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## Employment Situation and Influential Factors on Employment Status of Graduates from the Field of Social Sciences and Humanities in Vietnam

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### Abstract

In Vietnam, graduates' employment status has become a concerned of not only graduates themselves but also educational administrators. Graduates' employment status directly connects to provision and demand in the job market, particularly of standardizedly training laborers, who can be high quality employees in the future. In the last five years, in comparison to graduates from the fields of economics and technique, graduates from the field of social sciences and humanities have more and more job opportunities. In our study on "Employers' requirements of necessary skills of graduates in the majors of social sciences and humanities" (VNU's project, code QGTĐ.13.20), we approached to the research topic differently from the previous studies. Particularly, we applied different sampling, set different research objectives. In this study, we emphasized the description of new graduates's employment situation, employers' requirements of necessary skills of recruited graduates and the satisfactory levels of those graduates, and then recommended solutions to improve graduates's job opportunities. Overall, graduates in the fields of social sciences and humanities at USSH, VNU, Hanoi, often got their first job during the first six month after graduating.

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A majority of the participants in this study worked at governmental offices. The average salaries of participants were reported approximately from 03 to 06 million VND. Although most participants indicated a highly sustainable level of employment status, they demonstrated that their current jobs did not fit their training background.

The study findings revealed some influential factors on graduates' employment situations. Family was acknowledged as one of the most key determinants in participants' job searching, applying, and maintaining their employment status. Additionally, hometown and the suitable levels of current jobs with training background also had some influences on graduates' job opportunities and sustainable level of their employment status. Last but not least, low salary was determined as stimuli leading participants to change their jobs. However, this study was implemented with a small sample size and only focused on an educational institution. In the future, we expect to conduct further studies on influential factors on the employment situation of graduates in the fields of social sciences and humanities across the country.

**Keywords:** Social sciences; humanity; education; employment

## **1. Introduction**

In Vietnam, graduates' employment status has become a concern of not only graduates themselves but also educational administrators. Graduates' employment status directly connects to provision and demand in the job market, particularly of standardizedly training laborers, who can be high quality employees in the future. In the last five years, in comparison to graduates from the fields of economics and technique, graduates from the field of social sciences and humanities have more and more job opportunities. The University of Social Sciences and Humanities (USSH), which is under the management of the Vietnam National University, Hanoi (VNU, Hanoi), has been considered one of the biggest institutions of education and research across the country. USSH takes the responsibilities of training high standardizedly scientific employees working for domestic development. Through the national college entrance exam, USSH often accepts students with higher test scores compared with other universities in the same fields. Hence, students graduating from USSH often have more advantages and job opportunities.

In the current situation of job market, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) in Vietnam as well as universities and three-year colleges have continuously adapted educational policies in order to improve their training quality in the undergraduate programs and meet the internationally educational criteria. In 2007, MOET officially released the decision of converting colleges' program format from uniform class-based into credit-based [6]. USSH was one of the pioneers following this decision and has implemented the new format since the school year of 2007-2008. Initially, USSH acknowledges some gains. For example, USSH's students can actively arrange their study plans and even complete the whole program faster. Recently, the law of college education accepted by the Vietnamese Parliament in August 2012 and officially valid since 01 January 2013 allowed colleges and universities to be self-control in major activities in human resources, organization, budget, education, research, international collaboration and educational quality guarantee [13]. The self-control in admission and curriculum development creates a chance for educational institutions to tailor a suitable program

for their own capacity and the needs of the job market.

Regarding this topic, there are some studies and conference reports related to the situations of young labor or graduates. Most of those studies aim to describe job situation of young laborers currently and influential factors in order to recommend potential solutions to improve job opportunities for laborers. These situations were mentioned by Vietnam Union of Sciences and Techniques Association (VUSTA) [11], Nguyen, H.L [7], and the Center for Policy Analysis at USSH, VNU [2]. These reports and studies focused on the description of situations which new graduate seeked their jobs and if graduates could meet social demands in their jobs. Pham, H.C in [6] pointed out two main factors impacting students' vocational orientations, which are the sustainability and salary. The study also demonstrated that students' orientations were ambiguous and unpractical. Additionally, this study provided some other influential factors on students' vocational orientations, such as families, friends, studying and employment environments.

