005) defined attitudes as internal state focus on particular aspects of or objects in the environment. According to Mathis and Jakson, many supervisors talk about employees' attitudes, but they have difficulty identifying what they mean by attitudes (Mathis and Jakson, 2004). Then, it is clear that attitudes of a person are difficult to define and measure. This is common to the managers to assess the job seekers in the labour market.

Graduates who are seeking jobs in the labour market will engage in recreation of new management carrying it out to the different industries. However, there is a big obstacles for the graduates to enter the industrial world regarding bad attitudes of managers. This is common also for the undergraduates. Also, there is a research gap about empirical data about the managers' attitudes regarding the undergraduates. The problem of the study, therefore, "is HR managers' attitudes towards undergraduates positive or negative". Then the main objective of the study is to find out the attitudes of HR managers towards management undergraduates. The research questions are given below.

- [i.] Are HR managers' attitudes regarding the language of management undergraduates positive or negative?
- [ii.] Are HR managers' attitudes regarding the communication skills of management undergraduates positive or negative?

- [iii.] Are HR managers' attitudes regarding the practical skills of management undergraduates positive or negative?
- [iv.] Are HR managers' attitudes regarding the practicability of methods of learning of management undergraduates positive or negative?
- [v.] Are HR managers' attitudes regarding the specific skills of management undergraduates positive or negative?
- [vi.] Are HR managers' attitudes regarding the mismatching skills of management undergraduates positive or negative?
- [vii.] Are HR managers' attitudes regarding the performance of management undergraduates positive or negative?
- [viii.] Are HR managers' attitudes regarding the perception of many undergraduates toward ragging positive or negative?

### **Literature Review**

In this section, the researchers focused on available literature in relation to the exact area of the research of "HR Managers Attitude towards Management Undergraduates" which has not been reviewed by the researchers in the broad perspective. There has not been much written in this regard and one can rarely find information on this subject matter within the accessible literature. Since undergraduates represent the prospective employee groups and job seekers of a certain company, we can also gather available literature regarding the managers' attitudes towards such parties. There are questions and problems which are relating to various aspects of this subject matter that are fully or partially not been disclosed in the available literature.

When discussing about different aspects, managers' focus on undergraduate's language and communication skills can be considered as an essential area to be discussed. Those aspects mainly affected managers' attitudes towards undergraduates. Many of the articles reveal that very often graduates are at the receiving end of comments made by Sri Lanka's corporate community as to their inability to fit into the corporate work environment (Waduge, online<sup>1</sup>). Their attitude to work, their lack of English language skills, their body language, their dress sense etc are all frowned upon. There is also a need for employers to be more flexible in their approach to employing graduates (online<sup>2</sup>). However employers themselves hesitate to take responsibility to train graduates who have the requisite work attributes to re-train them (online<sup>3</sup>). There is an excessive emphasis on knowledge in English on the part of employers. They have less willingness to take graduates with a limited knowledge of English and provide them opportunities for learning the language which may create additional burden for employers (online<sup>3</sup>). They further reveals that one of the leading universities in the country, undergraduates do not use the library to read books published in English, rather they use it to read notes in Sinhala or Tamil provided by their lecturers (Waduge, online<sup>1</sup>).

Next aspect which affects managers' attitudes is practical skills and practicability of the education. Some of the articles discussed several implications of attitudes towards undergraduates held by the employers and other parties in society. One of the primary requirements to make graduates more employable would be a change in university curricula to reflect the needs of industry (Waduge, online<sup>1</sup>). Unfortunately, business

enterprises and industrial establishments do not think that most graduates could be usefully employed in their organizations. This is due to university education being reduced to memorizing notes and passing examinations, rather than developing skills that are necessary, not merely in the specialized field, but also skills of a general nature needed for day - to - day work (online<sup>2</sup>). University education must instill in undergraduates attributes which are useful to employers. This would include development of good work ethics, language and communication skills, and leadership qualities and a dynamism and willingness to continue learning and updating of skills (Waduge, online<sup>1</sup>). Unfortunately, many employers think that graduates lack these attributes and that it would be more useful to employ and train school leavers. University academics and university students themselves must realize that they cannot obtain employment unless these changes are made. Such changes would not be confined to changing the university curricula alone, but would involve new approaches to knowledge seeking and attitudinal changes. While Sri Lanka's standard of education may have been commendable decades ago – today the requirement is for more creative and practical approaches to studies (online<sup>2</sup>). Students should no longer be molded into bookworms – forced to memorize curricula and duplicate the teacher's notes at examinations. Yet this is exactly what is happening. Students are being forced to memorize their text books and very few teachers want to indulge the student in intellectual dialogue or arouse his/her creativity and innovativeness. This negative trend is carried forward to university levels as well, which is why young graduates find themselves in limbo when they start employment. This situation is completely the opposite of what the commercial world is looking for when seeking suitable employees (Waduge, online<sup>1</sup>). They want people who can think, who will approach problems in a different way. How can children think out of the box “when they have been trained only to memorize and duplicate what is in the text books?

