

A STUDY OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR MYANMAR GRADUATES OF ASSUMPTION UNIVERSITY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MYANMAR'S LABOR MARKET

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Abstract

In the past, the vast majority of Assumption University's (AU) Myanmar graduates have tried to achieve better employment and higher socio-economic positions in other countries. English proficiency is a strength for AU graduates to obtain proper jobs, not only in Myanmar but also in other countries. Significant political reforms and economic developments in Myanmar have emerged since 2010. As a result, more employment opportunities have induced more AU graduates to work in their home country. On the other hand, these graduates have encountered many challenges in Myanmar's working environment. Nevertheless, some graduates have achieved high positions with attractive remuneration in multinational or local enterprises while some returnees are running their own businesses successfully.

Keywords: Myanmar graduates; labor market; employment opportunities; economic development; skilled migrants.

1. INTRODUCTION

Assumption University (AU) is internationally well-known for producing quality graduates. Approximately 20,000 undergraduate students from more than 60 countries study every year at AU. AU has had an initial advantage compared to other Thai universities since the 1990s, as it was the only English-speaking Thai university at that time. Meanwhile, tertiary education was in disarray at that time in Myanmar; consequently, many

Myanmar students came to study at AU. More than 400 Myanmar students have already graduated with bachelor's degrees in various majors from AU. In the past, the vast majority of Myanmar graduates in Thailand did not return to look for proper jobs in their home country.

However, there have been numerous significant changes in Myanmar politically, as well as economically since the 2010 election. Myanmar has begun an economic overhaul aimed at attracting foreign investment and reintegrating into

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the global economy. Moreover, more employment opportunities for the recent graduates have been emerging in Myanmar. The shortage of skilled labor is the biggest obstacle to the progress of Myanmar's economy. Currently, there is a severe shortage of human resources in the Information Technology (IT), telecommunications and banking sectors. In 2013, a labor market assessment report pointed out that many business sectors needed vocationally skilled workers – among them, sales and accounting were in high demand (Thiha, 2016). An estimated 5 million Myanmar nationals are living abroad. Recent political changes might lure them back to their home country along with their skills and knowledge, which could help to fill the void. Therefore, more AU graduates who are majoring in fields such as IT, Engineering, Accounting, Marketing, are expected to fill the shortage in Myanmar's labor market.

This paper assesses the type of employment opportunities available for Myanmar AU graduates and how these graduates have encountered the challenges and benefits of working in Myanmar and foreign countries, especially Thailand. In addition, this study explores how economic development and political reforms can lure Myanmar's professional Diaspora, also focusing on the potential for AU graduates to return to Myanmar, and their reasons for doing so. Furthermore, it will find out how much their knowledge and the subjects they learned from AU are applicable in their work, and how their work experience and skills can contribute to the labor market of their home country.

2. POLITICAL REFORMS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN MYANMAR

Following the 1988 crackdown of the democratic movement and the military coup in Myanmar, the protracted closure of universities and colleges forced numerous university students, teachers and educated people to leave the country. This 'brain drain' has become a virtual outflow since the late 1980s (Myat-Mon 2014: 47). In the 1990 election, the National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Suu Kyi won a landslide victory. However, not only did the military junta not recognize the election results, they also placed Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest. In spite of international condemnation and economic sanctions, the regime of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), later renamed as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), started to implement economic reforms in the early 1990s. Economic sanctions by the United States and other Western countries had been imposed on the military regime since 1997. As a result, the sanctions led to international isolation of the country, making Myanmar the poorest country in Southeast Asia with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of US\$ 1204 in 2015 (Foerch, 2016 :15).

Rieffel (2010) argued that the international sanctions were not the main cause of the sluggish economy in Myanmar. Instead, misguided economic policies, compounded by extraordinary neglect of the education and health sectors, had deprived the economy of the basic foundations for sustainable

improvements in living standards. Furthermore, foreign investments were deterred in Myanmar due to the government's practice of making unrealistic policy decisions (Rieffel, 2010:7).

In addition, the Ministry of Education lacked credibility and, like all ministries, was headed by military personnel who have limited knowledge of their portfolios. For tertiary education inadequate infrastructure, outdated teaching equipment and poorly qualified teachers were major problems. According to Martin (2007), higher education institutions in Myanmar were increasing in quantity but decreasing in quality. Moreover, overseas Myanmar graduates did not return, thus leaving the country even poorer. Consequently, millions of people have been leaving the country in search of better employment and better education since the 1990s.

