



Impact of English Language Skills On Youth Unemployment Duration in Vocational Education: A Case Study of Youth Trained in VETA in Colombo District

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Abstract

Youth unemployment is one of the major problems encountered by the developing countries. Vocational Education and Training (VET) is one way of addressing this issue. Therefore this study investigated the influence of English Language skills on youth unemployment duration. It focused on youth trained in Vocational Education and Training Authority (VETA) and critically looked at the influence of English Language skill on youth unemployment duration, variations of vocational courses under the Hotels and Tourism field among three years, effect of training duration and courses on the occupation and language problems and challenges facing youth in getting jobs. A questionnaire was used to collect primary data while secondary data was collected through document analysis. A Sample of 120 respondents were drawn through stratified sampling technique. Data were analysed using STATA 13.0 version. Survival data analyse technique was used as the statistical tool to determine the youth unemployment duration with the help of cox regression to determine factors influencing youth unemployment duration and stratified log rank test was used to compare the effect of the English Language skills on unemployment duration and descriptive statistics was used to determine the effect of language problems and challenges on youth unemployment duration. The study finding revealed that, unemployment duration for trainees in Hotels and Tourism field is mainly due to the poor performance in English language skills mainly the speaking and writing skills.

Introduction

The youth are the asset and prospect of every country with a long-term vision for welfare and development that are concerned with the best ways to integrate youth into the labor force. Youth plays a vital role in placing Sri Lanka into a smart growing path which is a collective task. Investments on this valuable human capital, yield long term returns on national and global development. However, now the world is facing a problem of youth unemployment. Both developing and developed economies are faced with the challenge of creating expedient and sustainable jobs for the large cohort of young women and men entering the labor market every year (ILO, 2006; Mbokothe, 2012). Sri Lanka's high economic growth rate when compared with its high youth unemployment rate presents a riddle for the country's development and wellbeing. The problem of youth unemployment has been linked to youth impulsiveness both in the Southern and Northern parts of the country (Ministry of Skills Development and Vocational Training, 2017 March). The gap between high educational competition, market demands and skills shortages as well as the mismatch between career wishes and available job opportunities is central to the problem of youth unemployability.

Technical and Vocational Training programs target those students who do not progress to higher levels of education. The aim is to provide the students with skills and competencies for engagement in wage employment or self-employment. However, as compared to general education, vocational Education and Training has a closer and more direct link with economic and professional development of the country.

On the Job Training is another important component included in vocational education and training and it plays a vital role in finding sustainable jobs. The VTA has the highest number of training centers with 224 rural vocational training centers, 22 District Vocational Training Centers and 7 National Vocational Training Centers, which had just 31 vocational training centers in 1995.

However, as compared to general education, vocational Education and Training has a closer and more direct link with economic and professional development of the country. Parents and young people consider the vocational training centers to be the most prestigious for they are wage – labor oriented. As a consequence, there is strong competition for places and entrance tests that are employed as the principal selection mechanism for the youths to become useful resources. They must be gainfully employed, but every year large number of students is completing vocational education but there are no jobs.

Problem statement

Few studies have been done on the role of Vocational Training in upgrading youth employment. Sri Lanka, like many developing countries suffers from particularly high youth unemployment where poor language performance lying behind many issues.

Despite the efforts done by the government through VETA to provide Vocational Education for a large numbers of youth find it difficult to find a job due to their low level of English knowledge and skill. A number of studies have been done to assess the English language skills on different labor market

outcomes, including wages, productivity and job related skills (Ntallima T. M., 2014). However, there has been less comprehensive assessment done on the impact of English language skills on youth unemployment duration in Vocational Education.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are;

- To identify the effect of English language skills on youth unemployment duration,
- To identify the variations of English language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) among youth who were followed the Hotel and Tourism course.
- To identify the problems and challenges facing youth trainees in learning English language.

Method

The data were collected using the structured questionnaire and the sample was selected from the youth trainees in the Hotels and Tourism courses by using the stratified sampling technique. Sample size was decided for each strata by using the proportionally allocation method. Systematic sampling technique was used within the strata to select the youth in each sample and analyze these data by using the Survival data analyzing technique.

