



THE OPEN
UNIVERSITY
OF SRI LANKA

Centre for Educational Technology and Media
(CETMe)

Tracer Study of the OUSL Graduates - 2017 /2018

B Gayathri Jayatilleke
November 2021

ISSN 2386 - 124x

Tracer Study of the OUSL Graduates - 2017/2018

B Gayathri Jayatilleke



Centre for Educational Technology and Media (CETMe)
The Open University of Sri Lanka

November 2021

Lists of Figures

Figure 1 - Output of the OUSL graduates Source: General Convocation 2018 (I).....	3
Figure 2 - Achievements of the OUSL graduates 2018 General Convocation, Order of Proceedings, 2018(I).....	3
Figure 3 - Gender distribution of the bachelors degree holders	4
Figure 4 - Age Distribution of the bachelors degree holders	4
Figure 5 - Civil Status of the bachelors degree holders	5
Figure 6 - Ethnicity of the bachelors degree holders	5
Figure 7 - Religion of the bachelors degree holders	6
Figure 8 - Graduate Profile of the BEd (Special Needs) degree holders of the OUSL – 2017	6
Figure 9 - Graduate Profile of the BIS degree holders of the OUSL – 2017	7
Figure 10 - Graduate Profile of the BSE degree holders of the OUSL – 2017 .	8
Figure 11 - Graduate Profile of the BTec degree holders of the OUSL – 2017	9
Figure 12 - Graduate Profile of the BASS degree holders of the OUSL – 2018	10
Figure 13 - Graduate Profile of the BAELT degree holders of the OUSL – 2017	11
Figure 14 - Graduate Profile of the BSc degree holders of the OUSL – 2017	12
Figure 15 - Outreach of the bachelors degree holders	13
Figure 16 - Most lived areas of the OUSL degree holders	14
Figure 17 - Type of school attended by the OUSL degree holders	14
Figure 18 - Educational qualifications of the parents of the OUSL degree holders	15
Figure 19 - Entry qualifications of the OUSL degree holders	16
Figure 20 - Grade received for English at the GCE O/L of the OUSL degree holders	16
Figure 21 - Oral skills of English of the OUSL degree holders (at the time of the Registration and the Graduation).....	17
Figure 22 - Writing skills of English of the OUSL degree holders (at the time of the Registration and the Graduation).....	18
Figure 23 – Perceptions on the use of computer of the OUSL degree holders (at the time of the Registration and the Graduation)	18
Figure 24 – Perceptions of the use of web of the OUSL degree holders (at the time of the Registration and the Graduation)	19

Figure 25 - Perceptions of the use of email of the OUSL degree holders (at the time of the Registration and the Graduation)	19
Figure 26 – Perceptions of the use of MS Office of the OUSL degree holders (at the time of the Registration and the Graduation)	20
Figure 27 - Perceptions of the use of Social Media of the OUSL degree holders (at the time of the Registration and the Graduation).....	20
Figure 28 – Competency in writing programmes of the OUSL degree holders (at the time of the Registration and the Graduation)	21
Figure 29 - Competency in searching jobs online of the OUSL degree holders (at the time of the Registration and the Graduation)	21
Figure 30 – Extra Activities carried out by the OUSL degree holders.....	22
Figure 31 - Employment status of the OUSL graduates (at the time of the Registration and the Graduation)	22
Figure 32 – Job type of the OUSL graduates (at the time of the Registration and the Graduation)	23
Figure 33 - Job sectors of the OUSL degree holders (at the time of the Registration and the Graduation)	24
Figure 34 – Job sector preference by the OUSL degree holders	24
Figure 35 – Views on the achievement of the OUSL degrees	25
Figure 36 – Occupation of the OUSL degree holders	26
Figure 37– Gross monthly salary of the bachelors degree holders (at the time of the Registration and the Graduation).....	27
Figure 38 – Perceptions of the job satisfaction of the OUSL degree holders .	27
Figure 39 – Method of finding a job by the OUSL graduates.....	28
Figure 40 – Time taken to find a job by the OUSL degree holders	28
Figure 41– Reasons for unemployment by the unemployed OUSL graduands	29
Figure 42 – Perceptions on the effectiveness of the course material of the degree programmes	29
Figure 43 – Perceptions on the use of standard textbooks in addition to course material of the degree programmes.....	30
Figure 44– Perceptions on memorizing the course material.....	30
Figure 45 – Perceptions on the acquisition of practical knowledge through course material.....	31
Figure 46 – Perceptions on the practical training.....	31
Figure 47– Perceptions on the learning process of the degree programmes .	32
Figure 48 - Perceptions on the workload of the degree programmes.....	32

Figure 49 - Perceptions on the teaching methods used	33
Figure 50 – Perceptions on the tutorials	33
Figure 51- Perceptions on the quality of classrooms	34
Figure 52 – Perceptions on the quality of lecturers	34
Figure 53 - Perceptions on the development of research skills	35
Figure 54 – Perceptions on the laboratory facilities	35
Figure 55 - Perceptions on the IT facilities	36
Figure 56 – Perceptions on the library facilities.....	36
Figure 57 – Perceptions on the association of the OUSL in the future	37
Figure 58 – Career goals of the OUSL degree holders for the next two years	37
Figure 59 – Recommendation of the OUSL degree programmes	38

Table of Contents

Lists of Figures	iii
Table of Contents.....	vi
Acknowledgements	viii
A Tracer Study of the OUSL Graduates of 2017 and 2018	1
1. Introduction	1
2. Methodology	1
2.1 Response rate of the questionnaires	2
3. Findings	2
3.1 Output of the OUSL graduates	2
3.2 Socio-economic background of the bachelors degree holders	3
3.2.1 Gender.....	3
3.2.2 Age	4
3.2.3 Civil Status.....	4
3.2.4 Ethnicity.....	5
3.2.5 Religion.....	5
3.3 Geographical distribution of the OUSL degree holders	13
3.4 Type of school attended by the OUSL degree holders	14
3.5 Educational Qualifications of the parents of the OUSL degree holders	15
3.6 Entry Qualifications of the OUSL degree holders	15
3.6.1 Subject specific entry qualification at the time of the registration	15
3.6.2 English literacy at the time of the registration.....	16
3.7 Skills acquired through the OUSL degree programmes	17
3.7.1 Oral and written skills in English	17
3.7.2 ICT skills	18
3.7.3 Extra activities.....	21
3.8 Employability of the OUSL degree holders	22
3.9 Perceptions on the various components of the OUSL degree programmes	29
3.9.1 Course material	29

3.9.2 Practical knowledge and training	31
3.9.3 Suitability of the learning process for an adult distance learner..	32
3.9.4 Workload of the degree programmes	32
3.9.5 Teaching methods used	32
3.9.6 Use of Tutorials as learning tools	33
3.9.7 Quality of classrooms	34
3.9.8 Quality of lecturers	34
3.9.9 Development of research skills.....	35
3.9.10 Facilities offered by the OUSL.....	35
3.10 Career goals of the OUSL degree holders	37
3.11 Recommendation of the OUSL degree programmes.....	38
3.12 Suggestions for continuous improvement of the OUSL degree programme.....	38
4. Conclusion	41
5. References	41
Appendices	42

Acknowledgements

Special thanks and appreciation are conveyed to

- Vice-Chancellor, Professor S A Ariyadorai, for assigning the task to conduct the tracer study for the year 2018
- Mrs I Pathirana, Senior Assistant Registrar of the Examination Division and her staff for providing necessary support in collecting data of the graduates
- Mr Mahesh Bandara Vaidyashekhare of the Centre for Educational Technology and Media (CETMe) for overall supervision of collecting the questionnaires and entering data carefully and promptly
- Awardees of Bachelors, for taking their time to provide necessary information and returning their questionnaires on time
- Deputy Registrar of the academic division for providing convocation reports - General Convocation, 2018 (I).

A Tracer Study of the OUSL Graduates of 2017 and 2018

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of the data collected from the OUSL graduands who were conferred their bachelors degrees at the 31st annual convocation (I) {General Convocation -2018(I)}. It was held on 14th November 2018 at the BMICH.

The main objectives of this report are to:

- describe the main socio-economic background of the graduands of the bachelors degree programmes
- explore the types of skills developed through the bachelors degree programmes
- assess the employability status of the graduands
- report on the perceptions of the study components in the bachelors degree programmes and
- report on the propose suggestions by the graduands for future improvement of their respective bachelors degree programmes which are delivered through Open Distance Learning (ODL) methodology.

2. Methodology

This research study mainly used the census method. Collection of data was carried out just prior to the 31st annual convocation (I) which was held on 14th November 2018.

The order of proceedings of the convocation – 2018 (I) was also used as documentary evidence and to validate the results obtained from the questionnaires.

All the graduands of the OUSL study programmes who were conferred their degrees at the convocation were taken as the target population. There were a total of 963 graduands (First session 465 and Second session – 498) who were awarded the bachelors/postgraduate degrees and postgraduate diplomas at this convocation.

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 registration and at the time of the graduation, their career achievements, about their perceptions on the degree programme and learning experience at the OUSL. This questionnaire was comparatively longer (6 pages) than the previous questionnaire which consisted of only 26 questions (4 pages).

As in the previous years, the tracer study questionnaire was posted to all the OUSL graduands along with other documents related to the convocation by the examination division of the OUSL. This activity was decentralized this year and graduands had the opportunity to hand over the duly filled questionnaires to their respective Regional Centres in addition to the collection centre at the Colombo Regional Centres (CRC). Collection of questionnaires at the central campus was carried out from 8th to 9th November 2018 at the Centre for Educational Technology and Media (CETMe) from 9.00 am to 4.00 pm and one staff member attached to the CETMe was specially assigned to oversee this task.

Collected data was computerized, tabulated, cross-checked with the order of proceedings of the convocation 2018 (I) and statistically analyzed using SPSS 12.0 application software.

Only the data of the graduates of the bachelors degree programmes 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). Refer Annex 1 for more details.

The number collected was comparatively low as some graduands did not hand over the questionnaires to the collection point at the regional centres. Response rates of the Bachelor of Industrial Studies Honours (BIS – 56%), Bachelor of Science (BSc – 40%) and Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences (BASS – 28%) degree programmes were below the accepted standard response rate of 60% for surveys (Fincham, 2008). Therefore, generalization of the findings of these bachelors degree programmes should be cautiously interpreted.

3. Findings

3.1 Output of the OUSL graduates

This convocation conferred 963 graduands; bachelors degree holders (922 – 96%), postgraduate diplomats (12 - 1%), masters degree holders (25 -3%), master of philosophy degree holders (2 - 0%) and Doctor of Philosophy degree holders (2 - 0%) - (Convocation Proceedings, 2018 (I) – Figure 1.

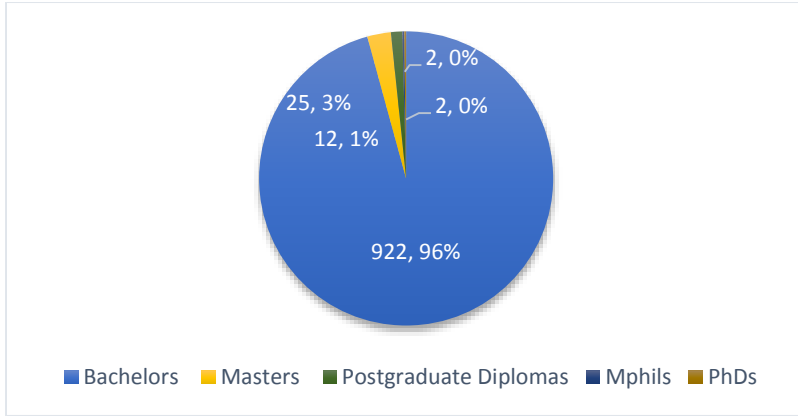


Figure 1 - Output of the OUSL graduates
Source: General Convocation 2018 (I)

Class distribution of bachelors degree programmes of the OUSL was illustrated in Figure 2 (General Convocation, Order of Proceedings 2018(I)).

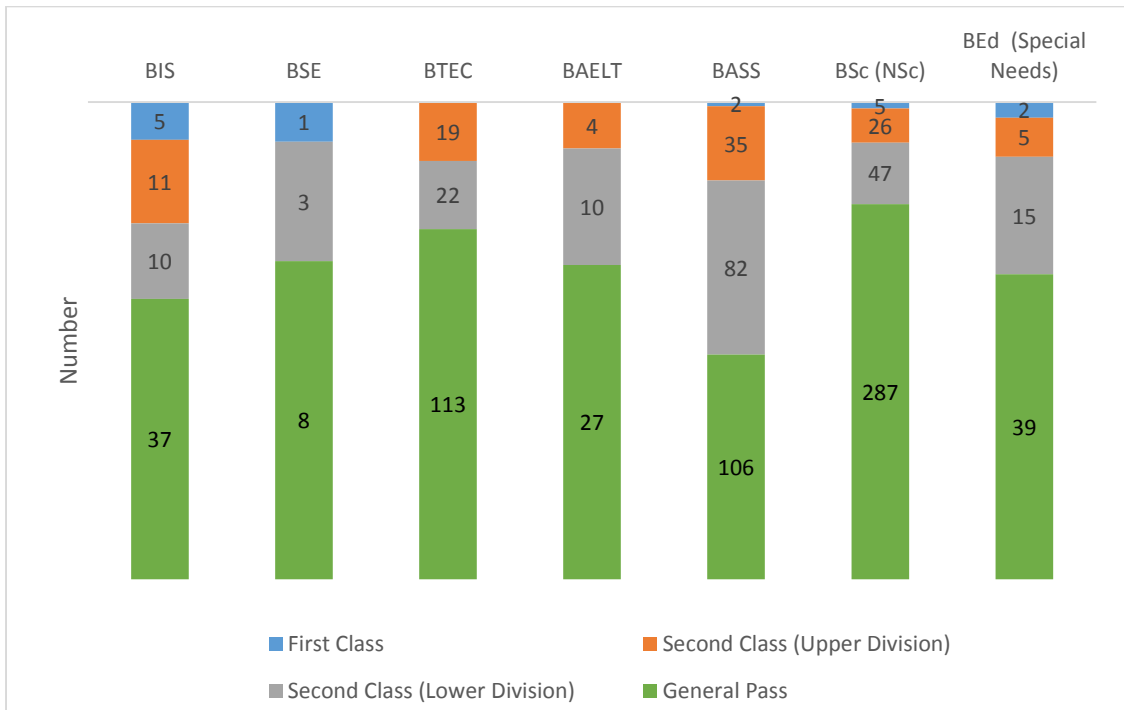


Figure 2 - Achievements of the OUSL graduates 2018 General Convocation, Order of Proceedings, 2018(I)

3.2 Socio-economic background of the bachelors degree holders

3.2.1 Gender

Females predominate in all bachelors degree programmes except in BSE and BTEC programme (Figure 3) where the subjects are more technical in nature. More than 80% were females in BIS (80%), BAELT (87%), BASS (81%), B.Sc (80%) and B.Ed in Special Needs (96%) degree programmes.

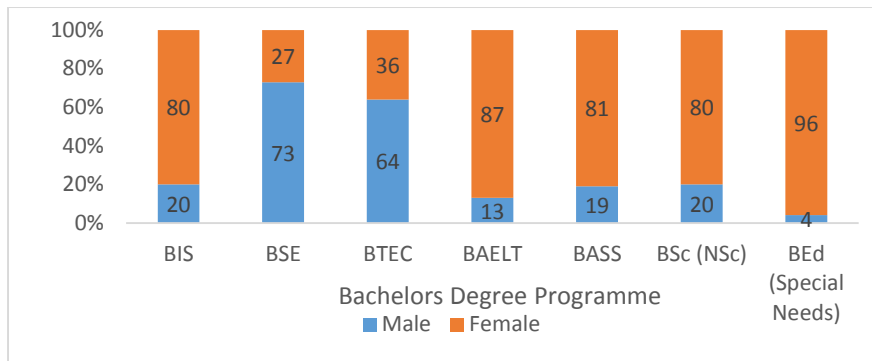


Figure 3 - Gender distribution of the bachelors degree holders

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 bachelors degree programmes were in the 25-29 years age group except for the BAELT and BEd in Special Needs programmes (Figure 4). The most widely accepted degree programme across all the age groups was BA in Special Needs.

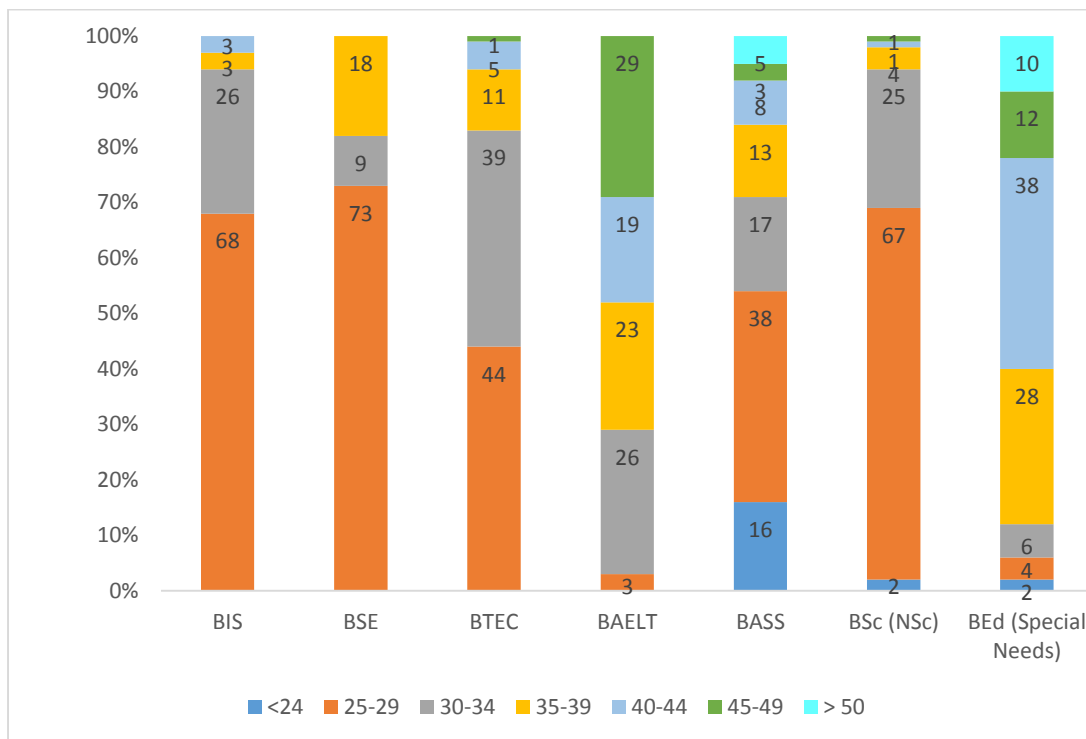


Figure 4 - Age Distribution of the bachelors degree holders

3.2.3 Civil Status

The civil status varies with the degree programmes; much older, married graduates were predominant in the BEd in Special Needs (86%), BAELT (72%) and BASS (52%). The rest of the programmes attracted younger counter parts (Figure 5).