In 2010 some noticeable changes in Myanmar's politics developed. The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) led by military generals claimed victory in the 2010 election.¹ The military regime handed over the county to a quasi-military government led by ex-general U Thein Sein, and later, Aung San Suu Kyi who was prevented from participating in politics was released from house arrest. The quasi-civilian government undertook significant reforms, including reduction of commercial tax, currency appreciation, and deregulation in export and import processes, the passing of the Arbitration Law, Investment Law and several

Intellectual Property laws. After decades of economic isolation, Myanmar initiated a series of gradual and fundamental changes, through economic reforms aimed at accelerating economic development (Lim and Yamada, 2012:3)

In April, 2012, the NLD led by Aung San Suu Kyi swept the board in parliamentary by-elections. The European Union also suspended all non-military sanctions against Myanmar for a year. The democratization process that began in early 2011 led to a free and fair election in November 2015 and a landslide victory was won by the NLD. With the new democratically elected government led by Aung San Suu Kyi, it was expected to become a big turning point in Myanmar's flourishing labor sector (Thiha, 2016). The opening of the country has seen economic growth accelerate, up from 5.9% in 2011, to hit a forecasted growth of 8.4% in 2017 (<http://www.consultancy.uk/news/12940/myanmar-to-see-rapid-economic-development-businesses-growth>). Further, lifting of economic sanctions by western countries is likely to make the country thrive even more.

Therefore, it can be expected that participation of skilled migrant returnees in Myanmar's labor market will increase, and the future plans of overseas Myanmar graduates will also change.

¹ National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Suu Kyi and some political parties boycotted the election.

3. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED IN THE SURVEY ANALYSIS

Some of the terms used are stated briefly as follows;

Graduates refer to those who have obtained a bachelor's degree at AU; some of these have already attained post-graduate degrees at AU or other universities.

Senior and Junior graduates- In this study the respondents are classified into two groups; namely senior graduates who graduated before 2010 and junior graduates who graduated in 2010 or later².

Status in employment- this is a terminology of the International Labor Organization (ILO). The classifications of ILO are "Employer", "Employee", "Own account worker" and "Unpaid family worker". Then there are three categories of "Employee"; namely 'government employee', 'private employee' and 'employee in a foreign organization'.

As this study emphasizes the development of local businesses and multinational enterprises in Myanmar, "Status in employment" is classified by "Own Business/ Family business", "Employees of local enterprises", "Employees of foreign enterprises" and "Employees of NGO/INGO".

² The 2010 election and the unprecedented developments in politics and the economy in Myanmar have started to change the future plans of Myanmar's skilled migrants (Myat-Mon, 2014). Khine (2013) also found that more Myanmar people around the world have been

Family union- union with family members such as parent(s), spouse or child(ren).

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews the previous studies on employment opportunities and the challenges of returning migrants in their home countries. It also presents the factors which attract the overseas graduates to return to work in their countries of origin.

In a study of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand, Chantavanich and Vungsiriphisal (2012) found that political stability and economic opportunities in Myanmar are the two main factors for migrant workers to return home. The first factor is important for low-skilled workers from ethnic minority groups; while the latter is important for skilled workers.

(Mackinno, 2012) also states that the annual economic growth (9 per cent or more since 2002) of China has been enticing more expatriates from abroad. Economic development and employment opportunities are the main attractions for Chinese migrant returnees. Approximately one million Chinese had pursued tertiary education in foreign countries since 1978 and only about 23 percent returned home. In recent years, the rate of returnees has dramatically increased. Wu and Shao (2014) also point out that the

returning to Myanmar since 2010, thanks to the political changes in Myanmar. Therefore, the year 2010 is considered as a turning point for Myanmar graduates in this study.

return rate of overseas Chinese students is mainly affected by political and economic factors. However, the stimulating policies of the government are more important than the economic growth rate of China.

In Jordan, it was found that family considerations, and government policies for employment opportunities, were the main motives for highly skilled returnees (Istaiteyeh, 2011:8). Other studies also show that family union is a main factor for migrant returnees (Tukhashvili, 2013; Wahba, 2015). According to Wahba (2015), the return rates are generally high for highly educated migrants, such as overseas graduates.

Although economic development and employment opportunities in the home country attract migrants to return home, their participation in the home labor market is not always as simple as they expected. Challenges include low earnings and a mismatch in the professional qualifications of returnees in their home country (Tukhashvili, 2013). Wahba (2015) also found that skills gained abroad may not match the skills needed in the labor market of the home country. Khine (2015) found that many Myanmar immigrants are overqualified to work in Myanmar, for example, astrophysics, biomedical engineering, and nanotechnology jobs are not available. However, skills that migrants attained in their host countries lead to higher earnings than the skills that non-migrants have.

Tanaka *et. al.*, (2015) stated that it is challenging to find skilled and talented workers in Myanmar and to attract the professional diaspora back to the country, because they expect high earnings and cannot adapt easily to a different standard

of living in their home country. In many developing countries, it is recognized that a lack of access to loans is a severe constraint in establishing one's own business (Mesnard, 2004; Wahba and Zenou, 2012). Tiemoko (2004) suggests that adequate financing mechanisms and a more friendly business environment are required for the development of business. Bureaucracy and red tape can hinder returnees' efforts to invest in their country of origin (Wahba, 2015). Different organizational culture, work ethics and professionalism of local staff also hamper partnership in business development or the job efficiency of returnees (Tiemoko, 2004).

