

Employment Characteristics, Transition and Status of SMU Graduates': The Case of 2016 to 2018 Graduates

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Abstract

Background and purpose

St. Mary's University has been trying its best in producing qualified professionals in the fields of Business and Informatics to the labour market in the different economic sectors. To continue competitive in offering quality education, a tracer study was conducted to investigate the employment characteristics, transition to employment, and satisfaction of graduates in the jobs they are engaged. Moreover, it emphasized on studying how graduates have been employed, their job-hunting strategies, duration it took them to secure their first jobs and how their works related to their fields of studies. This survey focused on graduates, who completed their studies between 2016 and 2018 academic years in the undergraduate programs.

Methodology

To meet the purpose, descriptive survey design was employed. The samples were considered using random and purposive sampling techniques. A total of 392 participants engaged in the study (312 graduates, 72 employers and 8 officials). Data from graduates and employers were collected using questionnaires. Furthermore, qualitative data from top officials and officers were collected using interview. The data gathered through quantitative and qualitative methods were analyzed and triangulated in line with the research questions raised.

Major findings

Most graduates (93%) were employed and have secured their first job with less than six months. They reported that they commonly used friends (25%), media (24.4%), and the Career and Internship Unit (CIU) (21%) as job hunting methods. Still, the majority of employers (61%) have been inviting graduates through short notices and CIU. Most graduates (84.3%) were full-time paid workers. As to working sectors, 63% of graduates have been working in private companies, while 25% of them are working in government offices. Regarding employment status, 85% of the graduates were employed on permanent basis while the remaining were hired temporarily (4.5%), on contractual basis (5.1%), and self-employed (5.5%). As to monthly salary, it was found that 17.91% of graduates are earning Birr 10, 000 and above, but more than 75% of them have been paid less than the average salary of Birr 8,900.00 or median salary of Birr 9,150.00.

On the other hand, graduates responded that their fields of specialization, personal skills, reputability of SMU, and GPA, have contributed to their employment ranking first to fourth respectively; between 78% to 84% of graduates reported that the knowledge and skills they acquired from courses delivered were relevant to their jobs. Similarly, employers have also confirmed that graduates have the required knowledge and skills in their fields of specialization. But to 14% of them, their experiences were not relevant to jobs they were

assigned; the majority of graduates (76 %) expressed their feeling of satisfaction with their current jobs whereas some of them (24%) were dissatisfied due to receiving insufficient salary and allowance, not assigned in the right position, and career challenges. On the other hand, some are interested to start their own business (self-employed), while others want to continue their further education. Regarding reasons for their unemployment, those unemployed graduates (7%), stated that a few vacancies and opportunities, disparity of jobs creation compared to increased number of graduates, and inadequate experience in searching for jobs, were the main shortcomings.

As to the role played by the undergraduate program, most graduates (89.4% to 94.7%) hold the view that it has contributed to their professional skills. Besides, 77%-82% of them have validated that the program has given them better exposure in developing their personal skills. These finding were also supported by employers and the University officials that “graduates have the essential professional skills and personal skills, but more need to be done on those employability skills relevant to the labour market in the future. It was also reported (83.8% - 92% graduates) that the teaching and learning environment was effective. Likewise, the academic support services were also helpful, though they require improvements. However, a reasonable number of graduates (15.9% - 29.5%) have the view that they were not sure of their creative and critical thinking, problem solving, and research skills. They have doubts on the adequacy of academic advising, their engagements in extracurricular activities, administrative supports, and facilities especially in computer laboratories. Students’ problems related to selection of fields, study skills, grading, and academic deficits have to be handled properly with the inclusion of different responsible bodies.

Regarding SMU, it was expounded that it was in good status and need to keep its prominence. However, some limitations that dishonour the effort of the University like some teachers’ deficiencies in their language capacity, problem on research advising and commitment to support prospective graduates in their research endeavours, problem of developing teaching manuals for courses that are offered commonly, exam preparation and using test results for feedback purpose on timely basis, handling students’ hitches, unfair grading, and lacking professional work ethics were reported. Concerning curriculum, it was suggested that updating and using software-based courses and including International Financial Reporting Standard (IFRS) are important. Finally, based on the study findings, practical implications for effective teaching-learning environment, student support services, and upgrading the capacity of prospective graduates in providing adequate customer service were made.

Keywords: Tracer, employment characteristics, transition, employability, professional, personal skills, job satisfaction

Introduction

St. Mary’s University is one of the pioneer private higher education institutions in Ethiopia. It took a little over a decade of experience to become a full-fledged university primarily beginning as a college, then university college and finally a university fulfilling the necessary formalities needed to be so. It has established an institutional set up, CEIQA, which has been

in operation for the last sixteen years, evaluating university-wide strengths and weaknesses through internal quality audit schemes. As a result, St. Mary's University has gone through gigantic changes to meet its Vision (i.e., to become among the leading higher education centres of academic excellence in teaching and learning, research, publications, and community services in East-Africa and contribute to the development of Ethiopia) and Mission (i.e., to offer conventional and distance education that is accessible to the larger society focusing on quality and standards in teaching, research and outreach services).

These days, the University is delivering regular and evening undergraduate program in different fields of studies of graduate program in more than 13 fields of studies. The University produces qualified workforce to the different sectors of the economy in the country. It also strives to scale up its links with enterprises to facilitate job opportunities and placements to graduates.