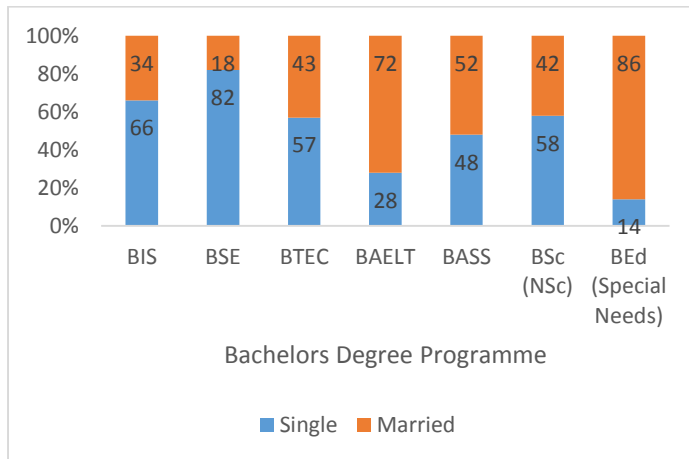


Figure 5 - Civil Status of the bachelors degree holders

3.2.4 Ethnicity

Sinhalese prevail in all study programmes (more than 75%) and the participation of the rest of the ethnic groups were not so pronounced except for the BASS, BSc and BEd in Special Needs even with the expansion of the services at all the provinces through the OUSL Regional Educational Services (RES) network (Figure 6).

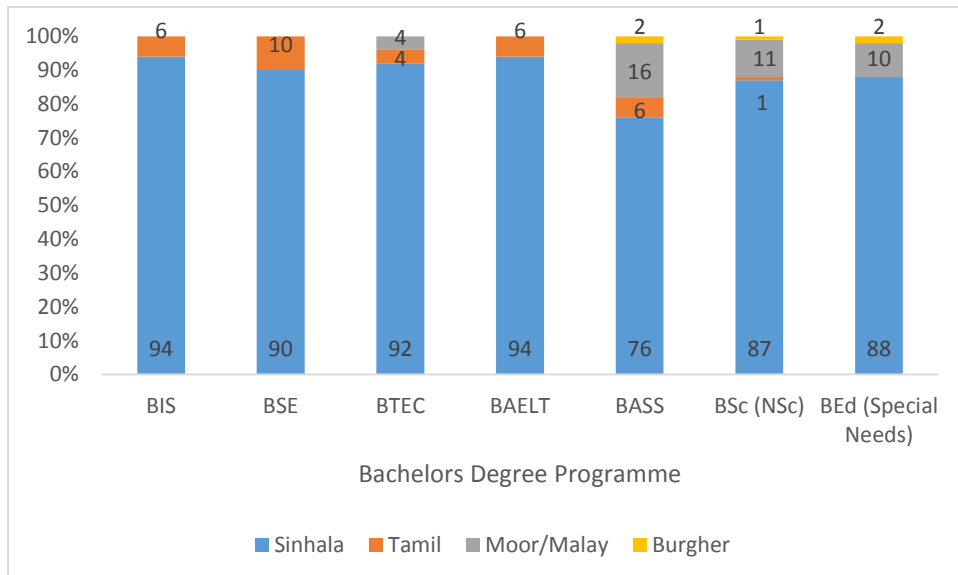


Figure 6 - Ethnicity of the bachelors degree holders

3.2.5 Religion

All the religious groups were represented in all the bachelors degree programmes; however, Buddhists predominate (Figure 7). The participation of minor religious groups was comparatively higher in certain programmes; for instance in BASS, BSc and BEd in Special Needs.

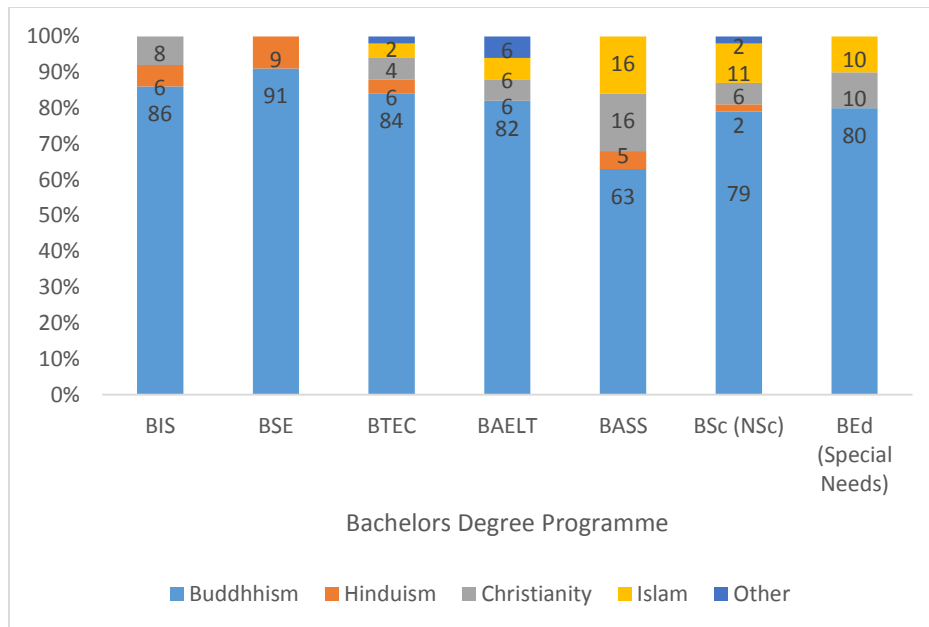


Figure 7 - Religion of the bachelors degree holders

Graduate profiles of the bachelors degree holders were given in Figure 8-14.

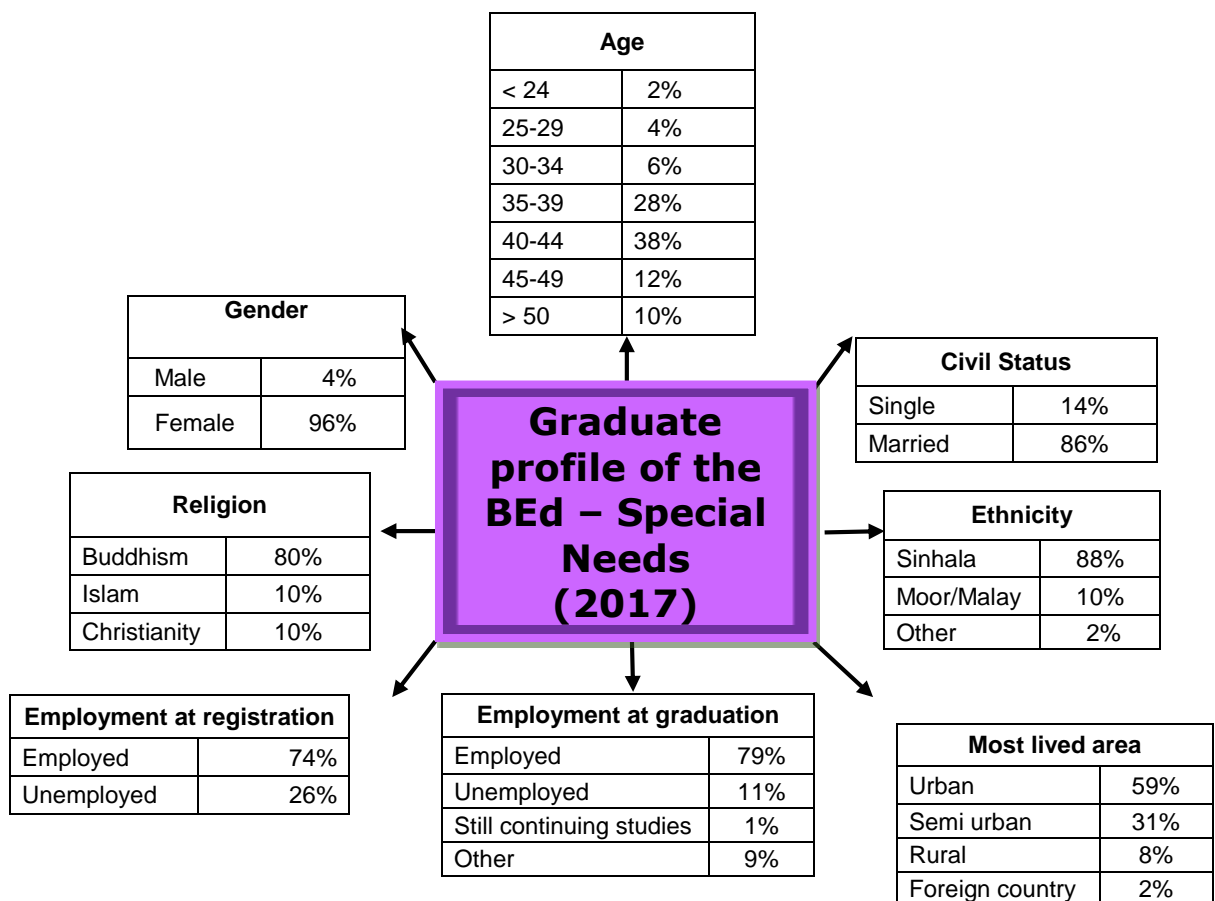


Figure 8 - Graduate Profile of the BEd (Special Needs) degree holders of the OUSL - 2017