According to the above findings, a structured questionnaire was prepared for the collection of data from Myanmar AU graduates.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is mainly based on primary data, from a structured questionnaire, designed with both closed and open-ended questions, in order to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data and information.

In September, 2017, the online questionnaire was sent to 20 Myanmar graduates for pilot testing. Sixteen respondents answered the questions. According to their answers, some inconsistent and unclear questions were found, and the questionnaire was re-designed. The revised online questionnaire was sent to Myanmar AU bachelor graduates (some of which may have post-graduate degrees from other universities) in many countries via email and social media.

Sampling method and data collection

According to the Sample Size Table of Research advisors (2006) (<http://www.research-advisors.com/tools/SampleSize.htm>), a sample size of 202 for a population of 422 was determined with 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error.

For this study, Myanmar AU graduates were working in many countries making it difficult to interview in person. According to Fricker (2017:17) an online survey can facilitate access to potential respondents who are difficult to reach and a "convenience sampling method" is recommended for such a population. Therefore, the online questionnaire was sent to Myanmar AU graduates via email and social media and circulated among graduates.

Unfortunately, the determined sample size of 202 could not be met, as only 139 graduates answered the questionnaire in November and December, 2016. After checking the returned questionnaires thoroughly, it was found that eight questionnaires were incomplete. Out of the remaining 131 respondents, six respondents were not currently working. Therefore, information from only 125 respondents was analyzed in this study. Thus, it can be assumed that the sample size of 125 from the population size of 422 would result in a confidence level of 93% and an error margin of 7% (<https://i.stack.imgur.com/fFclC.jpg>). Nevertheless, Hill (1998) recommends that the use of a sample size of about 10% of the population is large enough. Thus, the sample size of this

study, which is approximately 30% of the population, appears to be more than enough. In addition, some graduates were interviewed personally in Bangkok and Yangon in December 2016.

As it is not certain how many graduates received the questionnaire online, it is not easy to compute the return rate. As this study does not aim to approve any hypothesis, only descriptive statistics are applied to present the profile of Myanmar AU graduates and to examine the basic characteristics of the survey data.

Population and Sample of the Study

A total of 422 Myanmar students have graduated from different faculties of AU up until 2016. Tables 2 and 3 show the population and the sample of AU's Myanmar graduates.

Table 1 shows that the largest group of Myanmar students graduated from the Business Administration Faculty (39.4%), the second largest group (23.9%) were graduates of engineering, while the third group (18.4%) were from Science and Technology.

Table 2 indicates that the proportions of respondents in these faculties correspond to the population; namely Business Administration graduates (41%), Engineering graduates (22.4%) and Science and Technology graduates (18.4%), etc. It can be said that the sample data fairly represents the total population of AU's Myanmar bachelor's degree graduates.

Table 1: Population of Myanmar Bachelor Graduates by Faculty

| Faculty | No. | % |
|---|-----|-------|
| Business Administration | 166 | 39.4 |
| Engineering | 101 | 23.9 |
| Science and Technology | 56 | 13.3 |
| Nursing Science | 47 | 11.1 |
| Communication Arts | 21 | 5.0 |
| Arts | 13 | 3.1 |
| Architecture | 9 | 2.1 |
| Bio-Technology | 6 | 1.4 |
| Risk Management and Industrial Services | 3 | 0.7 |
| Total | 422 | 100.0 |

Source: Registration Office, Assumption University, 2017

Table 2: Sample of Myanmar Graduates by Faculty

| Faculty | Senior Graduates | | Junior Graduates | | Total | |
|-------------------------|------------------|-------|------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Business Administration | 27 | 38.6 | 25 | 45.5 | 52 | 41.6 |
| Engineering | 18 | 25.7 | 10 | 18.2 | 28 | 22.4 |
| Science and Technology | 19 | 27.1 | 4 | 7.3 | 23 | 18.4 |
| Nursing Science | 3 | 4.3 | 7 | 12.7 | 10 | 8.0 |
| Communication Arts | 0 | 0.0 | 6 | 10.9 | 6 | 4.8 |
| Arts | 3 | 4.3 | 2 | 3.6 | 5 | 4.0 |
| Bio-Technology | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 1.8 | 1 | 0.8 |
| Total | 70 | 100.0 | 55 | 100.0 | 125 | 100.0 |

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Analysis of the findings from the survey data is discussed in this section. Out of 131 respondents, 6 respondents are not currently working, and were excluded from this analysis.

The six respondents who are working and studying are in Myanmar and Australia; three in Myanmar and three in Australia. It is also noted that further studies can be pursued in Myanmar while

working, as some private education institutions affiliated with foreign universities, have emerged in Myanmar. This may be an incentive factor for Myanmar graduates to work back in their home country now and in the future, as such an opportunity was not available in Myanmar previously. The 2.3% of the respondents, who were neither working nor studying, are all female graduates who are married but used to work previously.

