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(CETMe)

A Tracer Study of the OUSL Graduates - 2021(II)

B Gayathri Jayatilleke
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- The OUSL graduands of 2021 for taking part in this online survey and spending their valuable time in filling the questionnaire online
- Mr S Daladawatta, Illustrationist of the CETMe for designing the cover page.

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A Tracer Study of the OUSL Graduates of 2021(II)

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of the data collected from the OUSL graduands who were conferred their bachelor's degrees at the General Convocation 2022(I) held on 5 January 2023 at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH).

The main objectives of this report are to:

- describe the main socio-economic background of the graduands of the bachelor's degree programmes and
- identify the challenges and constraints faced by the OUSL learners while following the degree programme through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) methodology.

2. Methodology

This research study mainly used the survey method and data collection was carried out online just prior to the general convocation.

The order of proceedings of the General Convocation 2022(I) was also used as documentary evidence to validate the data obtained from the questionnaires.

There was a total of 1077 graduands (First session 682 and Second session – 395) who were conferred undergraduate degrees, postgraduate diplomas, postgraduate degrees and postgraduate research degrees at this convocation. All the OUSL bachelor's degree holders who were conferred their degrees at the General Convocation 2022(I) were taken as the study population.

As in previous tracer studies, questionnaires were used to collect data from the OUSL graduands. The questionnaire was based on the questionnaire provided by the University Grants Commission (UGC) to conduct tracer studies across national universities. Some of the questions were modified to suit the context of the OUSL where the learners follow the degree programmes through ODL methodology. It consisted of 43 questions covering learners' demographics (age, ethnicity, religious diversity, geographical distribution etc.), educational qualifications, employment status and income levels of the employed learners at the time of the registration and at the time of the graduation, their career achievements and goals, and the perceptions on the components of their respective degree programmes and their learning experience at the OUSL. The survey questionnaire consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended questions.

Unlike in previous years, the tracer study questionnaire was administered online using Google Form and the weblink was shared among all the OUSL graduands by the Assistant Registrar (AR) of the examination division of the OUSL. This measure was taken to allow graduands to fill the form online instead of coming to the OUSL premises physically to handover the forms during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Responses to the online questionnaire were screened for multiple responses. Data were cross-checked with the order of proceedings of the General Convocation 2022(I) for further clarification before the analysis. Closed-ended data were statistically analyzed using SPSS 12.0 application software. Content analysis was used for open-ended questions to identify major themes and categories.

Only the data of the graduands of the bachelor's degree programmes {Bachelor of Industrial Studies Honours (BIS), Bachelor of Software Engineering Honours (BSE), Bachelor of Technology Honours in Engineering (BTEC), Bachelor of Science Honours in Natural Science (BSc) and Bachelor of Science General in Natural Science (NS)} were analysed and presented in this report.

2.1 Response rate of the questionnaires

Response rates were calculated considering two options:

- Option A - considering only the total number of awardees at the convocation (no. collected/total no. of awardees x 100).
- Option B - omitting the number of absentia and considering only the awardees who participated at the convocation (no. collected /(total no. of awardees – awardees in absentia) x 100).

Responses to the online questionnaire were significantly low irrespective of weekly reminders by the AR/Examination division. Response rate was calculated after screening the data for multiple responses as some graduands had responded again once they got a reminder. The response rates for all the degree programmes were far below the accepted standard response rate of 60% for surveys (Fincham, 2008). The highest response rate of 31% was obtained for the Bachelor of Software Engineering Honours (BSE) while 16% was received for the Bachelor of Technology Honours in Engineering (BTEC). The response rates for the other two bachelor's degree programmes were reasonably low: 10% for the Bachelor of Industrial Studies Honours (BIS) and 9% for the Bachelor of Science (BSc). Only one graduand of the Bachelor of Science Honours degree programme responded (out of nine) and was included in the BSc General database for analysis. Refer Annex 1 for more details. Since the response rates were significantly low, the findings of these bachelor's degree programmes should not be generalized and need cautious interpretation. However, suggestions/comments stated for the open-ended questions provided valuable insights for the improvement of the current practices of the respective degree programmes of the OUSL.

3. Findings

3.1 Output of the OUSL graduates

This convocation conferred 1077 graduands: bachelor's degree holders (709), postgraduate diplomats (1), master's degree holders (366) and one master of philosophy degree holder - (Order of proceedings of the General Convocation, 2022(I) – Figure 1.

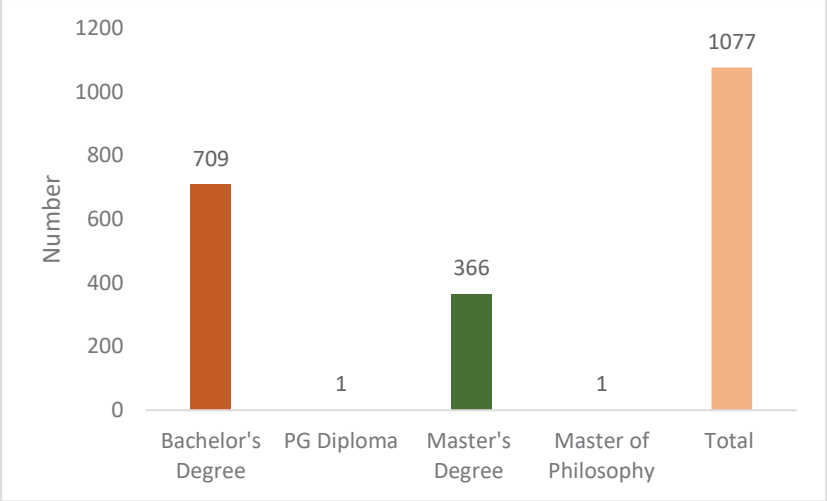

Figure 1 - Output of the OUSL graduates
Source: Order of proceedings of the General Convocation, 2022(I)

Class distribution of bachelor's degree programmes of the OUSL was taken from the Order of proceedings of the General Convocation, 2022(I) and illustrated in Figure 2.

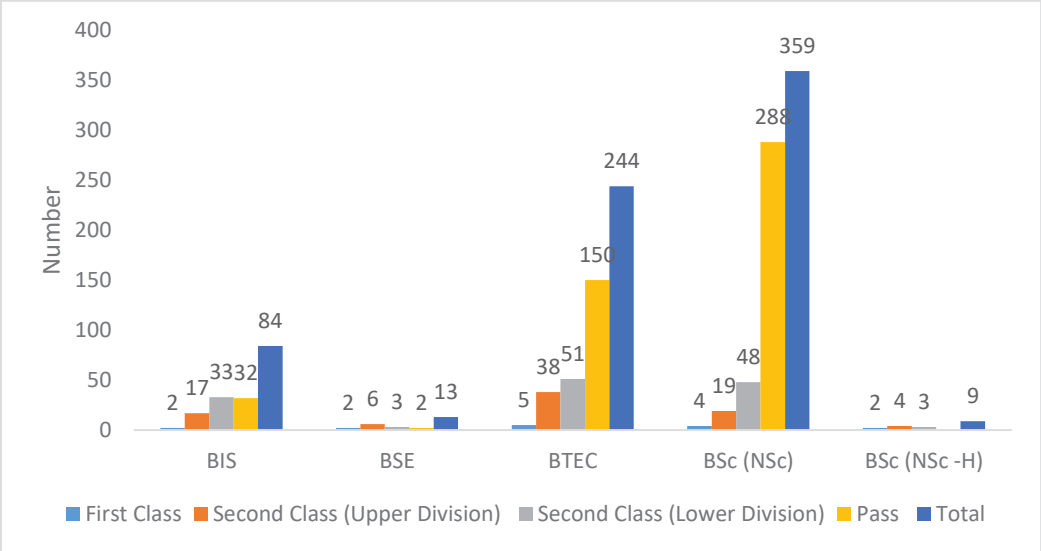

Figure 2 - Achievements of the OUSL graduates 2021
Source: Order of proceedings of the General Convocation 2022(I)

3.2 Socio-economic background of the graduands of the bachelor's degrees

3.2.1 Gender

Data related to gender were obtained from the Information Technology (IT) Division of the OUSL. Females were most prominent in BIS and BSc degree programmes while males were higher in BSE and BTEC programmes (Figure 3). More than 80% were females in BSc (82%) like in previous years.

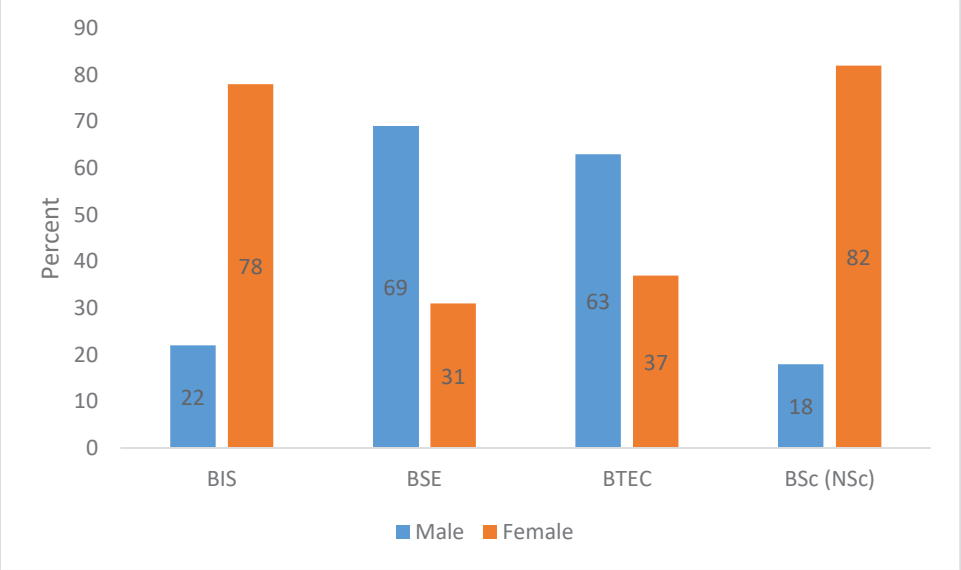

Figure 3 - Gender distribution of the graduands of the bachelor's degrees
Source: OUSL baseline data

3.2.2 Age

The categorization of the age groups in this study was based on the classification used by the Department of Census and Statistics for easy comparisons. The majority of awardees of the bachelor's degree programmes were in the 25-29 years age group except for the BTEC degree programme (Figure 4). The most widely accepted degree programme across all the age groups was the BTEC degree programme.

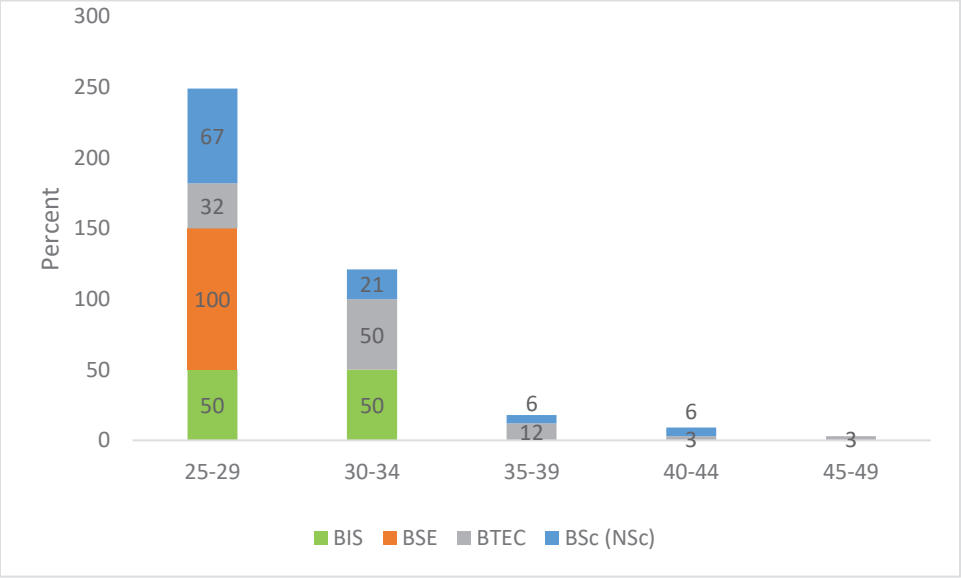

Figure 4 - Age Distribution of the graduands of the bachelor's degrees
Source: Survey data

3.2.3 Civil Status

The civil status varies with the degree programmes, married graduands were more noticeable in the BSc (64%) degree programme while single/married groups were equally distributed in the BTEC degree

programme (50%) - (Figure 5). In contrast, all were single in BSE degree programme while 75% were single in BIS degree programme.

