



TRAINING AND UNEMPLOYMENT IN SRI LANKA: IMPACT OF SKILLS TRAINING ON UNEMPLOYMENT

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AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

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ABSTRACT

Unemployment is one of the considerable economic problems in Sri Lanka. Especially there's a considerable amount of unskilled unemployment rate in Sri Lanka. The overall unemployment rate of Sri Lanka in 2020 is 5.55 percent. The urban unemployed population in Sri Lanka also rapidly increasing. This article aims to study the effect of currently implemented training programs on unemployment in Sri Lanka with special reference to the urban area and also aims to identify what kind of new training programs and policies should implement to eradicate unemployment and the outcomes of those programs and policies as well as to identify the challenges when implementing those programs and policies and remedies for them. This article presents a review of empirical studies that have been conducted to identify the impact of training of skills on unemployment. The review revealed that there is a positive relationship between skills training and the eradication of unemployment.

Keywords: Unemployment; training, skills training; urban unemployment; knowledge.

1. INTRODUCTION

Unemployment is one of the considerable economic problems in Sri Lanka. According to the definition of the Department of Census and Statistics of Ministry of Finance, Economy and Policy Development of Sri Lanka, Unemployment is a person available and/or looking for work, and who did not work and has taken steps to find a job during the last four weeks and ready to accept a job given a work opportunity within next two weeks are said to be unemployed [1]. The definition of training is teaching, or developing in oneself or others, any skills and knowledge or fitness that relate to specific useful competencies. Training has specific goals of improving one's capability, capacity, productivity, and performance [2].

In 2020, the unemployment rate of Sri Lanka was 5.5 percent [3] and more than 150,000 population were

unskilled and housemaids population. The highest unemployed population of Sri Lanka belongs to this unskilled and housemaids category.

There are a huge amount of skills training centers in Sri Lanka. For example, there are 718 private technical and vocational training centers and 635 public sector technical and vocational training centers are in Sri Lanka. However, there is still have an unskilled unemployed population in the country.

1.1 Unemployment

Unemployment is one of the major macroeconomic problems faced by most of the countries in the world. It is also one of the considerable economic problems in Sri Lanka.

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Unemployment is a person available and/or looking for work, and who did not work and taken steps to find a job during the last four weeks and ready to accept a job given a work opportunity within the next two weeks are said to be unemployed. According to the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) ‘Unemployment’ is people above a specified age (usually 15) not being in paid employment or self-employment but currently available for work during the reference period [4] The recognition of unemployment in the world occurred when economies in the world industrialized and bureaucratized. After that economies had started to understand unemployment as a major problem in economies. Unemployment is measured by the unemployment rate, which is the number of people who are unemployed as a percentage of the labor force (the total number of people employed added to those unemployed) [5] The Unemployment Rate is the proportion of the unemployed population to the total labor force.

The unemployment rate is expressed as a percentage and calculated as follows:

$$\text{Unemployment Rate} = (\text{Unemployed workers} / \text{Total labour force}) * 100$$

There are several types of unemployment. There are basically four main types of unemployment:

- (1) Demand deficient unemployment,
- (2) Frictional unemployment,
- (3) Structural unemployment, and
- (4) Voluntary unemployment.

Demand deficit unemployment is the biggest cause of unemployment that typically happens during a recession. When companies experience a reduction in the demand for their products or services, they respond by cutting back on their production, making it necessary to reduce their workforce within the organization. In effect, workers are laid off.

Frictional unemployment refers to those workers who are in between jobs. An example is a worker who recently quit or was fired and is looking for a job in an economy that is not experiencing a recession.

Structural unemployment happens when the skills set of a worker does not match the skills demanded by the jobs available, or alternatively when workers are available but are unable to reach the geographical location of the jobs.

Voluntary unemployment happens when a worker decides to leave a job because it is no longer financially compelling.

Unemployment can also be categorized as:

- Urban unemployment, and
- Rural unemployment

Urban unemployment means the urban population which is concerned of whom don't get a chance to provide their labor, but they prefer to be employed for any economic advantage.