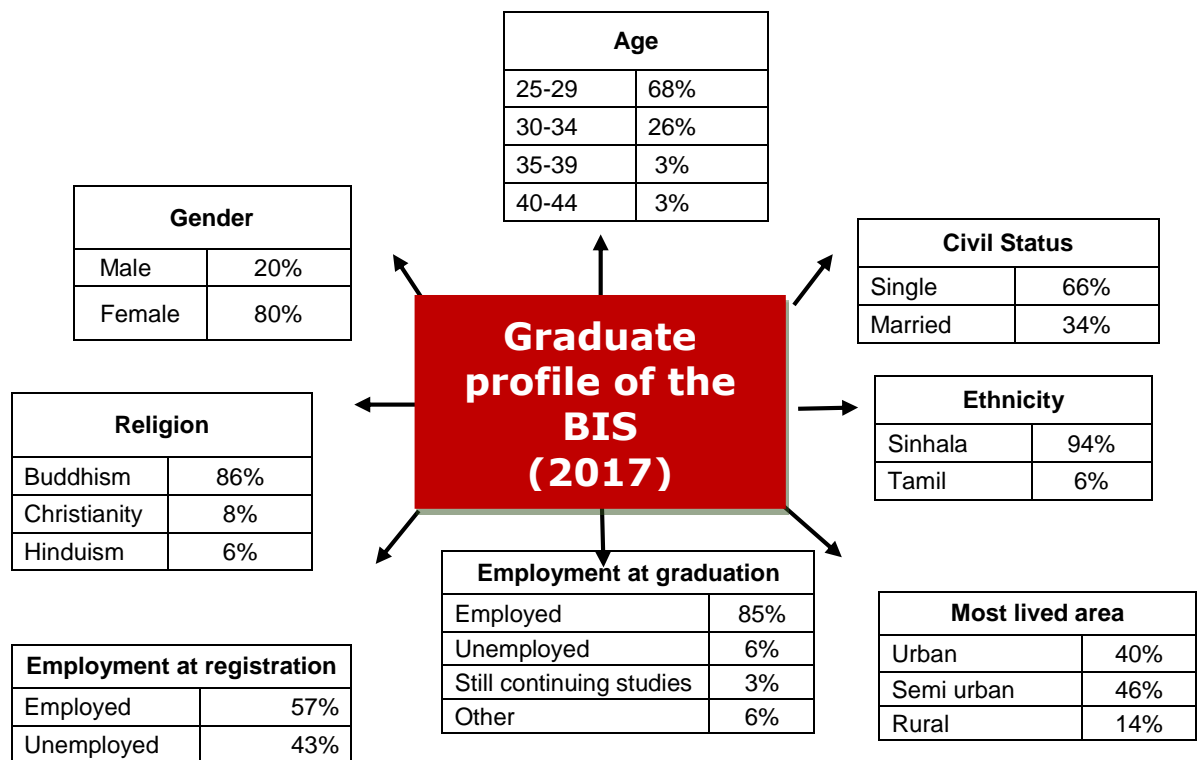


Figure 9 - Graduate Profile of the BIS degree holders of the OUSL – 2017

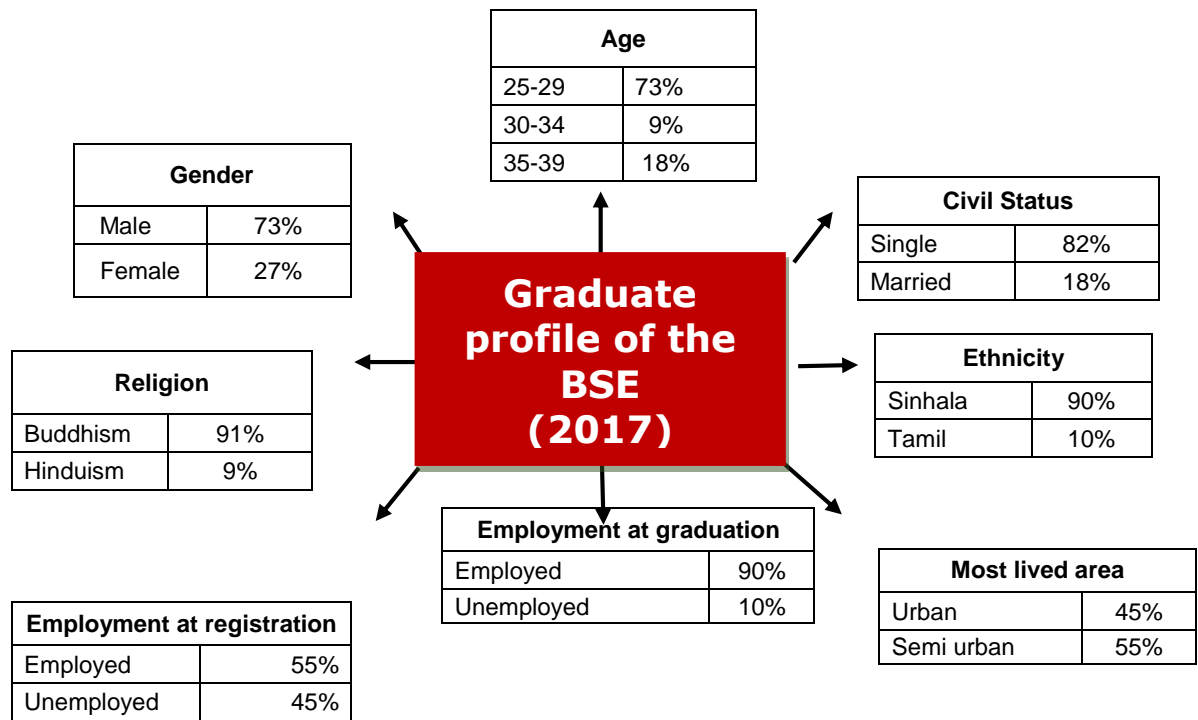


Figure 10 - Graduate Profile of the BSE degree holders of the OUSL – 2017

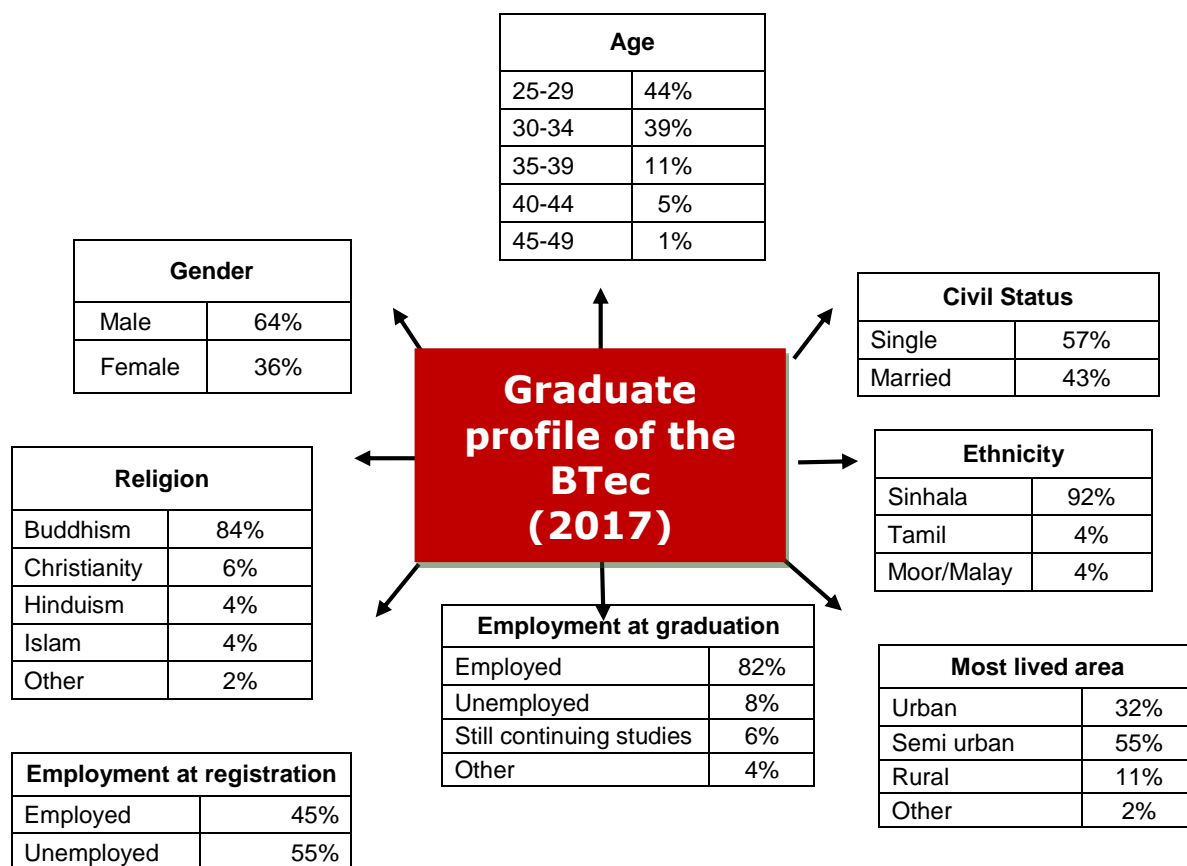


Figure 11 - Graduate Profile of the BTec degree holders of the OUSL – 2017

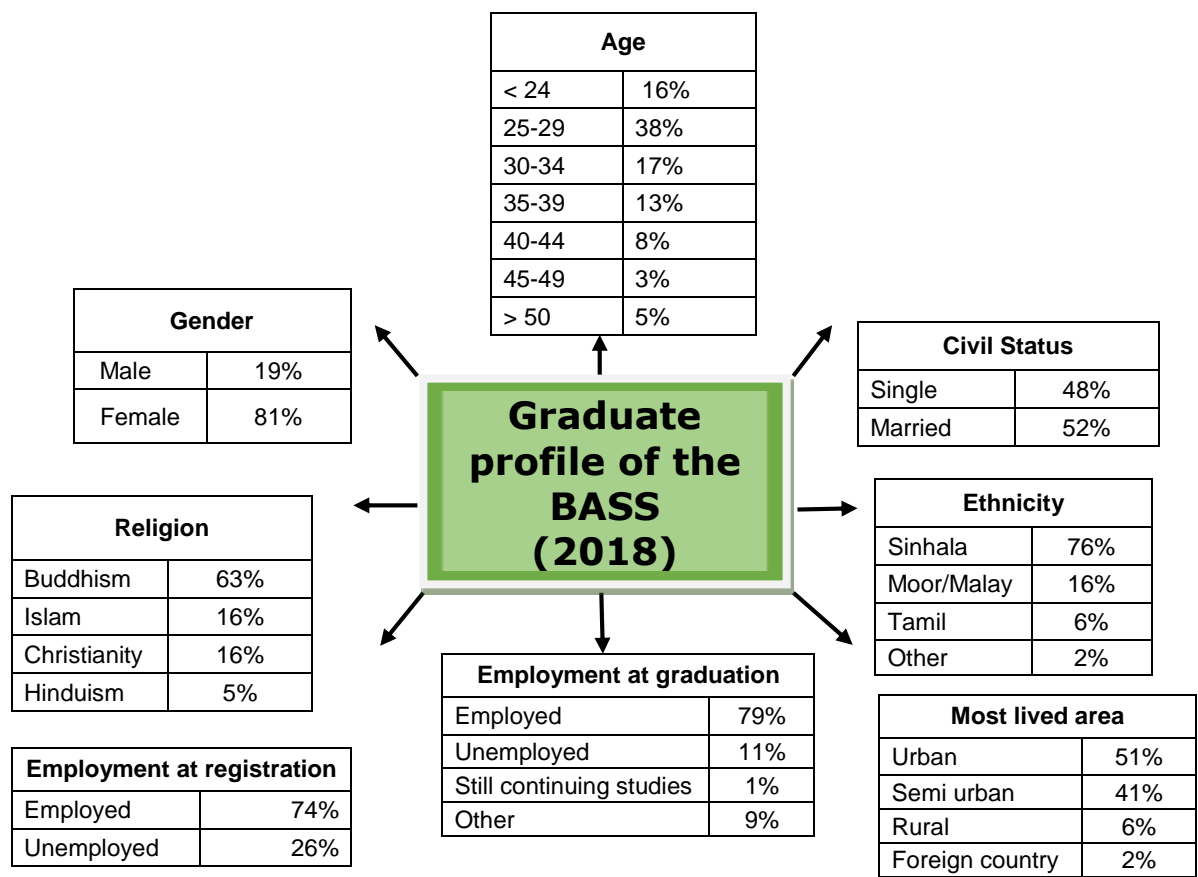


Figure 12 - Graduate Profile of the BASS degree holders of the OUSL – 2018

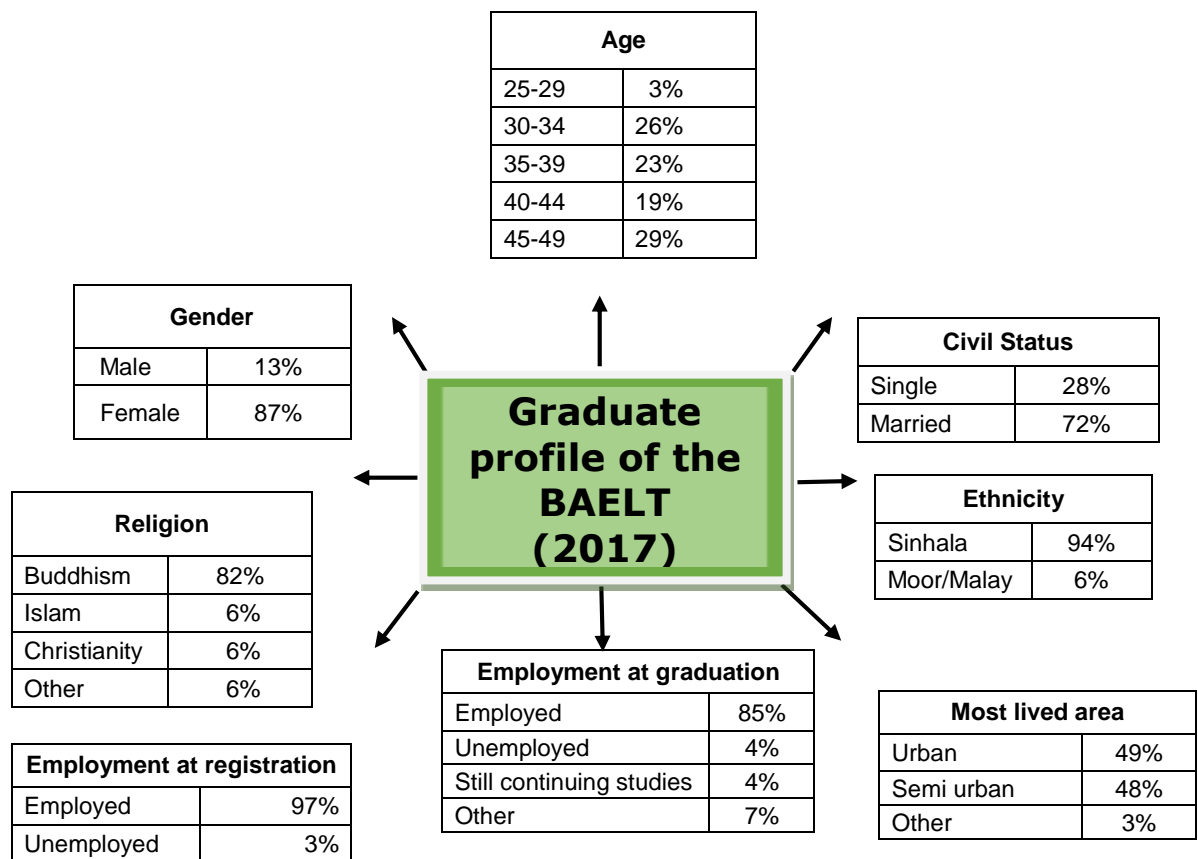


Figure 13 - Graduate Profile of the BAELT degree holders of the OUSL – 2017

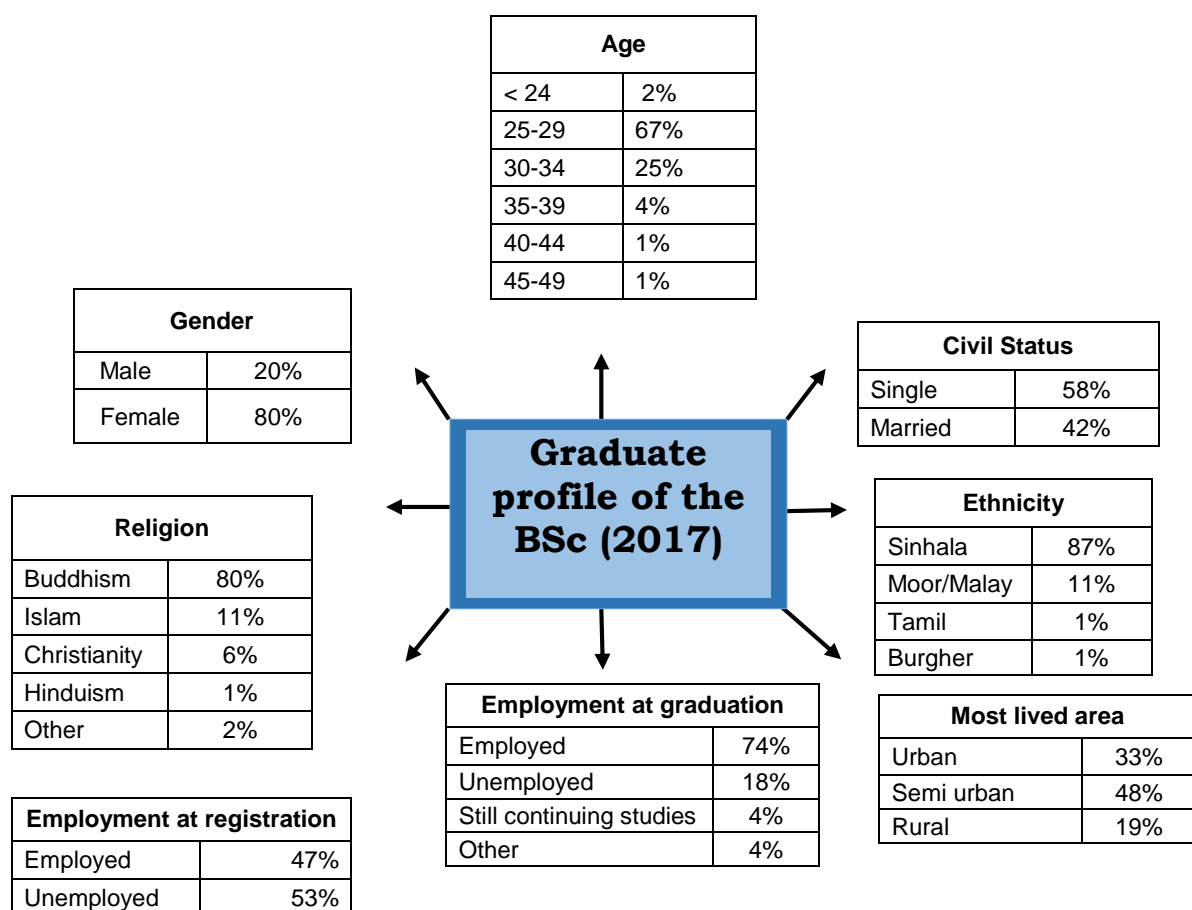


Figure 14 - Graduate Profile of the BSc degree holders of the OUSL – 2017

3.3 Geographical distribution of the OUSL degree holders

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 19 study centres. The nine regional centres are located in every district namely; Colombo, Kandy, Matara, Jaffna, Anuradhpura, Batticaloa, Kurunegala, Ratnapura and Badulla. The purpose of this expansion is to enable learners to pursue higher education while remaining in their own districts.

Findings indicated that the most of the graduands were mainly from western province especially from Colombo regional centre, Gampaha and Kalutara study centres (Figure 15).

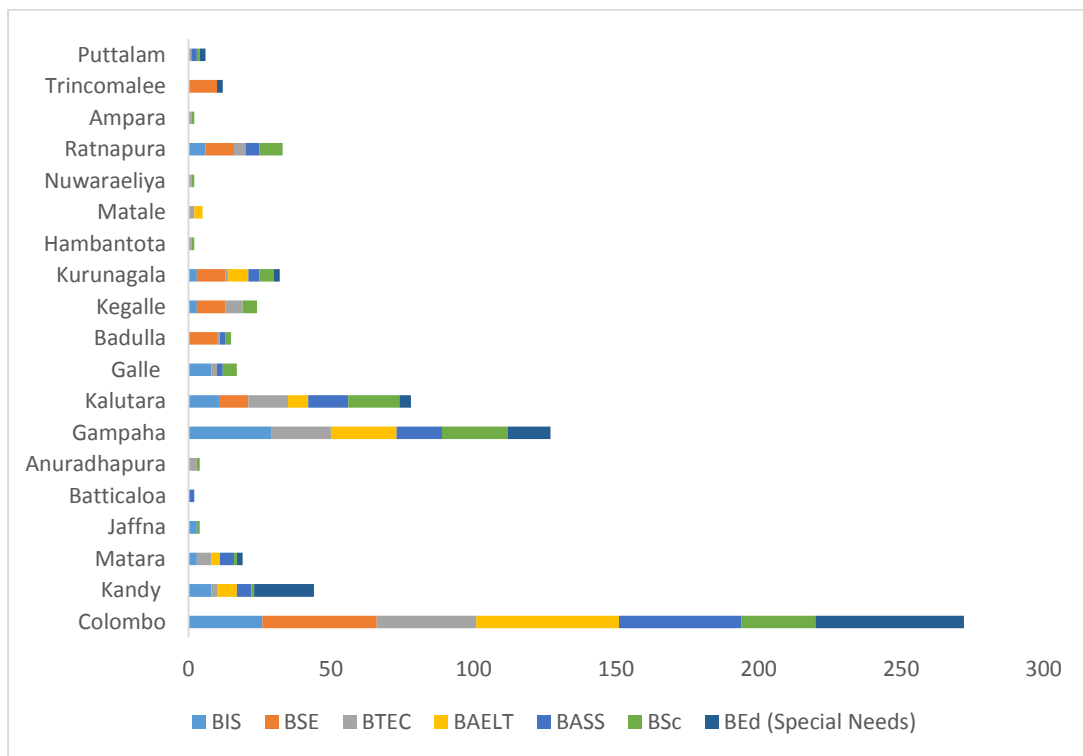


Figure 15 - Outreach of the bachelors degree holders

In this particular cohort of bachelors degree holders, most of them were living in semi-urban areas except in BAELT, BASS and BEd in Special Needs (Figure 16). However, the percentages of graduands who have been living in urban areas were equally high. The findings indicated that the graduands coming from rural areas were comparatively low.

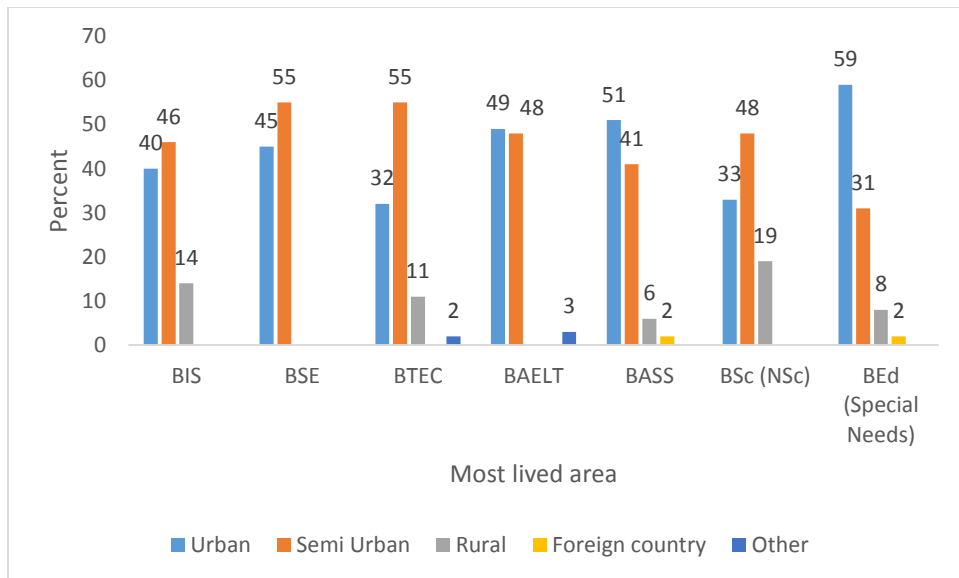


Figure 16 - Most lived areas of the OUSL degree holders

3.4 Type of school attended by the OUSL degree holders

When the data were analysed with respect to the type of schools attended by the OUSL degree holders, more than 55 percent of all the degree holders were from national schools. In contrast, 9-22% of graduands were from private/semi government schools (except for the BSE programme) indicating that the OUSL degree programmes have attracted learners from high income groups too (Figure 17).

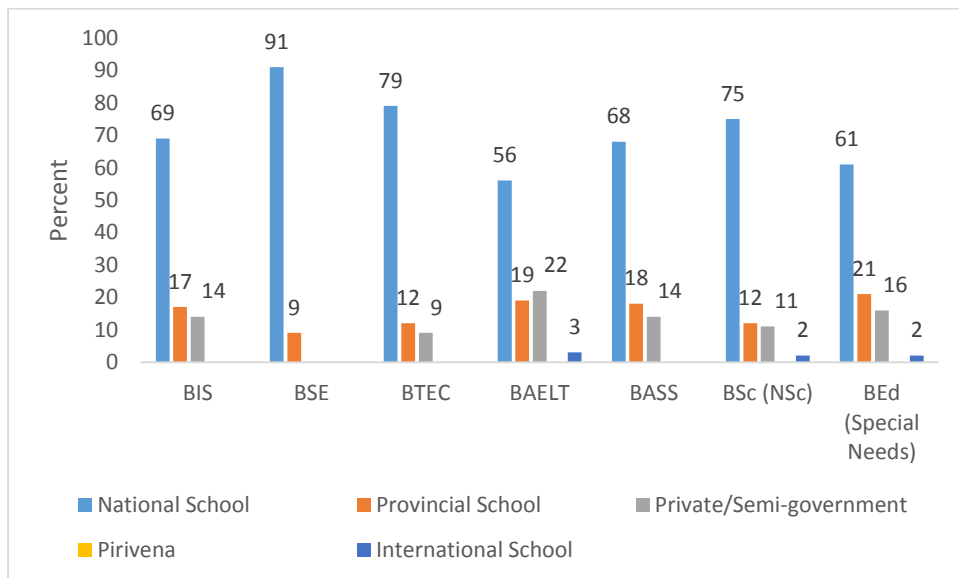


Figure 17 - Type of school attended by the OUSL degree holders

3.5 Educational Qualifications of the parents of the OUSL degree holders

The parents of the majority of graduands have passed the GCE A/L except for the parents of the BSE degree programme where the majority (46%) had completed at least a degree (Figure 18). It was interesting to note that more than 20% of the parents of the graduands had a degree or a higher qualification.

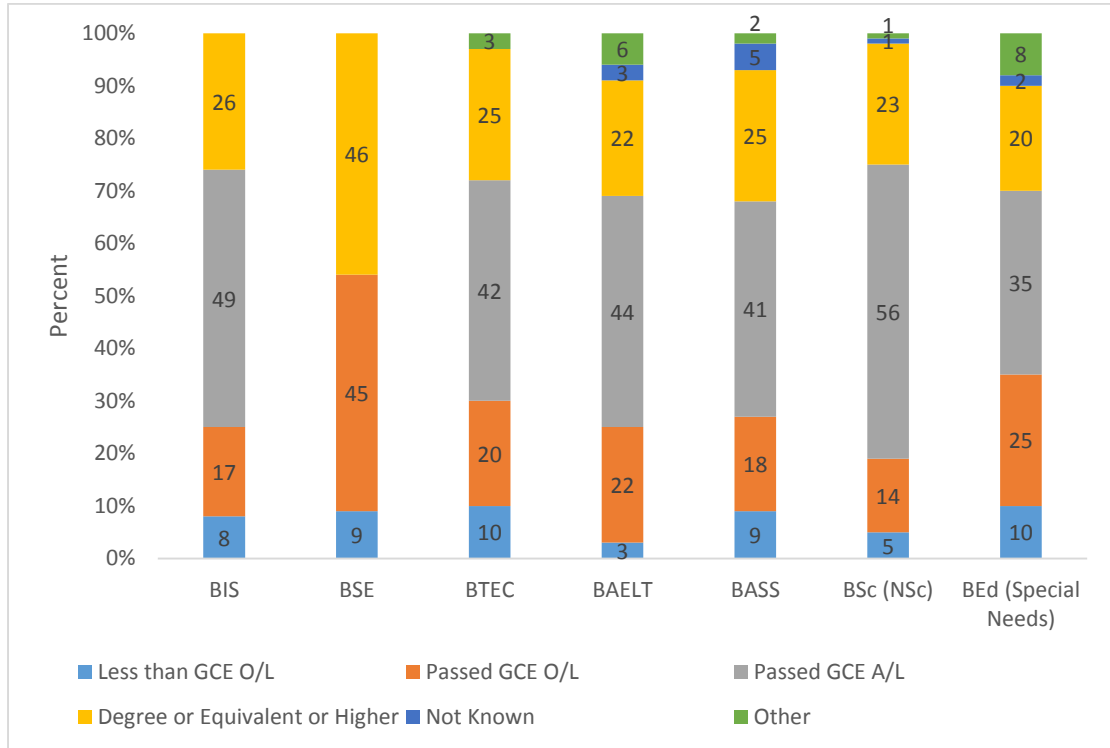


Figure 18 - Educational qualifications of the parents of the OUSL degree holders

3.6 Entry Qualifications of the OUSL degree holders

3.6.1 Subject specific entry qualification at the time of the registration

According to the findings, the majority of graduands from BIS, BTEC, BASS and BSc degree programmes had enrolled to the respective degree programme with the GCE A/L qualifications. In contrast, most of graduands from BSE, BAELT and BEd (Special Needs) degree programmes had enrolled for the degree programme using the diploma qualification. The OUSL Foundation Programme (currently named as Advanced Certificate) had also used as one of the entry qualifications especially for registering the BTEC, BSc, BASS and BEd (Special Needs) degree programmes (Figure 19) in keeping with the philosophy of lifelong learning. This clearly shows how the OUSL has opened up “ladders of opportunities” for those who would like to pursue higher education through flexible learning paths.