Profile of Respondents

The respondents, who all graduated between 1995 and 2016, consist of 46.4% males and 53.6% females. The minimum Grade Point Average (GPA) of the respondents is 2.02 and maximum is 4.0. The average GPA of all respondents is 3.05 which indicates that Myanmar graduates did quite well while pursuing their bachelor's degree. The respondents are classified into two groups; namely senior graduates who graduated before 2010 and junior graduates who graduated in 2010 or later as explained in the previous section.

Among the senior graduates, more than 50% of them have completed a

master's degree and 10% of respondents have earned Ph.D, while about 4% of them are currently pursuing a post-graduate degree. However, as junior graduates have recently finished their bachelor's degree, the vast majority of them have not attained postgraduate degrees yet, and less than 10% of them have graduated with a master's degree. It is reasonable to find that more senior graduates have attained higher degrees. Generally, it can be said that Myanmar AU graduates have been trying to achieve a higher level of education and it can also be forecast that the majority of them will attain at least a master's degree.

Table 3: Current Status of Respondents

| | No. | % |
|----------------------|-----|------|
| Working | 119 | 90.8 |
| Working and studying | 6 | 4.6 |
| Studying | 3 | 2.3 |
| Nothing | 3 | 2.3 |
| Total | 131 | 100 |

Table 4: The highest educational attainment of the respondents

| Degree | Senior Graduates | | Junior Graduates | | Total | |
|----------|------------------|-------|------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Ph.D | 7 | 10.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 7 | 5.6 |
| Master | 36 | 51.4 | 5 | 9.1 | 41 | 32.8 |
| Bachelor | 27 | 38.6 | 50 | 90.9 | 77 | 61.6 |
| Total | 70 | 100.0 | 55 | 100.0 | 125 | 100.0 |

Table 5 shows that the majority (64.8%) of AU graduates obtained proper jobs easily within three months. It implies that AU graduates are preferred in the labor market. No junior graduates needed to wait more than one year to obtain a job. The data also indicates that junior graduates were employed more easily than the seniors who looked for jobs in other countries, such as USA, Australia, etc. It seems that in Thailand and Myanmar, employment opportunities are more available to AU graduates than before. Nevertheless, the type of their degree does not determine the duration of seeking a job.

Relationship between GPA and employment opportunities

Among the respondents only 18% of the respondents said that GPA is an important factor to get a good job easily. Simple Linear Regression Analysis (see the SPSS output shown in Table 6) also confirms that GPA does not affect how long they wait to obtain a job, with a very weak correlation coefficient ($r = 0.073$). According to personal interviews with employers and applicants in Myanmar, employers prefer applicants who have good personality, work experience, and knowledge in applying for jobs, rather than GPA. However, educational institutions usually prefer to recruit graduates with a high GPA. It probably depends on the type of employment.

Table 5: Number of months waiting for a job

| Duration | Senior Graduates | | Junior Graduates | | Total | |
|---------------------|------------------|-------|------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Less than 3 months | 43 | 61.4 | 38 | 69.1 | 81 | 64.8 |
| 3-6 months | 17 | 24.3 | 15 | 27.3 | 32 | 25.6 |
| 6-12 months | 7 | 10.0 | 2 | 3.6 | 9 | 7.2 |
| More than 12 months | 3 | 4.3 | 0 | 0.0 | 3 | 2.4 |
| Total | 70 | 100.0 | 55 | 100.0 | 125 | 100.0 |

Table 6: Correlation Matrix of SPSS

| | | Correlations | |
|---------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------|
| | | GPA | No. of months |
| GPA | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .073 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .598 |
| | N | 125 | 125 |
| No. of months | Pearson Correlation | .073 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .598 | |
| | N | 125 | 125 |

Table 7: The countries where they work

| Country | Senior Graduates | | Junior Graduates | | Total | |
|----------------|------------------|-------|------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Myanmar | 16 | 22.9 | 30 | 54.5 | 46 | 36.8 |
| Thailand | 24 | 34.3 | 16 | 29.1 | 40 | 32.0 |
| USA | 12 | 17.1 | 1 | 1.8 | 13 | 10.4 |
| Singapore | 7 | 10.0 | 4 | 7.3 | 11 | 8.8 |
| Australia | 6 | 8.6 | 0 | 0.0 | 6 | 4.8 |
| United Kingdom | 2 | 2.9 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 1.6 |
| Canada | 1 | 1.4 | 1 | 1.8 | 2 | 1.6 |
| New Zealand | 1 | 1.4 | 1 | 1.8 | 2 | 1.6 |
| Others | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 3.6 | 2 | 1.6 |
| Total | 70 | 100.0 | 55 | 100.0 | 125 | 100.0 |