Rural unemployment means the rural population which is concerned of whom don't get a chance to provide their labor, but they prefer to be employed for any economic advantage.

1.1.1 Current situation of unemployment in Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, the overall unemployment rate is 5.55 percent in 2020 [6].

In Sri Lanka, there are mainly 3 determinants of unemployment. The first determinant is age: the probability of being unemployed is highest among the youth and it declines with age. The second determinant is education. The final determinant is the benefit from family support.

Causes of unemployment in Sri Lanka are,

- High population growth.
- Absence of employment opportunities.
- Seasonal employment.
- Joint family system.
- Increasing turnout of students from universities.
- Slow developing of industries.
- Insufficient rate of economic growth.
- Covid-19 pandemic situation.

1.1.2 Current situation of urban unemployment in Sri Lanka

According to the Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey (LFS) 2020, the estimated economically active population is about 8.5 million in the first quarter of 2020. The economically inactive population is about 8.2 million [7].

1.1.3 Unemployment in Sri Lanka according to education level

The unemployment rate can be divided according to the educational level as,

- Below G. C. E. O/L
- G. C. E. O/L
- G. C. E. A/L & Above

The majority of these four categories are unemployed due to a lack of training in skills. Employers only seek skillful employees.

Table 1. Economically inactive population by sector – First Quarter 2020

Sector	
Sri Lanka	8,186,108
Urban	1,522,935
Rural	6,361,143
Estate	302,031

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, Ministry of Finance, Economy and Policy Development

According to the Sri Lanka Labor Force Survey (LFS) 2020, in 2020 the highest unemployment rate is reported from the G.C.E A/L and above group which is about 10.1 percent. Corresponding percentages are 5.5 percent and 14.7 percent for males and females respectively. Female unemployment rates are higher than those of males in all levels of education. Survey results further show that the problem of unemployment is more acute in the case of educated females than educated males, which was observed consistently over the results of previous survey rounds as well.

1.2 Skills Training

A skill is a learned ability to perform an action with determined results with good execution often within a given amount of time, energy, or both.

The two main categorizations of skills are,

- Soft skills
- Hard skills

Soft skills are personal attributes that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people.

Soft skills include attributes and personality traits that help employees interact with others and succeed in the workplace. Examples of soft skills include the ability to communicate with prospective clients, mentor your

coworkers, lead a team, negotiate a contract, follow instructions, and get a job done on time.

Hard skills are learned abilities acquired and enhanced through practice, repetition, and education. Hard skills are essential because they increase employee productivity and efficiency and subsequently improve employee satisfaction.

Skill training is a career-orientated method of teaching workplace skills. It is aimed at providing personalized, hands-on training to employees in the workplace or prospective employees looking for employment, in order to equip them with the competencies required to perform a particular job.

1.2.1 Types of skills training

Skills training includes training in both hard and soft skills and includes training via case studies, practical experiences, brainstorming sessions, group discussions, games, etc.

- Employability skills
- Behavioral skills
- Management skills
- Personality development skills
- Positive thinking skills
- Technical skills
- Conflict resolution
- Critical thinking skills
- Communication skills
- Time management
- Work ethics
- Industry-specific skills
- Supervisory skills
- Teamwork
- Business acumen skills

By offering skills training, boost confidence, increase productivity, improves efficiency and give proper direction to the employee. The development of skills is not only important to the employee and employee, but also to the country's economy because it helps reduce the unemployment level of the country.

Table 2. Number of Unemployed and Unemployment rate by level of education – First quarter 2020

Level of Education	Number		Unemployment Rate (%)	
	Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka	Male	Female
Total	483,172	5.7	3.7	9.6
Below GCE O/L	170,784	3.4	2.7	5.4
GCE O/L	108,584	7.2	5.2	11.1
GCE A/L & Above	203,804	10.1	5.5	14.7

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, Ministry of Finance, Economy and Policy Development

Table 3. Unemployment rate of GCE A/L & Above educated population for past years

GCE A/L & Above	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020 Q1
Total	9.2	8.3	8.1	9.1	8.5	10.1
Male	4.7	4.7	5.0	5.1	5.0	5.5
Female	13.5	11.9	11.3	13.2	11.9	14.7

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, Ministry of Finance, Economy and Policy Development

Skills training helps the population to get a job as a well-qualified, more productive, more confident, and more efficient person. Skills training not only helps people to get a job but also obtain more achievements by currently employed people in their jobs.