In our study on "Employers' requirements of necessary skills of graduates in the majors of social sciences and humanities" (VNU's project, code QGTĐ.13.20), we approached to the research topic differently from the previous studies. Particularly, we applied different sampling, set different research objectives. In this study, we emphasized the description of new graduates's employment situation, employers' requirements of necessary skills of recruited graduates and the satisfactory levels of those graduates, then recommended solutions to improve graduates's job opportunities.

## 2. Methods

This study was conducted in June 2014 with 400 alumni, who graduated for two to four years in eight majors at USSH, VNU. We interviewed participants with questionnaire. The characteristics of participants are following:

**Table 1:** Participants' characteristics

Characteristics	Number	%
Gender		
Male	75	18.75
Female	325	81.25
Hometown		
Mountainous areas	30	7.5
Rural areas	180	45.0
Towns	98	24.5
Cities	92	23.0
Major		
Sociology	58	14.5
Phisology	50	12.5
Management science	43	10.8
Literature	45	11.3

History	50	12.5
Social work	51	12.8
Studies on Oriental	55	13.8
Journalism and Communication	48	12.0
Graduating year		
2010	106	26.5
2011	104	26.0
2012	190	47.5
Graduating ranks		
Average	2	0.5
Between average and good	8	2.0
Good	275	68.8
Distinction	109	27.3
High distinction	6	1.4

This study has some limitations. First, this study applied random sampling to eight over more than 20 majors at USSH, therefore, the study sample faced challenges in generalization to students in other majors at the site. Second, this study concentrated on analyzing employers' requirements of necessary skills of new graduates and their capacities to meet those requirements while influential factors on graduates' jobs were not the focus of this study.

### **3. Results**

#### ***3.1 Situation of new graduates' jobs***

Graduates in the majors of social sciences and humanities are dynamic in searching jobs and willing to experience different jobs and positions while they are waiting for their expected jobs. The study findings show that after two years since their graduation, 96% of graduates have a job at least one time. Among them, 36.1% got a job right after their graduations, 43% got a job in between three to six months in the post-graduation period, followed by 14% and 6.9% getting a job in between six to 12 months and over 12 months respectively after graduating. Cumutively, there were 93.1% of participants found a job successfully in one year after finishing their undergraduate program. However, participants had different evaluation of the appropriation of their jobs and educational backgrounds at the undergraduate level. Only 17.2% of participants reported that their jobs very fitted their training background, 37.2% rated the appropriate level as "fitting", while 32.7% and 12.9% thought that their jobs were less appropriate and totally inappropriate with their background respectively.

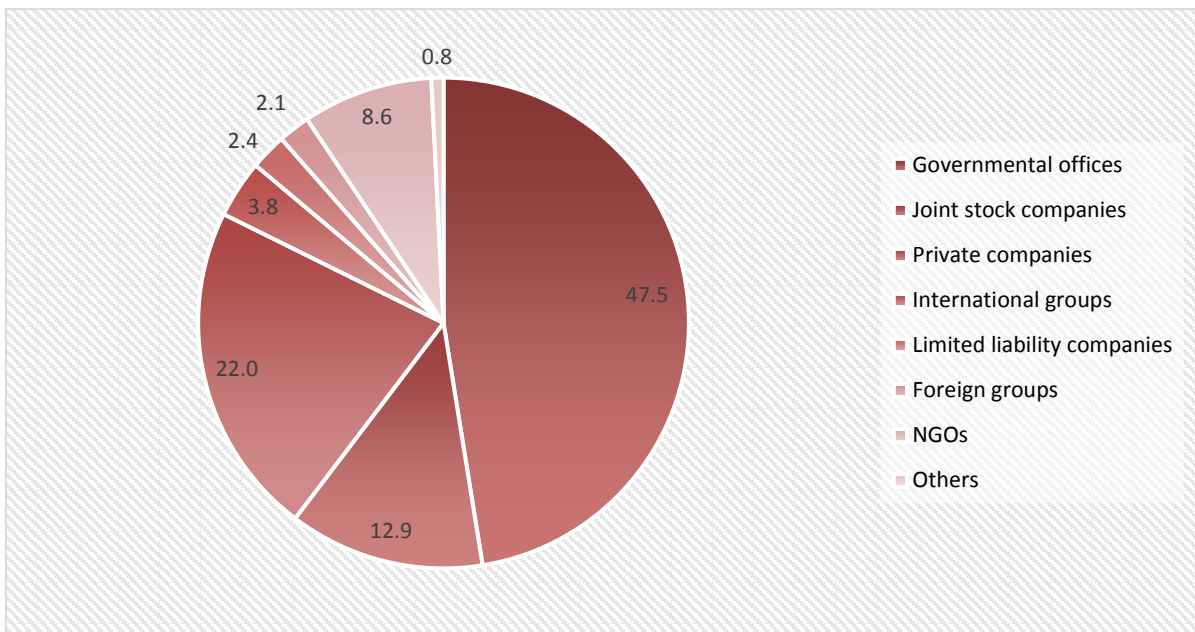
Explaining why choosing current jobs which did not fit their training backgrounds, participants picked different options in the multiple question (table 2). Particularly, 37% of participants chose the reason that they "work contemporarily while waiting for a better job". 32.7% gave a reason that they "could not find an appropriate job