Lack of specific skills of undergraduates can be regarded as the third aspect and thereby it creates a tendency of mismatch of skills with the requirements of job. There is also a need to realize that those graduates who do not have specific skills should be prepared to do any type of work (Waduge, online<sup>1</sup>). They must not expect the government or society to provide them employment opportunities. In developed countries like the United States, a large number of university graduates are employed as taxi drivers, salesmen or other in similar capacities although we in Sri Lanka do not consider it to be “fit” and “proper” for graduates (Waduge, online<sup>1</sup>). Managers do not agree with the attitude of expecting certain types of 'high status' job by the graduates who could create serious problems as university education grows. The fact is that many of our graduates have neither in-depth knowledge of the field that they have chosen to specialize in nor general aptitudes and skills which can be useful. They also lack other skills, besides their learning and memorizing which would enable them to make a livelihood. Many graduates may have to seek employment opportunities quite unrelated to their university education and to be satisfied if they find any employment which gives them an adequate livelihood (Waduge, online<sup>1</sup>).

Apart from all these facts average performance of undergraduates may also create negative attitudes in managers' minds. “Improving Undergraduate Student Involvement in Management Science and Business Writing Courses Using the Seven Principles in

Action” (Page and Mukherjee, 1999) identified that some educational institutions had some flexibility to adjust the performance mix of teaching, research and service to reflect the relevant mission of the particular institution. While the goal is clear and laudable, its achievement is not easy because the typical undergraduate student is apathetic about education. The goal for many students is to achieve a grade "C," get a degree and move on. However, this grade "C" in a course typically suggests that the student merely met requirements to pass the course. Such an outcome is not useful to anyone. Students suffer because they cannot decide properly. Businesses that hire these students suffer because employees who lack fundamental skills are not productive. Thus, no one has gained. It is not difficult to understand reasons for their apathy. The typical undergraduate student becomes apathetic towards academics because of what they perceive to be insurmountable hindrances in the pursuit of academic excellence.

When discussing about the aspects which affect the manager’s attitudes towards undergraduates, the influence of ragging and political activities carried out in universities cannot be ignored (online<sup>4</sup>). It is the politically-motivated groups-pawns in the hands of a militant group of students-who cannot see their lives clearly mapped out and whose employment prospectus are not guaranteed, that constitute the leadership of political protests and they specialize on typical university issues and trivialities to mobilize student support to disrupt the academic programmes in the universities (online<sup>4</sup>). It is this context that the question of employability of graduates needs to be given thought and consideration. However managers are more concerned about these matters when they recruit employees to their organizations since political influences may spread to their organizations as well. Therefore employers do not have positive attitudes towards in this regard (online<sup>4</sup>).

**Working Definitions of the Variables**

The indicators considered in the research are defined before collecting the primary data. The working definition for each variable is given in table No 01.

Table 01: Indicators and Working Definitions

Indicator	Working definition
Language skills	<i>Oral and written competency in English</i>
Communication skills	<i>Efectiveness of using verbal and non-verbal communication abilities in working environment</i>
Practical skills	<i>Ability to apply the theoretical knowledge practically in the actual work setting</i>
Practicability of methods of learning	<i>Extent to which the learning methods used in the university system facilitate the undergraduates to fit in to the dynamic work environment</i>
Specific skills	<i>The in-depth knowledge of an undergraduate in the field that he\she has specialized</i>
Mismatching skills	<i>Possibility of matching the knowledge and skills of an undergraduate with the required competencies of the job</i>

Performances	<i>Fulfillment of given duties by an undergraduate</i>
Perception towards ragging	<i>Graduate that passed out from a university who is famous for ragging</i>

### Method

The objective of the study was to determine the HR Managers' attitudes towards the management undergraduate. The study was based on HR Managers who are working in different industries in Sri Lanka. The nature of this study was descriptive. The data collection is done once. The unit of the study was individual: HR Managers in the Sri Lankan industries. This study relied upon the survey method of data collection for it was thought to be more appropriate method. This study was purely based on primary data and the non – contrived field – setting environment was used to collect required original data. The population of the study was all HR Managers in all industries in Sri Lanka. The sample was limited to 78 HR Managers in apparel sector. The sampling method was simple random sampling and a questionnaire was used to collect the primary data. The questionnaire was developed by the researchers, based on the available literature and the working definitions which were developed by the researchers. The working definitions used to develop the questionnaire was given in table No 01. The data were collected through e-mail as well as in printed mode. All indicators were measured by using five point scales from “strongly positive” to “strongly negative”. The level of measurements of all indicators of the study was interval. Univariate analysis was used to analyses the data. SPSS version 16 was used to analysis in the data. The decision rules used analysis of the primary data was given below.