Table 7 shows that Myanmar AU graduates have been working in many countries. The largest percentage of the respondents is currently working in Myanmar and the second largest is in Thailand.³ More than 50% of junior graduates are in Myanmar and the largest number of senior graduates are in Thailand. As the military government ruled the country and some western countries imposed economic sanctions in the 1990s, foreign direct investment was very limited and employment opportunities were not easily available. As a result, Myanmar graduates sought jobs in other countries rather in Myanmar. Some graduates tried to pursue further studies in developed countries, such as the USA, Australia and Singapore so that they were able to obtain good jobs or a stay visa. While searching for a proper job, some graduates had to attend work-related courses, such as master's or

diploma programs, or language and computer classes, while some took up other part-time jobs without a work permit. After being employed they were entitled to stay in those countries and became permanent residents or citizens who can access medical care and other social welfare benefits with a high standard of living. It implies that there may not be strong enough incentive factors for Myanmar graduates who have settled in developed countries to return to Myanmar.

As shown in Table 8, among the 125 respondents, 46 graduates are currently working in Myanmar. Status in employment is focused on only the graduates who work in Myanmar because almost all respondents in other countries are employed in foreign enterprises. Moreover, it also intends to highlight the employment status of the Myanmar labor market. "Status in Employment" is

³ It may be arguable that more graduates in Myanmar and Thailand are accessible as the author lives in Thailand. However, as the

questionnaire was sent via social media, everyone could be contacted easily.

classified into four groups, namely “Own business/family business”, “Foreign enterprise”, “Local enterprises” and “NGO/INGO”.

Interestingly, the largest percentage (34.3%), which is slightly higher than employees of foreign companies, is running their own business/family business. According to personal observation and interviews, it is found that most of these just help to manage the businesses of their parents. A few respondents, who are senior graduates with long-term work experience and a large amount of investment, were able to set up their own business in Myanmar. Own businesses vary from dairy farms, electrical goods shops, car workshops, pharmacies, travel agencies, and

restaurants to garment factories. The second largest group of respondents in Myanmar (31.4%) is employed in foreign enterprises, while 28.6% are working in local enterprises and the smallest group (5.7%) is working in NGOs/INGOs. English proficiency of AU graduates may be an advantage to working in multinational companies which offer better remuneration. Both local and foreign companies in Myanmar give preference to hiring graduates with foreign exposure. There are certainly no graduates working in government organizations, which offer a low salary compared to the others.

Table 8: Status in Employment

| | Senior Graduates | | Junior Graduates | | Total | |
|-------------------------------|------------------|-------|------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Own business/ Family business | 11 | 42.3 | 5 | 25.0 | 16 | 34.8 |
| Foreign enterprises | 8 | 30.8 | 6 | 30.0 | 14 | 30.4 |
| Local enterprises | 5 | 19.2 | 7 | 35.0 | 12 | 26.1 |
| NGO/INGO | 2 | 7.7 | 2 | 10.0 | 4 | 8.7 |
| Total | 26 | 100.0 | 20 | 100.0 | 46 | 100.0 |

Table 9: Employment by Industry

| Industry | No. | % |
|----------------------------|-----|-------|
| IT and Telecommunication | 28 | 22.4 |
| Trading (Wholesale/Retail) | 23 | 18.4 |
| Education | 18 | 14.4 |
| Hotel and Restaurant | 14 | 11.2 |
| Health | 13 | 10.4 |
| Manufacturing | 12 | 9.6 |
| Finance and Banking | 7 | 5.6 |
| Oil and Gas | 6 | 4.8 |
| Other | 4 | 3.2 |
| Total | 125 | 100.0 |

The largest group (22.4%) of respondents is currently working in the Information and Communication industry. IT and engineering graduates can obtain good positions easily in Myanmar as well as in other countries. One study (Myat-Mon, 2014) also found that many Myanmar IT technicians and engineers have landed IT and engineering jobs quite easily in Thailand. The dramatic development of telecommunications in Myanmar is the main factor for the highest employment of AU graduates. In Myanmar, MPT (Myanmar Post and Telecommunications) is the first leading telecommunications company. Previously, MPT monopolized both fixed and mobile telecommunication services for people and enterprises in Myanmar. In 2014, Qatar-based Ooredoo and Norwegian Telenor Group entered the market, resulting in the reduction of consumer prices and a rapid growth in the number of subscribers, as well as the expansion of the country's infrastructure. As of June 2015, Myanmar had a mobile phone penetration rate of 54.6%, up from less than 10% in 2012 (Thant, 2015).

Hence, IT and engineering graduates from AU were able to fill the shortage of skilled workers in Myanmar's IT sector. Some respondents who were well experienced in telecommunication in Thailand were able to take up high positions with attractive salaries in Myanmar. One respondent earns more

than US\$10,000 per month. Some respondents in the IT industry are working as marketing managers, human resource managers and accountants. Some engineers and IT technicians work in Thaicom Public Company Ltd.⁴ and multinational companies in Thailand.