which fit their training background.” Recently, students are likely to register for a major at college based on multiple factors but not only their preferences and expectations. Thus, after graduating, students likely changed their direction in seeking a job if they did not receive a consistently vocational orientation at the beginning.

**Table 2:** Reasons why graduates did not work in their training fields

Reasons	Number	%
Cannot find a job fitting training background	53	32.7
Satisfy with the current job	37	22.8
Satisfied salary	18	11.1
Working contemporarily while waiting for a better job	60	37.0
Not confident to find a better job	36	22.2

The percentage of graduates who worked in irrelevant training fields due to the impossibility to find a fitting job accounts for 32.7%. This percentage reflects a fact that there is a gap between the number of training students and available jobs related to the field of social sciences and humanities. Another potential reason is that those graduates did not meet the requirements of employers. Other choices such as “working contemporarily while waiting for a better job” and “not confident to find a better job” reflect an uncertainty and an intention to change jobs when graduates find another chance.



**Figure 1:** Current working institutions of graduates (%)

The pie Figure shows that 47.5% of graduates worked in governmental offices, 22% in private companies, 12.9% in joint stock companies, 8.6% in NGOs. The rest of participants worked in others. Working in governmental office was likely a high preference in Vietnam due to its sustainability of employment status and

condition. Many Vietnamese families suggested their family members to work in governmental offices. Additionally, hometown was also an indirected factor that influenced graduates' social capital. Many graduates came from rural areas in Vietnam and then worked in Hanoi, the capital of the country. The hometown-based relationship often led to friendship, collaboration and other relationships in working fields and the job market. Hometown is also acknowledged as an impact factor on students' access to information, resources related to foreign language training, and technological training.

According to [7], GDP of Vietnam was about \$1,910 USD, which equaled 3.3 million Vietnames Dong (VND) per month. The study finding illustrated the average salary of graduates in social sciences and humanities of from 03 to 06 million VND (approximately from \$137.67 to \$275.34 following [1]), accounting for 61.8% of participants. This estimation rated at average salary to most laborers across majority fields currently. 17.9% of participants had a salary rate below 03 million VND (approximately \$137.67). A similar percentage of participants received a higher rate of salary, which was from 06 to 09 million VND. 2.4% of graduates in this study accounted for the group of high salary which was above 09 million VND.

**Table 3:** The relationship between hometown and salary

Salary	Graduates' hometown areas							
	Mountainous areas		Rural areas		Towns		Cities	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Under 3 million VND	9	33.3	36	21.4	12	13.0	10	11.4
From 3 to 6 million VND	12	44.4	106	63.1	61	66.3	53	60.2
From 6 to 9 million VND	5	18.5	25	14.9	17	18.5	20	22.7
Above 9 million VND	1	3.7	1	0.6	2	2.2	5	5.7
Tổng	27	100.0	168	100.0	92	100.0	88	100.0

(Phi measure, p value=0.032, correlative level = 0.221)

The table above illustrated the differences of graduates' salary in the relationship with their hometowns. Graduates coming from urban areas often got higher salary than those came from mountainous and rural areas. Among graduates who came from urban areas, 5.7% of them have salary of above 09 million VND and 22.7% were in the salary group of between 06 and 09 million VND. One third of participants from mountainous areas had a salary rate was under 03 million VND that was three times more than the number of participants from urban areas in the same salary rate.