The University established the Career and Internship Unit in 2004. Since then the Unit had been coordinating Practicum and Apprenticeship courses for Diploma program students in Teacher Education and TVET respectively until both programs phased out, after which the Unit has taken charge of Internship for Degree program students to the present day envisaging to strengthen its activities far beyond.

Currently, the Unit is giving career development service to facilitate employment for new graduates and conduct internship program through creating link and partnership with stakeholders and collaborators. Most importantly, the office is highly expected to coordinate and monitor the application of internship, create awareness programs on entrepreneurial skills for prospective graduates and career club members, organize trainings on employability skills, preparing CV/resume and application writings, and provide information about employers' interest and work ethics to would be graduates (CIU,2017).

Improving the quality and relevance of education is expected of any higher education institute to continue competitive in producing professionally qualified graduates to meet the demands of companies.

Thus, it is important for St. Mary's University to conduct tracer study to find out the transition of its graduates to jobs, their employability rate, capacity to apply what they have learnt in the form of knowledge and skills in the working environment.

Statement of the Problem

In many countries, higher education institutions conduct graduate tracer studies to respond to the main challenge related to the changing needs of the labor market. For example, in Europe, education policies and programs have been encouraging reforms that aim to improve the efficiency of the education systems to decrease youth unemployment rates, and develop graduates' knowledge, skills and competences needed in a competitive labor market (National Commission for Further and Higher Education, Europe, 2016).

According to Menez (2014), recognizing the reality in today's academic world, the role of higher education institutions cannot only be limited to imparting knowledge, but also to

contribute to maintain a competitive economy and, most important of all, to secure the dream of graduates to get jobs and become socially accepted and successful in their respective field of endeavors. On the other hand, one of the major factors for underemployment and the difficulty in finding jobs is the inability of graduates to meet the necessary skills and competencies required by the industry.

For Ballon (2007), higher institutions need to play a significant role in offering higher education courses to students who will, in due course, become graduates with full competence in their fields of study. To keep pace with global competition, fresh graduates need to familiarize to the new business environment and workplace. Moreover, Robinson and Garton (2007) also stated that the fundamental component that empowers graduates to keep up with those demands appears to be the employability skills and traits that are taught during tertiary education. It is also a common principle in business that HEIs should provide graduates with the proper skills essential to achieve success in the workplace.

Furthermore, Zinser (2003) explains that career and employability skills must be taught in Universities, since many students leave education without the necessary skills to succeed in the world of work. It should also be emphasized that graduates should leave higher education better in many ways than when they enter it (Washer, 2007). This improvement should be attributable to the undergraduate curriculum which is important to equip them with skills they can use to ‘sell themselves’ to employers (Latisha and Surina, 2010).

St. Mary’s, as a University College, conducted a graduate tracer study in 2008. The study mainly focused on the employability and performance of the graduates as well as possible improvement in the demand-driven education service by the University College. It was found that the employment rate of graduates since graduation was 61%. The sectors where graduates employed were in private followed by the public.

Regarding, self-employment, its contribution was found to be minimal. Employability opportunities made available for graduates by industries were limited. The industrial linkage was found very narrow. Employers expressed their feeling that graduates lack research, entrepreneurial, and project management skills. Services delivered in the University College were in good conditions. In Parallel, the graduate survey has also made recommendations to improve things in the University College. It is almost a decade with no tracer study so far.

Checking whether the University has been achieving its goals is critical. To examine this outstanding issue, a tracer study was carried out to investigate the employability of graduates in the undergraduate program from 2016 to 2018. Moreover, the study emphasized on the role played in job-seeking, the length of time graduates took before getting employed and how their areas of work are related to the programs offered by the University. Most importantly, the study has attempted to help identify which programs are still relevant to current market demands and the findings of the study are to inform future improvement as well as further studies.

Basic Research Questions

The study has attempted to answer the following research questions.

- What is the extent of the transition of graduates from schooling to employment? Were they able to get paid employment with reasonable time?
- What are the job search approaches used by graduates during their transitional process?
- To what extent did graduates' personal factors influence their job search?
- To what extent did the knowledge and skills obtained from course works contribute to the success of graduates?
- What is the extent of the job satisfaction, income, and job stability of graduates? and
- What is the extent of the perception of employers with regard to the performance of graduates?

Objectives of the Study

General Objective

The overall purpose of the study was to find a clear perception of graduates' employment characteristics, transition to jobs, employability rate, and how they searched for a job.

Specific Objectives

Thus, the specific objectives of the study were to:

- investigate how the graduates moved from the University into various workplaces;
- find out the job search approaches used by graduates to secure employment during transition;
- identify graduates' employment status and the organizations where they work;
- compare the skills attained from the course of study and the requirements of the labor market, which contribute to the success of graduates;
- assess the relationship between graduates' fields of study and work experience, their job satisfaction, monthly income, and job stability; and
- analyze the perceptions of employers about graduates' performance and programs.

Significance of the Study

The aim of the undergraduate program at St. Mary's University is to equip students with professional skills to be Accountant, Finance Manager, Auditor, Marketing Manager, Business development officer, IT specialist, Programmer, Enterprise Manager, Human Resource Manager, Manager at different levels, etc. Thus, this tracer study should center on documenting the employment characteristics, transition to employment and the level of satisfaction of the graduates for services delivered by the university, learning environment and facilities. Hence, conducting this tracer study is assumed to have the following benefits:

- produce adequate information on the quality of the undergraduate program, its effectiveness, adequacy and relevance to the graduates' professional and personal skills and productivity and satisfaction;
- provide insights into having comprehensive bases for the preparation and implementation of better policies to effect better quality in Accounting and finance, Business Education, IT and Computer Science;
- give suggestions that could be positively considered by authorities in curriculum revision planning;
- offer information on the achievement of graduates which may in turn improve their services in the business education programs; and
- serve as source to interested groups to undertake similar tracer studies with wider sample in the future.