The second largest group (18.4%) is in the trading (wholesale and retail) industry which includes pharmacies, cosmetic shops, convenience stores, wholesale of vehicle goods and household wares, and department stores. The majority of these businesses are small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) which employ 3 to 20 staff, and are run by the graduates. Some large enterprises were already established by the parents of the respondents and the graduates are capable to manage these easily. Almost all these businesses are in Myanmar. Not all graduates may be business owners, but some graduates hold positions in marketing, human resources and accounting departments.

The third largest group (14.4%) of respondents is working in the education sector as lecturers, administrators and school principals in Myanmar, Thailand and other countries. They all have attained at least a master's degree and 7 respondents with PhD's hold titles of associate/assistant professor at prestigious universities in the USA and Thailand. In Myanmar, since the 1990s the government has allowed the operation of private schools with limited

⁴ It was formerly known as Shin Satellite Plc (SATTEL), Thailand's first satellite operator. It is a subsidiary of Shin Corporation, the biggest telecommunications conglomerate in Thailand. It

operates the THAICOM satellite fleet and other telecommunication businesses in Thailand and throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

supervision by the government. In Yangon, there have been increasing numbers of international schools, educational agencies and institutions that collaborate with foreign universities. The development of the private education sector in Myanmar has resulted in good employment opportunities for AU graduates. Two AU graduates have set up private schools in Myanmar.

Some 11% of the respondents are employees of hotels and owners of restaurants in the USA, Thailand and Myanmar. Not all are graduates of the Hotel Management major; even an engineering graduate runs a restaurant. Only one graduate works as a manager of a hotel in Yangon whereas seven respondents are working in Bangkok. In fact, there is also a shortage of experienced personnel in hotel management in Myanmar, in line with the growth of hotels in main destinations. Between 2011 and 2015, the number of hotel rooms has doubled in big cities, except in Bagan where the authorities are restricting the building of new hotels in the Bagan archaeological zone. In 2011 there were only 731 hotels in all of Myanmar but by 2015, the number increased to 1279 hotels - an increase of 75% (<http://bytelife.altervista.org/pop-hotels.htm>). According to personal interviews with Myanmar hoteliers, it is difficult to recruit qualified staff. They must hire foreigners to train local staff and to manage hotel services.

In the health industry, the majority of graduates are from the faculty of nursing science, working in NGOs and hospitals in Myanmar and Thailand. In fact, they cannot practice as a nurse at hospitals because they do not have nursing license

of the respective country. They work as research assistants at NGO/INGO's, and coordinators or interpreters for Myanmar patients, while some work as marketing staff for Thai hospitals.

Since 2003, Thailand has been promoting itself towards becoming a medical hub of Asia in competition with Malaysia and Singapore. More than 400 hospitals in Bangkok offer the most advanced treatments by internationally trained medical staff. These leading private hospitals have been actively encouraging medical tourists to visit Thailand. The number of international patients (including patients from Myanmar) has been increasing in the leading private hospitals in Bangkok (Chunlaka, 2010:22). By personal contact with Myanmar staff working in private hospitals, it is estimated that there are 3000-4000 Myanmar patients each month taking medical treatments at some well-known hospitals. In order to provide good service, the hospitals employ young Myanmar who can speak Thai as interpreters, liaison staff or marketing staff (Myat-Mon, 2014).

In the manufacturing industry, 9.6% of the respondents are working as employees or employers in food processing, garment factories, handicraft shops, footwear, electronic factories and rice mills. Interestingly, owners of the factories are found only in Myanmar whereas AU graduates work as engineers, supervisors and managers in other countries.

A few respondents (5.6%) work in the finance and banking sector in Myanmar and Australia. Myanmar's banking industry was monopolized by the government in the past. In 1992

Myanmar's financial sector was liberalized by legal changes in the Financial Institutions and governing bodies in, resulting in the emergence of private banks since then. Modernization of Myanmar's banking system has developed rapidly over the past years. As of March 2016, there were 28 local banks and 9 foreign banks (Foerch *et. al*, 2016:16-33). Among these banks, Kan Baw Za (KBZ) bank is well-known for offering an attractive salary⁵. It can be seen that various employment opportunities await AU graduates in the finance and banking industry in Myanmar, especially for Finance, Accounting and IT graduates. However, due to the lack of Thai proficiency, Myanmar graduates rarely have a chance to work in banks in Thailand.

Only 6 respondents work in the oil and gas industry of Myanmar and Thailand. However, they are not working as engineers but as administrative and IT staff as AU does not offer engineering in petroleum. The four respondents who are in other categories work as a designer, a hairdresser, a researcher and an auditor.