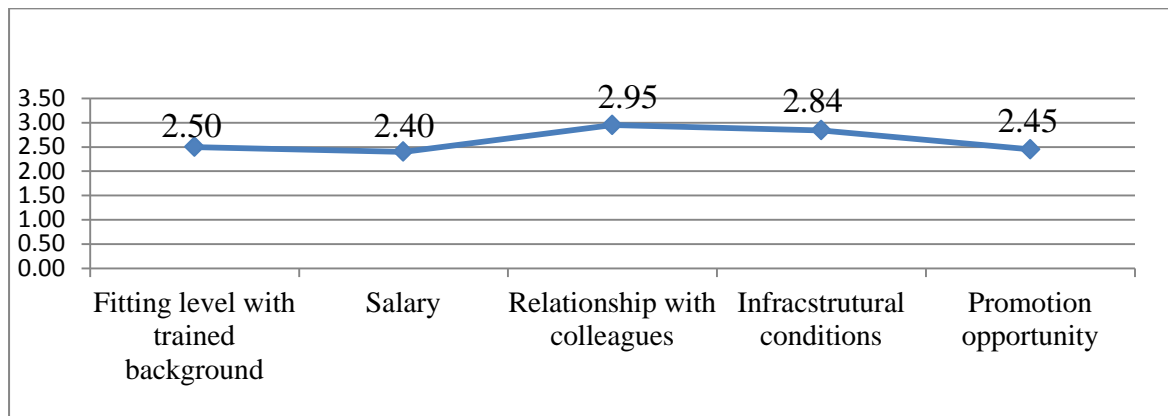
Table 4 shows different salary rates by types of institutions. In the lowest salary rate, which was under 3 million VND, there were 28.8% of participants from governmental offices while only 15.9% and 2.1% from private companies and joint stock companies respectively. In a higher rate of from 06 to 09 million VND, governmental officers accounted for 10.2% while NGOs' staff took 50%, employees from foreign groups and international groups respectively took 57.1% and 42.9%. Generally, salary rates in governmental offices were usually lower than other institutions with foreign investment.

The satisfactory level was considered one of the factors that predict employees' attachment to their jobs and institutions. Using a Likert scale with 4 levels, which 01 stood for "Not satisfy at all" and 4 stood for "Very satisfy", the average satisfactory levels of salary and promotion opportunity were 2.4 and 2.45 respectively. Participants reported higher satisfactory levels with colleagues and infrastructure with 2.95 and 2.84 in turn (Figure 2).

**Table 4:** Relationship between types of institutions and monthly salary

Types of institutions	Monthly salary								Total
	Under 3 million VND		From 3 – 6 million VND		From 6 – 9 million VND		Over 9 million VND		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Governmental offices	51	28.8	107	60.5	18	10.2	1	0.6	100.0
Joint stock companies	1	2.1	31	64.6	14	29.2	2	4.2	100.0
Private companies	13	15.9	58	70.7	9	11.0	2	2.4	100.0
International groups	0	0.0	8	57.1	6	42.9	0	0.0	100.0
Limited liaison companies	0	0.0	9	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	100.0
Foreign groups	0	0.0	2	28.6	4	57.1	1	14.3	100.0
NGOs	0	0.0	14	43.8	16	50.0	2	6.3	100.0
Others	1	33.3	1	33.3	0	0.0	1	33.3	100.0

(Phi measure, p value=.000, correlative level= 0.522)