Employment generation helps to raise the country's economy by increasing national income, aggregate demand, and economic growth rate and also by reducing poverty [8]. Therefore, employment generation helps to rise various sectors of the economy as a cycle.

As a developing country, our country should aim at the development and growth of every macroeconomic aspect of our country. A main macroeconomic aspect of our country is a very low level of unemployment or fully eradicating unemployment and that will help to achieve most of the macroeconomic goals and as well as improve the microeconomy of Sri Lanka. Therefore, our country should maintain a more skillful and intelligent labor force in our country. Hence, there is a very close relationship between skills training and reducing the unemployment level of the country and as a country with a lot of training centers, our country's labor force should effectively and wisely direct to those skills training programs and institutions and maintain more skillful and intelligent labor force in Sri Lanka.

1.2.2 Skills training institutions and programs in Sri Lanka

State Ministry of Skills Development, Vocational Education, Research & Innovations comprised of several Skills Development & Vocational Education Sector institutes and programs in Sri Lanka [9] Following are those institutes and programs:

1.2.2.1 Skills development & vocational education institutes & projects

1. National Institute of Business Management

The NIBM specialized in the business of training and development and it is one of the best management education institute in Sri Lanka which offers people unmatched opportunities in management and IT education in Sri Lanka.

2. The National School of Business Management

The National School of Business Management (NSBM) is the degree school of the National Institute of Business Management (NIBM) and offers undergraduate and postgraduate degree programs in Management, Computing, and Engineering.

3. Ocean University of Sri Lanka

Ocean University was established by Parliament Act No 31 in 2014. The objective of the University is to conduct academic and professional education and vocational training activities in fisheries, marine, and nautical engineering to fulfill and develop the needs of the fisheries and allied sector.

4. Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC)

The Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC) was established in 1991 under the Tertiary and Vocational Education Act No. 20 of 1990 and reconstituted as a statutory body by the TVE (Amendment) Act. No 50 of 1999. Major Objectives of TVEC are Policy Development, Planning, Co-ordination and Development of the Tertiary Education and Vocational Education at all levels in keeping with human resource needs of the economy, Development and Maintenance of a nationally recognized system for award the Tertiary and Vocational Education certificates and Development and Maintenance of academic and training standards for institutes, agencies and all other TVET providers.

5. Skills for Inclusive Growth Project (S4IG)

Skills for Inclusive Growth supports sustainable job creation and business growth in four districts of Sri Lanka: Ampara, Batticaloa, Polonnaruwa, and Trincomalee. The program assists local communities to establish new tourism businesses and improve existing offerings through targeted and flexible skills development training. The program encourages skills development across the tourism value chain, from food and beverage suppliers, tours, recreation and cultural heritage activities, national parks, and health and beauty services. Accessing tourism skills

development enables individuals and businesses to better meet the needs of a growing tourist market.

6. Skill Sector Development Program (SSDP)

The Sector Skills Development Program (SSDP) is a mega initiative in the skills development sector with the support of development partners as the successor of the Technical Education Development Project (TEDP) supported by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). This program is being executed by the Sector Skills Development Division (SSDD) under the purview of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skills Development (MYASD) {Currently Ministry of Skills Development & Vocational Training (MSDVT)} for a period of seven years commencing from 2014 onwards. The specialty of this program is result-based funding with help of disbursement linked indicators.

The major objective of this program is to build an efficient skills development system to meet the demands of local as well as foreign labor markets with the support of ADB and World Bank along with other development partners [9]. Hence, the overall objective of this program is to provide a constructive platform for better alignment and coordination of assistance in the TVET sector. Thus, all development partners enable to align their ongoing programs with this national requirement and channel their future initiatives through SSDP by closely cooperating with SSDD. Accordingly, the SSDP has been formulated to bring its overarching outcome that implant an efficient skills education system in the country by 2020 by achieving five specific objectives such as improving quality, access, relevance, supportive policies, system, and structure for skills training.