According to the survey data, 66% of respondents obtained jobs which are relevant to their degrees, while some graduates are working in employment that is irrelevant to their degrees. For example, an IT graduate is employed in a law firm and an electrical engineer is running a restaurant. However, 52% of the respondents said that knowledge and subjects they learned from AU are

applicable in their work since AU is a business specialized university.

Remuneration of AU Graduates

This study does not compare the current salaries of the respondents by different degrees or different countries because the salary is mainly affected by work experience. The initial salaries of new AU graduates in Thailand and Myanmar are not significantly different. The majority of AU graduates in both countries earn on average between Bt15,000 (less than US\$500) and Bt20,000 (about US\$600). However, salaries of local and foreign enterprises in Myanmar cannot be determined by the type of business and designation, which mainly depends on the owners of the enterprises and interpersonal relationships. Certainly, the respondents in other countries (USA, Australia, Singapore etc.) earn much more than this amount.

However, among the returnees from Thailand, more than half of the respondents have higher earnings in Myanmar than in their previous employment in Thailand. According to one source, many young people in Myanmar lack formal education and English language proficiency and are unqualified for many jobs. On the other hand, experienced and skilled local workers usually find jobs with attractive salaries abroad. Qualified workers who remain in their home country demand

⁵ Senior executives earned an annual median salary of \$165,080 as of May 2010 at KBZ bank

in Myanmar. (<http://revotechmm.com/kbz/en/job/senior-executives/>)

high salaries (<http://consult-myanmar.com/2016/01/20/myanmar-labour-market-beyond-2015/>). The survey data also revealed that the graduates returning to Myanmar, who have work experience from foreign companies are paid higher salaries. While they were working in Thailand, being alien and lacking in Thai language proficiency, they are hampered to attain higher positions in their future employment. Thus, Myanmar can lure skilled labor more easily from Thailand than other countries. However, there are fewer skilled migrants in Thailand than other countries, such as Singapore.

As an AU graduate, English proficiency is the advantage over local graduates in attaining higher positions in multinational companies. About 2% of the respondents have already earned more than \$5000 in Myanmar and such an attractive salary can be a pull factor for Myanmar's professional diaspora.⁶

Potential Return of Myanmar Graduates

Among the respondents who are currently working abroad, 42.1% already have a plan to return to their home country in the near future while 47.4% of the respondents will probably go back. Most of these graduates are working in Thailand where their earnings are not much higher than those in Myanmar, and where they will neither be easily entitled to become permanent residents, nor Thai citizens. Some respondents who are working in Singapore without permanent

resident status, do not earn a high salary. It seems that potential earnings in Myanmar can attract more educated people to be able to contribute to the economic development of the country.

Only 10.5% of the respondents have no plan to go back to work in Myanmar. Most of these graduates have become permanent residents or citizens, and have already settled down with high living standards in the United States, Australia or United Kingdom. Therefore, the limited earnings, few social benefits and low living standards in Myanmar cannot attract them at all. Moreover, they have also gained overseas master's and PhD degrees in science and technology, and so are overqualified to work in Myanmar. Even if they want to return home, the above circumstances make it an unrealistic goal.

Furthermore, it is less likely for some respondents who have families in Thailand to return home. Some male respondents whose spouses are foreigners have started running businesses in Myanmar and Thailand. Twenty-two respondents who previously worked abroad, have returned to work in Myanmar. Among them, the largest group (63.3%) returned from Thailand, 24.7% from Singapore and 12% from USA and Australia. The survey data confirm that the young graduates had foreseen good opportunities in their home country. The majority of the respondents who are currently working in Myanmar said that "Better future prospects in Myanmar" was considered as an important factor to

⁶ Senior executives earned an annual median salary of \$165,080 as of May 2010 at KBZ bank

in Myanmar (<http://revotechmm.com/kb/en/job/senior-executives/>)

return to Myanmar. Another main reason was “Family Union”.

Challenges and Benefits of Working in Myanmar

Although more employment opportunities are available in the home country, this does not mean that everything will run smoothly for Myanmar graduates returning home. Some graduates have encountered challenges, while some enjoy the benefits of the working environment in Myanmar.

As attending international training programs, seminars and workshops is often possible for the graduates in Myanmar, they have gained good exposure and new knowledge from other countries. The majority of the respondents had foreseen that this is the best time to start working or doing business in Myanmar thanks to the political changes and economic reforms since 2010. Among the migrant returnees, more than half of the respondents said that workload in Myanmar is less stressful than in other countries. “Family union” is another benefit for working in Myanmar. Some respondents are capable of easily managing their family businesses which were already established by the parents.