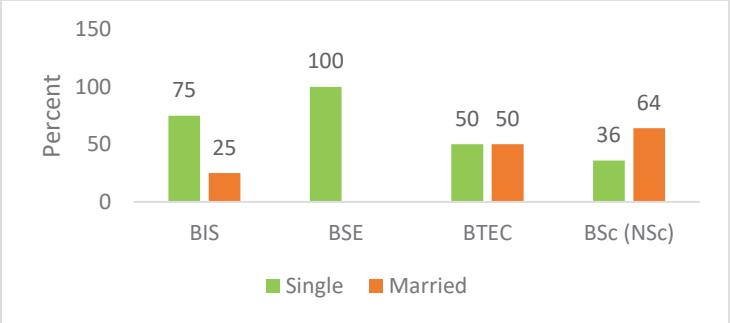

Figure 5 - Civil Status of the graduands of the bachelor's degrees
Source: Survey data

3.2.4 Ethnicity

Sinhalese were the majority in all bachelor's degree programmes (more than 75%) and the participation of the rest of the ethnic groups was not so pronounced in all degree programmes despite the expansion of the services through the OUSL Regional Educational Services (RES) network (Figure 6). However, the response rates for this survey were remarkably low across all the degree programmes and most probably other ethnic groups may not have responded to the survey. Thus, the findings should be interpreted very carefully.

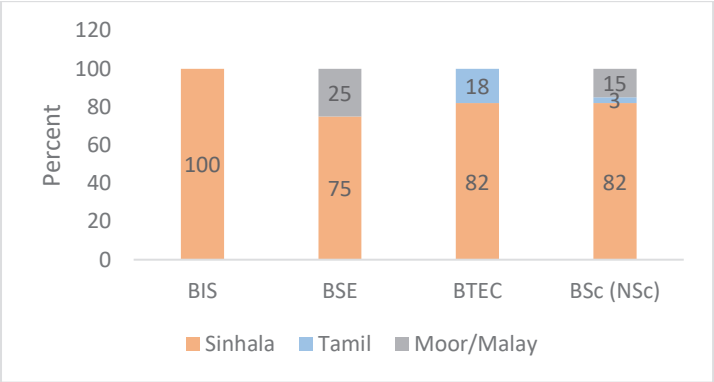

Figure 6 - Ethnicity of the graduands of the bachelor's degrees
Source: Survey data

3.2.5 Religion

Buddhists predominate in all the bachelor's degree programmes as the majority respondents were from the major ethnic group (Figure 7). The participation of other religious groups representing other two ethnic groups was remarkably low across all the degree programmes.

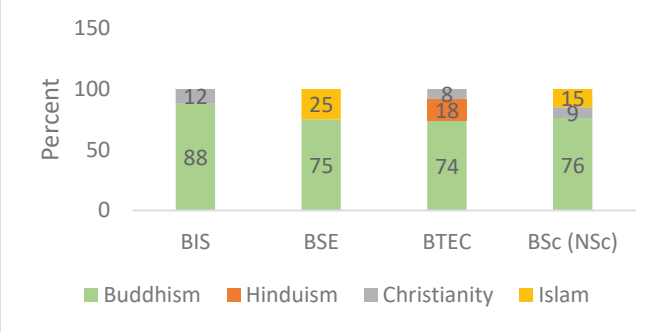

Figure 7- Religion of the graduands of the bachelor's degrees
Source: Survey data

Graduate profiles of the graduands of the bachelor's degrees were given in Figure 8-11.