Table 1: Sampling frame

Year (stratum)	Size of the strata	Size of sample for each strata
2013	217	40
2014	208	38
2015	225	42
Total	650	120

Significance of the Study

Youth unemployment is currently a substantial issue in Sri Lanka and youth unemployment is higher than adult unemployment. Vocational Education provides a fertile platform to build the gap between the mismatch of skills or skills shortages with job demand. However, youth who pass out from VETA, especially those who follow Hotels and Tourism courses find it difficult to acquire jobs after their completion of the training due to their poor performance in English language (Ministry of Skills Development and Vocational Training, 2017 March). Therefore this research is important due to several reasons. The most important is that there is no much literature focus on this area of youth unemployment duration. Thus this research will become a guiding source for those who expect to follow the VETA courses in future. Secondly, this research will bring to light the hidden reasons as to why the youth should focus more on developing their English language skills if they want to discovery a job swiftly. Finally this research will provide the information for the future researchers who wish to research on this area.

Data analysis, Presentation and Interpretation

This section will provide data analysis, presentation and interpretation of the findings on the contribution of English language skills on youths' job placement time. Frequency tables and graphs are presented. The main subheadings include Demographic and Social characteristics of youth in VETA and the objectives of the study. The objectives of the study were; to identify the effect of English language skills on youth unemployment duration, to identify the variations of English language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) among youth who followed the hotel and tourism course and to determine the problems and challenges facing youth trainees in learning English language.

Table 2; Summarized unemployment duration data

	Time at risk	Incidence rate	No. of subjects	Unemployment Duration		
				25%	50%	75%
Total	21049	0.0047094	120	150	189	224

(Source: calculations by author)

Table 2 showed that the summary of the youth unemployment duration. According to that 25 % of youth trainees have a chance to getting new jobs averagely after 150 days. 50% of the trainees have a chance to getting new jobs averagely after 189 days and 75% of the trainees have a chance to getting new jobs averagely after 224 days.

Table 3; Summarized unemployment duration data according to the gender

Gender	Time at risk	Incidence rate	No. of subjects	Unemployment Duration
				25%
Male	18318	.0044765	100	152
Female	2731	.006591	20	78

(Source: calculations by author)

Table 3 shows the average time to find the jobs for males and females of vocational youth trainees. Results of the study indicate that 25% of male trainees have a chance to getting new jobs averagely after 152 days and females have a chance to getting new jobs after 78 days. 50% of the males have a chance to getting new jobs averagely after 194 days and females have this chance after 140 days. 75% of the male trainees have a chance to getting new jobs averagely after 241 days and females have this chance after 171 days.

Table 4: Describe survival time data

Category	Total	Per trainee			
		mean	min	median	max
No. of subjects	120				
No. of records	120	1	1	1	1
(First) entry time		0	0	0	0
(Final) exit time		176.95	31	181	352
Time at risk	21049	176.95	31	181	352
failures	100	0.8334	0	1	1

(Source: calculations by author)

Table 4 shows the summary statistics of all the data set. According to that total no of respondents are 120 and record all of these respondents unemployment duration. From that 100 trainees were completed their vocational training but 20 trainees did not complete their full training period successfully. There are no trainees in delayed entry in the data set because every ones entry time is zero. Minimum unemployment duration per trainee is equal to 31 days and maximum is 352 days. Median unemployment duration is equal to 181 days.

Table 5: Life table

interva l	Beg. Total	Completion s	Dro p outs	Surviva l	(95 % conf. int)
	1				

0	120	3	0	0.97	0.9	0.9
50	100	117	10	1	0.89	0.8
100	150	106	16	6	0.75	0.6
150	200	84	41	6	0.37	0.2
200	250	37	15	4	0.21	0.1
250	300	18	11	0	0.08	0.0
300	350	7	2	3	0.05	0.0
350	2	2	0	0.00	-	-

(Source: calculations by author)

According to the above life table, youth unemployment duration has divided into the intervals of 50 days. At the beginning whole 120 respondents were expecting a job and it has declined to 117 respondents when the unemployment duration extends beyond 50 days (50 – 100). Three of the respondents have obtained jobs before passing 50 days and during that period no respondent has dropped the courses. However, one respondent has removed himself from the course without completing. Accordingly, 10 respondents were employed during the 50-100 days. Most number of respondents was employed during 150 to 200 days. Most number of respondents has left the course between 100-200 days.

Demographic and Social Characteristics of Youth

The Demographic and social characteristics of respondents are presented in table 3. Demographic characteristics include Gender, Marital Status and Age while Social characteristics include education level and job experience. The data for the study was obtained from 120 youth trainees trained under the Vocational. This table shows that majority (84.2%) of youth were between the age of 15 and 25 years. This implies that most of vocational trainees interviewed were in the active age group. 12.5% were aged between 25 & 35 years, 2.5 % were between the ages 35 & 45 years and a small proportion of youth trained at 0.8% was 45 & 55 years of age. Marital status of the respondents showed that the number of youth who are unmarried exceed that one of married.