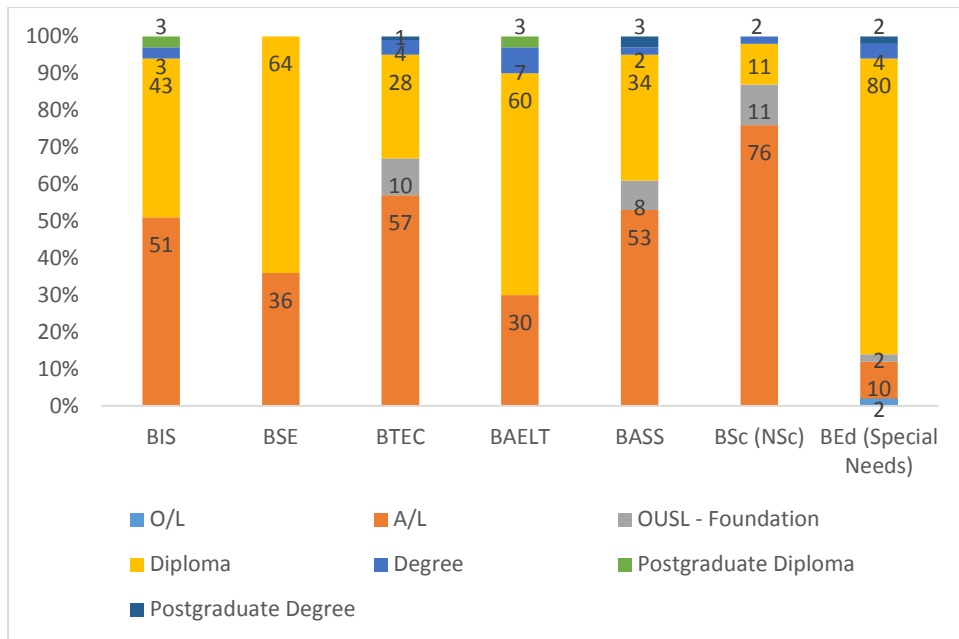


Figure 19 - Entry qualifications of the OUSL degree holders

3.6.2 English literacy at the time of the registration

When analysed the English literacy among the OUSL degree holders at the time of the registration, the majority have received an A grade (BSE, BTEC, BASS, BSc) at the GCE O/L followed by a C grade (BIS, BEd in Special Needs). In contrast, the majority of the BAELT have obtained an equivalent qualification other than the GCE O/L qualification (Figure 20).

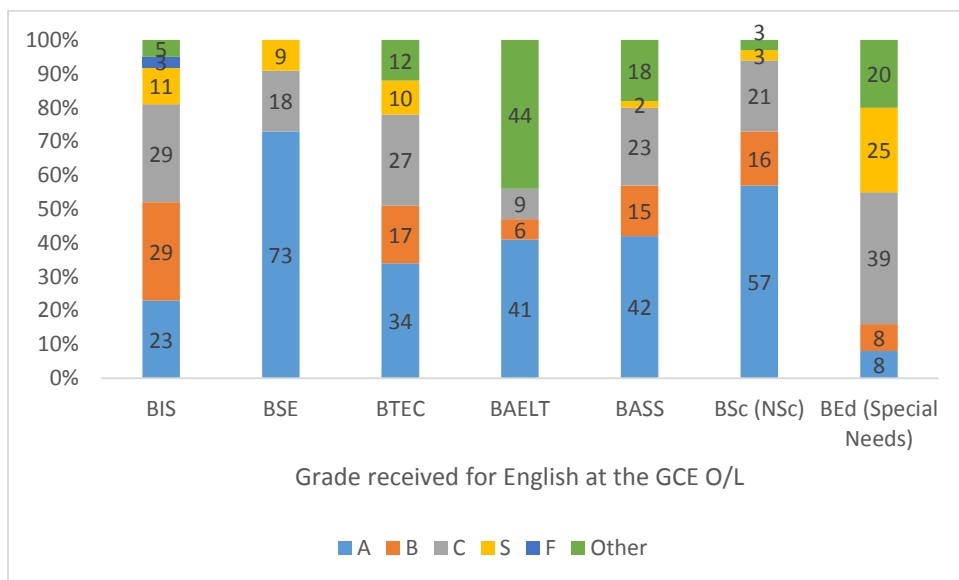


Figure 20 - Grade received for English at the GCE O/L of the OUSL degree holders

3.7 Skills acquired through the OUSL degree programmes

3.7.1 Oral and written skills in English

When compared the views of 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 trend towards “Very good” and “Good” categories implying the improvement in the oral skills among graduates at the end of the degree programme. The percentage of “Poor” category was only observed at the time of the registration of the BTEC, BASS, LLB and BEd (Special Needs) in small percentages. However, in the BSc degree programme, the “Poor” category was significantly reduced from 10% to 1% (Figure 21).

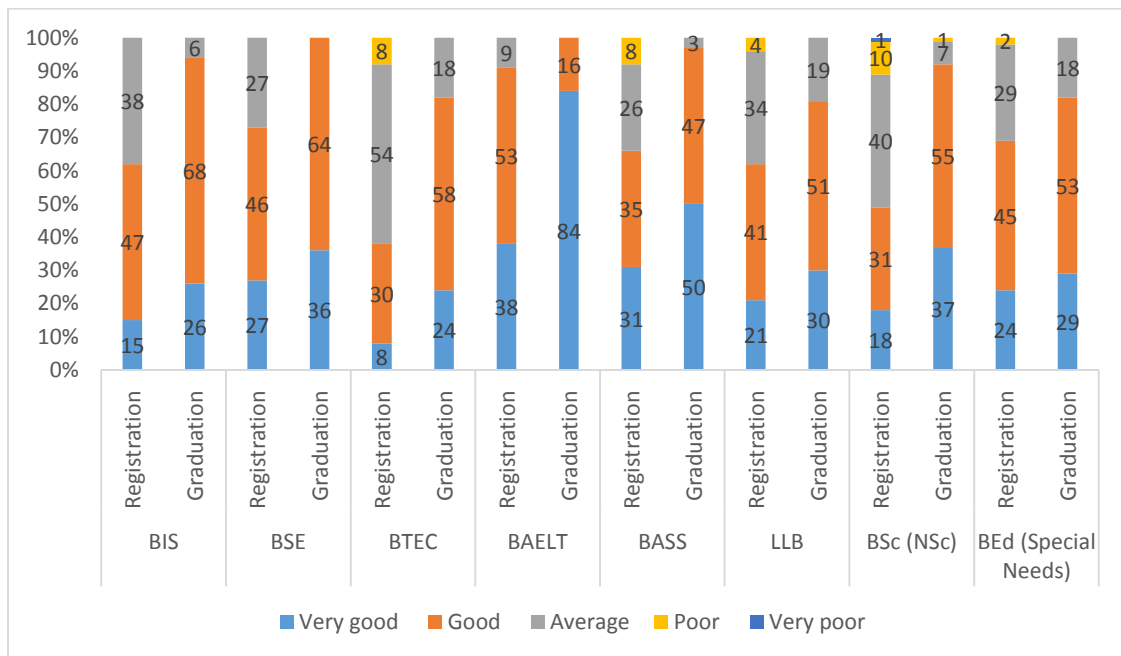


Figure 21 - Oral skills of English of the OUSL degree holders (at the time of the Registration and the Graduation)

Similar pattern was observed in the writing skills and there was no “Very poor” category across all degree programmes – Figure 22.

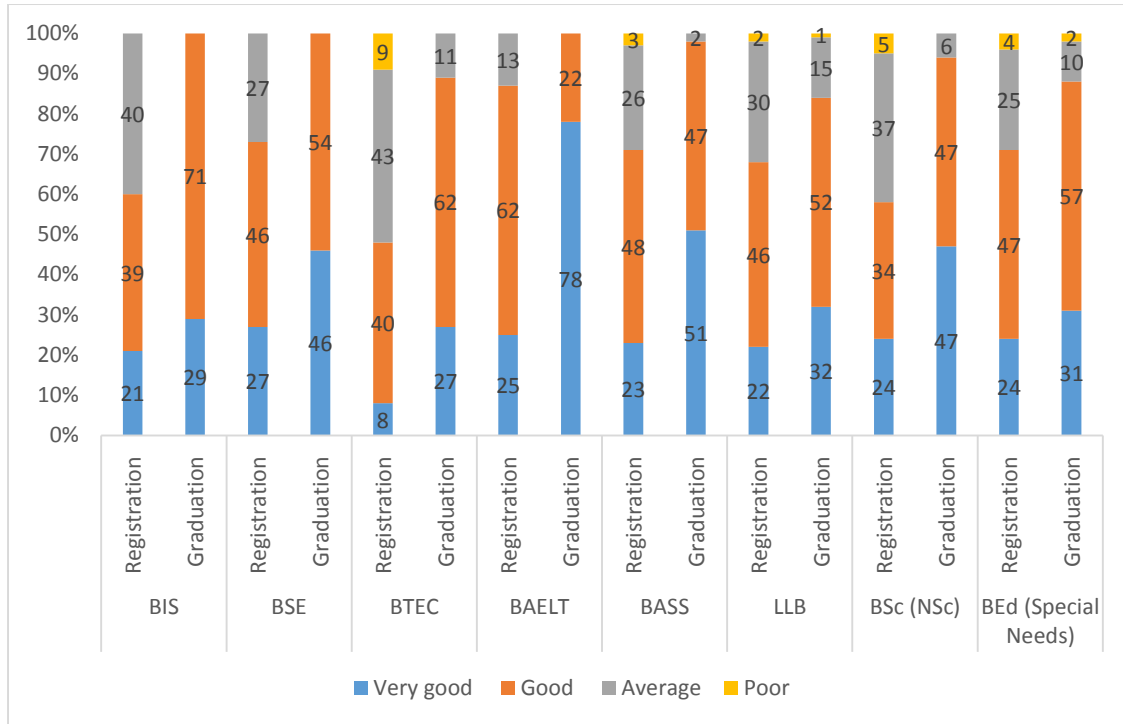


Figure 22 - Writing skills of English of the OUSL degree holders (at the time of the Registration and the Graduation)

3.7.2 ICT skills

In general, undergraduates felt that they used computers (Figure 23), web (Figure 24), email (Figure 25), MS Office (Figure 26), Social Media (Figure 27) to a greater extent whereas writing programs (Figure 28) and searching jobs online (Figure 29) were comparatively less when they joined the programme. They believed that their skills improved to a greater extent at the time of the graduation. In both occasions, the majority indicated that their level of competency was “Very poor” with respect to writing computer programmes.

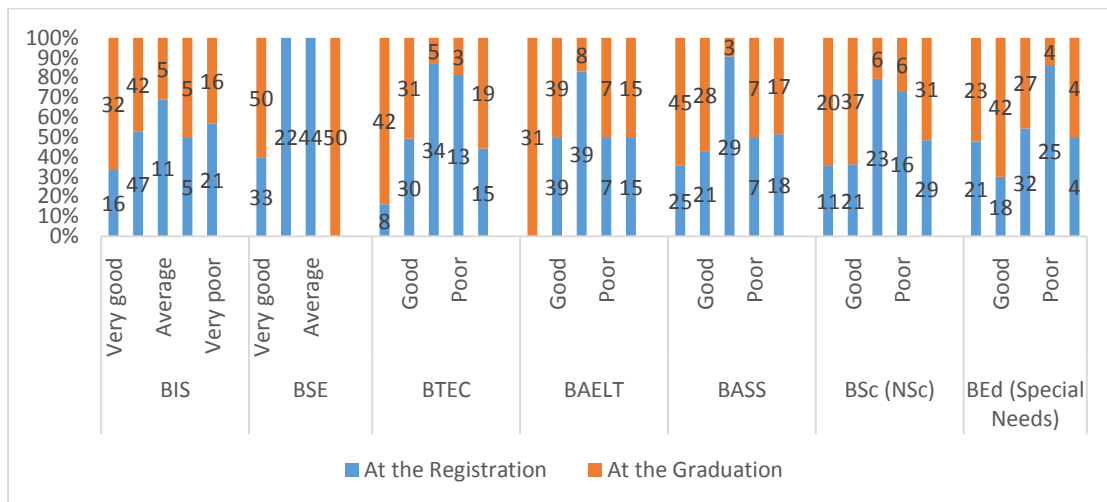


Figure 23 – Perceptions on the use of computer of the OUSL degree holders (at the time of the Registration and the Graduation)

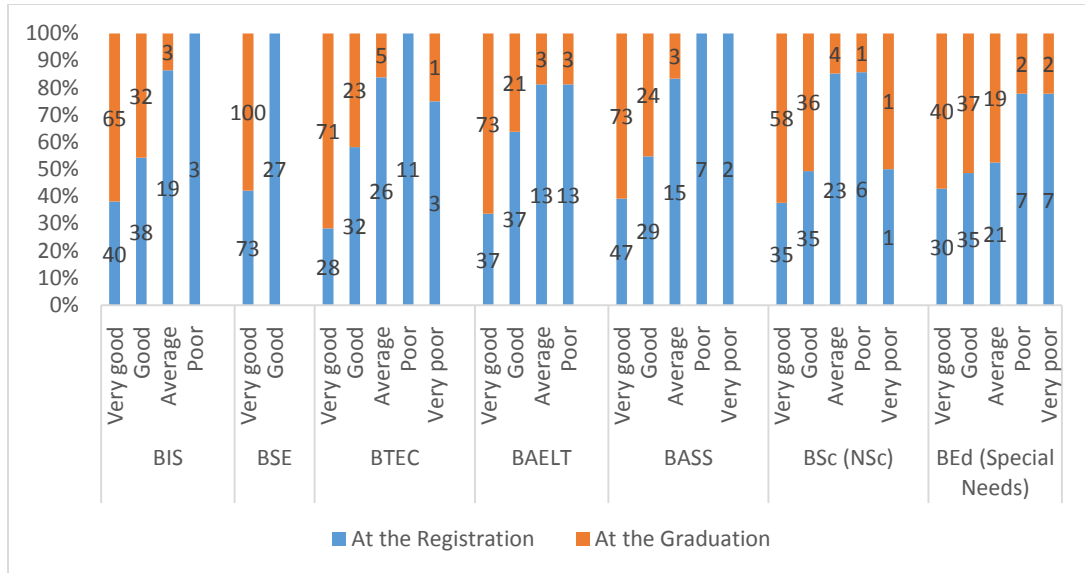


Figure 24 – Perceptions of the use of web of the OUSL degree holders (at the time of the Registration and the Graduation)

Perceptions of the use of email during the study period were illustrated in Figure 25.



Figure 25 - Perceptions of the use of email of the OUSL degree holders (at the time of the Registration and the Graduation)

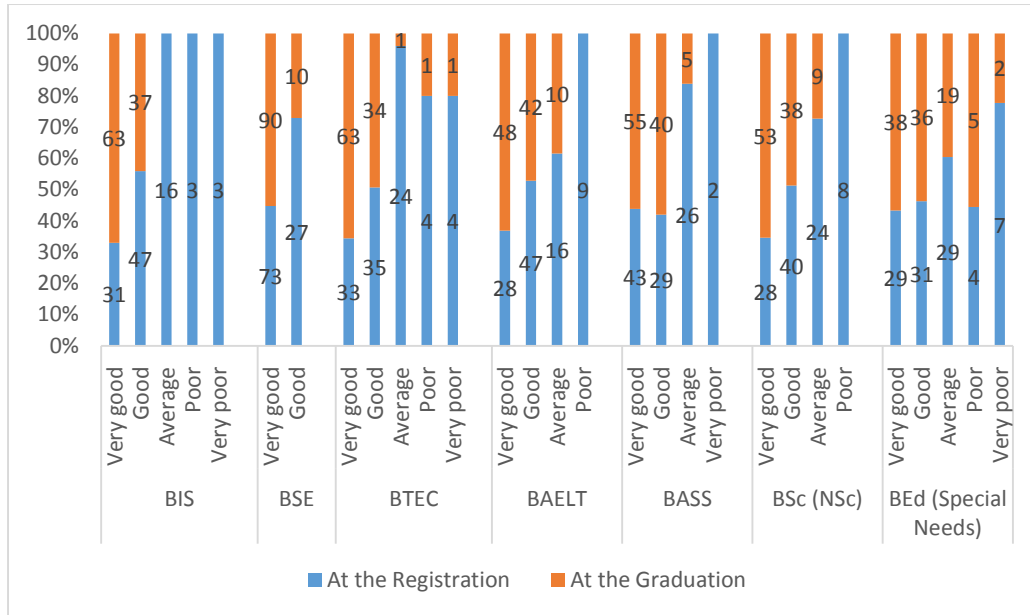


Figure 26 – Perceptions of the use of MS Office of the OUSL degree holders (at the time of the Registration and the Graduation)

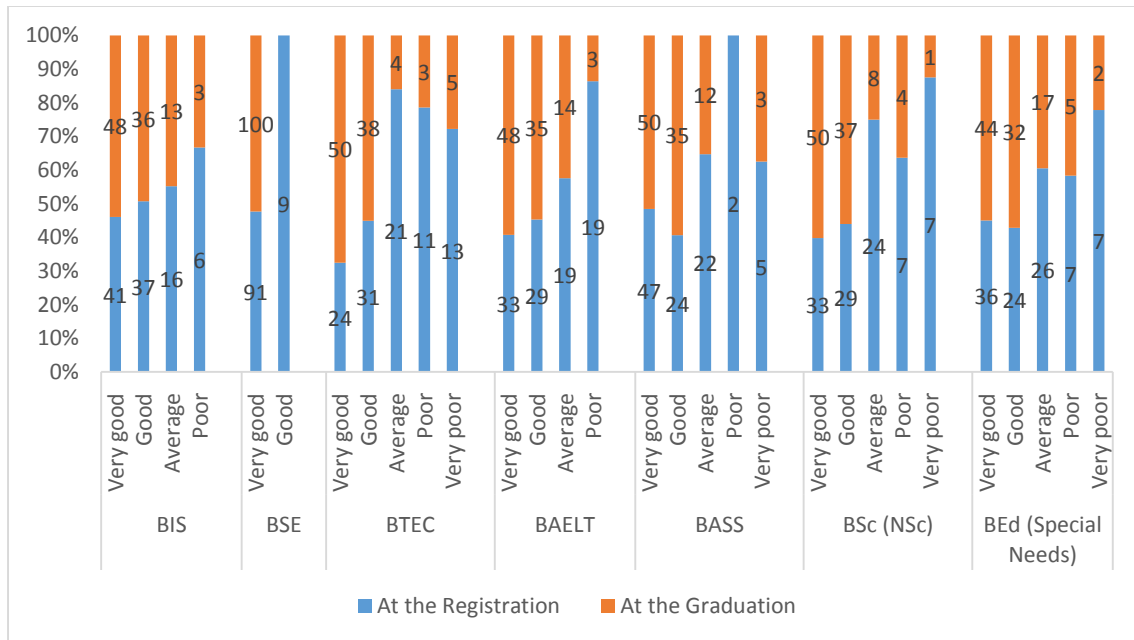


Figure 27 - Perceptions of the use of Social Media of the OUSL degree holders (at the time of the Registration and the Graduation)