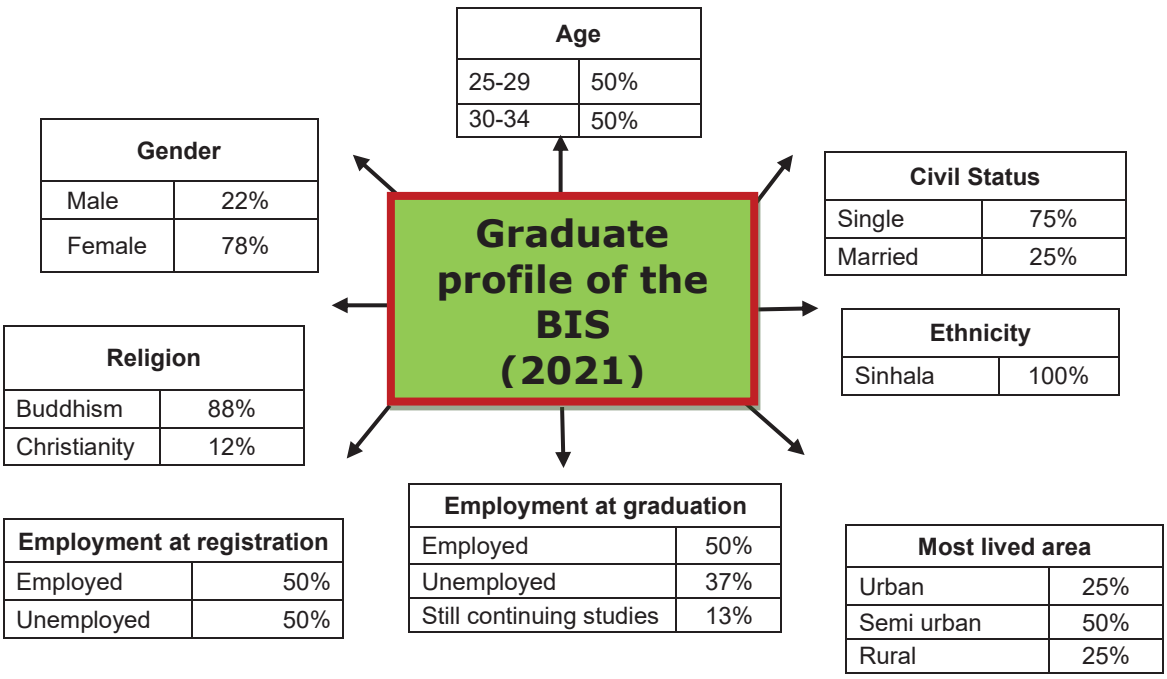

Figure 8 - Graduate Profile of the BIS graduands – 2021
Source: Survey data

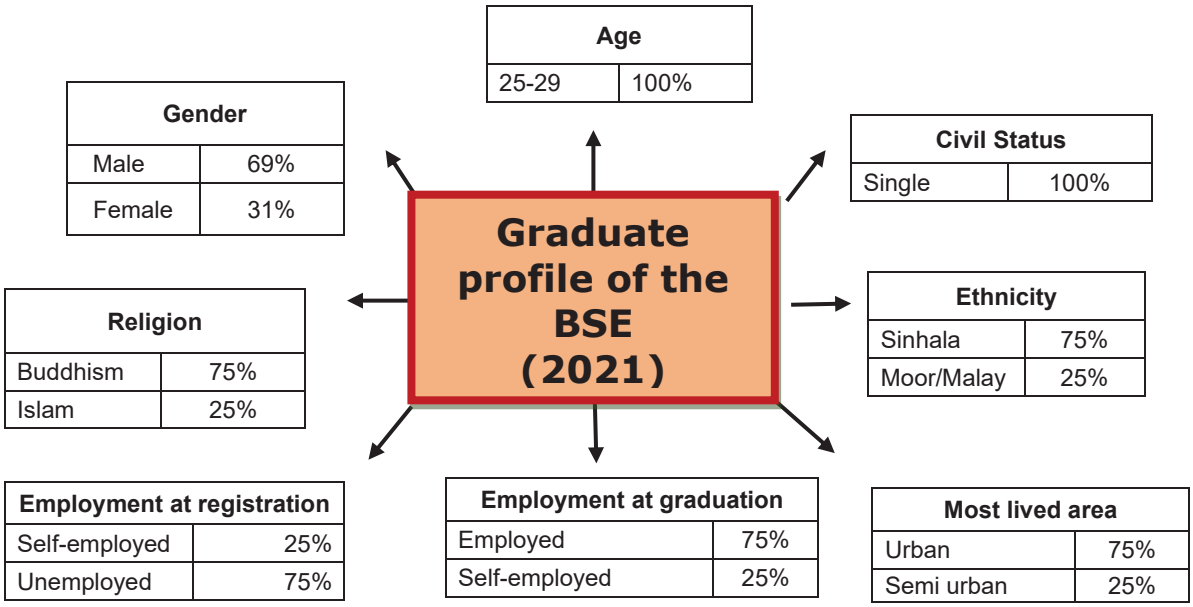

Figure 9 - Graduate Profile of the BSE graduands – 2021
Source: Survey data

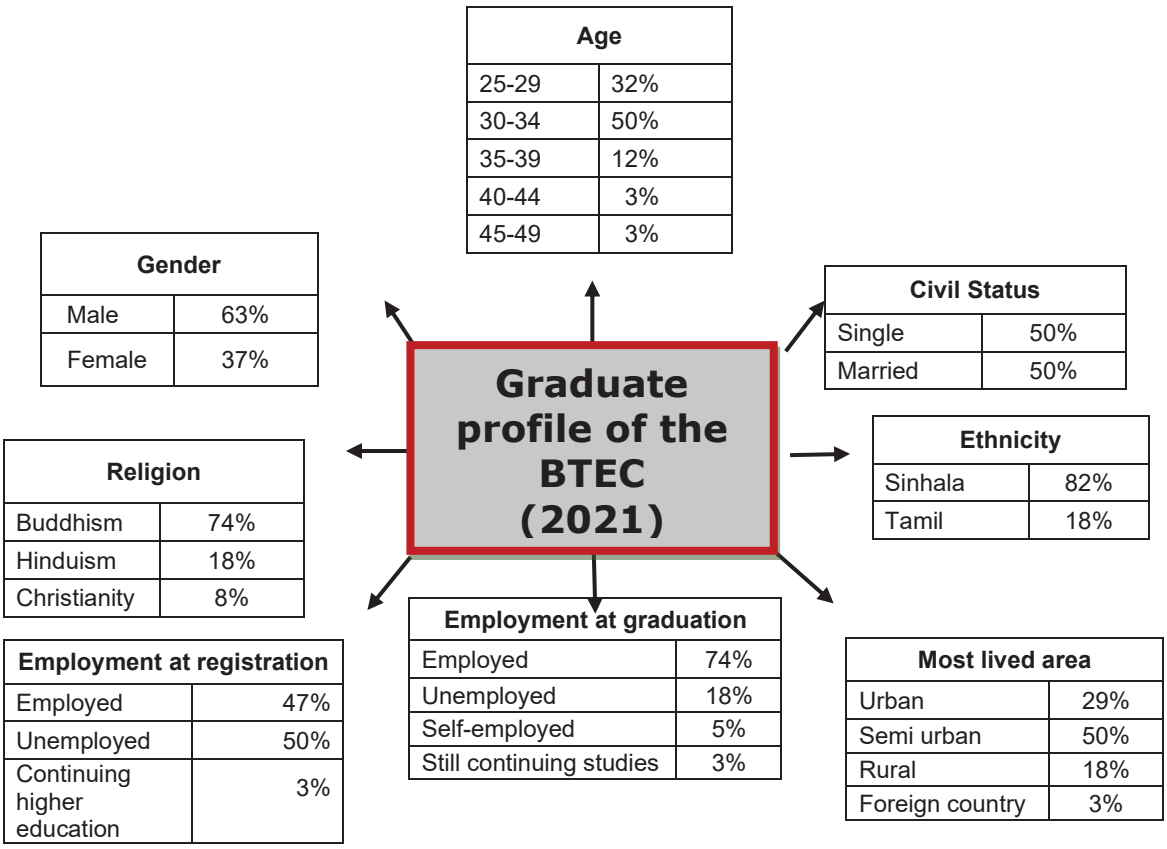

Figure 10 - Graduate Profile of the BTEC graduands – 2021
Source: Survey data

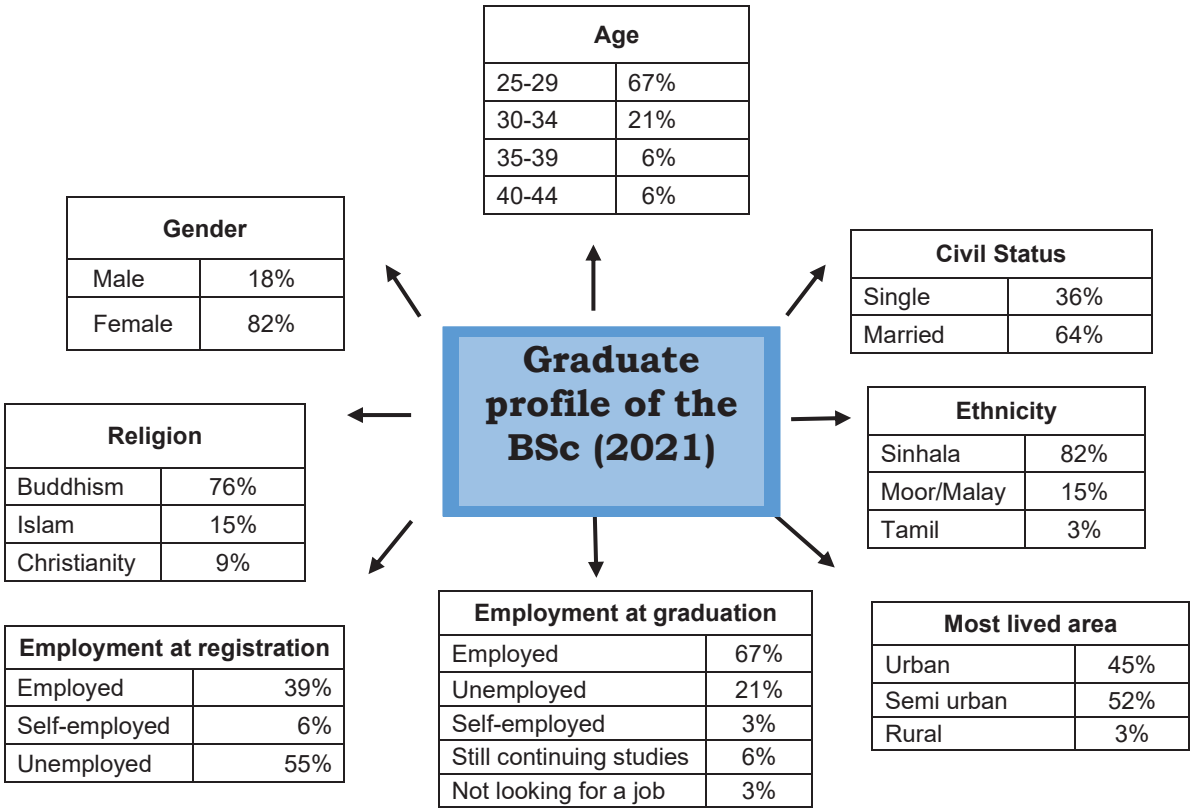

Figure 11- Graduate Profile of the BSc graduands – 2021
Source: Survey data

3.3 Geographical distribution of the graduands of the bachelor's degrees

As an ODL institution, the prime mission of the OUSL is to remove barriers for education and to reach the unreached. In view of this situation, the OUSL has expanded its services to regions and sub-regions with 9 regional centres and 19 study centres, representing all the districts in the country. The nine regional centres are in every province namely, Colombo, Kandy, Matara, Jaffna, Anuradhapura, Batticaloa, Kurunegala, Ratnapura and Badulla. The purpose of this expansion is to enable all learners to pursue higher education while remaining in their own districts.

Findings indicated that most of the graduands were mainly from western province, especially from Colombo, Gampaha and Kalutara (Figure 12).

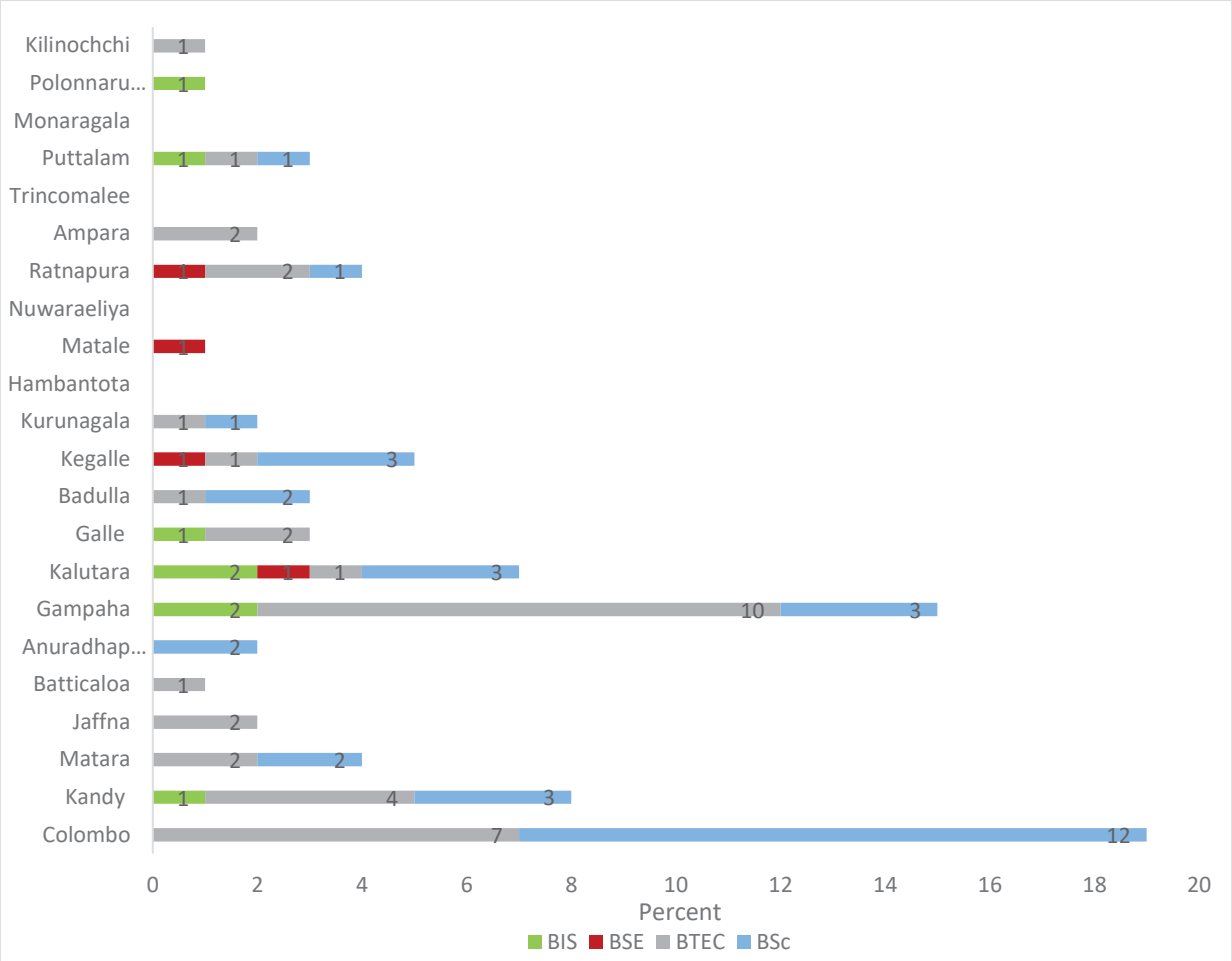

Figure 12 - Outreach of the graduands of the bachelor's degrees
Source: Survey data

In this cohort of graduands of the bachelor's degrees, most of them were living in semi-urban areas except for BSE graduands (Figure 13). Most of them live in urban areas. The findings showed that the graduands from rural areas were comparatively low in BIS, BTEC and BSc degree programmes.

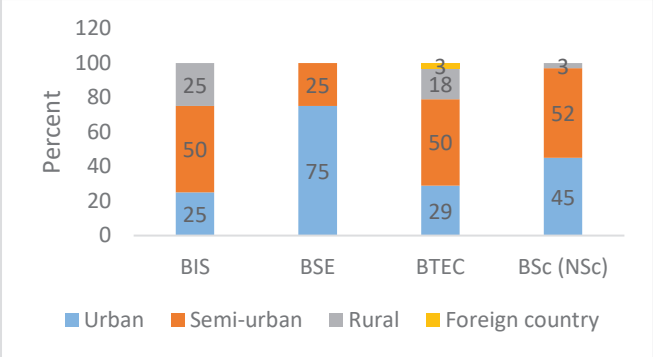

Figure 13 - Most lived areas of the graduands of the bachelor's degrees
Source: Survey data

3.4 English literacy of the graduands of the bachelor's degrees at the time of the registration

When analysed English literacy among this cohort of the graduands of the bachelor's degrees at the time of the registration for their respective bachelor's degree programmes, the majority had received an A grade at the GCE O/L examination (BSc -79%, BTEC – 55%, BIS – 38%) followed by a B grade (Figure 14). All of them had passed English in the GCE O/L examination.

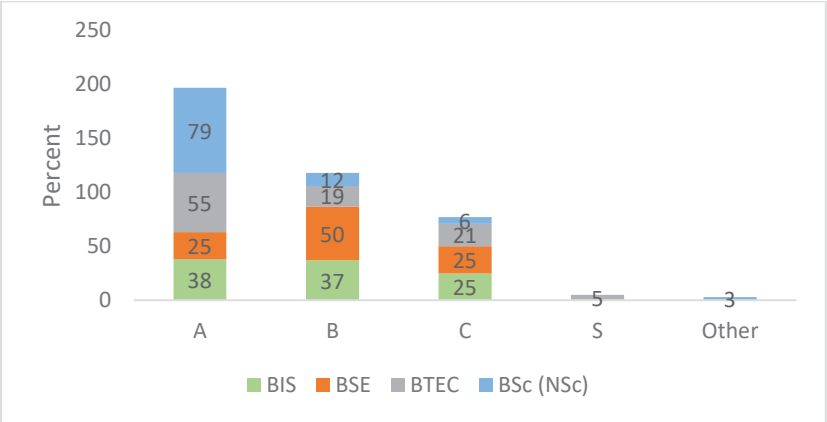

Figure 14 - Grade received for English at the GCE O/L examination of the graduands of the bachelor's degrees
Source: Survey data

In contrast, the majority had obtained a S grade for English at the GCE A/L examination. Eighteen percent of the BTEC degree programme were not successful in passing English in the GCE A/L examination (Figure 15).

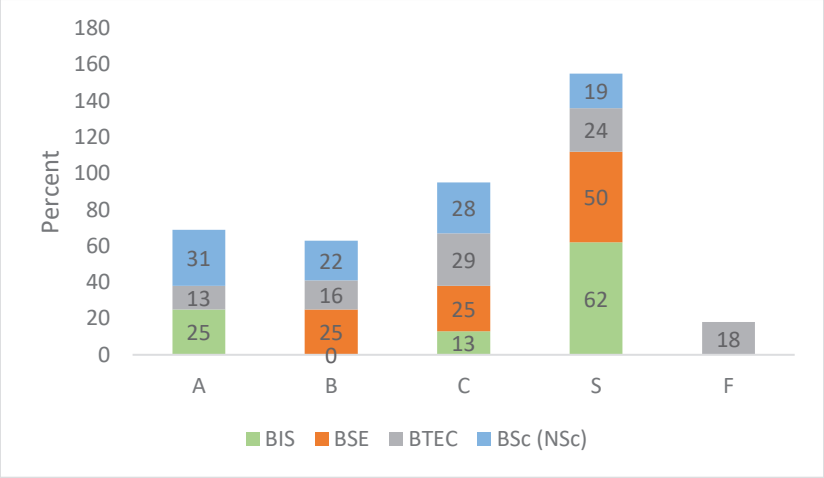

Figure 15 - Grade received for English at the GCE A/L examination of the graduands of the bachelor's degrees
Source: Survey data

3.5 English literacy skills acquired through the OUSL degree programmes

3.5.1 Spoken, listening, writing and reading skills in English

When compared the views expressed by the graduands on their English literacy at the time of the registration of the degree programme and at the completion of the degree, there was a shift towards either "Good" or Excellent" category implying the improvement in the spoken skills among graduands at the end of the degree programme. There were no respondents for the "Very poor" category across all degree programmes and the percentage for the "Poor" category was only observed at the time of the registration of the BTEC (5%) and BSc (6%) degree programmes. There were no respondents for the "Poor" category at the time of the graduation. Thus, we can conclude that these graduands have improved their spoken English skills while following the degree programme (Figure 16).

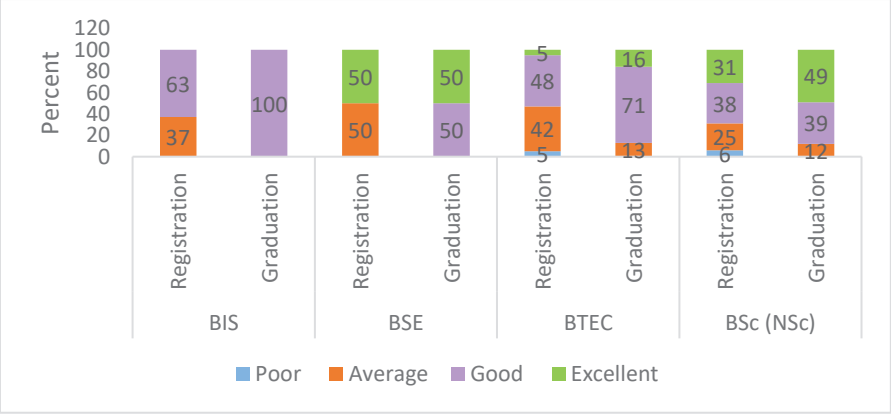

Figure 16 – Spoken skills of English of the graduands of the bachelor's degrees (at the time of the registration and at the time of the graduation)
Source: Survey data

A similar pattern was observed in the listening skills (Figure 17).