7. Vocational Training Authority

Vocational Training Authority of Sri Lanka, established under the Vocational Training Authority Act No. 12 of 1995, is the premier institute that conducts vocational training programs in the government sector. Vocational Training Authority of Sri Lanka has been functioning for 20 years and contributed extensively to the national economy through providing vocational training to the youth throughout the island. It comprised of a network of 220 centers, consisting of 07 National Vocational Institutes, 22 District Vocational Training Centers, and 191 Vocational Training Centers established at Divisional Secretariats level, the course duration from 45 days to 2 years, are being conducted under 18 fields. Nearly 30,000 youth are enrolled in these courses per annum.

8. Sri Lanka Institute of Printing

Sri Lanka Institute of Printing, the pioneer professional body committed to the advancement of knowledge, skills, and expertise in the Printing & Graphic Arts industry. Develop competitiveness of Printing & Graphic Arts Enterprises. Ensure increased foreign exchange earnings through developing a multi-skilled workforce for Global Printing & Digital Arts Industry. Develop SLIOP as a dynamic world-class enterprise support one-stop service center for the Local Printing & Digital Arts Industry. Sustain empowered competent and contended staff in SLIOP.

9. National Apprentice & Industrial Training Authority

NAITA is a state body having the capacity of providing industry-acceptable technical and vocational training for youths with different abilities through the island-wide industrial and institutional-based training providing system with fully-fledged updated training facilities and techniques. NAITA provide a competent and confident professional workforce to meet the industrial requirement and standards with the utilization of minimal physical and competent human resources towards the journey of becoming a national icon in the field of technical and vocational training.

10. Ceylon – German Technical Training Institute

The Ceylon – German Technical Training Institute (CGTTI) is the foremost institute in Sri Lanka for the training of skilled technicians in the field of Automobile Engineering and allied trades. The institute was originally established in 1959 at the premises of the central workshop of the Sri Lanka Transport Board at Werahera. This was a result of an agreement entered into between the government of the Federal Republic of Germany and Sri Lanka in 1958 to supply trained Technicians in the maintenance of the bus fleet, which belonged to the Sri Lanka Transport Board. The Institute was shifted to Moratuwa in 1974 and re-named as the Ceylon-German Technical Training Institute. It was originally set up and managed by a German Director and his German staff until February 1976. Then its management was handed over to Sri Lanka, under a Director /Principal and local Staff. At present, The CGTTI comes under the purview of the Ministry of Skills Development & Vocational Training.

11. Department of Technical Education and Training

Department of Technical Education and Training, which commenced with the establishment of Technical school in 1893, with 25 students and has completed 122 years of services. This Department, which was established under the Education Act of Sri Lanka was converted to a grade one Department in the year 1994. Currently, this Department is functioning under the purview of the Ministry of Skills Development and Vocational Training. This Department provides new Technical and Technology Education and Training to the Sri Lankan youth community from 09 Colleges of Technology and 30 Technical Colleges, which were established, covering all Districts in the island.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

2.1 Main Objectives

- Identify the impact of training of skills on eradicating unemployment.

2.2 Sub Objectives

- Identifying what kind of training programs and policies should implement to eradicate unemployment and the outcomes of those programs and policies.
- Identifying the challenges when implementing those programs and policies and remedies for them.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is a quantitative study. It hopes to randomly select samples from, "below G. C. E. O/L", "G. C. E. O/L", and "G. C. E. A/L & above" three educational categories. In this study interviews, questioners, and telephone conversations are used to gather primary data, as well as past research papers, magazines, bank reports, and web pages used as secondary data. Excel sheets and SPSS software are used for the data analysis.