Table 6: Demographic characteristics of respondents (n=120)

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	100	83.3
	Female	20	16.7
Marital status	Married	19	15.8
	Unmarried	101	84.2
Age group	15-25	101	84.2
	25-35	15	12.5
	35-45	3	2.5
	45-55	1	0.8

(Source: calculations by author)

The English language skills influencing youth unemployment duration.

The study aimed at determining the English language skills influencing youth unemployment duration in Colombo district. Vocational trainees were 120 who were trained of vocational education skills in vocational training centers which were run by Vocational Training Authority. This study focused to identify whether English language skills, Gender, Marital status, Age and Education level are significant in vocational youth trainees in getting jobs or not.

The Cox regression method is wide when it is desired to investigate several variables at the same time. Table 8 presents the results of cox regression analysis

of the factors influencing on time to find the jobs of trainees. The covariates included in the cox regression were English language skills such as listening, writing, reading and speaking skills, Gender, Marital status, Age, Education level. This objective achieved through the following steps.

Step 1

Table 7: Cox regression results presenting all factors influencing VETA trainees' unemployment duration

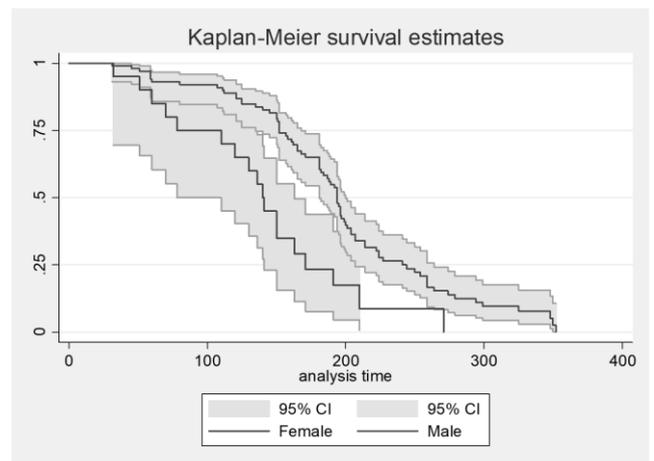
Variables in the equation	-2 log Likelihood	B	DF	Significance
Non	770.741			
Gender	761.960	-0.861	1	0.001
Marital status	770.257	-0.186	1	0.478
Age	770.740	0.841	1	0.972
Education level	767.056	0.686	1	0.061
Reading skill	766.077	0.708	1	0.035
Writing skill	765.528	0.832	1	0.029
Listening skill	763.662	0.725	1	0.049
Speaking skill	761.842	0.841	1	0.040

(Source: calculations by author)

Gender

Gender as classified being a male or female and this had effect on youth unemployment duration. This study showed that gender contributed to youth unemployment duration negatively. Cox regression analysis showed covariate was statistically significant (P < 0.05). Therefore, gender affects the youth in getting jobs. Males and females have not equal chances to find the jobs.

Kaplan- Meier survival estimate is the graphical method of comparing two groups of survival data, according to that unemployment duration for males were higher than females and it clearly showed that there was a difference between unemployment duration of males and females.



(Source: survey data)

Figure 1: Kaplan – Meier Survival estimates for males and females with 95% confidence interval

The weakness of this approach is that it does not provide a comparison of the total survival experience of males and females and create further problems of

interpretation. Especially if the curves are significantly different at some point but not at another. Therefore way of comparing the complete survival curves for two independent sets of observations are considered. The most common way of doing this is to use the log rank test.

Log Rank Test

H0: There is no difference in unemployment duration of the males and females.

H1: There is a difference in unemployment duration of the males and females.

Test Statistic

If $P < 0.05$, reject null hypothesis.

According to this test P- value is equal to 0.0008. It is less than 0.05. Finally it can be concluded that there was significant difference in unemployment duration of males and females.

English language skills

This is another significant variable. It is measured within the four skills. Such as reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. English language is the main determinant of lifestyle and status of an individual enjoys in a society. It enables a person to acquire knowledge which helps in doing jobs according to the attained skills. These skills were measured by using cox regression looking at whether language skills were the factor influencing the youth unemployment duration. According to the results these four skills of the youth trainees was statistically significant ($P < 0.05$). Therefore, English language skill effect on youth trainees in getting jobs.