Scope of the Study

This study was limited to assessing the employability and working situation of graduates of first degree programs in business related courses and Computer Science at St. Mary's University from 2016 to 2018. The graduates of the years under discussion were considered for the study since better database has already been available for these groups. The study focused on investigating the employment characteristics of the graduates, their job hunting approaches, duration it took them to get their first jobs, occupational profile and level of job satisfaction, and employers' perceptions on the performance of graduates.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

It is clear that graduate surveys are empirical studies which can provide useful data for assessing the outcomes of the education and training of a particular Higher Education Institutes. This information may be used for additional improvement of the institution in the frame of quality assurance.

The theoretical framework of this study was adapted from the works of Schomburg (2003). The framework was designed to show the relationships of variables with graduates' professional success. Therefore, information on the professional success with respect to objective indicators (i.e., methods of searching jobs, duration of job search by field of study, quality of the first job, occupational position, full/part time, permanent/temporary) and subjective indicators (i.e., overall satisfaction with career, status, income of graduates) are needed. Moreover, information on the relevance of knowledge and skills with respect to work requirements, area of employment, and professional position is required.

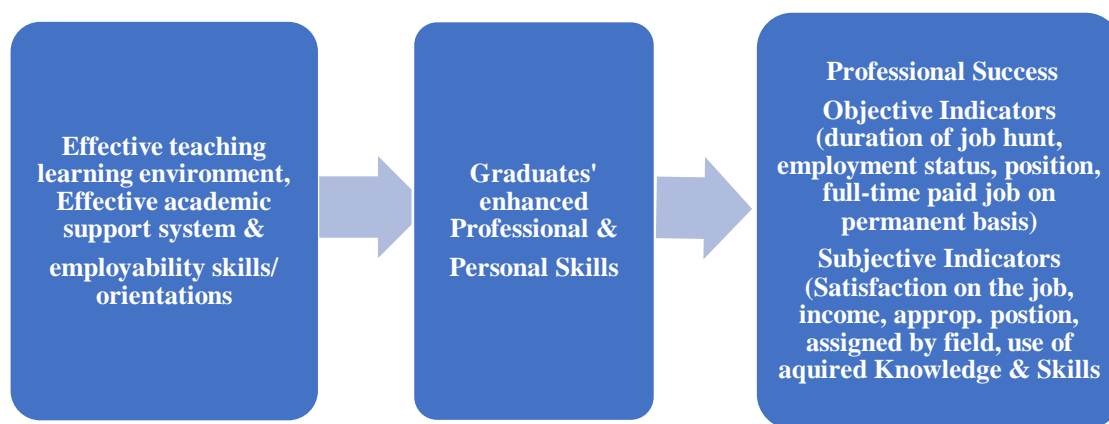


Figure 1: Conceptual frame work of the study adapted from Schomburg (2003)

Research Design

The design of this study was survey belonging to the descriptive research. More specifically, mixed methods design was used to collect, analyze and interpret both quantitative and qualitative data.

Population and Sampling Techniques

The population of the study were all regular first degree program graduates of SMU between 2016 and 2018 academic years and employers. The size of the target population was 2,271 graduates and 100 employers. More specifically, the sample graduates were selected using stratified and simple random sampling techniques. In addition, key informants from the University were included in the survey.

Determining Sample Size

In order to select the desired number of samples with respect to departments and year of graduation, Yamane formula has been employed. Yamane (1967) formula was used to calculate the sample size of graduates and employers.

Accordingly, from a target population of 2,271, at a 95% confidence level and $\pm 5\%$ precision level, a sample size of 340 graduates was assumed to be representative. They were selected using stratified and simple random sampling techniques.

On the other hand, from a total of 100 employers, 80 employers were randomly selected for the study through a similar procedure.

Table 1: Summary of the Sample Subjects

No	Year of graduation	Quantitative data				Qualitative data			
		Graduates		Employers		Top managers & officers	Deans	Dep't heads	Total
		N	n	N	n				
1	2016	538	80	100	80	4	4	4	172
2	2017	940	141						141
3	2018	793	119						119
Total		2271	340	100	80	4	4	4	432
Sampling techniques		Stratified and simple random		Simple random sampling		Purposive	Purposive	Purposive	

N- Target pop, n- Sample size

As observed in Table 1, for collecting quantitative data through questionnaire, a total of 340 graduates and 80 employers were selected using stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Whereas, about 12 respondents (top managers, deans, department heads, and officers) were purposively selected to give their views on issues that focused on graduates' employability and whatever challenges they encountered while hunting jobs, etc.

Sources of Data

Both primary and secondary sources of data have been used. The primary sources were graduates, employers, top managements, deans, and department heads. The secondary sources were related documents such as, degree program course catalogue, education policies, standards, guidelines, and operational manual for career internship unit, related documents from HERQA and research study results and other relevant documents.

Data Collection Tools

Adequate and reliable data are crucial to make sound decisions. Such significant data need to be gathered across using distinctive tools for the purpose of triangulation. Therefore, questionnaire, interview, and documents were used.

Questionnaires

Two types of questionnaires, one for graduates and the other for employers have been used to collect data. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected through these instruments. The tools consisted of both close and open ended items.