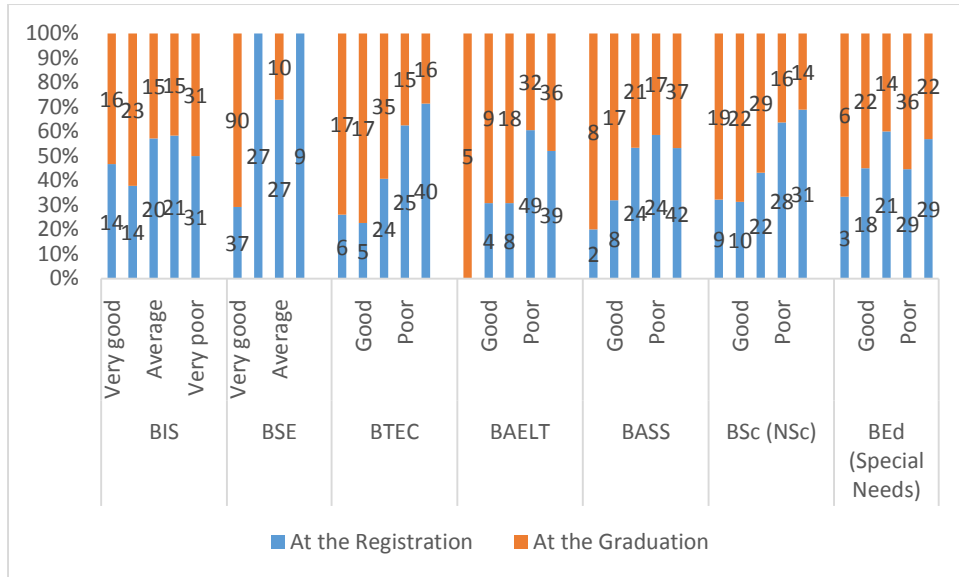


Figure 28 – Competency in writing programmes of the OUSL degree holders (at the time of the Registration and the Graduation)

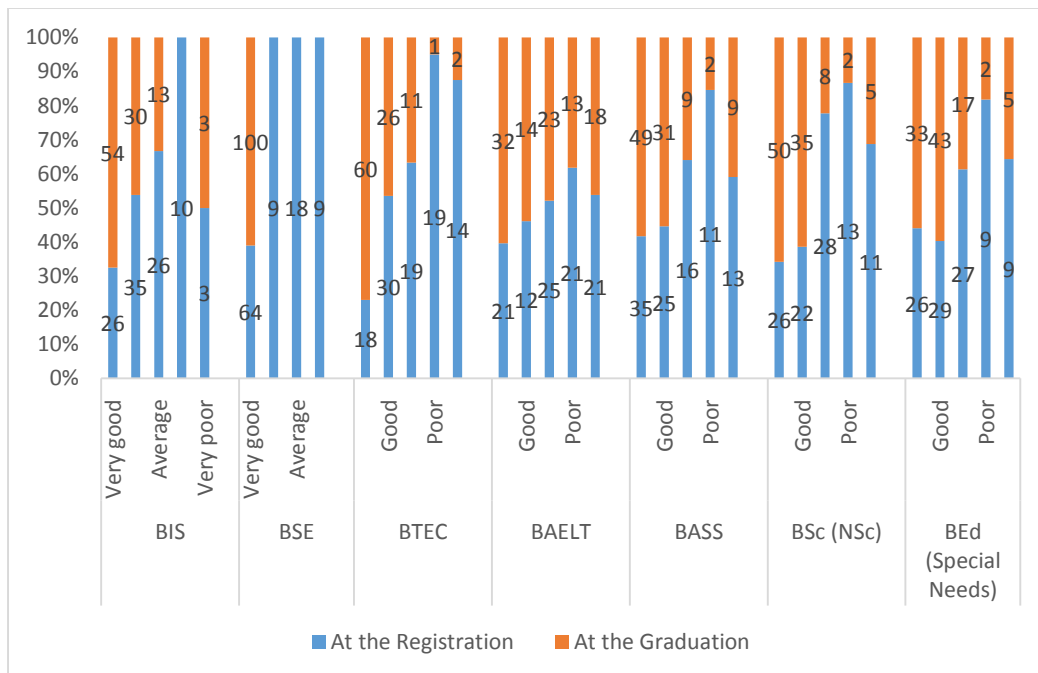


Figure 29 - Competency in searching jobs online of the OUSL degree holders (at the time of the Registration and the Graduation)

3.7.3 Extra activities

According to the findings, the participation in extra-activities by the OUSL undergraduates was very low across faculties in all three activities: extra curricular, vocational and academic activities. However, participation in vocational activities (except in the BAELT, BSc and BEd – Special Needs) was comparatively higher than the other two activities. No one in the BAELT had indicated in the participation in the vocational activities – Figure 30.

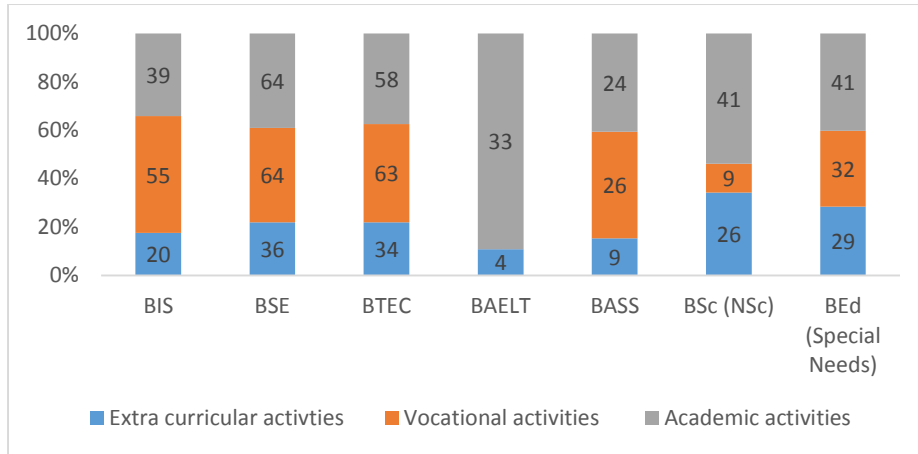


Figure 30 – Extra Activities carried out by the OUSL degree holders

3.8 Employability of the OUSL degree holders

The majority of the undergraduates were employed when they started the OUSL degree programme; except for the BTEC and BSc (NSc) where the majority were young school leavers (Figure 31). It was interesting to note that more than 74% of graduates had secured a job at the time of the graduation.

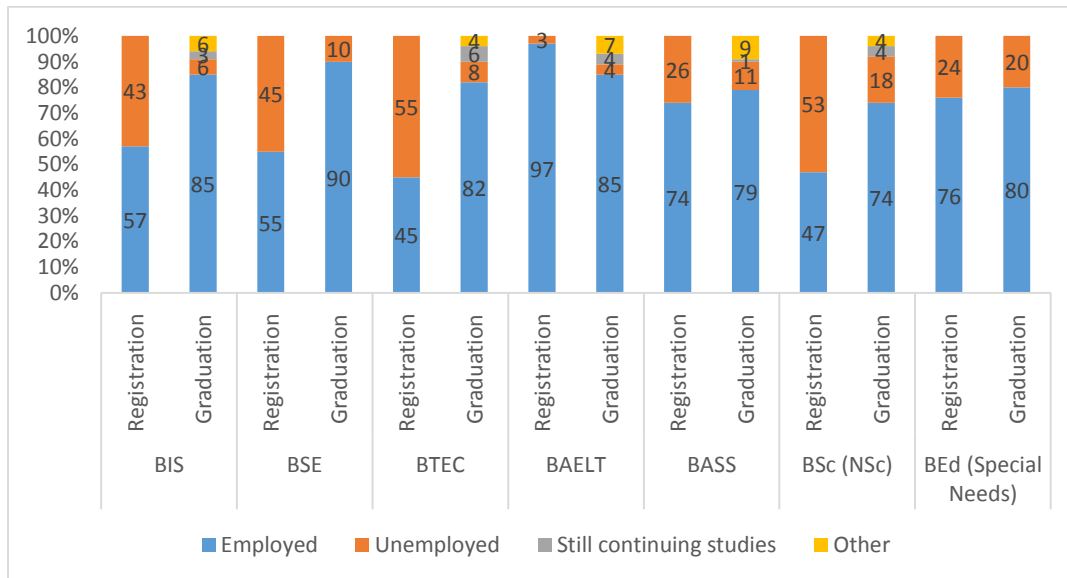


Figure 31 - Employment status of the OUSL graduates (at the time of the Registration and the Graduation)

The percentages of graduands who were holding permanent positions at the time of the registration has decreased at the time of the graduation across study programmes except in the BAELT graduands. It was evident that the percentages in temporary occupations have increased at the time of the graduation implying that some of the graduands may have taken challenges and changed their career paths for better career prospects even though the positions were temporary or contract-basis (Figure 32).

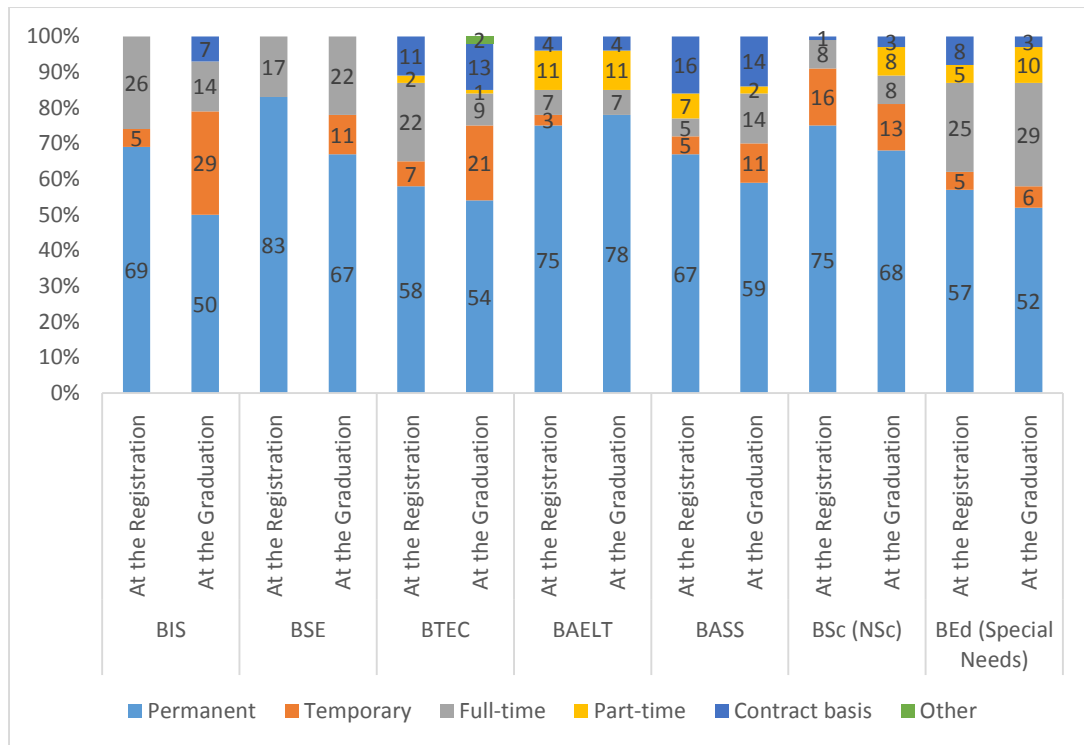


Figure 32 – Job type of the OUSL graduates (at the time of the Registration and the Graduation)

When analyzed the job sectors of the employed OUSL graduands, there was a clear alignment with the degree programmes. The majority of the BAELT, BASS, BSc (NSc) and BEd (Special Needs) graduands were teachers either in public or private schools (Figure 33). In contrast, the majority of the technical related degree programmes such as BIS, BSE and BTEC, graduands were in the private sector; BSE graduands in particular.

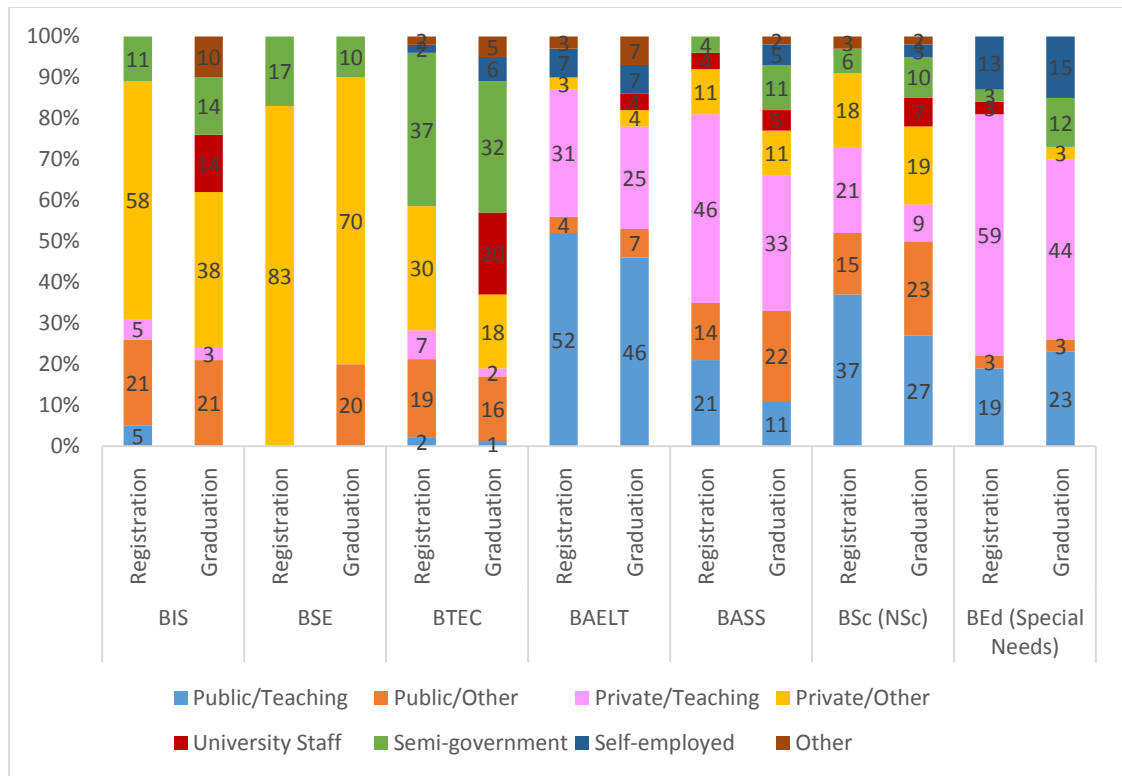


Figure 33 - Job sectors of the OUSL degree holders (at the time of the Registration and the Graduation)

When investigated the total population with respect to the sector preference, still the majority preferred to work in the public sector (32%), followed by the private (12%) and the university (6%) sectors (excluding the multi-code category – 42%) - (Figure 34).

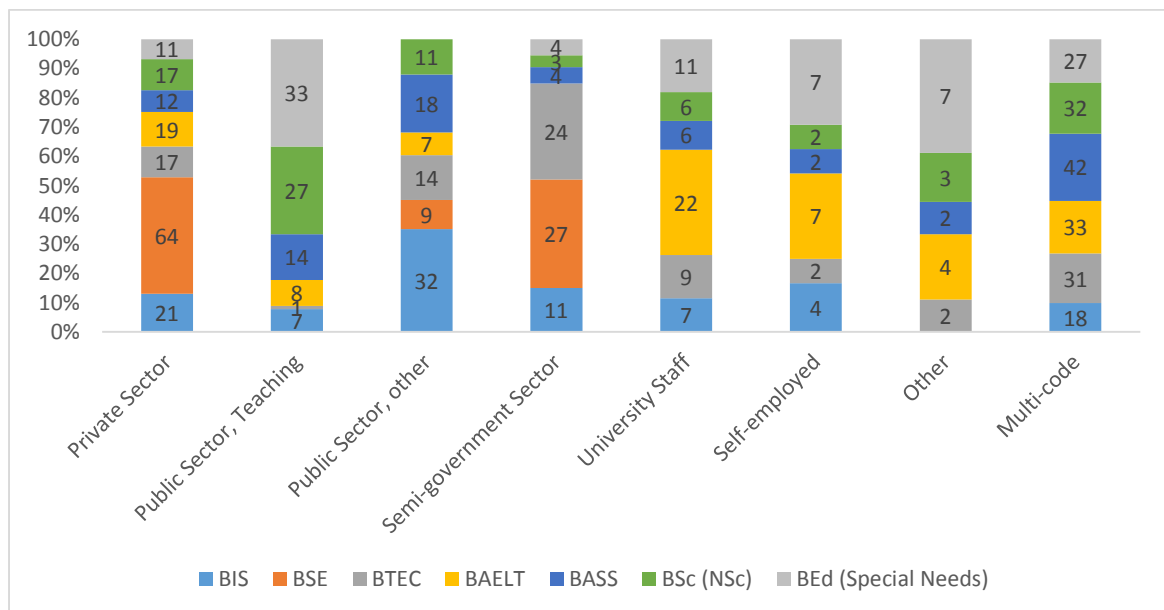


Figure 34 – Job sector preference by the OUSL degree holders

The majority of the graduands felt that their success in finding a job or getting a promotion was due to the result of the OUSL degree while the graduands of the BAELT (78%), BASS (69%) and BSc (NSc) – 51% believed that their achievement was not due to the completion of their respective degrees (Figure 35). Surprisingly the majority of unemployed students at the time of the registration were also had the same opinion.

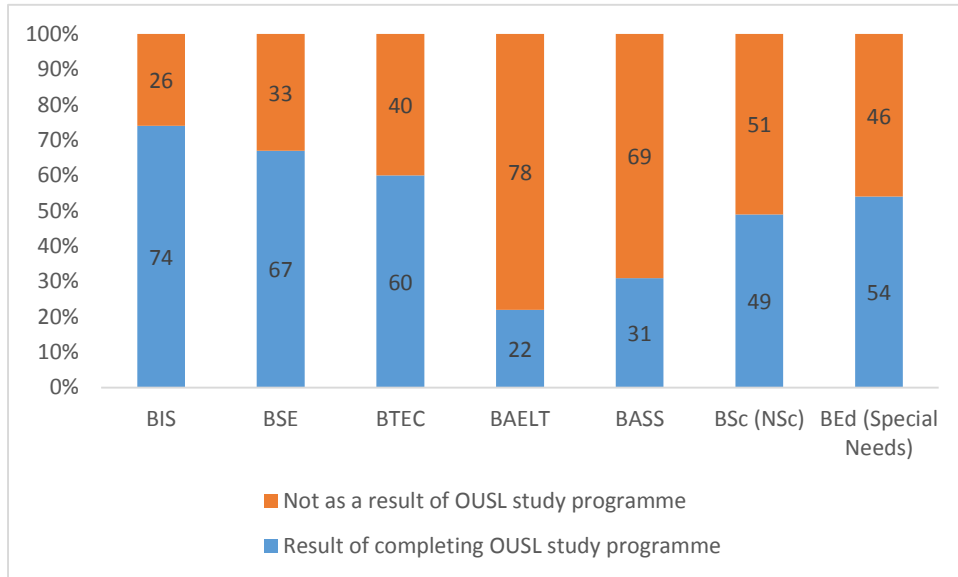


Figure 35 – Views on the achievement of the OUSL degrees

Most of the employed BSE (67%) and BTEC (44%) undergraduates were in the IT sector when they joined the study programme. However there was a clear reduction of the percentages at the time of the graduation (BSE – 50%, BTEC – 22%) indicating the career mobility of graduates towards other posts; especially for the post of economic/financial analyst. In contrast, the BAELT, BASS, BSc (NSc) and BEd (Special Needs) graduands were mostly teachers at the time of registration and the situation has remained the same at the time of graduation with lower percentages except in BA (Special Needs) graduands (Figure 36).