3.1 Empirical Pieces of Evidence

1. In 2009 Michael Lechner and Conny Wunsch [10] have conducted a study on the effect of training programs on unemployment when the unemployment rate is high. They estimated short-run, medium-run, and long-run individual labor market effects of training programs for the unemployed by selected programs participation

on a monthly basis over a ten-year period. Since analyzing the effectiveness of training over such a long period is impossible with experimental data, they used an administrative database compiled for evaluating German training programs. This study concludes that there is a clear positive relationship between the effectiveness of the training programs and the unemployment rate over time.

2. In 2021 A.R.P. Weerasiri and G.R.S.R.C. Samaraweera [11] have studied 'Factors influencing Youth Unemployment in Sri Lanka'. The main purpose of this study is to identify the factors influencing youth unemployment in Sri Lanka using a sub-sample of 3,562 youths derived from the Sri Lanka Labor Force Survey, 2018.

This study uses the quantitative approach and this study employ secondary data to analyze youth unemployment factors. This study uses the secondary data collection method using micro-level data of the Sri Lanka Labor Force Survey (SLLFS) in 2018.

They revealed that skill mismatch, including language and digital literacy, and geographical mismatch, including province, influences youth unemployment in Sri Lanka [12]. Moreover, this study showed that the probability of being unemployed is high among young females, youths who are educated up to post-secondary level, vocationally trained youths, and youths with high levels of language and digital literacy [13]. The findings highlight the importance of improving the country's human capital in terms of education and national training and allow policymakers to rethink the possible reforms in the education and vocational training systems to improve knowledge, skills, attitudes, and the mindsets of the youth targeting job orientations [14; 15].

3. In 2010 Inoka Aruni Dasanayaka [16] have done an empirical study of the relationship between training and job performance in semi-government organizations in Sri Lanka. It was an analytical and hypothesis testing type research. The results of the study were training practice directly contributes to the improvement of employees' job performance. The researcher concluded that there is a positive relationship between existing training activities and the improvement of employees' job-related ability and job-related motivation.

4. In 2016 Aderonke Osikominu [17] has conducted a study on the dynamics of training programs for the unemployed. It was social experimental type research. They say that time plays an important role in both the design and interpretation of evaluation studies of training programs. While the start and duration of a training program are closely linked to the evolution of job opportunities, the impact of training programs in the short and long term changes over time. The conclusion they made is 'Job-search training and occupational skills training are both effective'.

5. In 2015 Uruthiran Sivachelvy [18] conducted a study on the effectiveness of vocational training in the western province with reference to Government Vocational Institutions.

The sample included 150 students and 150 academic staff members. Data were collected using questionnaires and interviews. Pearson's correlation coefficient and regression analysis were done using SPSS software to identify relationships among variables. The degree of the satisfaction of the course and the employment were considered as the independent variables while the performance of the students and employability of the students were considered as the dependent variables.

The findings of the study revealed that the degree of satisfaction of employment of the students has a strong relationship with the effectiveness of vocational training. The degree of satisfaction of staff about the course had a moderate relationship, whereas the degree of satisfaction of students about the course and degree of satisfaction of staff on employment showed a weak relationship on the effectiveness of the vocational training.

6. In 2011 Open Society Foundations [19] conducted a study of employment and training. It states that poor employment prospects are perhaps the most clearly discernible symptom of social disadvantage. They examined in the guide represent some of the most disadvantaged areas in Europe. The higher unemployment rates in those areas showed that they correlate with locations where Muslims make up a large proportion of the population. There is a recognized cycle of disadvantage that needs to be broken, as Muslims and other marginalized groups tend to be located in areas with poor opportunities in housing, education, employment, and training, each of which reinforces and exacerbates the other factors and make it very

difficult for such groups to integrate or progress in the broader society. As the Open Society Foundations' research on education confirms, poor educational outcomes have an impact on labor market participation. They state that employment patterns are a gauge of the relative standing of different groups in society. They conclude that "Access to vocational training and participation in the labor market remains at the core of economic integration, which requires not only opportunities for employment, but employment in the mainstream labor market and in jobs that are commensurate with individuals' skills and qualifications."