The questionnaire prepared for graduates included 5 major parts (i.e., personal detail, educational background, employment information, current employment status, personal and professional growth of graduates and overall effectiveness of the teaching learning environment and academic support services at SMU) with 22 major close-ended questions and in between a great number of sub items, to be answered by ranking and rating on a 5 point scale, and 3 main open-ended items were used in the process of data collection. The

close-ended items were optional questions which have a five point Likert scale rated as Very High = 5, High= 4, Moderate = 3, Low = 2, and Very Low = 1. Similarly, a five point Likert scale, Outstanding = 5, Very Good = 4, Good = 3. Poor =2, V. Poor =1, were used.

In the same way, employers' questionnaire involved about two main parts (i.e., background information, and questions pertaining to SMU's undergraduate program) with a total number of 10 primary questions and more than 25 sub-items under some major questions. The questionnaire was developed to obtain the most relevant information about graduates' career outcomes and employers' perceptions on graduates' performance.

The employers' questionnaire was prepared and written in the English language. However, in the process it was translated into the Amharic language to reduce language barriers. The latter is the working language of all participants and that they could easily understand, explain and describe concepts related to the variables.

The data collection was carried out from January 15 to March 20, 2020. A total of 420 questionnaires were distributed to graduates (340) and employers (80). Among the distributed questionnaires, 384 (91.43%) were properly completed and returned. The rest, 36 (8.57%) questionnaires, were either not returned or not completely filled out and, therefore, were discarded. Thus, data from 312 graduates and 72 employers were analyzed.

Interview Guide

As part of the study instruments, interview guide has been prepared to collect information from key informants that include top managers, faculty deans, department heads, and officers of the University. The interview guide covered seven open-ended questions that focused on graduates' employability, transition, challenges and measures to be considered to improve conditions for graduates' employment in the undergraduate program of SMU. Among the 12 officials, only 8 of them were interviewed.

Document Review

Documents such as three-year records of graduates employed at different companies by the support of Career and Internship Unit, annual performance reports of the unit, tracer studies reports at national and international levels and others were consulted.

Data Analysis

Depending on the nature of the data obtained from respondents, the quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed. The quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (version 20) computer software. Descriptive statistical analysis was carried out; hence, statistical measures like frequencies, percentages, medians, and interquartile range were used to summarize data. Besides, qualitative data were analyzed by organizing them based on themes.

Pilot Study

In order to assure the reliability of the item scales in the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted. 40 questionnaires were distributed to the norm group that had been randomly selected from recent graduates of 2019 majoring in different fields of Business (Accounting, Marketing Management, Informatics, Management and Tourism), before it was administered to the actual sample of the study. The subjects completed the questionnaire. The reliability tests for the five sub-scales and the two major components are summarized as follows:

Table 2: Reliability Indices of the sub-scales and the aggregate components

<i>No</i>	<i>Reliability test of the main scales and sub-scales</i>	<i>No of items</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>
1	<i>Professional and personal skills</i>	14	0.899
1.1	<i>Graduates' Professional skills</i>	7	0.808
1.2	<i>Graduates' Personal skills</i>	7	0.830
2	<i>Effectiveness of teaching learning environment and academic support services</i>	22	0.909
2.1	<i>The teaching learning environment</i>	12	0.868
2.2	<i>Academic support services</i>	7	0.774
2.3	<i>Facilities & infrastructures</i>	3	0.731

As can be seen in Table 2, it was found that the two major components, professional and personal skills and the effectiveness of the teaching learning environment and academic support services are very highly reliable with a reliability index of 0.899 and 0.909, respectively. The two sub-scales under the professional and personal skills are strongly reliable as their Cronbach's Alpha varied between .808 and .830. Likely, the sub-scales that make up the effectiveness of the teaching learning environment are strongly reliable, because the reliability indices, which vary between 0.731 and 0.868, are very high.

DeVellis (2012), George and Mallery (2003) and Kline (2000), explained that a Cronbach's Alpha between 0.7 and 0.8 is considered as an acceptable coefficient for describing the internal consistency of set of items, whereas, those reliability indices below 0.5 are unacceptable.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Respondents' Characteristics

Demographic variables such as sex, education level, year of graduation, qualification, specialization and working firms are presented as follows.

Table 3: Sample Graduates by Year of Graduation

No	Graduation year	Total	%
1	2016	81	23.75
2	2017	140	41.35
3	2018	119	34.90
	Total	340	100.0

As presented in Table 3, 23.75 percent of graduates from 2016 batch, 41.35 percent of graduates from 2017 batch, and 34.9 percent of graduates from 2018 academic group were proportionally and randomly selected in turn. Among these, 230 (67.65%) were females and 110 (32.35%) were males.

Table 4: Sample Subjects by Sex and Educational Background

No	Sex	Graduates		Graduates' educational background				Employers	
				Bachelor		Master's			
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Female	193	61.9	164	52.56	29	9.3	36	50.0
2	Male	119	38.1	106	33.97	13	4.2	36	50.0
	Total	312	100.0	270	86.5	42	13.5	72	100.0

As observed in Table 4, of the sample subjects included in the study who filled out the graduates' questionnaire successfully, 193 (61.9%) were females and 119 (38.1%) were males. Regarding employers, 36 (50.0%) of them were females while 36 (50 %) of them were males who participated in providing responses by filling out the employer's questionnaire properly and completely.