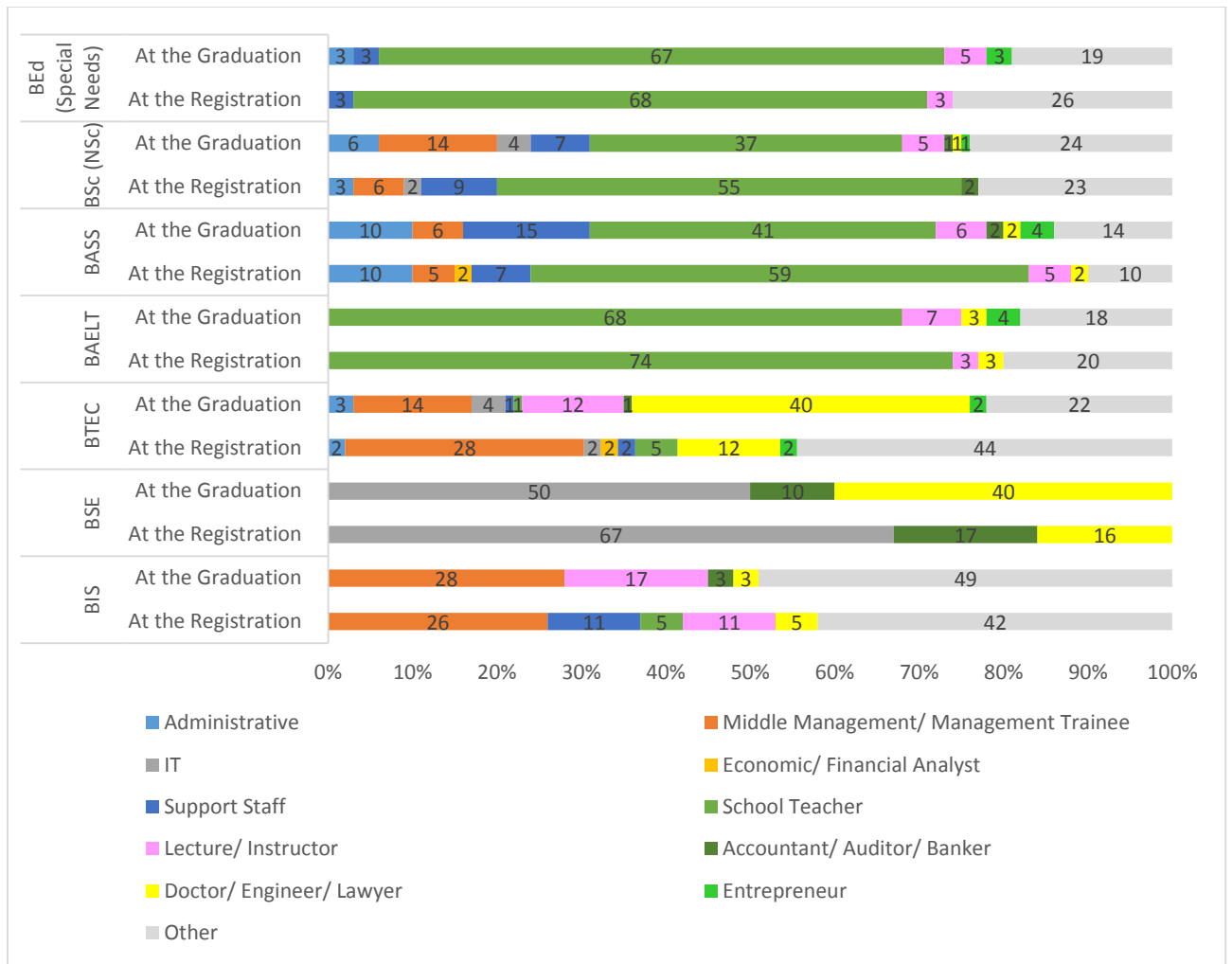


Figure 36 – Occupation of the OUSL degree holders

It is clearly apparent that there was a tendency towards the increase in the salary scales when drawing a gross monthly salary of the employed graduands at the graduation when compared to their salaries at the time of the registration (Figure 37) suggesting the career progression of graduands.

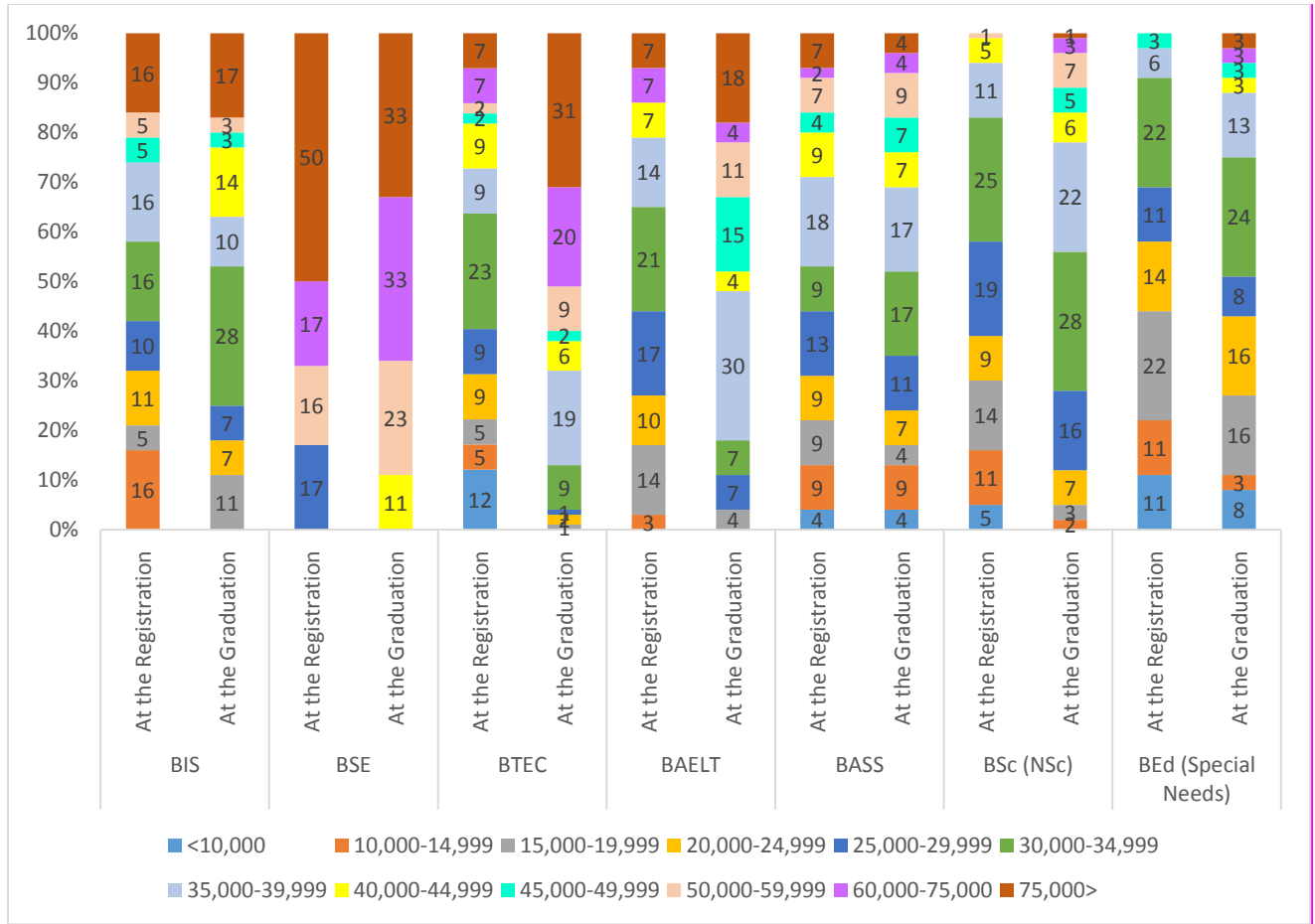


Figure 37– Gross monthly salary of the bachelors degree holders (at the time of the Registration and the Graduation)

Mixed opinions were expressed by the OUSL degree holders regarding the satisfaction of their respective occupations. Very remarkable satisfaction was observed among the graduands of the BAELT (84%). - Figure 38.

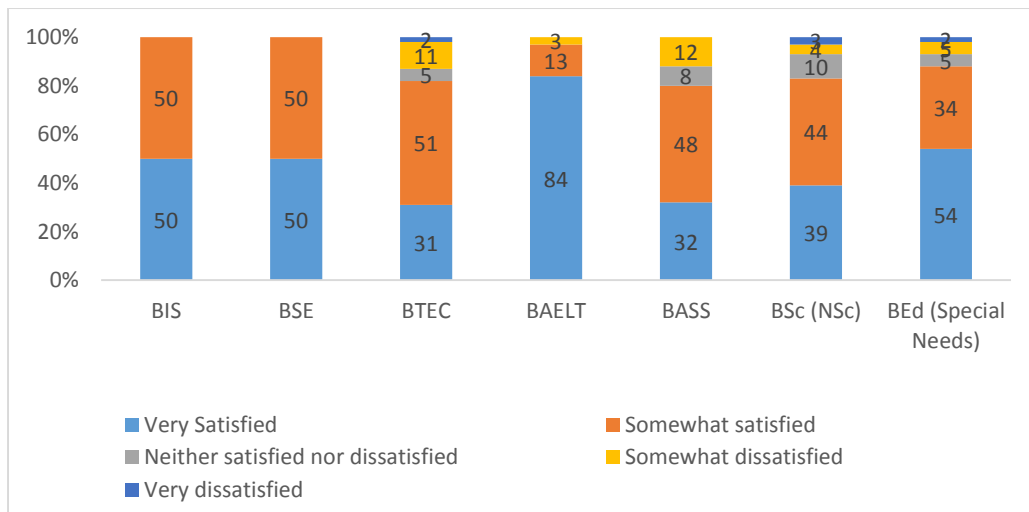


Figure 38 – Perceptions of the job satisfaction of the OUSL degree holders

Several methods have been used by the unemployed graduands for securing a job at the end of the graduation such as newspapers (BTEC – 17%, BAELT – 10%, BEd (Special Needs) – 13%), personal contacts (BTEC – 23%, BSc (Nsc) – 17%, BEd (Special Needs) – 24%), through competitive exams (BAELT – 31%) etc. (Figure 39). Some have used many methods.

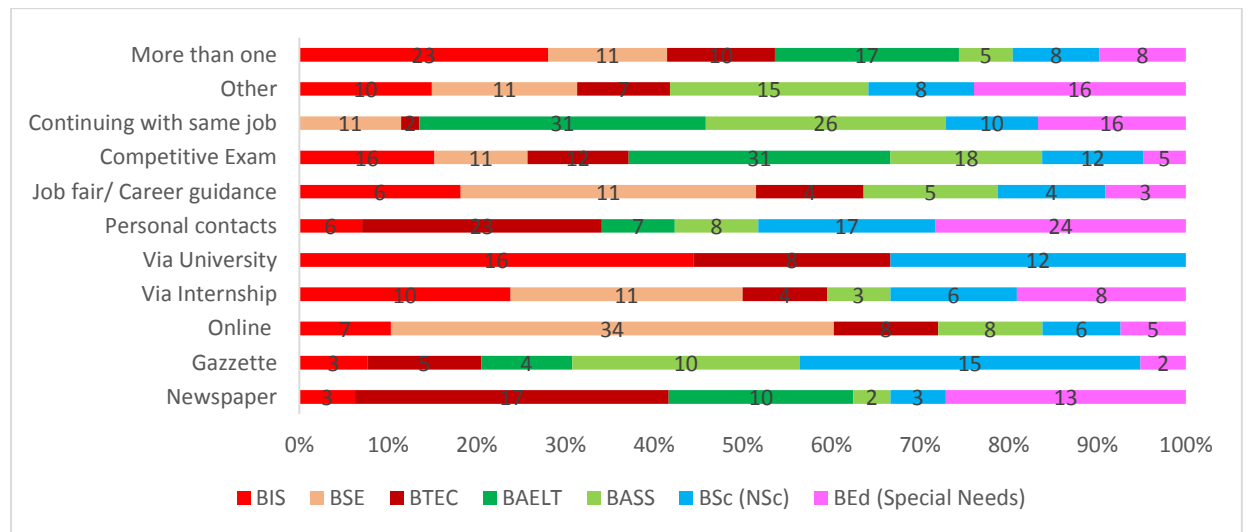


Figure 39 – Method of finding a job by the OUSL graduates

Time taken to secure a job among the unemployed graduands varies; a significant proportion of the BTEC, BSc (Nsc) and BEd (Special Needs) graduands had secured a job within a period of less than three months whereas the majority of the BAELT graduands had secured a job between 3-6 months. In contrast, equal percentage of the graduands followed the BASS and BEd (Special Needs) degree programme had waited more than a year to find a job (Figure 40). BIS and BSE graduands have not responded to this question.

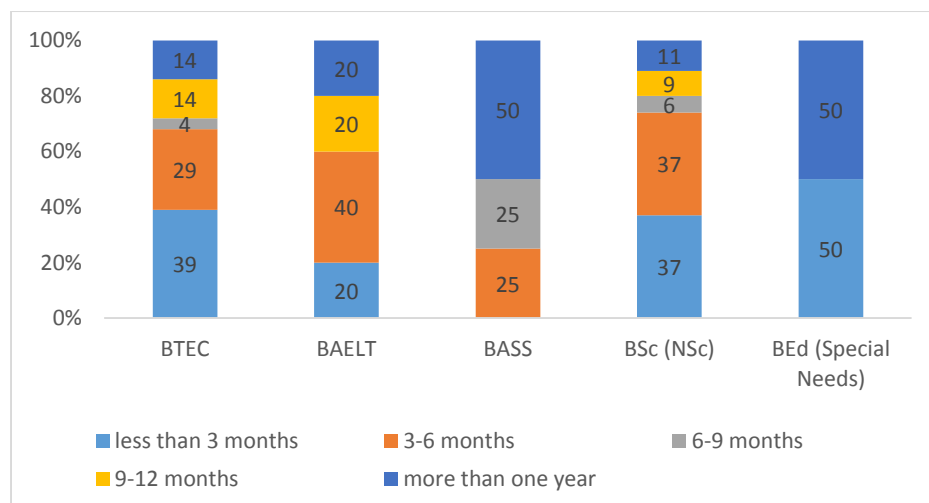


Figure 40 – Time taken to find a job by the OUSL degree holders

The reasons stated by the unemployed graduands for not finding a job were job scarcity (approximately 30%), not possessing required skills, and not applied for jobs due to personal reasons such as family commitments, very selective in finding jobs, continuing/ planning to do higher studies (Figure 41). Graduands of the BIS, BSE and BAELT had not responded to this question.

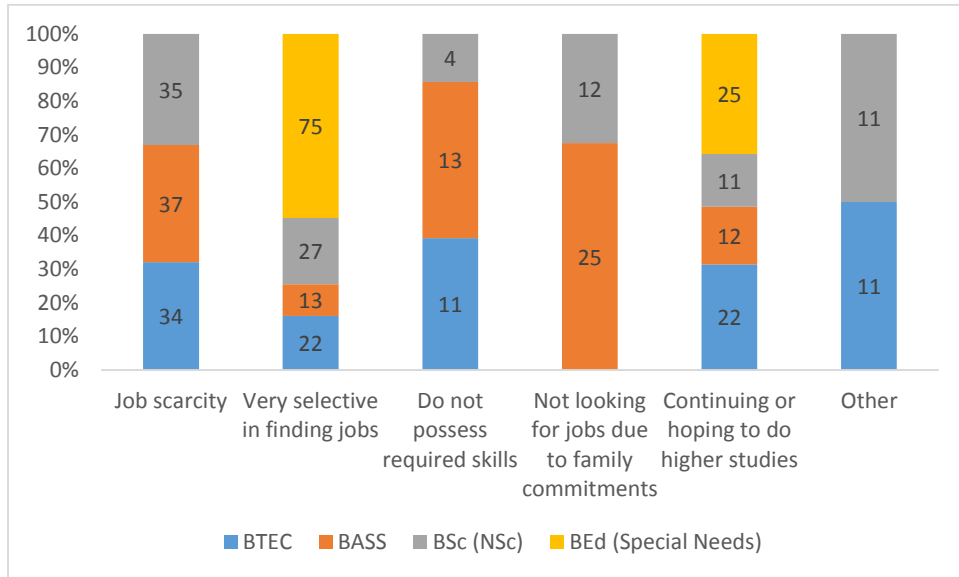


Figure 41– Reasons for unemployment by the unemployed OUSL graduands

3.9 Perceptions on the various components of the OUSL degree programmes

3.9.1 Course material

Perceptions of the effectiveness of course material for their learning by the graduands are illustrated in Figure 42.

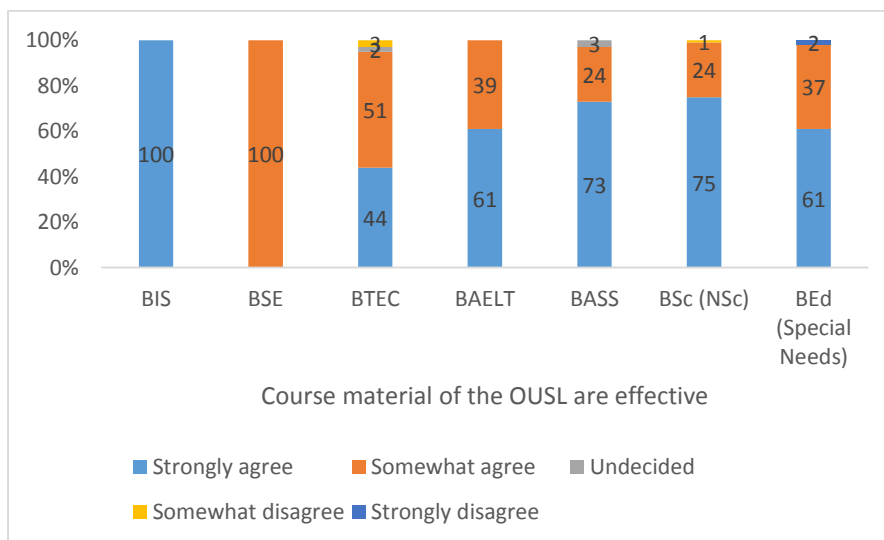


Figure 42 – Perceptions on the effectiveness of the course material of the degree programmes

More than 24% of graduands across all the degree programmes had the opinion that the course material were “somewhat” effective except for the BIS programme (100%). This is a source of concern as the main vehicle of transferring knowledge to learners in the OUSL is through course material 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 material.

Figure 43 illustrates the opinions expressed by the graduands for the statement on “Standard textbooks are also used in courses taught in addition to the core course material”.

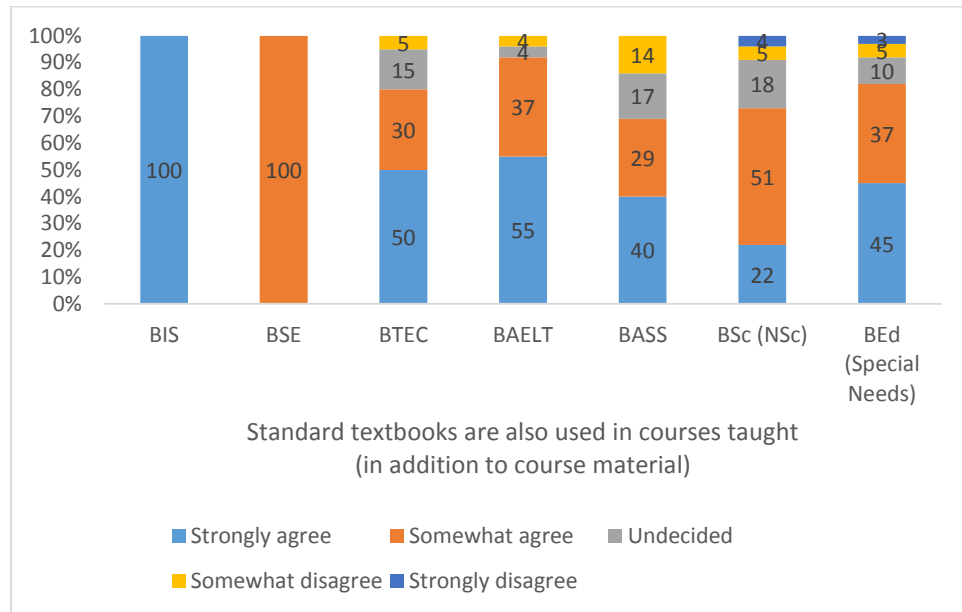


Figure 43 – Perceptions on the use of standard textbooks in addition to course material of the degree programmes

Mixed opinions were expressed on the statement on “Learning is mostly done by memorizing the course material” (Figure 44).