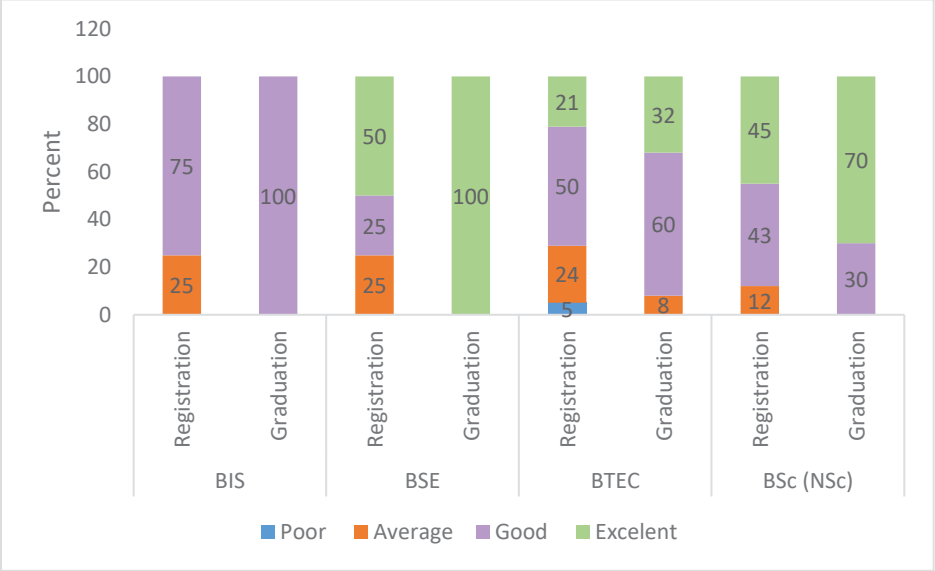

Figure 17 – Listening skills of English of the graduands of the bachelor's degrees (at the time of the registration and at the time of the graduation)
Source: Survey data

The performance of the writing skills of the OUSL undergraduates was also improved during their study period and a similar pattern was observed (Figure 18).

Figure 18 – Writing skills of English of the graduands of the bachelor's degrees (at the time of the registration and at the time of the graduation)
Source: Survey data

Findings showed that the reading skills of the undergraduates also improved during their study period (Figure 19).

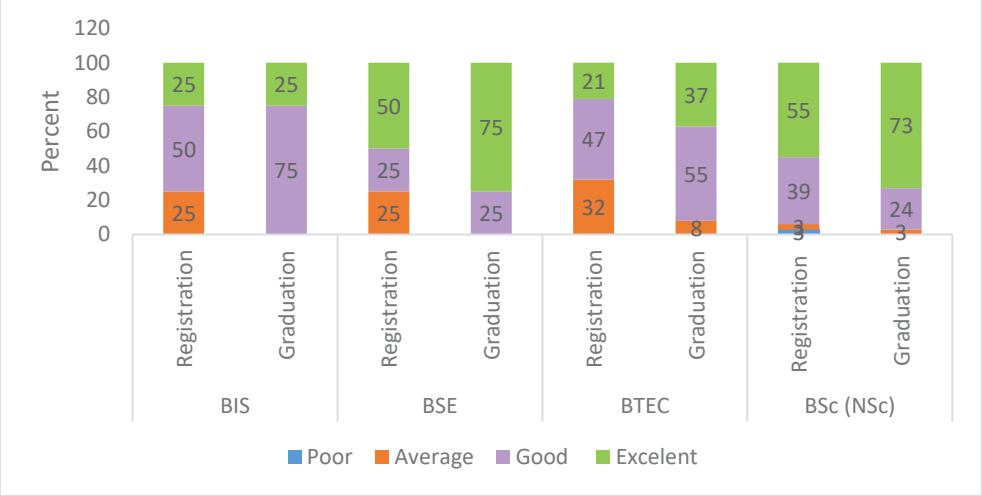

Figure 19 – Reading skills of English of the graduands of the bachelor's degrees (at the time of the registration and at the time of the graduation)
Source: Survey data

Overall, we can infer that English literacy skills of the graduands had improved from the levels that they had at the time of the registration.

3.5.2 ICT skills

In general, graduands felt that their familiarity with the use of email, web and Microsoft office package has increased to a greater extent at the time of the graduation than at the time of the registration (Figure 20). Only a few (BTEC-8% and BSc-3%) had not used a computer at the time of the registration. On both occasions, the majority stated that their level of competency was low with respect to writing computer programmes.

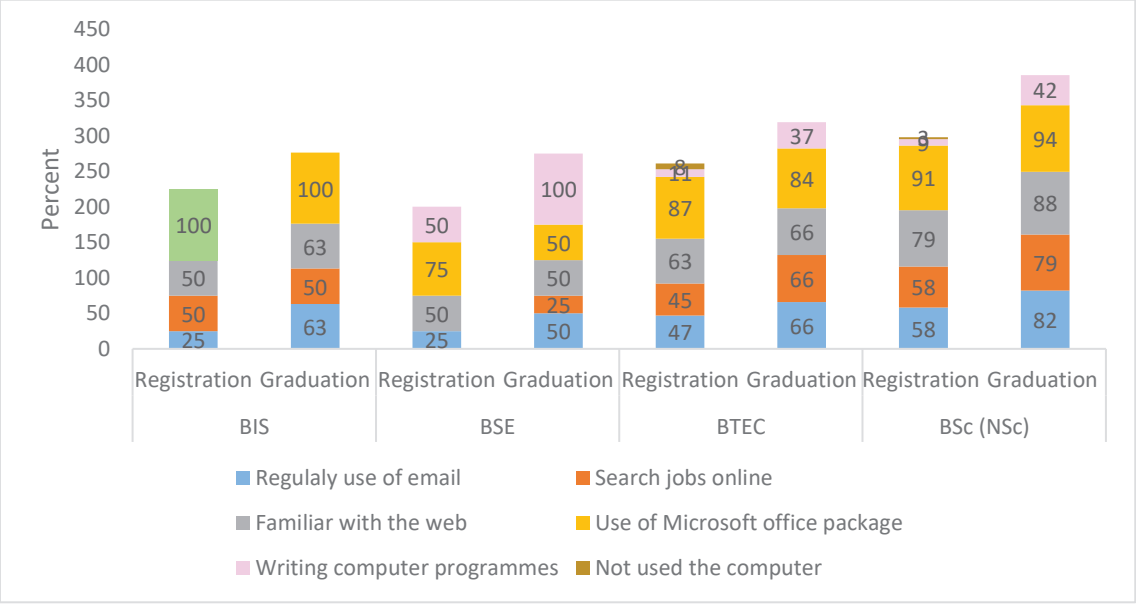

Figure 20 – ICT skills of the graduands of the bachelor's degrees (at the time of the registration and at the time of the graduation)
Source: Survey data

3.6 Employability of the graduands of the bachelor's degrees

Most of the graduands were unemployed when they started the OUSL degree programme (Figure 21). However, more than 50% of graduands had secured a job at the time of the graduation.

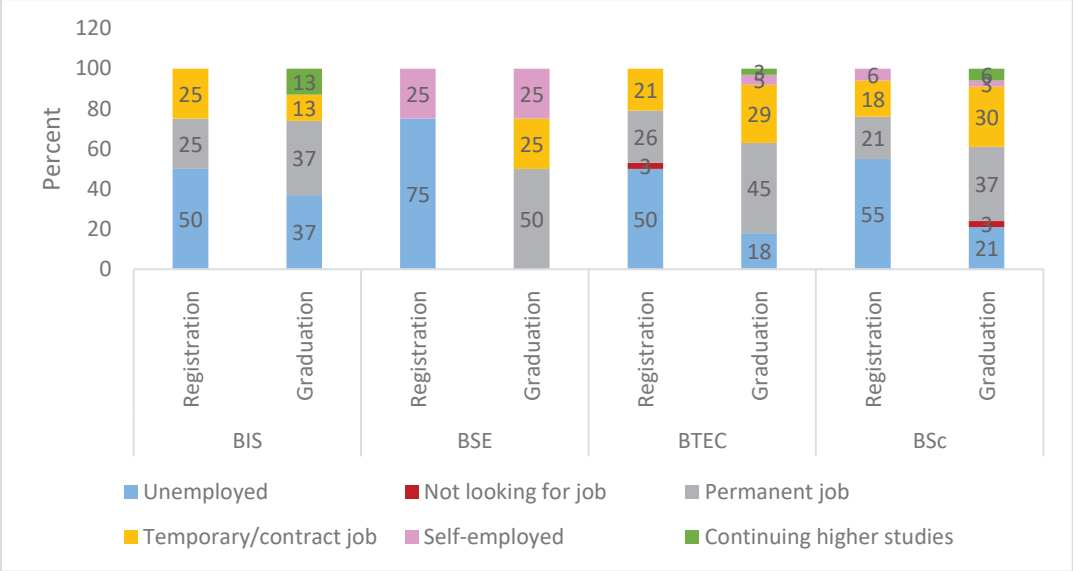

Figure 21- Employment status of the graduands of the bachelor's degrees (at the time of the registration and at the time of the graduation)
Source: Survey data

In this cohort of graduands, the majority were employed in the private sector (Figure 22). However, an equal percentage of science graduates (43%) were employed in the public sector. Twenty-five percent of BSE graduates, 20% BIS and 7% BTEC graduates were self-employed. Three percent of the BTEC graduates were employed in foreign companies.

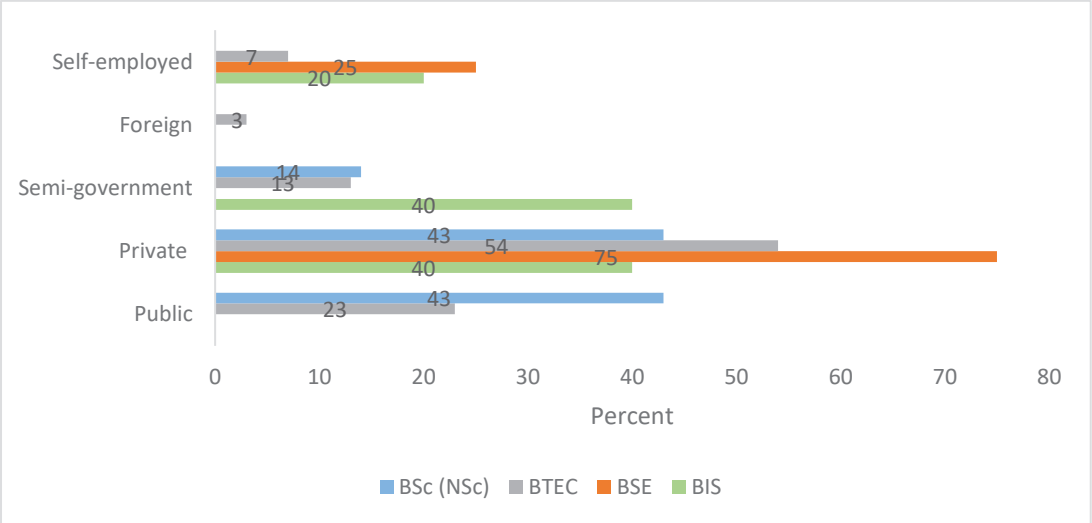

Figure 22 – Job sectors of the employed graduands of the bachelor's degrees
Source: Survey data

The income levels of the graduates vary between Rs. 10,000.00 to over Rs. 75,000.00. All BSE graduands were drawing a salary of more than Rs. 75,000.00 whereas 54% of BTEC and 4% of BSc graduands were also drawing more than Rs. 75,000.00. In contrast, 3% of BTEC graduands were still drawing a salary between Rs. 10,000.00 to Rs. 19,000.00. This finding needs further investigation to find out the exact reasons for the underpayment.

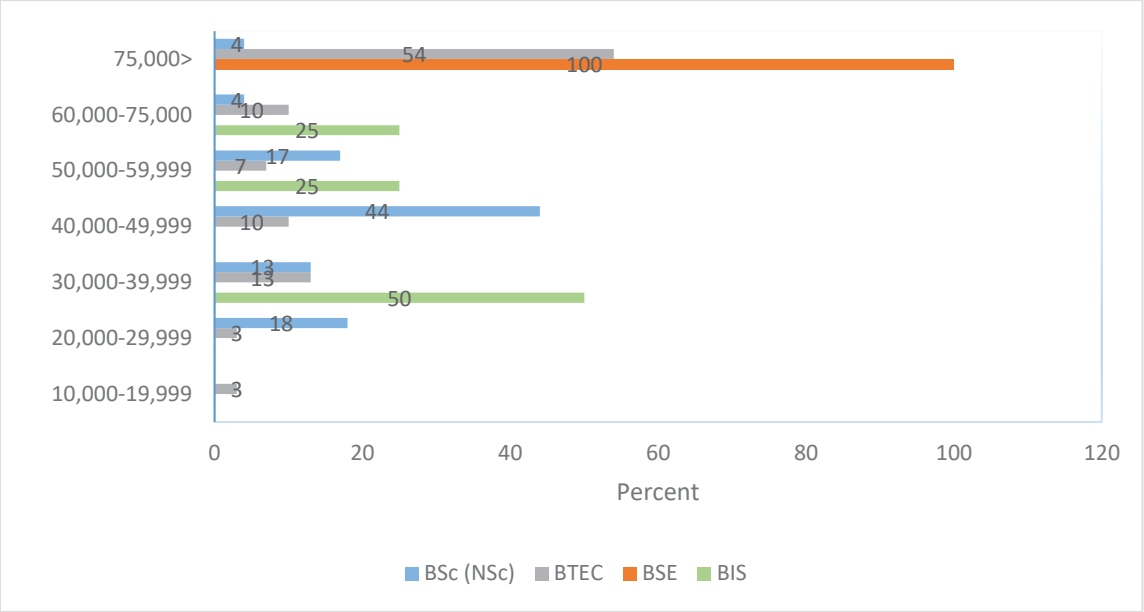

Figure 23 – Gross monthly salary of the graduands of the bachelor's degrees
Source: Survey data

The reasons stated by the unemployed graduands for not finding a job were job scarcity (BIS -100%, BTEC - 86% and BSc – 85%) and lack of job experience (BTEC – 14%). In contrast, 15% of BSc graduands stated that they were very selective in finding jobs (Figure 24).