Regarding educational background, 86.5 percent of graduates have a Bachelor's degree while 13.5 percent of them have received their Master's degree, of which, females (9.3%) were more than males (4.2%) in receiving their Master's degree.

Table 5: Graduates' Fields of Studies and Employment Status

No	Fields of studies				Employment status		
	Responses	N	%	Reponses	N	%	
1	Accounting & Finance	181	58.01	Yes	173	95.58	
				No	8	4.42	
2	Marketing Management	51	16.35	Yes	43	84.31	
				No	8	15.69	
3	Computer Science	38	12.18	Yes	37	97.37	
				No	1	2.63	
4	Information Technology	4	1.28	Yes	4	100.0	
				No	-	-	
5	Management	28	8.97	Yes	26	92.86	
				No	2	7.14	
6	Tourism & Hospitality Management	10	3.21	Yes	7	70.00	
				No	3	30.00	
	Total	312	100.0				

Referring to Table 5, 58 percent of the graduates studied and specialized in Accounting and Finance, 16.35 percent of them graduated in Marketing Management, 12.38 percent studied Computer Science and about 9 percent specialized in Management. However, very few have been graduated in Tourism and Hospitality Management (3.21%) and in Information Technology (1.28%), subsequently.

As observed in Table 5, it could be grasped that graduates from Accounting and Finance (95.58 %), Marketing Management (84.31%), Computer Science (97.37%), Management (92.86 %), Tourism and Hospitality Management (70%), and Information Technology (100.0%), were employed on paid works, respectively. However, some graduates (2.63-15.69%) were not hired. Those three in Tourism and Hospitality Management were found engaged in their own businesses as self-employed.

As shown in Table 5, it could be said that the large majority that add up to 290 (92.95%) were employed and yet a few of them, 22 (7.05%) were unemployed. From the interview of top Managers, Deans and Department heads, it was learned that the employment rate of graduates is encouragingly good, for example 70 to 80 percent were hired. Moreover, they indicated that our graduates have been favorably accepted by employers.

Table 6: Methods of Identifying Vacancies

No	Responses	Graduates		Employers	
		N	%	N	%
1	Friends	77	24.7	–	–
2	Relatives	40	12.8	–	–
3	Written short notices and seating for selection test	54	17.3	44	61.1
4	Advertisement in the media (TV or Radio, Newspapers)	76	24.4	5	6.9
5	Career and Internship unit of SMU	65	20.8	17	23.6
6	Using others' recommendations/head hunting	-	-	6	8.3
	Total	312	100.0	72	100.0

As observed in Table 6, referring to methods of getting information about vacancies, 25 percent of graduates reported that they got information from friends, 24.4 percent from media, 20.8 percent through Career and Internship Unit of SMU, 17.3 percent on written notices, and 12.8 percent from relatives in that order.

On the other hand, about 61 percent of employers reported that they have been inviting graduates on short written notices and administer selection tests and 23.6 percent responded that they contact graduates through SMU's Career and Internship Office. However, using others' recommendations/head hunting (8.3%) and inviting graduates on TV and /or Radio (6.9%) are less likely used by employers.

Table 7: Duration to get the first job after Graduation from SMU

No	Responses	N	%
1	Immediately after graduation	114	36.5
2	Less than three months	122	39.1
3	Less than six months	56	17.9
4	Less than one year	13	4.2
5	About one year	5	1.6
6	More than one year	2	.6
	Total	312	100.0

As indicated in Table 7, about 37 percent of graduates responded that they got their first job immediately after graduation (could be within one month or less). For about 39 percent of them, it took them less than three months, while for about 18 percent graduates, less than six months. However, 4.2 percent of graduates responded that the time gap to get their first job was about less than one year. From the data, it can be seen that, most of the graduates (94 %) have secured their first job within less than six months, of which 76 % of them secured their jobs in less than three months.

Table 8: Graduates' Current Position as to Paid Work

No.	Status of work	N	%
1	I am working full-time.	263	84.3
2	I am working part-time, but seeking full-time work.	15	4.8
3	I am working part-time, but not seeking full-time work.	4	1.3
4	I am self- employed.	17	5.4
5	I am working on contractual basis.	6	1.9
6	I am not working, but looking for job.	7	2.2
	Total	312	100.0

From Table 8, it could be understood that most graduates (84.3%) are full-time workers. On the contrary, about 5.4 percent of graduates are self-employed and 4.8 percent of them are working on part-time basis, but seeking full-time work. Still, a very few of them (1.3-2.2%) were either working on contractual basis, part-time basis, or not working but looking for a job.

Table 9: Graduates' Employment Status & Working Sectors and Employers' Organizations

No	Employment status	N	%	Sectors	Graduates' responses		Employers' responses	
					N	%	N	%
1	Permanent	265	84.9	Gov't/ public	91	29.17	6	8.4
2	Temporary	14	4.5	NGOs	8	2.6	2	2.8
3	Contractual	16	5.1	Private	196	62.8	64	88.9
4	Self-employed	17	5.5	Self-employed	17	5.45	-	-
	Total	312	100.0	Total	312	100.0	72	100.0

As presented in Table 9, 84.9 percent of graduates were permanently employed. Whereas, only 5.5 percent were self-employed. Still a few graduates are either working on contractual basis (5.1%) or temporarily (4.5%).

As to their working sector, 63 percent of graduates were working in private organizations. Next to private entities, 29.17 percent are working in Government/public offices, but, about 5.45 percent of them are self-employed and 8.4 percent are hired at NGOs. The trend of response is similar in that 88.9 percent of employers are from private sectors. Next to privates, though few in number, 8.4 percent of government offices, and 2.8 percent of NGO's, were employers of SMU graduates in that order.