7. In 2007 Inge Sieben [20] have done a study on the topic of "Does training trigger turnover - or not? - The impact of formal training on graduates' job search behavior" This study turnover in two ways. First, insights from the human capital perspective are contrasted with insights from the commitment perspective. Second, several aspects of training are simultaneously studied in one model: training intensity (incidence and duration), specificity (type of training, location, and objectives), and funding (payment and timing). The results show, in line with the human capital perspective, that specific training decreases female graduates' probability to search for a new job. Other findings are more in favor of the commitment perspective. After controlling for training intensity and specificity, employer-funded training is associated with lower levels of job search for male graduates. In addition, female graduates who follow management training are less likely to search for a new job. Other aspects of training are not related to job search behavior.

8. In 2012 Bénédicte Rouland [21] have conducted research on the topic of "Training, Unemployment, and Efficiency." This thesis is comprised of five chapters on firm-specific training investments, job destruction, and inefficiencies issues. Firm-specific training investments refer to firm-provided training spells that workers benefit from in their adult life while in employment. This thesis is concerned both with the positive aspects of firm-specific training and job destructions, and with their normative implications, but does not go about general training. Throughout, "firm-specific training" is synonymous with "on-the-job training" or "training". The goal of this paper was to address heterogeneity issues about wages, job destruction rates, and training investments. To that end, they have considered a matching model with idiosyncratic productivity shocks, endogenous

firm-specific investments in training, and workers' heterogeneity according to ex-ante unobservable abilities. From numerical experiments confronted to real data, they have shown that this framework is credible enough to deal with the two sources of inefficiency that arise in such a theoretical framework -a holdup problem and a composition externality in the search process. The optimal labor market policy then consists in implementing both training subsidies firing taxes. In a first-best approach, both instruments should depend on the ability level.

9. In 2006 Leela Hebbar [22] did research on 'Impact of vocational training for the unemployed of uncommonly served groups.' This paper aims to examine the impact of vocational training on unemployed workers not typically studied: women enrolled in engineering or computer programming training and high school dropouts. The study used data from New Jersey's Individual Training Grant (ITG) program and a quasi-experimental design, it compared the ITG groups' re-employment and wage recovery rates with a matched comparison group.

The article finds that women enrolled in the male-dominated fields of engineering or computer programming experience re-employment rates that are lower than or similar to those in the comparison group, but they experience higher wage recovery in the 8th and 12th quarters after claiming unemployment insurance (UI). Hispanic high school dropouts experience both higher re-employment and wage recovery rates than their comparison group, but the wage recovery advantage disappears when those enrolled in truck driving training are removed from the sample. Further, white and black high school dropouts experience no re-employment or wage recovery advantage. For all participants, the study finds participants experience a higher re-employment rate than the comparison group beginning in the fifth quarter and experience no wage recovery advantage.

10. In 2012 Costanza Biavaschi, et al. [23]. Zimmermann conducted research on 'Youth Unemployment and Vocational Training.' This paper focuses on the determinants of the labor market situation of young people in developed countries and the developing world, with a special emphasis on the role of vocational training and education policies. This study used longitudinal data with a full set of individual characteristics. Training and ALMP programs

accompanied by a systematic collection of evaluation data. Researchers highlighted the role of demographic factors, economic growth, and labor market institutions in explaining young people's transition into work. They assessed differences in the setup and functioning of the vocational education and training policies in major world regions, as an important driver of differential labor market situation of youth. Based on their analysis they argue in favor of vocational education and training systems combining work experience and general education and give some policy recommendations regarding the implementation of education and training systems adapted to a country's economic and institutional context.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper mainly aims to identify the impact of training of skills on eradicating unemployment. The study uses quantitative data using samples according to the educational level. Previous studies done by researchers have concluded that there is a huge positive relationship between skills training and the eradication of unemployment. Although there are a huge amount of skills training centers in Sri Lanka, there still have an unskilled unemployed population in the country. The main reason for this can be identified as due to the fact that the people in Sri Lanka are not guided wisely by responsible parties to choose or join existing training institutes or programs which they are capable of and which suit their existing skills and preferences. These study findings revealed the perceived usefulness of existing training institutes and their programs on eradication of unemployment as well as the usefulness of implementing effective training programs in Sri Lanka.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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