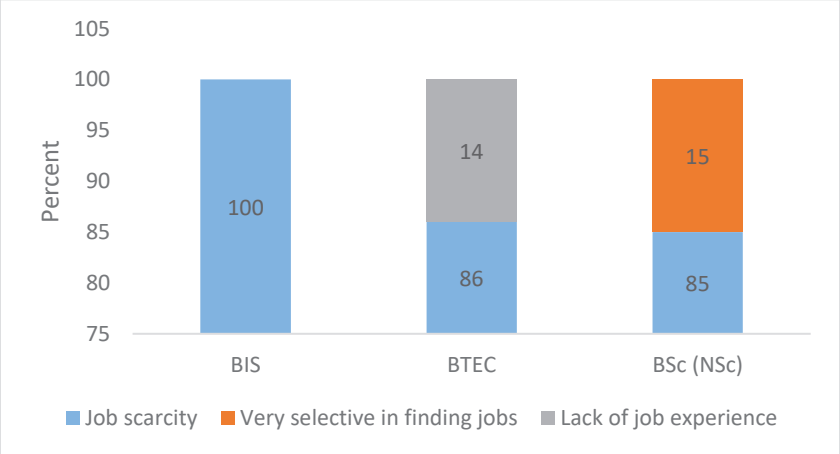

Figure 24 – Reasons for unemployment by the unemployed graduands of the bachelor's degrees
Source: Survey data

3.7 Perceptions on the various components of the OUSL degree programmes

3.7.1 Course materials and other standard textbooks

Perceptions of the graduands pertaining to the statement on "Course materials of the OUSL are effective" for their learning are illustrated in Figure 35.

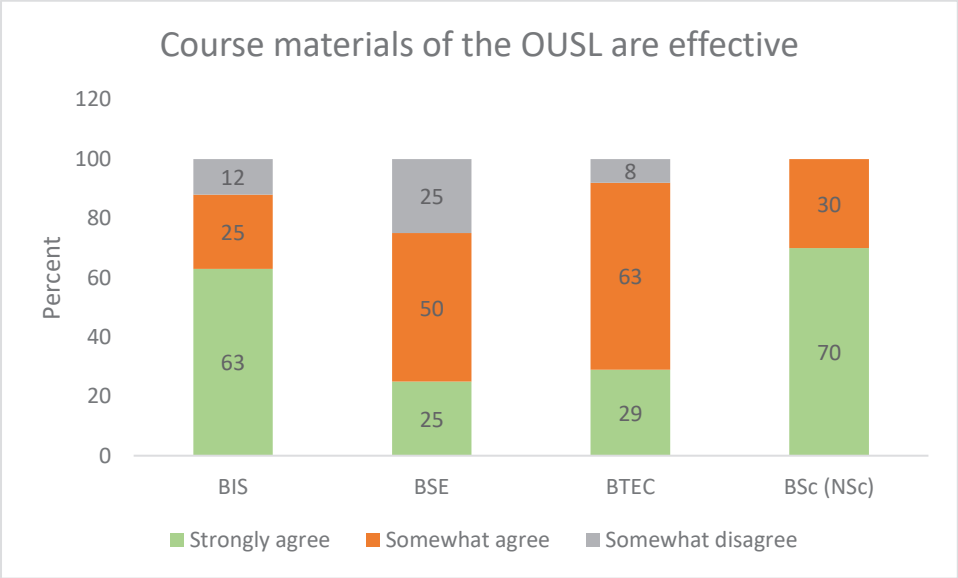

Figure 25 – Perceptions on the effectiveness of the course materials of the degree programmes
Source: Survey data

Seventy percent of the BSc (NSc) and 63% of BIS graduands "Strongly agreed" on the statement while the majority of BSE (50%) and BTEC graduands (63%) had opted for "Somewhat agreed" option. In contrast, 25% of BSE, 12% of BIS and 8% of BTEC graduands "Somewhat disagreed" on the statement. This view is a source of concern as the main vehicle of transferring knowledge to learners in the OUSL is through course materials unlike in conventional universities where the knowledge transfer is through face-to-face instructions by teachers. Therefore, departments should take measures to improve the effectiveness of the course materials.

Figure 26 illustrates the opinions expressed by the graduands relating to the statement "Standard textbooks are also used in courses taught (in addition to course materials)". The majority "Somewhat agreed" on the statement (BTEC – 63%, BSc - 58% and BIS - 39%). Most of the BSE graduands (50%) "Somewhat disagreed" on the statement whereas 12% BIS and 3% of BTEC graduands "Strongly disagreed".

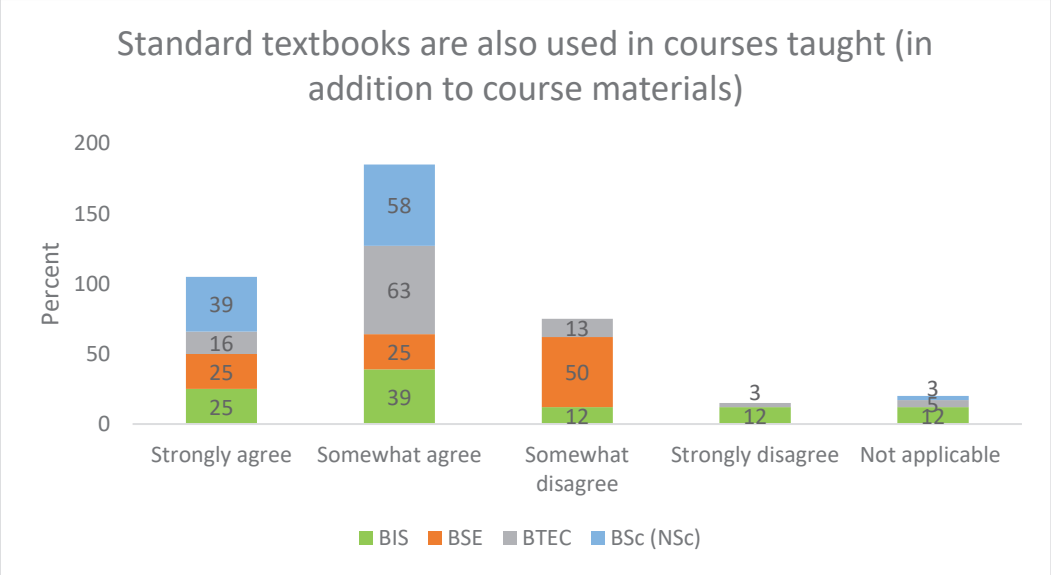

Figure 26 – Perceptions on the use of standard textbooks in addition to course materials of the degree programmes
Source: Survey data

3.7.2 Teaching methods

The views expressed for the statement on "Teaching methods used at the OUSL are effective" are presented in Figure 27.

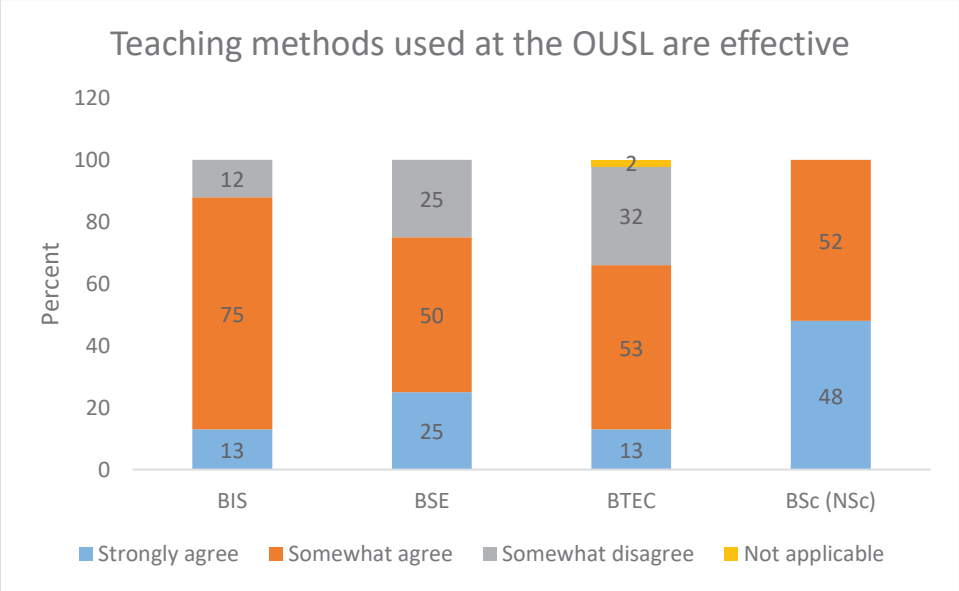

Figure 27– Perceptions on the teaching methods used
Source: Survey data

3.7.3 Tutorials as learning tools

Figure 28 shows that the significant proportion of BTEC (63%), BSE (50%) and BIS (50%) graduands "Somewhat agreed" that the "Tutorials were used as learning tools". However, most of the BSc graduands (55%) "Strongly agreed" on the above statement.

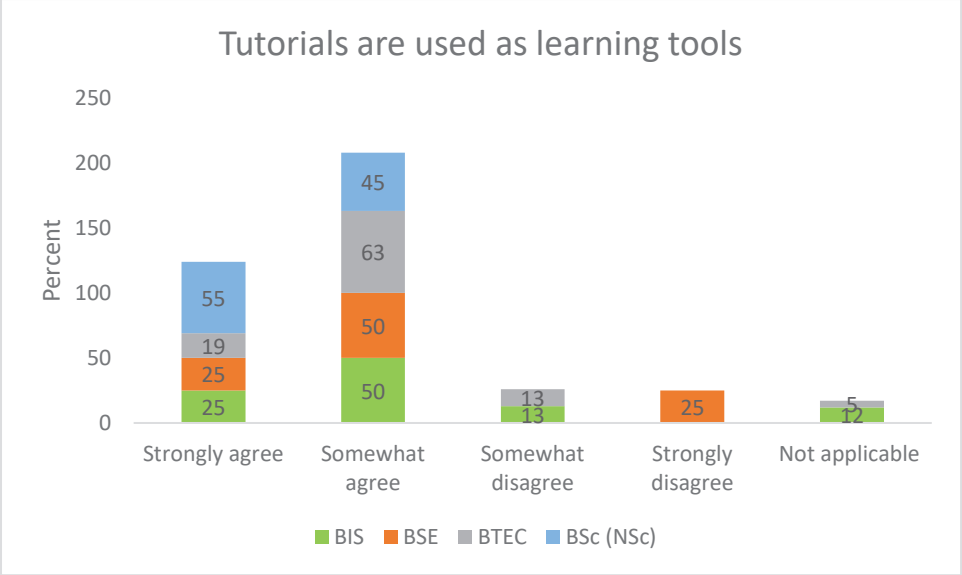

Figure 28 – Perceptions on the tutorials
Source: Survey data

3.7.4 Practical knowledge and training

The views expressed by the graduands on the acquisition of practical knowledge through course materials are illustrated in Figure 29. It was clearly apparent that most graduands of the BTEC (63%), BSc (55%) and BIS (50%) degree programmes "Somewhat agreed" on the statement. In contrast, 50% of BSE graduands "Strongly disagreed" on the statement indicating the need for integrating more practical knowledge in the course.