Table 10: Factors that contributed most to find Jobs

No	Responses	N	%
1	Areas of specialization	122	39.1
2	Reputation of SMU	59	18.9
3	One's personality	74	23.7
4	Scholastic standing/CGPA	57	18.2
	Total	312	100.0

As to factors that contributed most to graduates to obtain their current jobs, the data summarized in Table 10 signifies that their areas of specialization is prioritized first by the large portion (39.1 %) of graduates and the second factor considered was “one's personality” by 23.7 percent of them. Graduates personality factors refer to gender, competences during graduation, employment conditions e.g. economic sector, size of organization, and the experiences after graduation. By the same token, almost equal number of graduates (18.9% and 18.2%) have considered “Reputation of SMU” and “CGPA” as the next factors that contributed to get their jobs.

Table 11: Relation and Usefulness of Courses to Jobs

No	Responses	Graduates'			
		Relationship between their field of study and jobs		Usefulness of the knowledge/skills of courses to jobs	
		N	%	N	%
1	Very much	125	40.1	142	45.5
2	Much	119	38.1	119	38.1
3	Little	59	18.9	47	15.1
4	Very little	9	2.9	4	1.3
	Total	312	100.0	312	100.0

As can be seen from Table 11, the degree of relationship between graduates' study fields and jobs they are engaged in was reported by graduates as very much (40.1%) and much (38.1%) individually. On the contrary, 19% and 2.9% of the graduates commented that the relationship is little and very little, respectively.

Similarly, as to the usefulness of knowledge and skills obtained from different courses to the jobs, about 45.5 percent of graduates indicated that they are very much useful, and 38.1 percent of them responded that they are much useful to the job they perform. Nevertheless, a relatively very few graduates stated that the degree of usefulness of the knowledge and skills they acquired to jobs they are involved in are little or very little. Perhaps this could be linked with the mismatch between jobs given and field of studies.

Table 12: Degree of Satisfaction in one's Current Work and Staying on the Job

No	Degree of satisfaction in one's current job			Staying on the current job		
	Responses	N	%	Responses	N	%
1	Very much	115	36.9	Yes	209	67.0
2	Much	123	39.4	No	103	33.0
3	Little	51	16.3	Total	312	100.0
4	Very little	23	7.4			
	Total	312	100.0			

The sample graduates have been asked whether they are satisfied or not with the job they are engaged in. From the data in Table 12, it could be understood that between 36.9 and 39.4 percent of graduates, their degree of satisfaction is 'very much' or 'much'. However, a few of them, between 7.4 and 16.3 percent are dissatisfied with the jobs they are working. As observed in Table 12, 67 percent of graduates responded that they need to stay in the job they are involved. However, 33 percent of them are not interested to continue in their current job.

Those who responded that they wanted to discontinue their job were asked about their immediate plan. The majority of them stated that their future plan is to begin their own private businesses. They wanted to be self-employed and interested to manage themselves in the future. Others also stated that they are learning their Master's degrees; interested to work in big companies like banks in the future.

Table 13: Causes for Graduates' Unemployment

No	Responses	Rank given								
		1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th
1	Mismatch of educational qualification	22	6	9	19	13	5	9	13	9
2	Your personality	7	8	2	6	4	13	7	8	22
3	Not passing the pre-employment interview	5	3	16	7	16	11	15	12	5
4	Not passing the pre-employment exam	5	2	7	14	10	11	11	13	8
5	Inadequate knowledge and skills	6	7	5	10	17	15	6	3	4
6	Lack of employment skills	10	11	12	13	11	11	8	5	7
7	Few vacancies and opportunities	38	22	7	2	5	1	48	6	3
8	Inequality of jobs creation to increase no of graduates	15	30	15	3	3	2	4	34	4
9	Inadequate experience in hunting/searching a job	11	15	21	8	6	5	6	5	29

Those who reported that they are not employed, were asked to rank the supposed causes for their unemployment. The data summarized in Table 13, indicates that a few vacancies and opportunities (by 38 graduates); mismatch of educational qualification (by 22 graduates); imbalance between jobs creation and the increased number of graduates (by 15 graduates); inadequate experience in hunting jobs (by 11 graduates); and lack of employment skills (by 10 graduates) were selected and ranked as the primary causes to their unemployment. Likewise, imbalance of jobs creation compared to increased number of graduates (by 30 graduates); few vacancies and opportunities (by 22 graduates); and inadequate experience in hunting/searching a job (by 15 graduates) were also selected as the second thoughts for their unemployment.

Referring to the third ranked group, inadequate experience in hunting/searching a job (21 graduates); not passing the pre-employment interview (16 graduates); imbalance of jobs creation compared to increased number of graduates (15 graduates); and lack of employment skills (12 graduates) were selected and rated as the third causes for their unemployment.

Taking into account the three ranks given, a few vacancies and opportunities, imbalance between jobs creation and increased number of graduates, inadequate experience in hunting/searching a job, Mismatch of educational qualification, not passing the pre-employment interview and lack of employment skills were the main drawbacks for their unemployment.

Discussions

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the employability rate, status and satisfaction of SMU graduates and the degree of relationship and usefulness of the courses taken to jobs they have been engaged.