Decision rules: HR Manager Attitudes

Mean values between 1.00 – 2.33 was labeled as negative attitude

Mean values between 2.34 – 3.66 was labeled as in between positive and negative (neutral)

Mean values between 3.67 – 5.00 was labeled as negative attitude

### Empirical Data

The empirical data of the attitudes of HR Managers towards management undergraduates is given in tables from No 02 to No 11. Mean value, medium, mode, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis were the statistical tools used to identify the nature of the attitudes of HR Managers.

Table 02: HR Managers' attitudes towards the English language oral competency of undergraduates

N	Valid	74
	Missing	0
Mean		3.0946
Median		3.0000
Mode		4.00
Std. Deviation		.87849
Skewness		-.188
Std. Error of Skewness		.279
Kurtosis		-1.694
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.552

According to the table No 02, the HR Managers in Sri Lanka have perceived that the ability of the English language oral competency of undergraduates was average in nature; therefore, their attitudes towards the English language oral competency was neutral (mean value – 3.0946 and standard deviation – 0.87849).

Table No 03 presents the attitudes of HR Managers toward the English language competency - written of management undergraduates.

Table 03: HR Managers' attitudes towards the English language (written) competency of undergraduates

N	Valid	74
	Missing	0
Mean		3.5946
Median		4.0000
Mode		4.00
Std. Deviation		.79241
Skewness		-.999
Std. Error of Skewness		.279
Kurtosis		.099
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.552

According to table No 03, mean value of the attitude of HR Managers towards the English language competency - written of management undergraduates is 3.5946 and standard deviation is 0.79241. Thus, the attitude of HR Manager toward this phenomenon is also neutral.

Management undergraduates' effectiveness in using verbal communication skills in the working environment is given in table No 04.

Table 04: HR Managers’ attitude towards the effectiveness of using verbal communication of undergraduates in the working environment

N	Valid	74
	Missing	0
Mean		3.0946
Median		3.0000
Mode		3.00
Std. Deviation		.60066
Skewness		-.035
Std. Error of Skewness		.279
Kurtosis		-.182
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.552

According to table No 04, the attitude of HR Managers towards the effectiveness of using verbal communication of undergraduates in working environment remains at a neutral scale. The mean value and standard deviation are 3.0946 and 0.60066 respectively.

Effectiveness of non – verbal communication in the working environment of undergraduates perceived by HR Managers is given in table No 05.

Table 05: HR Managers’ attitude of towards the effectiveness of the use of non-verbal communication of undergraduates in the working environment

N	Valid	74
	Missing	0
Mean		3.7027
Median		4.0000
Mode		4.00
Std. Deviation		.51630
Skewness		-1.504
Std. Error of Skewness		.279
Kurtosis		1.398
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.552

According to table No 05, the attitude of HR Managers towards the effectiveness of the use of non – verbal communication by the management undergraduates in the working places is positive. Mean value and standard deviation of this variable are 3.7027 and 0.51630 respectively.

Table No 06 indicates the attitude of HR Manager towards the ability to apply theoretical knowledge in practice.



Table 06: HR Managers' attitude towards the ability to apply theoretical knowledge of undergraduates into practical applications

N	Valid	74
	Missing	0
Mean		3.6892
Median		4.0000
Mode		4.00
Std. Deviation		.80963
Skewness		-.482
Std. Error of Skewness		.279
Kurtosis		-.082
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.552

According to table No 06, the mean value of the attitude of HR Managers towards the ability to apply the theoretical knowledge of undergraduates into practical application is 3.6892 and standard deviation is 0.80963. It illustrates that the attitude of HR Managers towards the ability to apply the theoretical knowledge of undergraduates into practical situations are positive.

The attitude of HR Managers towards the fact of the university academic system should cater to the industrial needs from graduates is given in table No 07.

Table 07: Attitudes of HR Managers towards the university academic system and its fulfillment of their requirements in graduates

N	Valid	74
	Missing	0
Mean		3.2568
Median		3.0000
Mode		3.00a
Std. Deviation		.72264
Skewness		-.433
Std. Error of Skewness		.279
Kurtosis		-.972
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.552

According to the table No 07, there is neutral attitude of HR Managers towards the university academic system. Their attitude is that the university academic system caters moderately to the needs of industry in creating graduates.