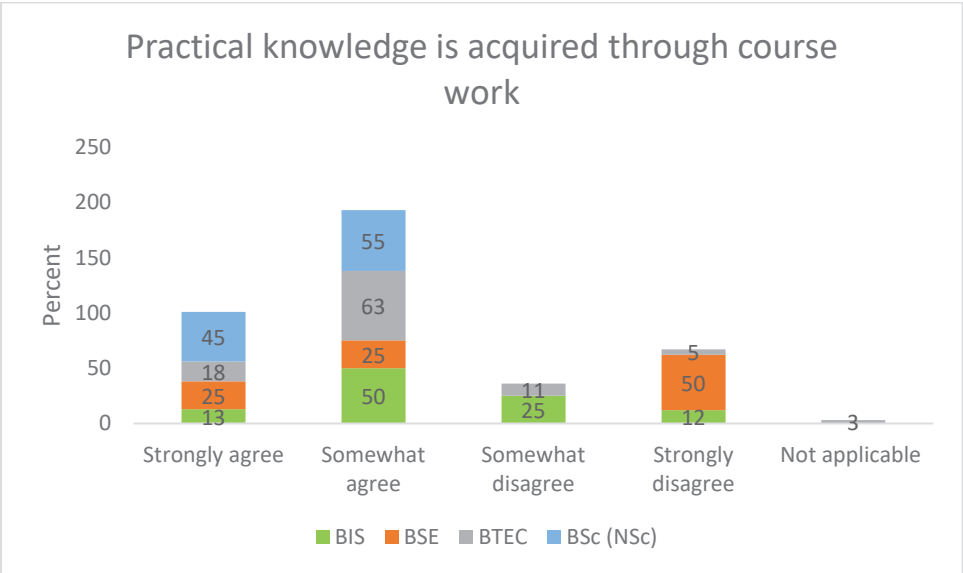

Figure 29 – Perceptions on the acquisition of practical knowledge through course materials
Source: Survey data

Most of all graduates (BTEC – 55%, BSc 52%, BIS – 50% and BSE – 50%) "Somewhat agreed" on the statement (Figure 30). Since some of the graduands had opted for "Strongly disagreed" (25% BSE and 3% BTEC) and "Somewhat disagreed" (25% BIS and 11% BTEC) options, indicating

the need to have more practical training as all these degree programmes are practically driven degree programmes.

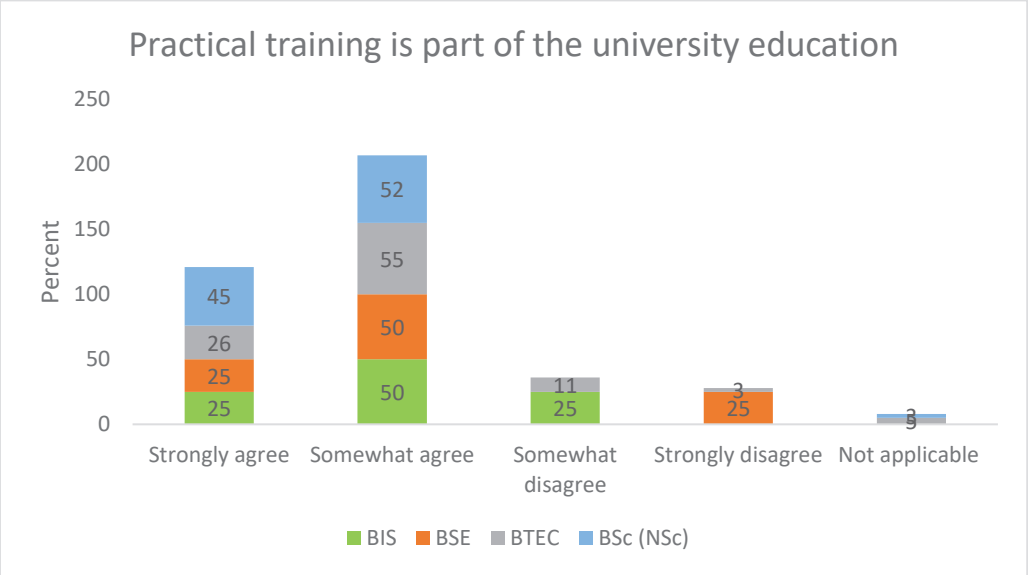

Figure 30 – Perceptions on the practical training
Source: Survey data

3.7.5 Quality of lecturers

Fifty-five percent BSc, 50% BSE, 38% BIS and 21% BTEC graduands "Strongly agreed" on the statement whereas most of BTEC (65%) and BIS (50%) "Somewhat agreed" on the statement (Figure 31). However, some graduands (12% BIS and 9% BTEC) "somewhat disagreed" and 25% BSE graduands "Strongly disagreed" implying the need for improving the quality of lecturers.

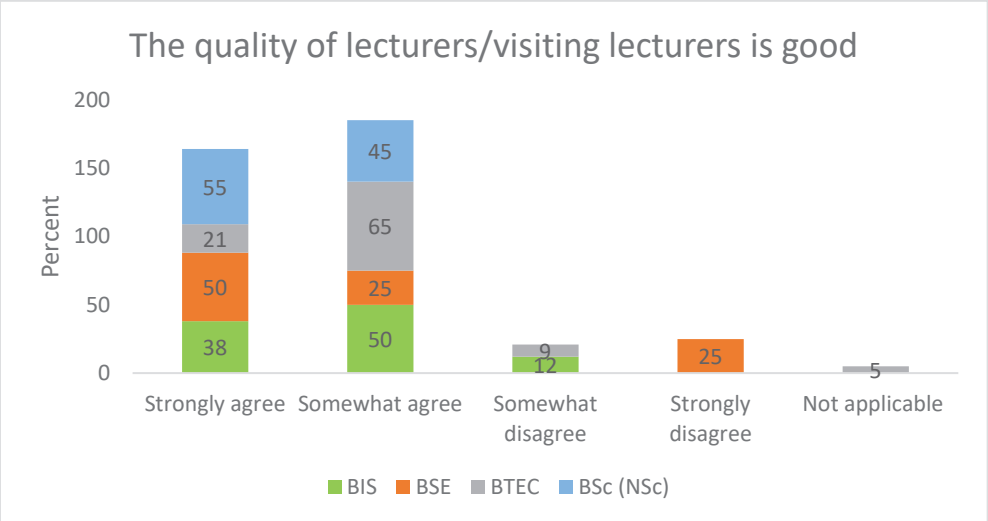

Figure 31– Perceptions on the quality of lectures
Source: Survey data

3.7.6 Learning approach

Mixed opinions were expressed on the statement "Learning is mostly done by memorizing the course materials" (Figure 32). However, most of the graduands either "Strongly agreed" (BSE – 50%, BIS- 38%) or "Somewhat agreed" (BSc – 61%, BTEC – 42%, BSE – 37%) on the statement suggesting that they memorized the course materials. This finding needs further exploration of the teaching-learning aspect of these degree programmes and re-design course materials integrating effective teaching strategies for learners to use deep approaches of learning.

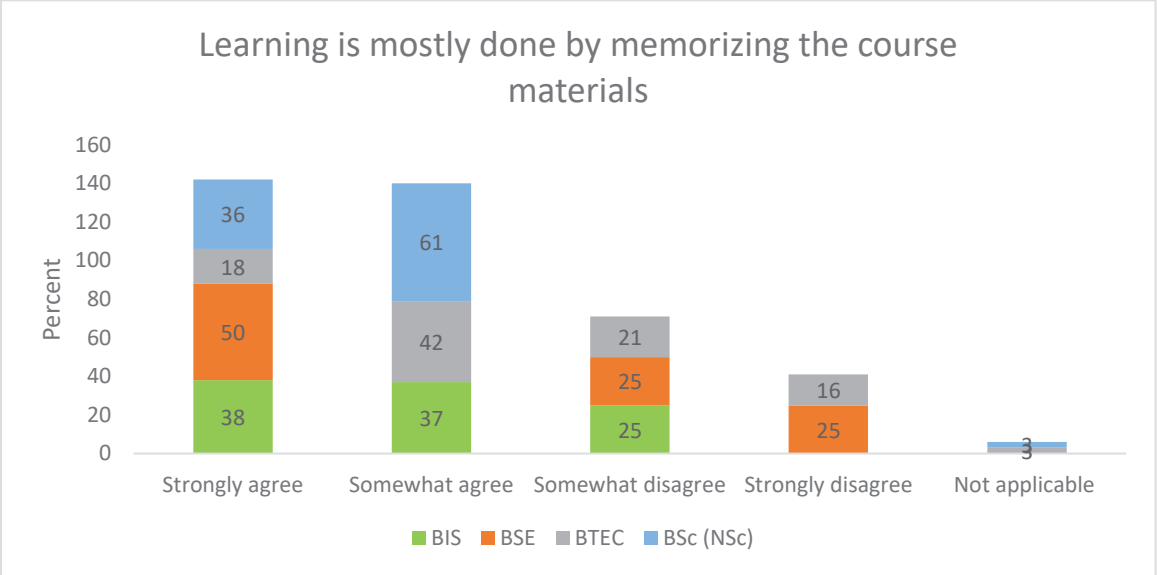

Figure 32 – Perceptions on the statement on "Learning is mostly done by memorizing the course materials"
Source: Survey data

3.7.7 Suitability of the learning process for an adult distance learner

Figure 33 shows the opinions expressed by the graduands to the statement on "learning process is suitable for current job environment". Most of the graduands "Somewhat agreed" on the statement. However, 25% of the BSE graduands "Strongly disagreed" while 13% of BIS graduands and 21% of BTEC graduands were "Somewhat disagreed". This finding paved the way to investigate the requirement of empowering employed adult learners to mitigate challenges in learning while working.

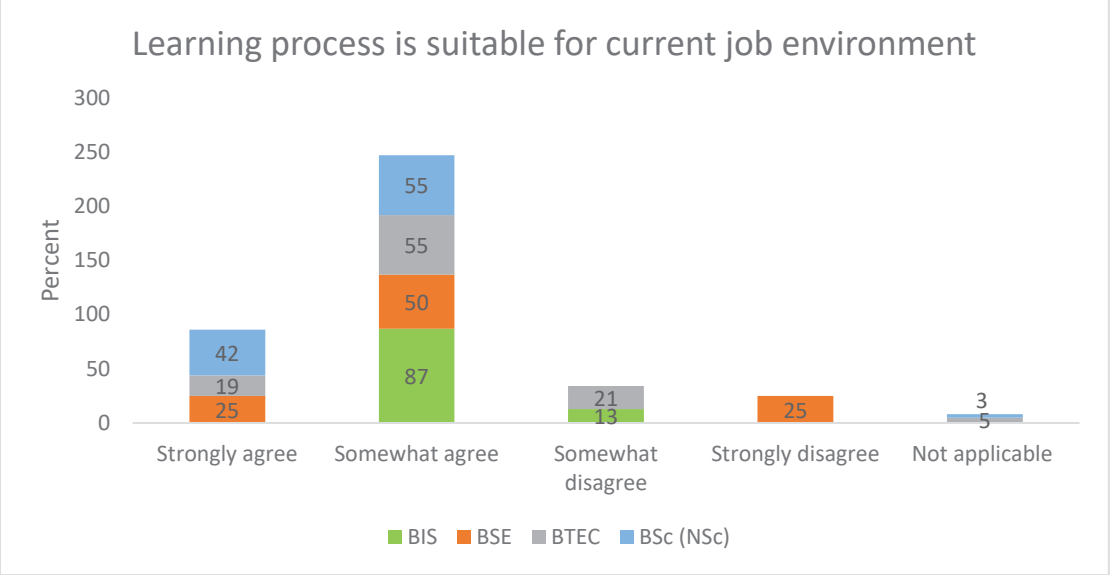

Figure 33 – Perceptions on the learning process of the degree programmes
Source: Survey data

3.7.8 Workload of the degree programmes

Figure 34 highlights the perceptions related to the workload of the respective degree programme.

It is apparent that the majority of the graduands had the view that the workload assigned to their degree programmes was considerably high. This finding needs further investigation for continuous improvement of the degree programme.

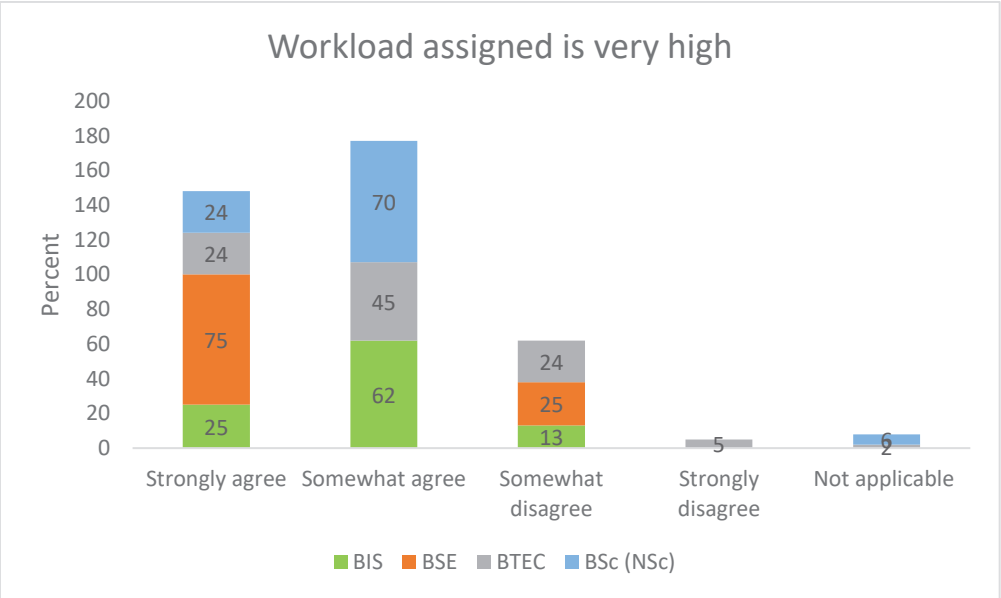

Figure 34 – Perceptions on the workload of the degree programmes
Source: Survey data

3.7.9 Development of research skills

This section focuses on developing research skills through the study period. Fifty percent of BIS, 45% of BTEC and 36% of BSc graduands "Strongly agreed" and 61% of BSc "Somewhat agreed" on the statement (Figure 35). Nevertheless, some percentage of graduands "Somewhat disagreed" and "Strongly disagreed" showing the need for strengthening the development of research skills among undergraduates.

