

## **F-09: Parameters of graduate employment: Is English the key ?**

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In recent times, the problem of graduate unemployment has become enmeshed with the role and standard of English in Sri Lanka. This paper examines the link between English and employment. The project which was carried out over the past 3 years was based on the hypothesis that English was the **Key** factor in graduate employment. To test the hypothesis, data was collected on the perceptions of parameters for employment in the public as well as the private sector. The methodology was based on sociolinguistic ethnographical research methods and involved the use of questionnaires, as well as face-to-face interviews with selected employers. The employers identified for the project were those considered 'gate keepers', i.e. those who commanded positions of social/economic importance because they were the heads of, or otherwise identified with large public and private sector companies and institutions, and hence decided who should be employed. 90 such employers in the urban centres of Colombo, Kandy and Matara, were surveyed.

The survey revealed that the factors affecting graduate employment were complex, and that English was only one of many parameters. The others included social and educational skills and achievements, some within the purview of universities and others outside the scope of university education. The question therefore seems to necessitate examination of university education as a whole.

Sections of the findings relevant to English language teaching were presented at the *7th National University ELT Conference*, Colombo 1994.