To that end, the first three research questions mainly addressed the determination of the extent of the transition of graduates from education to employment, access to paid work with reasonable time, job search approaches used by graduates and their personal factors that influenced their job search. As to the employment status of graduates, it was reported that most of them (93%) were employed, while a few (7%) of them were not able to find jobs. This finding has been substantiated by the University top and middle level officials that graduates' employment is favorably decent. Concerning the duration they find jobs after graduation, 37 percent of graduates got their first jobs immediately after graduation, whereas it took 39% percent of graduates about less than 3 months. With less than six months most graduates (94%) have secured their first jobs. These findings substantiate findings of past studies in which the average duration to get first job for majority of graduates was 3 to 6 months (Catacutan, et al., 2020; ETF, 2016; Mand & Matidza, 2016; Hailu et al., .2015; Gines, 2014; Oseifuah et al., 2014; Shongwe & Ocholla, 2011; SMUC, 2010).

That said, those graduates who reported that they were not employed, have been given choices that were assumed as causes for their unemployment. According to their responses, a few vacancies and job opportunities, gap of jobs creation compared to increased number of graduates, inadequate experience in hunting jobs and lack of employability skills were identified as major hindering factors to their unemployment. Regarding methods used to hunt

for job, though varying approaches were there, graduates have been using information on vacancies intensely through media (i.e., TV, Radio, and Newspapers), friends, and Career and Internship Office and written notices. Yet the great majority of employers (61%) had been inviting graduates through written notices and Career and Internship Unit.

Concerning paid work, it could be said that most graduates (84.3%) were full-time paid employees, but very few of them (4.8 -5.4%) were either self-employed or working as part-timers. With respect to field of specialization, those graduates from Management (89.3%), Informatics (88.1%), Accounting (87.3%) and Marketing Management (76.5%) in turn are found engaged in full-time paid jobs.

Regarding place of work, the majority of graduates (63%) are working in private companies, whereas, 29% of them are working in government offices, and yet few of them were in public or self-employed. Employers as well supported this view. According to them, 88.9 percent of them are from private sectors.

Pertaining to status of employments, most graduates (85%) were hired permanently, while few graduates were employed temporarily, contractual or self-employed. At department level, graduates from Accounting and Finance (90.1%), and Informatics (83.33%), Management (78.6%), Marketing Management (76.5%) and Tourism (60%) were employed permanently.

Regarding factors that contributed most to their employability, graduates asserted that their field of specialization was key. Next came their personal skills. Yet, the reputability of SMU and scholastic achievement (CGPA) took the third rank since almost the same number of graduates has selected them. This finding is consistent with the study findings of (Hailu, et al., 2015; Gines, 2014; and UNESCO, 2012). As to the relevance of technical knowledge to the job they do, most graduates (86%) reported by endorsing that they have the necessary know-how. However, for some of them (14%), their knowledge was not relevant to the job they were hired. Perhaps, this might be due to assignment to jobs not related to their field. Such a mismatch between areas of specialization and job placement prevails in labor market. These days, securing the job is a priority to most graduates in such environment where job scarcity is high. Such situation has been experienced by graduates from Debre Birhan University (Getachew, 2015.)

With reference to relationship and usefulness of courses to the job they are engaged in, the large majority of graduates (78-84%) communicated that the courses offered at the university and the knowledge and skills they acquired are strongly related and are useful to their jobs. But, for some (16-22%) graduates, it was not so. In this regard, most of the employers have authenticated in their report that the graduates have adequate knowledge and skills in their fields of studies. They are capable of doing things in the job diligently with confidence. These results confirmed with findings of studies conducted by different studies that graduates were satisfied with trainings offered in their respective Universities (Getachew, 2015; Hailu, 2015; Gines, 2014; UNESCO, 2012; Hiedmann, 2011; Schomburge, 2011; Shongwe, and Ocholla, 2011; Uguonah and Omeje, 1998; and Zembere and Chinyama, 1996).

Concerning the degree of satisfaction, the majority of graduates (76%) testified that they are strongly satisfied with their current jobs, but some of them (24%) were little satisfied.

Concerning their income, 58.11% of graduates have been receiving a gross salary between less than Birr 3000 and 7500, while 41.86% of graduates were earning from Birr 8000 to 10000+. This data delineates that graduates' salary may not be adequate to their daily expenses and their family needs due to the existing standard of living. According to salary explorer.com (2020) the median salary in Ethiopia is Birr 9150.00 per month, whereas the average salary is Birr 8970.00. This indicates more than 75% of the graduates have been receiving salary less than the median salary or the average salary determined in Ethiopian context. Only 17.91% of graduates have been earning Birr 10, 000 and above per month.

Among the reasons for not being satisfied, inadequate salary and allowance, not appointed in the right position, and career challenges were chiefly talked about by graduates. Similarly, employers have stated that graduates' turnover was high and the main cause described was the need for better salary.

On the contrary, the majority of graduates (67%) would like to stay in their current job while one-third of them (33%) are lacking interest to continue in their job and rather aspire to begin their own business (self-employed) and some would like to continue their further education. This finding corresponds with previous findings carried out by (Fentiman, 2007).

Qualitative Data

Pertaining to what the University should do to improve in the future, it was explained that the University has been doing its best in offering quality education. Such a trend has to be maintained and continued. However, gaps that need the University's attentions are indicated as well.