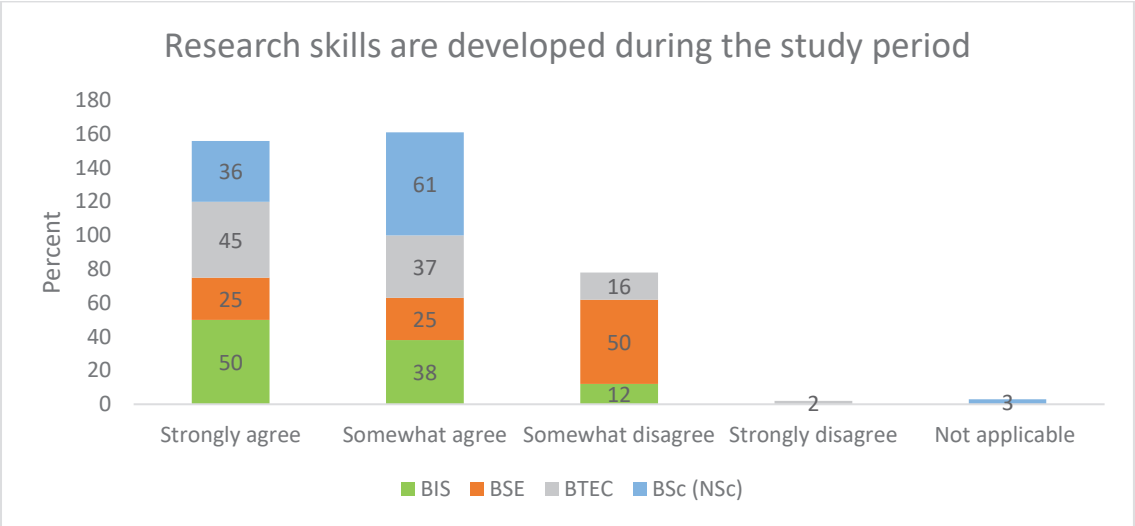

Figure 35 – Perceptions on the development of research skills
Source: Survey data

3.7.10 Laboratory facilities

Figure 36 shows the perceptions on the statement on the "laboratory facilities provided are satisfactory" with respect to their degree programmes. Most of the graduands "Somewhat agreed" (BTEC - 63% and BSc - 55%) while 63% of BIS graduands were "Somewhat disagreed". Twenty five percent of BSE graduands "Strongly disagreed. This finding implies that the facilities at the laboratories need to be increased further to offer laboratory-based degree programmes.

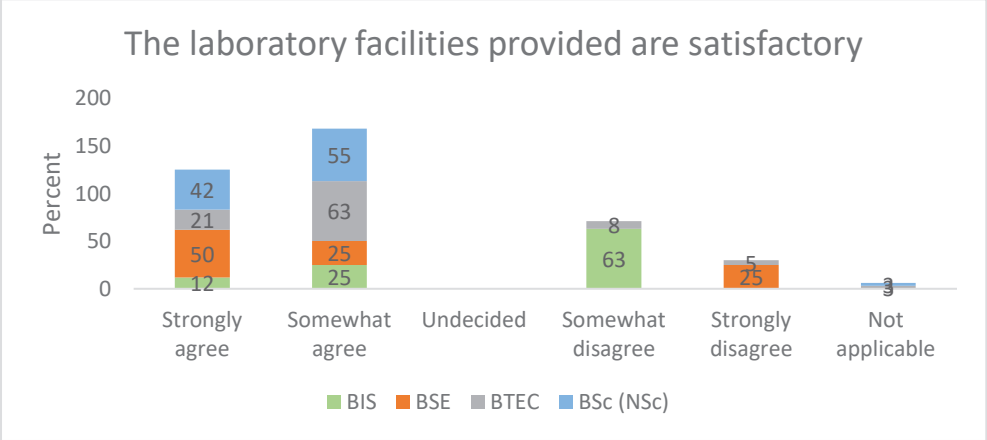

Figure 36 – Perceptions on the laboratory facilities
Source: Survey data

3.7.11 IT facilities

Most BSE (75%) and BSc graduands (39%) "Strongly agreed" on the statement on "IT facilities are satisfactory" – (Figure 37). In contrast, the majority of BIS (50%) and BTEC graduands (47%) "Somewhat agreed" on the above statement.

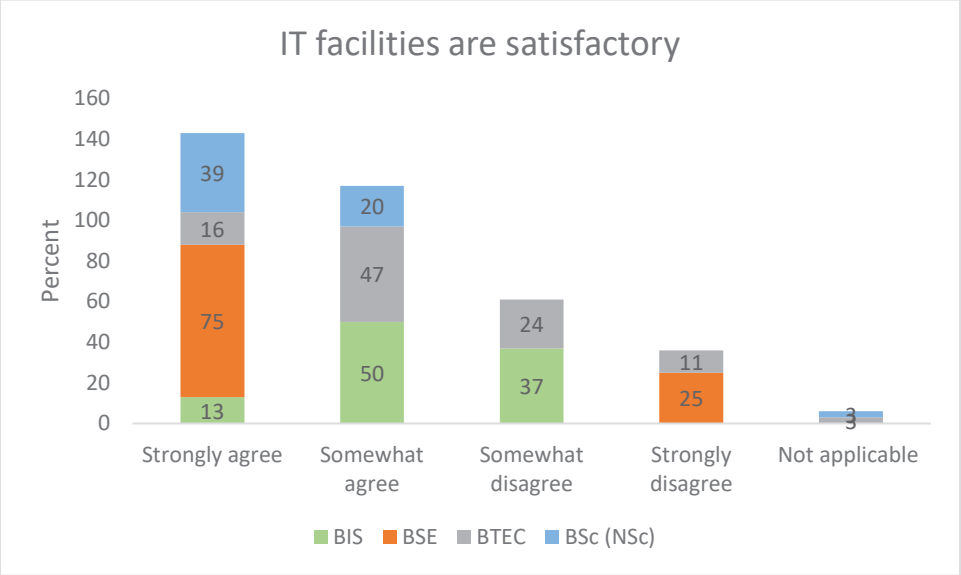

Figure 37 – Perceptions on the IT facilities
Source: Survey data

3.8 Perceptions on the satisfaction of the learning experience at the OUSL

Figure 38 illustrates the views on the satisfaction of the learning experience at the OUSL. Most of the graduands were "Neutral" in their opinion and some were "Somewhat satisfied" while 25% of BSE, 5% of BTEC and 3% BSc graduands were "Very dissatisfied". Thus, it is necessary to find out the reasons for their dissatisfaction.

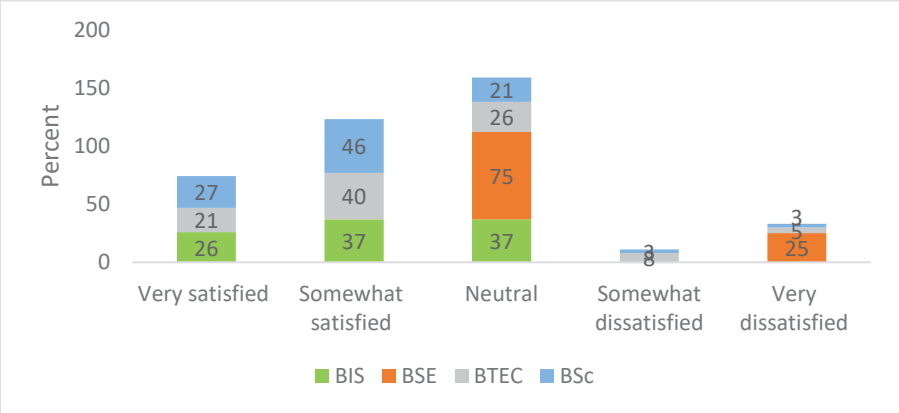

Figure 38 – Perceptions on the satisfaction of the learning experience at the OUSL
Source: Survey data

3.9 Career goals of the graduands of the bachelor's degrees

Respondents were given a choice of selecting more than one option to indicate their views on career goals for the next two years. The majority opted for migration (BSE – 100%, BIS - 75% and BTEC - 66%) and most of them selected find a job option (Figure 39). In contrast, majority of BSc graduands (79%) stated that they would like to pursue higher education.

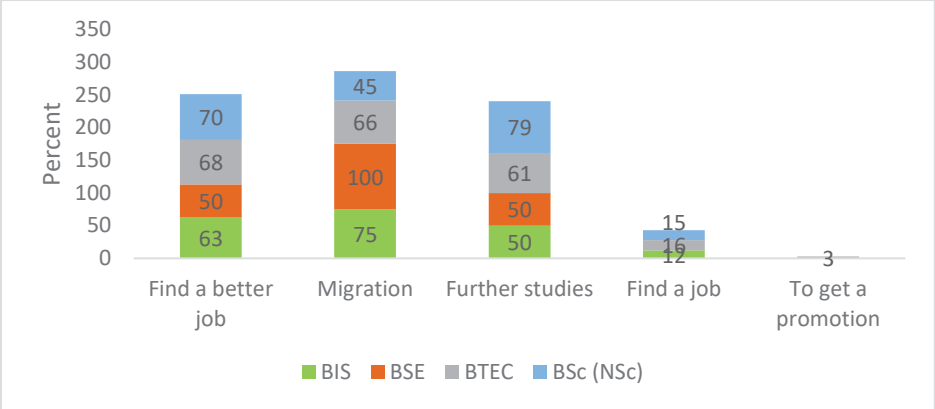

Figure 39 – Career goals of the graduands of the bachelor's degrees for the next two years
Source: Survey data

3.10 Future contacts with the OUSL

With respect to their views on future contacts with the OUSL, the majority selected more than one option (Figure 40). Having included the multi-code options, the majority would like to join the alumni and to have regular contacts with the OUSL. However, 8% of BTEC and 6% BSc graduands would not like to have any contacts with the OUSL. Further investigation on this issue would provide valuable insights to know the reasons for not like to have contacts with the OUSL.

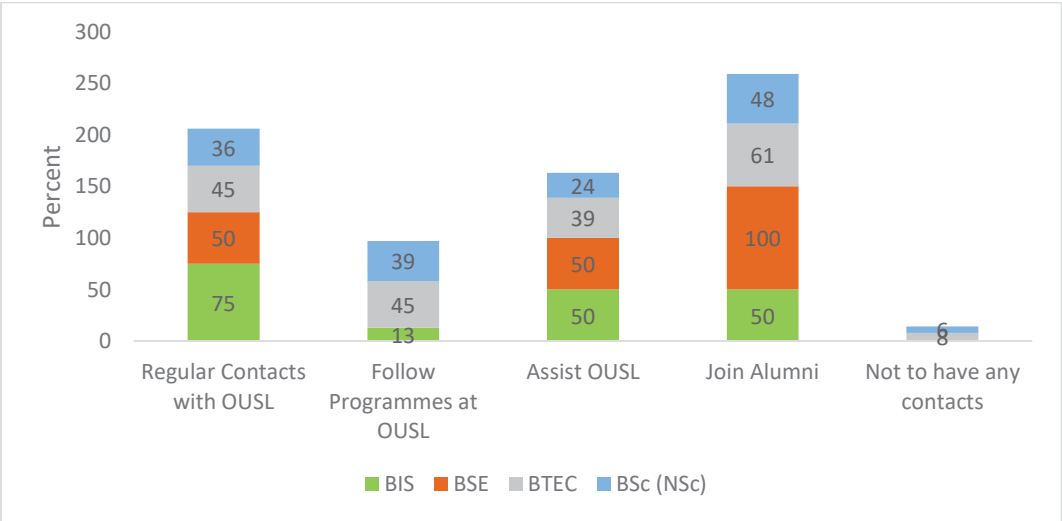

Figure 40 – Perceptions on the future contacts of the OUSL
Source: Survey data

3.11 Recommendation of the OUSL degree programmes

The majority recommended their degree programme for future learners (Figure 41) indicating the success of these degree programmes. However, some graduands had not recommended their respective degree programme; BSE (75%) and BTEC (32%) in particular. In contrast, 97% of science graduates recommended the BSc degree programme.