Attitudes of the HR Manager regarding the knowledge of undergraduates in specialized area is illustrate in table No 08.

Table 08: HR Managers’ attitude towards the knowledge of undergraduates in specialized area

N	Valid	74
	Missing	0
Mean		3.9459
Median		4.0000
Mode		4.00
Std. Deviation		.46499
Skewness		-.200
Std. Error of Skewness		.279
Kurtosis		1.776
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.552

The attitude of HR Managers towards the knowledge of undergraduate in specialized area is positive. According to table No 08, mean value is this phenomenon is 3.9459 and standard deviation is 0.46499.

Table No 09 indicates the attitude of HR Managers towards the possibilities of matching the knowledge and skills of an graduate with the required competencies of the jobs.

Table 09: Attitudes of HR Manager towards the possibilities of matching the knowledge and skills with the jobs

N	Valid	74
	Missing	0
Mean		3.4865
Median		4.0000
Mode		4.00
Std. Deviation		.91026
Skewness		-.127
Std. Error of Skewness		.279
Kurtosis		-.762
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.552

According to the table No 09, the attitude of HR Managers towards the possibilities of matching the knowledge and skills of a graduate to the requirements of the jobs are neutral. Mean value of the responses is 3.4865 and standard deviation is 0.91026.

The attitude of HR Managers towards fulfilling the given duties by a graduate is given in table No 10.

Table 10: Attitudes of HR Managers towards the fulfillment of given duties by undergraduates

N	Valid	74
	Missing	0
Mean		4.1351
Median		4.0000
Mode		4.00
Std. Deviation		.50543
Skewness		.246
Std. Error of Skewness		.279
Kurtosis		.681
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.552

There is a very positive attitude in HR Managers towards the fulfillment of the duties given by management graduates according to table No 10. The mean value of the responses is 4.1351 and standard deviation is 0.50543.

Table No 11 indicates the attitude of HR Managers towards university ragging.

Table 11: Attitude of HR Managers towards university ragging

N	Valid	74
	Missing	0
Mean		2.0405
Median		2.0000
Mode		2.00
Std. Deviation		1.02622
Skewness		1.168
Std. Error of Skewness		.279
Kurtosis		.918
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.552

There is very negative attitude of HR Manager towards university ragging. The mean value of the responses is 2.0405 and standard deviation is 1.02622.

### Findings of the Study

The major findings of the study can be summarized as below.

- HR Managers' attitude towards the management undergraduates' oral competency in English is neutral.
- HR Managers' attitude towards the management undergraduates' written competency in English is neutral.
- HR Managers' attitude towards the management undergraduates' effectiveness in using verbal communication in the working environment is neutral.
- HR Managers' attitude towards the management undergraduates' effectiveness in using non – verbal communication in the working environment is positive.

- HR Managers' attitude towards the management undergraduates' ability to apply the theoretical knowledge practically in the actual working environment is positive.
- HR Managers' attitude towards the learning methods used in the university system facilitating undergraduates to cope with the dynamic working environment is neutral.
- HR Managers' attitude towards the management undergraduates' knowledge in the specialized field is positive.
- HR Managers' attitude towards the possibility of matching the knowledge and skills of an undergraduate with the required competencies of the job is neutral.
- HR Managers' attitude towards the management undergraduates' fulfillment of given duties is positive.
- HR Managers' attitude towards university ragging is negative.

### **Discussion and Recommendation**

The majority of the variables used to assess the attitudes of HR Managers towards the management undergraduates are neutral and only one variable is negative. There are four variables that are positive. The negative attitude of HR Manager is towards university ragging and positive attitudes of HR Managers is lead towards the non – verbal communication, theoretical knowledge, knowledge of specialized area of undergraduates and fulfillment of job requirements by the undergraduates. However, there is neutral attitude regarding the English language, verbal communication, the gap between the curricular of the university and skills regarded by the dynamic job environment. These findings further confirme the ideas given by Waduge, online<sup>1</sup>, online<sup>2</sup>, online<sup>3</sup> and online<sup>4</sup>. However, all opinions of the above authors stress above attitudes of different level.

In the university level, especially the curricula of the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce should be restructured concerning these research findings. The curriculum of the degree programme should be changed with practical orientation and the teaching and learning method should be also changed with this point; if not, in future, management graduates from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura will face a high competition and therefore face difficulties to find the appropriate jobs from the labour market.

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