As to academic support services, it was indicated that students had been facing challenges related to their selection of field of specialization, academics, study skills, academic and research advising, grading, communication, peer pressure, etc. Moreover, in reality adequate services from concerned bodies were not obtained (i.e. guidance and counseling, registrar and respective departments). According to employers, graduates were knowledgeable and skillful, and do assigned activities with a feeling of responsibility, are eager to learn, ready to change, competitive and have good work ethics. Still, more is needed to improve the employability of graduates in the future. The University should strengthen graduates' career link with current needs in the labor market. These include marketing tasks, skills for labor market analysis, which is mandatory in the bank, customer recruiting, digital channel sales, resource mobilization and making them problem solvers. Besides, improving their language skills, enhancing creative thinking skills, entrepreneurial skills and related transferable skills relevant to the business are critical.

Regarding curriculum, both graduates and departments have shown similar views that accounting software applications like Peachtree Accounting, and Auditing, and IFRS related courses have to be up-dated and incorporated. E-view, STAT, and SPSS need to be also included. Besides, extracurricular activities should be effectively organized with the purpose to engage students actively.

Regarding the link between employers and CIU, most companies reported that they have good relationship with the office and ensured that the office has been cooperative and responsive to their requests. But most employers have suggested that the link should be strengthened and expect the Office to e-mail them adequate information about fresh graduates every year. And finally, the employers stated that though they knew people in the office, their attachment should be institutionalized so that the link becomes official.

Conclusions

Based on the major findings of the study, conclusions could be drawn as follows:

Graduates' being hired with a reasonable time interval, engagement in full-time paid jobs permanently, and getting employed in private companies at large scale imply that the private sector trusts the professional capability of graduates, which designates the competitiveness of graduates on one hand and the reputability of the University on the other.

It could also be inferred that, nowadays, the expansion of banks, insurance companies, industries, service giving organizations and the role played by the University in creating job opportunities to graduates through its Career and Internship Unit might have contributed better to SMU graduates to be employed in big numbers. This possibly could be taken as the first indication of professional success. From both findings (graduates and officials) as well it could also be figured out that graduates' employability status and rate was really commendable.

Largely, the data from graduates and employers, concerning knowledge and skills, suggest that courses offered in the different fields of specializations were appropriate to jobs. From this data, it could be inferred that except few, most of the graduates seemed to be assigned to jobs by profession, which corroborate that the knowledge and skills obtained were relevant to jobs they were placed in. Above all, graduates' fields of specialization, personal skills, reputability of SMU, and GPA have contributed to their employability rate.

The number of self-employed graduates was very little. This may indicate that we are producing job seekers more than job creators, which needs attention in the future.

With regard to salary, more than three-fourth of graduates are earning that may not adequately satisfy their daily expenses and family needs. However, most of them want to stay on the job, even though they are not earning better salary. Staying on the job may not guarantee satisfaction with the job. But, if they leave their jobs, they may not get a second chance to be employed due to shortage of job opportunities. In the same way, those graduates who do not want to continue in their current jobs stated that salary and allowance are key among others.

Taking into account the major findings with respect to graduates' transition to employment, job hunting methods, duration for securing the first job, employment status, and relevance of knowledge and skills acquired to the jobs, etc., St. Mary's University graduates' appear to be successful in their profession.

It seems good that graduates are competitive in the job market. Furthermore, it is evident that the University is also fully trusted by different organizations in relation to the provision of quality of education.

Implications

Based on the results and conclusions, the following implications were derived:

Top Managers and Administrators

- The University officials ought to create synergy among the University community to sustain its reputability through offering quality education and producing professionally competent graduates based on labor demands in such a competitive business environment. Enhancing its image further is highly indispensable.

Career and Internship Unit and Departments

- Members from these two offices need to work collaboratively on the provision of internship program since it is one major area in which students would be acquainted with the real world tasks. Such a program has to be strengthened to increase the practical experience of students by creating strong link with companies. Students should be assigned to the appropriate work and effective monitoring system should be in place.
- The job creation opportunity to prospective graduates should be expanded to make all graduates beneficiaries by consolidating career and job fairs by inviting new and big companies; forming strong ties with agencies that are working on graduates' employment, job search and creation like Ethio- jobs, Derja.com, Jobs creation Commission Ethiopia, etc.

Faculties, Departments and Offices

- Graduates' mindset towards engaging in the creation of jobs of their own should be positively shaped and supported. To this end, faculties, departments and the CIU should collaboratively deliver trainings on entrepreneurship-gearred skills to prospective graduates inviting experts with real life experience during their stay and make a strong link with government offices that support graduates to create their own jobs through the mechanisms put in the policy direction of the country. Such actions seem important to encourage graduates to enable them get self-employed.
- Faculties and departments in the undergraduate program seem to equip prospective graduates with up-dated knowledge and skills in the profession, especially on market demand-focused fields of studies that prepare them to be competent and competitive in the labor market.
- Improving and refining graduates' employment through provision of practical course level trainings on employability skills and work values are important to meet the demands of the labor market and most importantly on how graduates could give adequate customer services (communication skills; honesty, integrity, dependability).

team spirit; self-initiation and work ethics; self-confidence; self-management; work place adaptation; CV/resume writing and application writing; and Leadership skills).

- Students' problems related to selection of fields, study skills, academic advising, grading system, and adjustment problems need to be regularly solved by guidance and counseling service, departments, Registrar Office and Career and Internship Unit. There should be synergy among these offices to provide the required support. This gap demands the academic support services to be strengthened.

RaKMO, CEIQA and CIU

- Members from these offices of the University could carry out further study in the future with relatively large samples on key curriculum and instruction, and relevant employability skills to the labor market and on how prospective graduates are made to be actively engaged in job creation of their own.

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