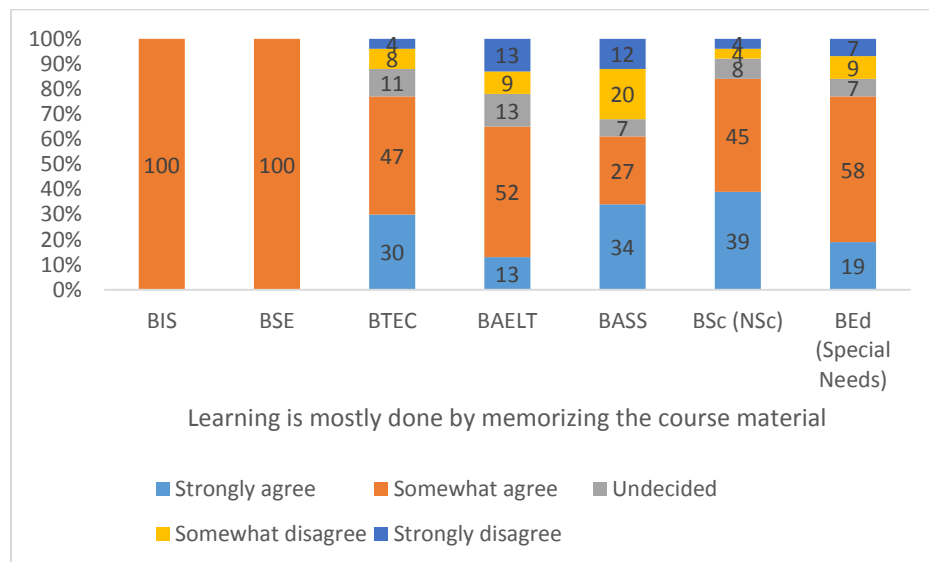


Figure 44– Perceptions on memorizing the course material

3.9.2 Practical knowledge and training

The views expressed by the graduands on the acquisition of practical knowledge through course material is illustrated in Figure 45. It was clearly apparent that the majority of graduands of the BAELT (60%), BASS (50%), BSc (46%) and BTEC (41%) degree programmes expressed that that they have acquired practical knowledge through the course material in contrast to the graduands of the BIS and BSE degree programmes.

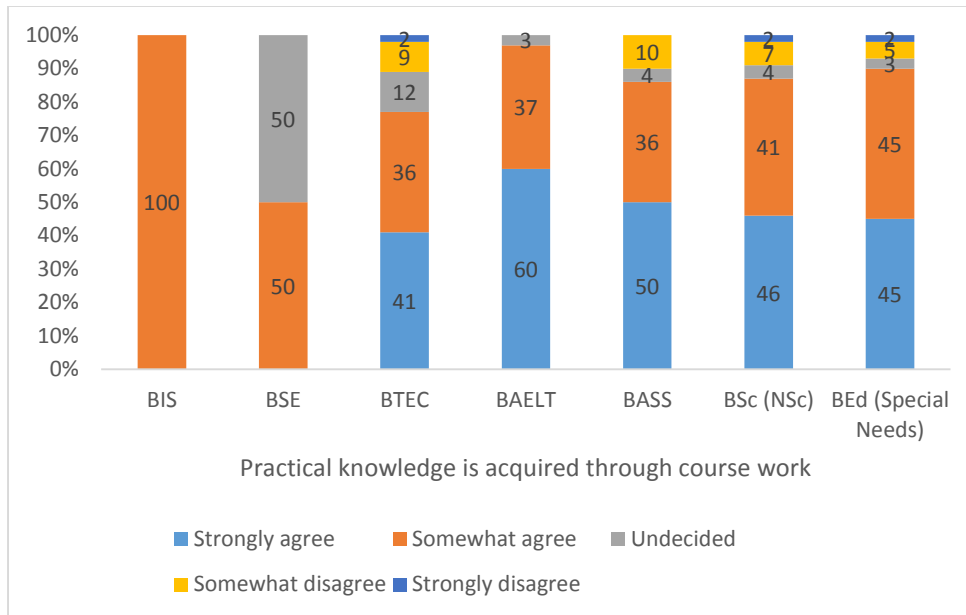


Figure 45 – Perceptions on the acquisition of practical knowledge through course material

Most of the graduands believe that the practical training is part of the university education except for the BIS and BSE graduands (Figure 46).

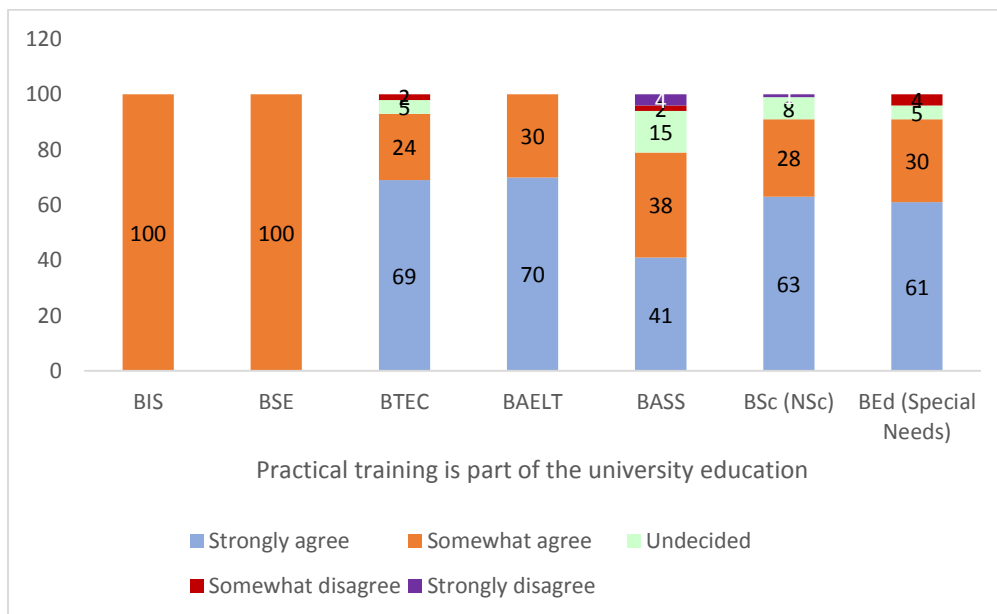


Figure 46 – Perceptions on the practical training

3.9.3 Suitability of the learning process for an adult distance learner

Figure 47 shows the opinion expressed by the graduands to the statement on “learning process is suitable for current job environment”. Most of the graduands felt that the learning process was not so suitable to the needs of the employed adult learners.

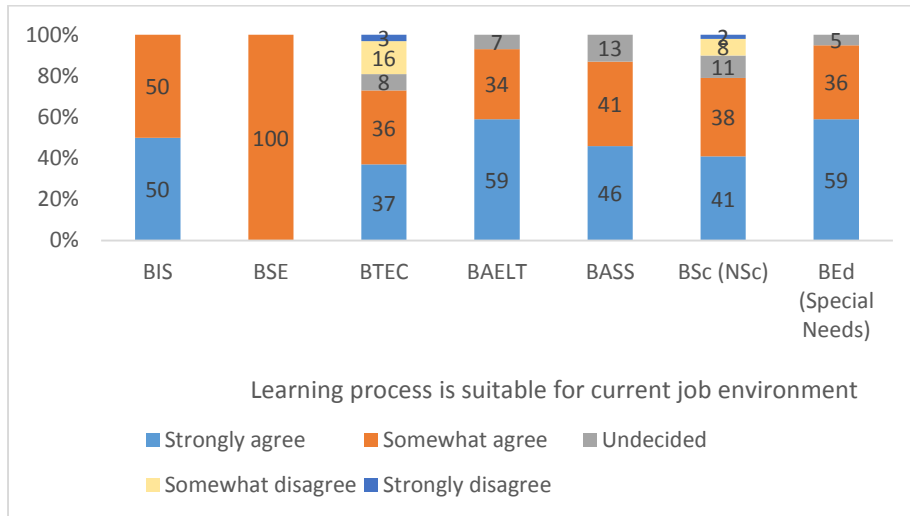


Figure 47– Perceptions on the learning process of the degree programmes

3.9.4 Workload of the degree programmes

Figure 48 highlights the perceptions related to the workload of the respective degree programmes. It is apparent that the majority of the graduands had the view that the workload assigned to their degree programmes was considerably high and needs thorough investigation.

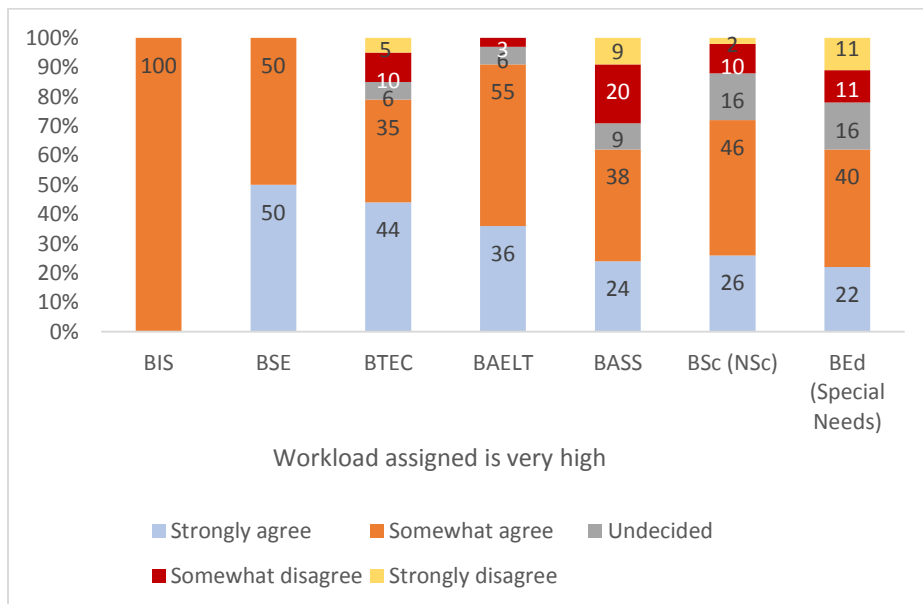


Figure 48 - Perceptions on the workload of the degree programmes

3.9.5 Teaching methods used

The views on the effectiveness of teaching methods used in different study programmes are presented in Figure 49. Graduands of BAELT (71%) were

very much satisfied with the teaching methods while approximately 50% of the graduands from BEd and BIS were also in agreement.

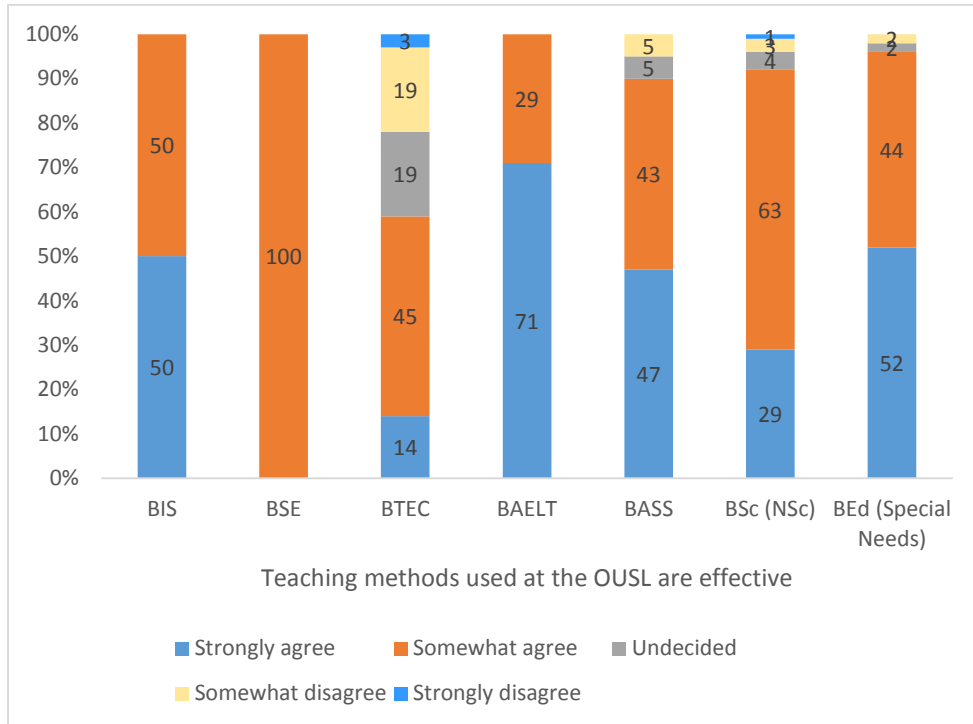


Figure 49 - Perceptions on the teaching methods used

3.9.6 Use of Tutorials as learning tools

Figure 50 shows that the significant proportion of BEd (Special Needs) – 69% and the BAELT (55%) graduands were in agreement of the statement “tutorials were used as learning tools”.

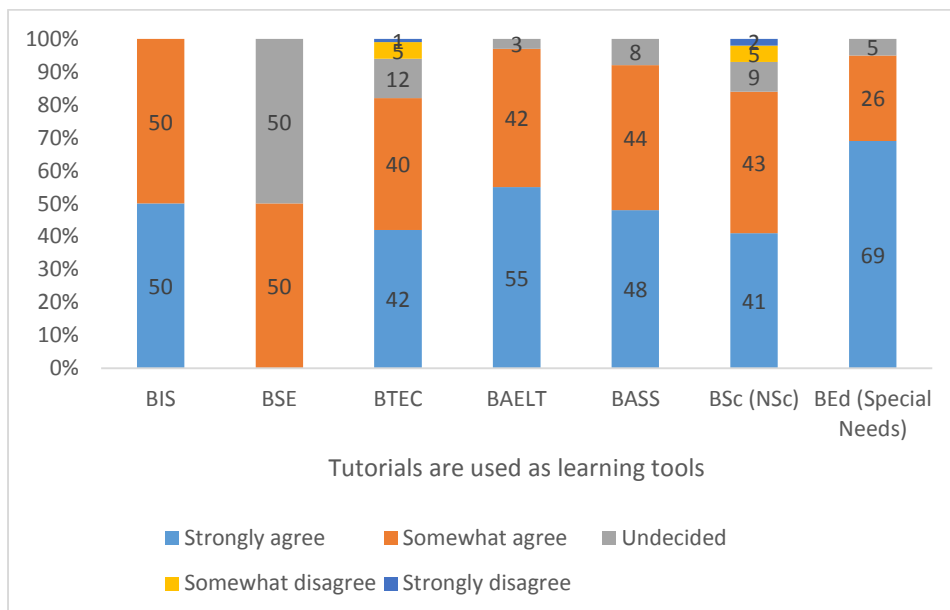


Figure 50 – Perceptions on the tutorials

3.9.7 Quality of classrooms

This aspect is a source of concern as the majority were not in agreement with the statement of quality of classrooms (Figure 51) except for the graduands of the BEd (Special Needs).

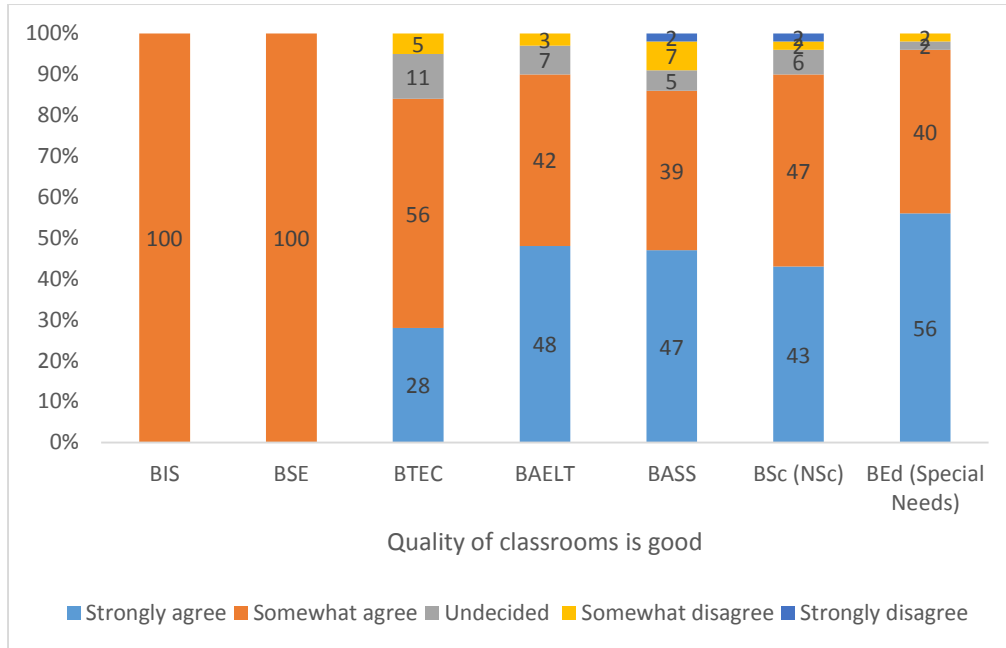


Figure 51- Perceptions on the quality of classrooms

3.9.8 Quality of lecturers

Figure 52 shows the perceptions of the graduands with respect to the quality of their lecturers. The 87% of graduands of the BAELT were in agreement with the statement while the majority of BTEC and BSc graduands were “Somewhat agree” with the statement.

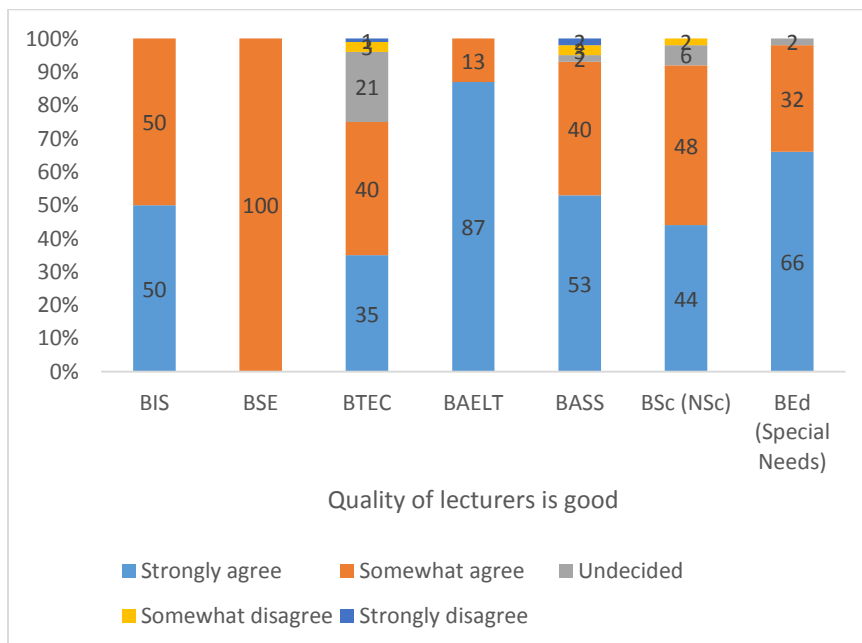


Figure 52 – Perceptions on the quality of lecturers

3.9.9 Development of research skills

This section focuses on developing research skills through the study period. The significant proportion (80%) of BAELT graduands indicated that they have developed research skills during the study period (Figure 54). Moreover more than 50 percent of BASS (68%) and BEd Special Needs (58%) graduands mentioned that they have developed the research skills. In contrast, opinion of the majority of engineering and science graduands were comparatively low; science graduands in particular (30%) suggesting for further improvement in this area.