Table 8: English language skills of the youth trained in VTA

English language skills	Youths capability	Percentage
Reading	40	33.33
Writing	40	33.33
Listening	28	23.34
Speaking	12	10

(Source: survey data)



Figure 2: youths 'capability of English language skills

According to the above pie chart, most of the students have capability to writing and reading but most of them have a problem of speaking English. Speaking skill is the most important skill for the youth to find the jobs.

Next step is to fit the model that contains these significant variables.

Step 2

Table 9: Cox regression results presenting significant factors influencing VETA trainees' unemployment duration

Variables in the equation	-2 log
Non	770.741
Gender +reading skill	734.62
Gender +writing skill	755.32
Gender + listening skill	765.43
Gender + speaking skill	729.79
Gender + speaking skill + reading skill	720.36
Gender + speaking skill + writing skill	719.15
Gender + speaking skill + listening skill	727.22

(Source: calculations by author)

According to the above table variables Gender and speaking skill leads to the largest reduction in -2 log likelihood. Then reading skill, writing skill, listening skill one by one with the model of Gender and speaking skill represented the reduction of -2 log likelihood values. Among the presented alternative models, the most satisfactory model was that containing Gender, speaking and writing skills.

After the model has been fitted to an observed set of survival data, the adequacy of the fitted model needs to be assessed. Once a model has been fitted, there are number of aspects of the fit of a model that need to be studied. So for that considered the residual analysis.

Goodness of Fit of the Final Model

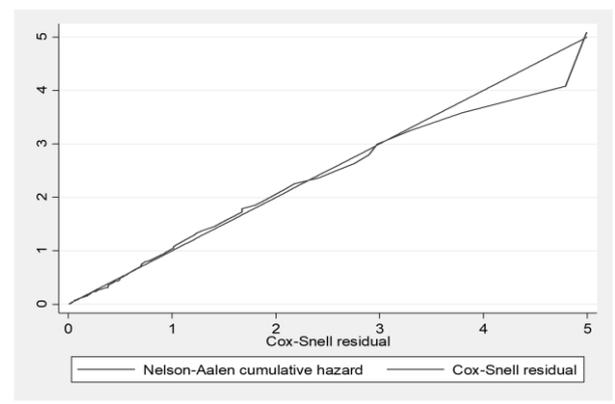


Figure 3: Goodness of Fit of the Final Model

Above figure shows that the hazard function follows the 45 degrees line more closely except for very large values of time. It is very common for models with censored data to have some wiggling at large values of time and it is not something to be concerned. Overall the study would conclude that the final model fits the data very well.

Problems of Learning English Language

Youth trainees have different type problems for using English language. These problems are different according to the skills. Most practical problem for finding jobs in hotel and tourism sector is less capability of speaking skill. According to them following table shows their problems affect to the speaking ability.

Table 10: Problems of English Language

Problems	No.of youths 'trained in VTA
Finding of appropriate words	25
Construct sentences correctly	65
Pronunciation of words	10
Use of time clauses	20

Table 10 shows the English language problems faced by the youth in VTA. Accordingly, 65 youth trainees out of 120 respondents faced the problem of constructing sentences. It is the major problem for them in finding a job in

tourism field. Out of 120 respondents, 25 trainees find it difficult to find the appropriate words to communicate while 20 respondents faced with the issue of using the correct time clauses. Only 10 respondents have the problem with pronunciation of words.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the study disclosed that the English language skills act as a vital factor in demining the youth unemployment duration. Among the four major skills of a language, the speaking and writing abilities directly affect the unemployment duration of the students who follow the Hotel and Tourism course under VETA. By considering the capability of the language skills most of the youth trainees in the hotel and tourism field find it not difficult to acquire jobs because they have good education levels, but there English language ability stand as a barrier in securing a job. Female trainees can find jobs within a very short time period but male trainees want more time to find jobs. Reason for this is mainly because female trainees pay their special attention on learning the English language than male trainees.

Recommendations

One of the major problems faced by youth trained in VTA is their lack of knowledge in English, specifically the speaking skill. Hence, provisions for English language teaching should be increased in VTA and English courses by incorporating more speaking modules and number of training centres should be increased so as to attract more students.

Guiding students for On Job training after completing Vocational Training by giving a special reference to specific vocational skills they were trained.

Trainees should be encouraged to follow the course till the end without dropping and training course should be moderated to suit the youth.

Drop outs could be minimized by providing knowledge on future labour market for vocational training to the trainees during the training period.

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