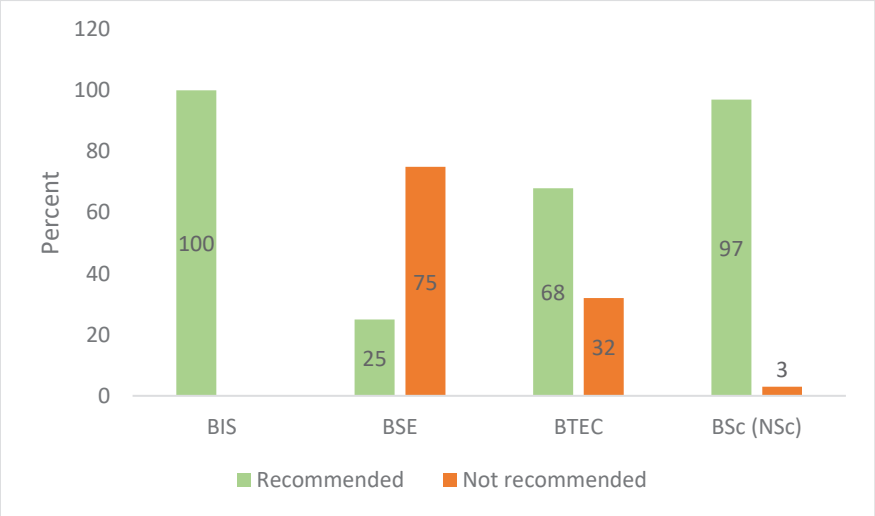

Figure 41 – Recommendation of the OUSL degree programmes
Source: Survey data

When analysed the reasons for not recommending the degree programme, the following opinions were expressed by the respondents (Table 1).

Table 1: Reasons for not recommending the degree programme

Degree Programme	Reasons for not recommending
BSc	▪ Not recommended by some foreign universities and very difficult to get a class or a good grade for subjects. ▪ Another thing is not having an internship. Also not having good practical sessions.
BSE	▪ "Take long time period to complete even if I don't have any repeat". ▪ "Cannot complete within 4 years. Course drags even if we do not have any arrears". ▪ "It's time consuming and haven't much support from the university".
BTEC	▪ "The degree isn't accredited anymore". ▪ "There are no job opportunities for us during this financial crisis. It hurts us since we can't go for an English-speaking country for employment since our degree is not accredited and for evaluation, we haven't received the official transcript still date {sic}". ▪ "Time consuming and not enough face to face sessions". ▪ "Not updated with the international standard accord and time consuming, no proper administrative role, lecturers have to be more flexible with students".
	▪ "OUSL degree is extremely hard to complete. As an employee we were asked sometimes to come to labs in all 5 days of the weekdays. And at the beginning, they look at us as exteriors and treat differently. I even got 2 repeats at level 4. I have never got repeats at HNDE or at OUSL other than that. Everything is not easy in OUSL. Even 3 years of degree dragged to 5 and half years. And even after completing the degree, there is no value for that. No accreditation from IESL. Only recognition. Very hard to get higher results. There is some favoritism for some students over us. Specially towards full time students. There is no any collaboration between internal students with us. We always share the study materials even answer guides, but I never received a single word of a help from full time students. Most of them show smiles on their faces but rotten inside. Hopefully less exposure to the industry made them so. In my opinion, at this situation of the country, I strongly recommend anyone to follow a private university degree over this one. However, I am proud, and I always do my best towards the university. ▪ useless and time waste. ▪ 1) This programme takes too much time to complete (wasting Valuable time), 2) Less recognition in the industry compared to other universities, 3) Delaying activities like training purposely, 4) Unavailability of Washington accord accreditation which is very useful to migrate to a country like Australia without assessing a skill assessment test etc. ▪ Period is too much by delaying university side. ▪ Should have to spend years to complete the degree. ▪ Because of do or die attitude in the university. ▪ Time duration is too long.

It is necessary to carry out in-depth analysis for the reasons pointed out by the graduands and take remedial measures promptly to make these programmes more appealing to future learners.

3.12 Suggestions for continuous improvement of the OUSL degree programme

Having analysed the responses for the open-ended questions related to the continuous improvement of the OUSL degree programmes, the suggestions were grouped into the following categories (Table 2):

Table 2: Suggestions for improvement

Category	Programme	Suggestions
Course material/ Subject Content	BTEC	▪ Update textbooks for latest and user friendly to readers. ▪ Need up to date syllabus and course materials. ▪ Need to update the course content frequently. ▪ Need learning resources.
	BSE	▪ Please be on the current trend. For example, incorporating the software skills relevant to the field will be highly advantageous. ▪ Courses should be updated. I was a BSE student, and I didn't learn any new industrial using things while I am studying.
	Fashion Design	▪ Need to change and update the syllabus of fashion designing programme (because there are many students struggling with maths subjects those who have good creative skills – [Sic]).
	BSc	▪ Course materials were not provided in some semesters. ▪ If course materials are simplified more, it will be better. ▪ It's better if the course materials are distributed on time.
Workload	BTEC	▪ Better to minimise the workload.
Medium of Instruction	BSc	▪ To change the level three subjects to complete English and to conduct practical sessions completely in English medium as the medium of the degree programme is English.
Pedagogy	BTEC	▪ Need to adapt distance learning method. ▪ I like to learn while doing a job.
Entry requirement	BTEC	▪ Must filter the students and limit the number of student by conducting entrance exams (especially for Faculty of Engineering Technology). Also, minimum requirement is necessary (E.g. 3Cs).
Course selection	BSc	▪ Students should be able to specify a subject at least in the level 5. We had to do all the major and minor subjects in the final year also. It was a disadvantage to follow more credits on the subject we prefer {sic}.
Eligibility	BTEC	▪ If lost in eligible please give another chance to move to next level.
Final Examination	BTEC	▪ Arrange final examinations twice.
		▪ If final exam is held on semester basis and online. It is useful and can manage the time.
		▪ Conduct lab evaluations and lectures on weekends.
	BSc	▪ Conduct repeat exams in the same year. Me and most of the students waited one whole year to complete one subject.
Day schools/Course delivery	BTEC	▪ Need more lectures. ▪ Conduct more online classes and day schools.
		▪ formalize day school sessions to give a better guidance.
	BSc	▪ Increase number of day schools. ▪ Give more support via lectures.
Infrastructure/ Lab facilities	BTEC	▪ Improve lab facilities for practical sessions. ▪ Lab facilities must be improved for textile students. ▪ Develop laboratory facilities. ▪ Infrastructure and facilities should improve.
Practical work	BTEC	▪ More programming lessons, more practical skills like excel and 3D designing. ▪ Please include practical skills and update students with the current technical skills. ▪ Need to improve practical knowledge. ▪ Conduct lab evaluations and lectures on weekends.
	BSc	▪ Give/promote practical experience. ▪ Practicals are overloaded, the information they have included in Practicals is not effective as time allocated for practical is limited. ▪ Time allocated for practical sessions should expand including field visits and trainings.

Category	Programme	Suggestions
Internships/work-related/field work	BTEC	▪ More industry exposure. ▪ Other than unpractical and useless courses in final year, could introduce industry standard courses. ▪ Improve field visits during the study period. ▪ Have more practical and up to date industrial knowledge integrated into the courses. ▪ Flexible internship criteria. ▪ Increase more Job field visits to students.
	Fashion Design	▪ Poor training facilities by the department for Fashion design students therefore that should be improved and fairness to those students. ▪ Fashion design students need to be enhanced their creative thinking ability by the support of university skill development programmes as private universities.
	BIS in Agriculture	▪ Improve practical knowledge and industrial experience as they are focusing industrial studies mainly in my field. BIS in Agriculture. Not much industrial exposure.
	BSc	▪ Could include work related hand on experience like things more to be effective and enhance our job path. ▪ Need to enhance the research, practical and internship training facilities. ▪ It's good if given a training/ internship to improve their skills and experience, but they don't. It's a weakness of the university. ▪ Practical Applications for Mathematics Students or internship opportunities.
Research	BTEC	▪ Improve research studies.
	BSc	▪ Arrange more research programmes for related subjects. ▪ Encourage students to do research and projects in the undergraduate period. ▪ Guide students to do research.
Use technologies	BTEC	▪ Include new technologies for studies.
Learner Support	BTEC	▪ More interaction with students online or physically. ▪ Motivate students through peer groups. ▪ lecturers should be flexible. ▪ Must give much guidance to the student rather than failing them.
Administration	BTEC	▪ Administration need to.be more user friendly. ▪ They are taking a lot of time to prepare the graduation list and issuing transcripts. ▪ Late issuing of transcripts.
Duration	BTEC	▪ The time takes to complete an academic year must get lower than current duration. ▪ Suitable plan should be used to minimize the duration spend for completing degree program and day school and exams should be plans for weekends to help employed students. ▪ reduce time delays.
	BSc	▪ Time-consuming is a disadvantage to completing the degree on time. ▪ Finish the learning processes without delays.

Category	Programme	Suggestions
Empathy of students	BTEC	▪ Lectures must learn how to deliver their subject to the students equally. ▪ Treat every student in the same way. ▪ Make study more friendly for working adults (some demos told us to choose either job or continues 5 weekdays lab).
	BSc	▪ First of all, the staff of academic must think about the students and their future goals. They should support to enhance the abilities and results of students. It's no point in lecturers are outstanding by giving papers that changing the structures and adding very difficult questions {sic}. They must compassionate to students like other government universities. That is the main reason though some students do their best in the exam, they unable to get good result. So many students give up their program at the first level of study. OUSL is very famous for above mentioned facts among the society. From that student unable to get a class even they try their very best. I was a student who did very best at the exam, but I missed my class from 0.3 of GPA. ▪ According to those reasons if you could appoint a flexible and good academic staff, it would be a good university in Sri Lanka that at least recommended by Sri Lankan students.
Career guidance	BTEC	▪ Assistance for graduated students for their careers through a career fair or exhibition. ▪ Increase job opportunities to students. ▪ please find internship programmes for graduate students.
Recognition of the OUSL degree	BTEC	▪ Enhance the quality of the degree and get an accredited degree then only the OUSL graduates can get scholarship opportunity and foreign jobs.
	BSc	▪ My application was rejected by a foreign university as having the degree from the OUSL.
Existing/New Programmes	BTEC	▪ Please change the degree to Bachelor of Science or Engineering rather than Technology.
	BSc	▪ Introduce practical /job-oriented courses.

4. Conclusion

The main goal of the OUSL is to provide lifelong learning opportunities for the adult learners who were deprived of higher education in conventional national universities due to the limited intake and to empower them for the future. This study reflected that the OUSL has become more “open to people” irrespective of their age, gender, ethnicity, lack of formal educational qualifications.

The findings also indicated that some of the graduands were employed at the time of the registration, and they completed their studies while in employment. Most of the graduands recommended the degree programme for future learners. However, some expressed their concerns specially with respect to the recognition of the degree programme in foreign countries especially the BTEC and BSc degree programmes, quality of course materials, learner support, inadequate laboratory and IT facilities, quality of classrooms and lecturers, and delay in completing the degree programme as scheduled, etc. They also provided some valuable suggestions for continuous improvement of the degree programmes. Thus,

policy/decision makers/teachers should carefully go through these comments/suggestions and take timely and appropriate decisions, plan proactive strategies and implement them immediately to improve the quality of all OUSL degree programmes so that these programmes would be more appealing to future learners.

5. References

Order of proceedings of General Convocation 2022(I) - (2023). The Open University of Sri Lanka.

Fincham, J E (2008) Response Rates and Responsiveness for Surveys, Standards and the Journal. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* 72 (2) Article 43.

Appendices

Annex 1 - Response rates by Bachelors Degree Programme
Source: Order of Proceedings of General Convocation 2022(I) ,

Faculty	**Degree Programme**	**No. of Awardees**	**Absentia**	**Collected Questionnaire**	**Option A =Response Rate (%)** (no. collected/total no. of awardees x 100)	**Option B =Actual Response Rate (%)** (no. collected /total no. of awardees – awardees in absentia x 100).
Engineering Technology	Degree of Bachelor of Technology Honours in Engineering [**BTec**] - 2021	244	3	38	38/244 x 100 = 16%	38/241 x 100 = 16%
	Degree of Bachelor of Industrial Studies Honours [**BIS**] - 2021	84	4	8	8/84 x 100 = 10%	8/80 x 100 = 10%
	Degree of Bachelor of Software Engineering Honours [**BSE**] - 2021	13	-	4	4/13 x 100 = 31%	4/13 x 100 = 31%
Natural Sciences	Degree of Bachelor of Science [**BSc NSc**] - 2021	359	6	32	33/359x100 =9%	33/353 x 100 = 9%
	Degree of Bachelor of Science [**BSc NSc**] (Special) - 2021	9	-	1		