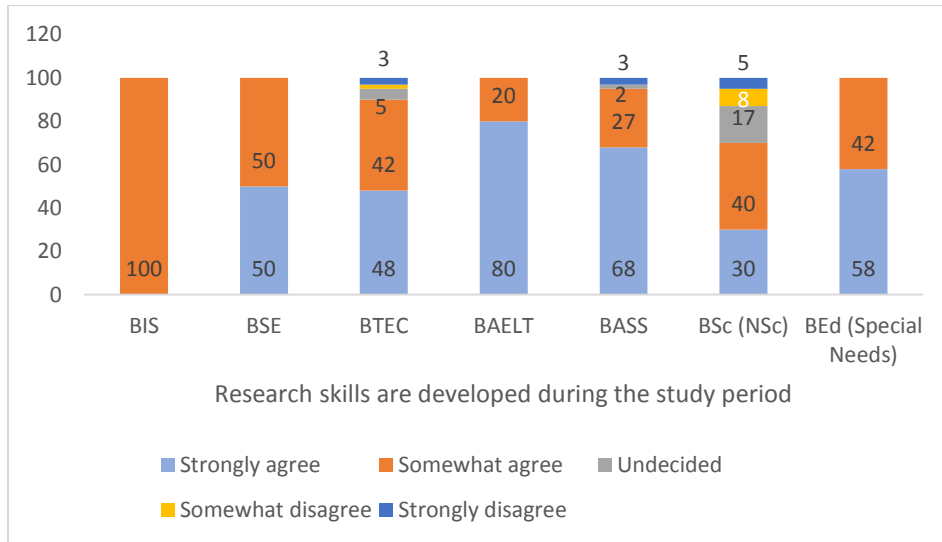


Figure 53 - Perceptions on the development of research skills

3.9.10 Facilities offered by the OUSL

Laboratory facilities

Figure 54 shows the perceptions of the facilities at the laboratories with respect to their degree programmes. Most of the graduates felt that the facilities at the laboratories were somewhat satisfactory except for the graduates from the BIS and BTEC. This finding implies that the facilities at the laboratories need to be increased across degree programmes.

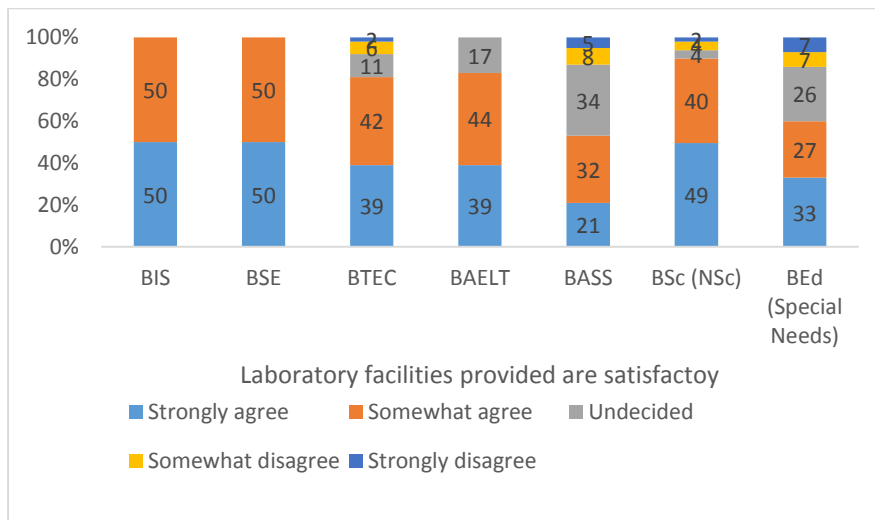


Figure 54 – Perceptions on the laboratory facilities

IT facilities

The opinion of the graduates with respect to the satisfaction of the IT facilities was below 50% (except for BIS) across all the degree programmes (Figure 55). This area needs thorough investigation for continuous improvement of the degree programmes.

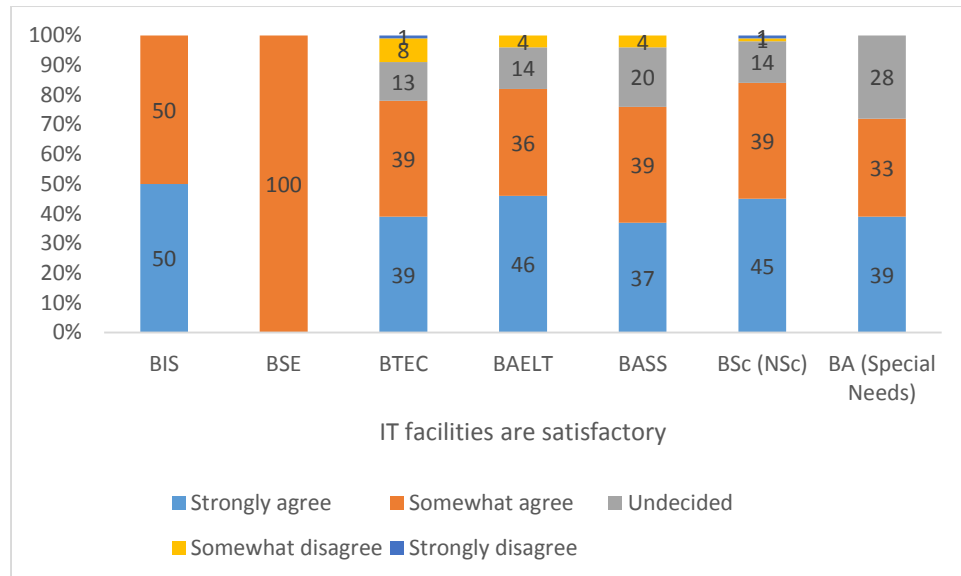


Figure 55 - Perceptions on the IT facilities

Library facilities

In contrast, the opinion expressed for library facilities by the majority graduates was 50% and above (Figure 56).

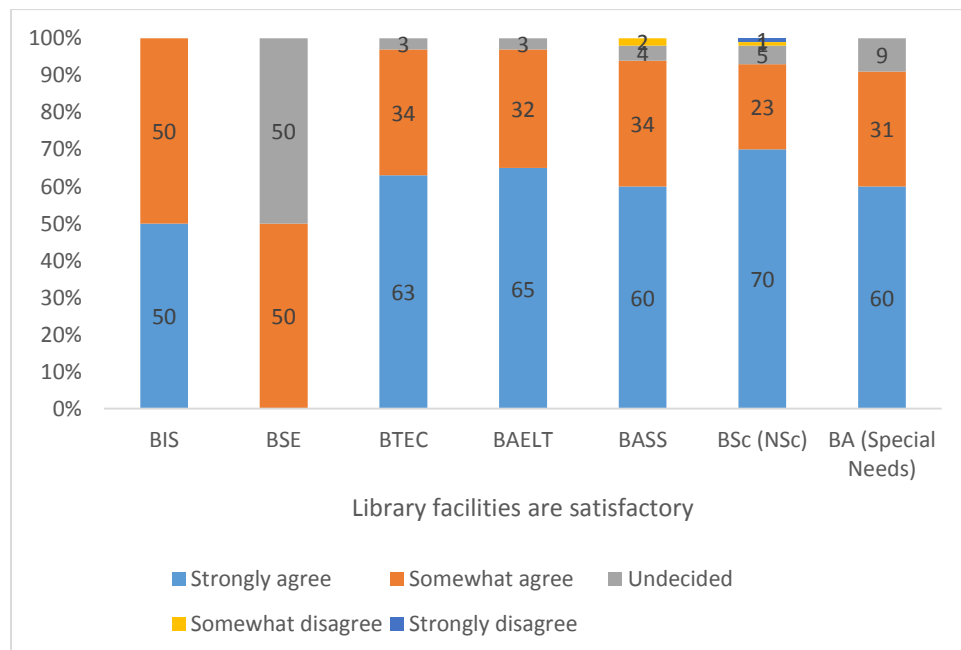


Figure 56 – Perceptions on the library facilities

With respect to their views on future contacts with the OUSL, the majority indicated more than one opinion (more than 45%) – Figure 57. Having excluded the multi-code options, 7 to 37% would like to follow another programme at the OUSL and 8-50% would like to have regular contacts with the OUSL. Surprisingly only 2-6% would like to assist the OUSL in its future endeavours.

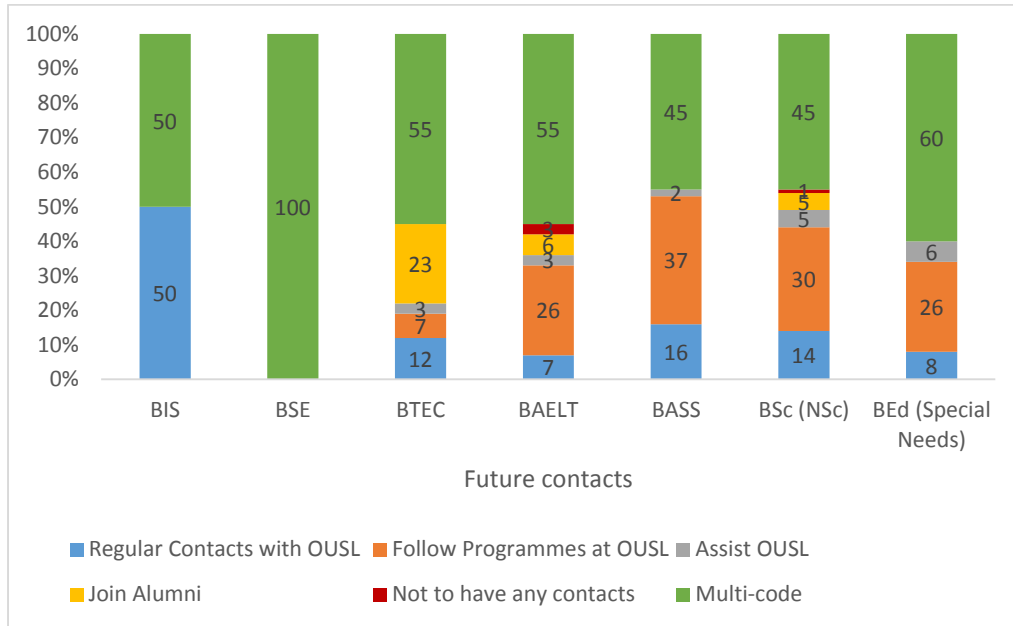


Figure 57 – Perceptions on the association of the OUSL in the future

3.10 Career goals of the OUSL degree holders

With respect to the career goals of the OUSL graduates for the next two years, the similar pattern was observed across all study programmes. More than 90% of all the degree holders would like to find a better job and to pursue higher studies (Figure 58). Migration was also selected by a substantial proportion (69-100%).

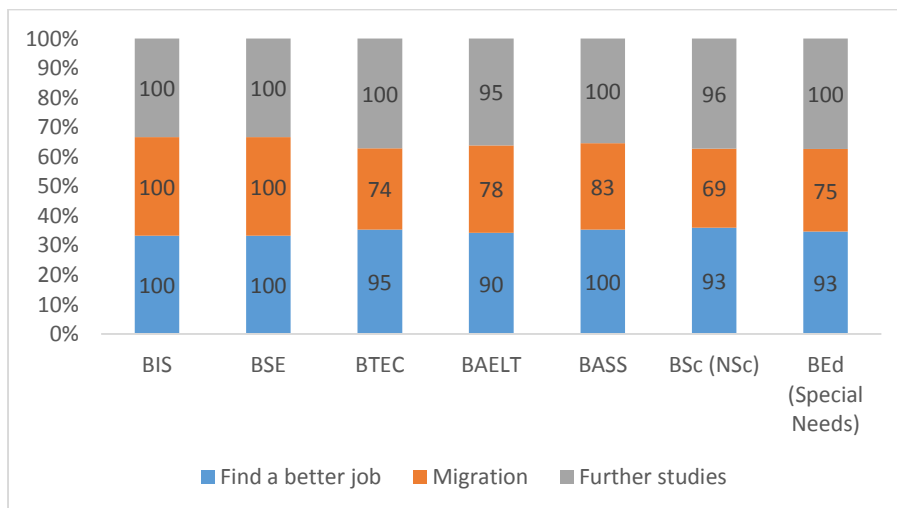


Figure 58 – Career goals of the OUSL degree holders for the next two years

3.11 Recommendation of the OUSL degree programmes

All the BIS, BSE, BASS and BEd (Special Needs) graduands recommended their study programme for future learners (Figure 60) indicating the satisfaction of these degree programme among graduands. However, some graduands had not recommended their respective degree programmes; BTEC in particular (16%) and it is necessary to investigate the issues related to the success of these degree programmes and take remedial measures promptly to make the programmes more appealing to suit the distance learners.

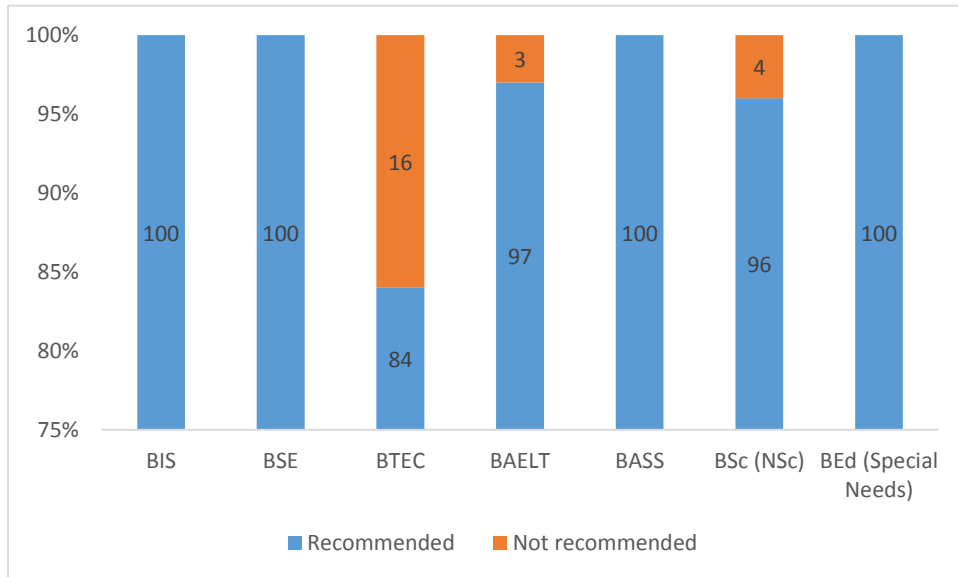


Figure 59 – Recommendation of the OUSL degree programmes

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 1):

Table 1: Suggestions for improvement

Category	Programme	Suggestions
Subject Content	BTEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change the syllabus Provide good course material with regular updates
	BAELT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve quality of course material
	BASS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplify course material Update course material/online modules
	BSc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course material must be shorter Need simple explanations Need course material with colourful images
	BEd (Special Needs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplify the course material Subject module should be more attractive
Pedagogy	BTEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need project based education with middle level examples
	BAELT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research module have to start from the beginning
	BASS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build more interaction/interactive activities in courses
	BSc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporate more online activities
Assessment and feedback	BAELT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need more time for assignments Need feasible deadlines for assignments Allow submission of assignments via email
	BASS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide CAT feedback before the final examination Provide past papers
	BSc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should have gaps between CATs Hold CAT in Rathnapura centre also
Final Examinations	BTEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct repeat exams Avoid scheduling exams during practicals
Course delivery	BTEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need more day schools Provide quality lectures Change the learning/teaching method and make them effective Increase lecture time
	BAELT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase day schools Improve the quality of lecturers as some lecturers just reading
	BASS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need more day schools
	BSc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More interaction with students
Practical work	BTEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need good practical experience/lab work Increase lab practicals Increase/improve lab facilities Do the modules on time at the lab sessions
	BAELT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a language lab Practice skills needed
	BSc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do more tutorials Improve practical training Need more practical work/ field visits Provide internships to get experiences in industries
	BEd Special Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide more practical sessions Need more practical and experiences Improve practical knowledge Increase workshops Need good practical examination

Research	BTEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve research and development areas
	BAELT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the availability of relevant research material at library
	BSc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance research experiences
Use of technologies	BTEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upgrade technologies Use online platform and video call lectures
	BAELT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make more courses accessible via online
	BSc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give online access Need video presentations
	BEd Special Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use technology more
Academic counselling/ support	BTEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase students guidance
	BASS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educate more on subject selection Provide more guidance on difficult subject areas
Learner support	BTEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give permission to study even on strike days
	BASS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More guidance on the programme
	BSc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve PASS programme and make it more friendly with students
	BEd Special Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate all courses in all regional centres Facilitate regional centres with same facilities as Colombo
Communication	BTEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need better communication Strengthen the relationship between lecturers and students
	BAELT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen official communication enhance oral communication
	BASS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance timely communication related to exam timetables, results, job counselling etc. Introduce more convenient communication system Introduce an information system to notify information timely
	BSc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance communication
Administration	BTEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start semester-wise study Arrange non crashly activities
	BAELT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need better admin support and reduce impact of staff Need more information at the registration
	BASS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To be more organized Timely dispatch of course material Issue transcripts once the results are out
	BSc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic and nonacademic work should go parallel
	BEd Special Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transcript should be available just after the convocation
Financial matters	BTEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Propose reasonable course fee
	BASS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower the tuition fees
Library	BTEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide study area
	BAELT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update library books
	BASS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to be more organised
Career guidance	BTEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide training places Open window to find suitable jobs
	BASS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide career guidance for postgraduate studies

Duration	BTEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimise the time taken to complete the programmes
	BAELT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speedup the completion of Degree
	BSc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimise the time taken to complete the programmes Wasting time due to strike
Scholarships	BTEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote scholarships
Student welfare	BTEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrange transport within the OUSL premises
Introducing new Programmes	BTEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce new MSc like big data analytics
	BAELT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need further education at the Masters and Postgraduate levels
	BASS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce practical /job-oriented courses
	BSc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce job related courses
	BEd Special Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve to Phd level Introduce latest courses Like to know about new 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 the majority of graduands were employed at the time of the graduation 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 course material, learner support and dragging of the study programme due to various factors and gave suggestions for improvement. Thus, decision makers have to take timely decisions, plan proactive strategies and implement them immediately in order to improve the quality of all OUSL degree programmes.

5. References

General Convocation 2018(I) Proceedings (2018). 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: Survey data General Convocation 2018(I), Order of Proceedings

Faculty	Degree Programme	No. of Awardees	Absentia	No. Applied	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 – absentia x 100]
Education	Degree of Bachelor of Education in Special Needs Education [BEdu SNn] - 2017	61	4	57	51	84%	89%
Engineering Technology	Degree of Bachelor of Technology Honours in Engineering [BTec] - 2017	154	3	151	101	66%	67%
	Degree of Bachelor of Industrial Studies Honours [BIS] - 2017	63	-	63	35	56%	56%
	Degree of Bachelor of Software Engineering Honours [BSE] - 2017	12	-	12	11	92%	92%
Humanities and Social Sciences	Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences [BASS] - 2018	225	1	224	63	28%	28%
	Degree of Bachelor of Arts in English & English Language Teaching [BAELT] - 2017	41	1	40	32	78%	80%
Natural Sciences	Degree of Bachelor of Science [BSc NSc] - 2017	365	9	356	142	39%	40%
	Degree of Bachelor of Science [BSc NSc] (Special) - 2017	1		1		1	100%