On the other hand, there are also many challenges for Myanmar's employers as well as employees in the home county. Irregular electricity supply is often cited as an obstacle to any business in Myanmar. In other countries

migrant returnees have never experienced such a problem which is the most frustrating issue for every respondent. High rent of accommodation in Yangon⁷ is also an impediment for AU graduates returning to work in Myanmar. They cannot afford the high deposit for renting a room (usually payable for 6 or 12-month deposit) which is unrealistic. In other countries, especially in Bangkok, a large amount of money is not necessary for a proper accommodation. Moreover, it is a disappointing factor for those who have no house or condo unit or whose families, especially parents are not in Yangon.

Shortage of electricity, skyrocketing rent of office buildings, office space and land unnecessarily cause the need for huge capital in order to operate any business in Myanmar. Difficulties in accessing finance and high interest rates also discourage young entrepreneurs who do not have financial support from their parents. Some entrepreneurs pointed out that the weakness of the current financial institutions in Myanmar is one of the challenges. In practice, it is difficult to take out financial loans from banks, although the SME service centre in Yangon and the SME financing schemes enable graduates to obtain loans for Small and Medium Industrial Development (SMID). SME loans can be granted at a maximum of 50 million kyat (approximately US\$42,000) depending on the size of the enterprise, and with collateral. However, it is not as accessible to receive loans as it may appear, and no respondent has applied to SMID. Instead

⁷ Almost all respondents from Myanmar are working in Yangon.

they have set up their businesses with the financial support of their parents. In addition, scarcity of skilled labor in Myanmar is also one of the biggest obstacles in starting a business.

Substandard roads and infrastructure are also barriers, blocking the development in Myanmar. Some aspects of institutional capital, including the protection of intellectual property rights, taxation, business and labor regulations, and administrative procedures all appear to be obstacles to business operations. The unclear economic policies of the government and unpredictable legislative procedures also have negative effects on doing business in Myanmar.

The lack of mutual respect between qualified returnees and local employees creates unnecessary problems in the work environment. Poor coordination and cooperation among employees causes difficulties in improving productivity. Besides this, unclear organizational charts or job descriptions (responsibilities) of local and foreign companies reduce the efficiency of employees.

However, if such difficulties and barriers can be reduced by the government in the near future, Myanmar's labor market can induce more professional returnees with better prospects.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It can be concluded that there are no big challenges for Myanmar's AU graduates to obtain proper jobs in Myanmar or in other countries. The majority of respondents have jobs relevant to their degrees. It was found that the GPA of the graduates does not

determine their employment opportunities, but personality, work experience and efficiency are more important to achieving a high position or attractive salary. As AU graduates, their English proficiency is considered as an advantage in obtaining better jobs in multinational companies in Myanmar. Also, the majority of AU graduates have already attained at least a master's degree. In addition, some emerging private education institutions which have affiliated with foreign universities, offer incentives for Myanmar graduates to work back in their home country.

The research results showed that there are more employment opportunities available in the IT industry than in other industries, not only in Myanmar, but also in other countries. It can be concluded that due to the political reforms and economic development in Myanmar after 2010, better employment opportunities have lured more AU graduates to work in their home country. The majority of respondents have considered "Better prospects in the future in Myanmar" and "Family union" as important factors to return home. These findings support previous studies in China, Jordan and Africa (Wu and Shao, 2014; Istaiteyeh, 2011 and Wahba, 2015).

It is less likely that AU graduates who have families in their host countries will return home. However, some male respondents whose spouses are foreigners have started running businesses in Myanmar and Thailand. Harvey (2012: 175) also suggests that it is not necessary for migrants to return to their home country permanently, but entrepreneurs may shuttle back and forth between their host and home countries.

Some people are fortunate enough to secure a job with attractive payment as in foreign countries. On the other hand, there are also many challenges for employers as well as employees, e.g. overqualified graduates were not able to obtain jobs easily because there are no job opportunities at high-technology industries such as astrophysics, bio-medical engineering and nanotechnology. Such difficulties were also found in the previous studies of Tukhashvili (2013) and Khine (2015). Poor infrastructure, unclear government policies, high living costs, low living standards and differences in the working culture have hampered business operations in Myanmar and made many people hesitant to return to Myanmar. The unaffordable amount of deposit for renting a room (usually payable for 6 or 12-month deposit) is also a big obstacle for the graduate returnees.

If Myanmar's government can ease some barriers, such as, better infrastructure, clear government policies, more accessible financial loans for SMEs entrepreneurs, resourceful social welfare programs, or affordable accommodation, more expatriates could be enticed to contribute to the business sector in Myanmar. Wu and Shao (2014) state that the stimulating policies of the government are more important than the economic growth rate in China for luring overseas Chinese graduates. Myanmar's government also needs to set up feasible policies which make use of the returnees' talents and investment. The potential returnees also should be prepared to encounter some challenges and to compromise on

salary, working culture and living conditions in their home country.

In conclusion, financial constraints have caused this study to focus only on the employment of AU graduates. It would be more interesting if research could be undertaken on the social and economic contributions of skilled migrant returnees or overseas Myanmar graduates (not only AU graduates), to the development of Myanmar.

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