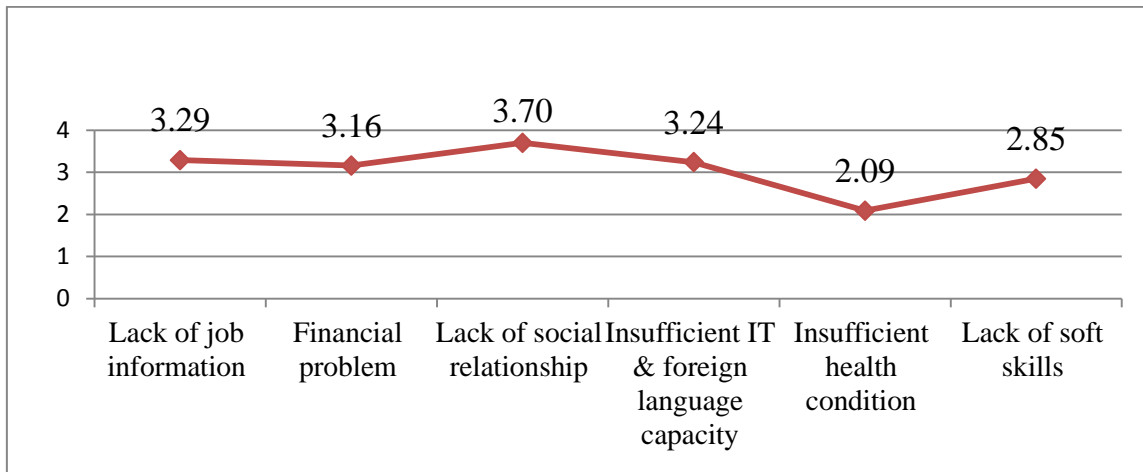


**Figure 2:** Satisfactory levels with current jobs

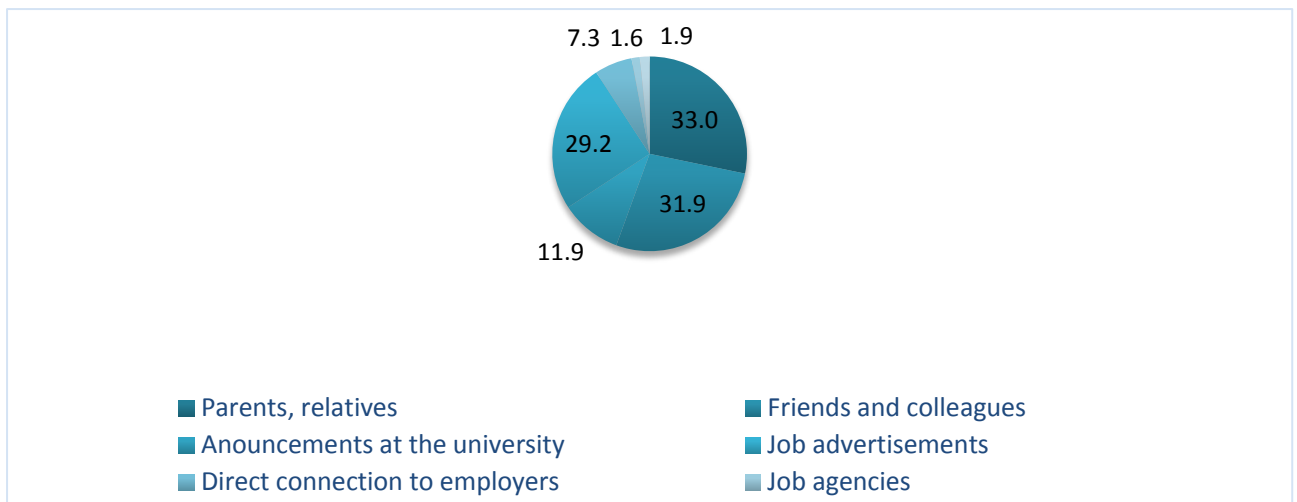
In short, the study findings showed that approximately, in the first 06 months since graduation, graduates had their first jobs. The average salary rate was 03 to 06 million VND since 02 to 04 years starting working. Most participants worked in governmental offices and a majority of the participants evaluated their jobs as fitting their own capacities and characteristics. There were a small proportion of participants (12.9%) reported that their current jobs were not suitable for them at all. Regarding the job sustainability in the next three years, 12.3% of participants presented that their job would be very sustainable, which meant they would not change their jobs. 53.1% assessed their jobs to be sustainable, 23.9% reported at less sustainable level, and 10.7% gave an assessment of no sustainability in their job status. In other words, one third did not feel engaged with their jobs and were thinking about a new job in the next three years.

### 3.2 Influential factors on graduates' employment situations

There were differently influential factors on graduates' jobs. However, in this paper, we concentrate on influential factors on (i) job searching process, (ii) salary, and (iii) the sustainability of employment status of graduates.



**Figure 3:** Challenges to graduates' job searching process



**Figure 4:** Student's information sources of job %

Graduates often faced many challenges while searching for a desirable job. On a Likert scale from 01 to 04, which 01 stood for the least difficult level and 04 for the most difficult level, participants reported their self-assessment of the difficulties they faced while searching for a job. Lacking social relationship was considered the most difficulty in the job searching process of graduates with the score of 3.70, followed by the lack of job information which scored at 3.29 and insufficient capacity of IT and foreign languages(3.24) (Figure 3). Thus, participants likely emphasized the lack of social capital in their job searching process.

Regarding information sources, among six listed choices, parents and relatives were reported the majority



source with 33% participants selected, followed by friends and colleagues with 31.9% and job advertisements with 29.2%. These sources also supported participants in their job applying process. The findings demonstrated that 35.1% of participants received support from their parents and relatives, and 30.6% got a help from friends and colleagues during the application procedure. The percentage of participants getting information from other sources were much lower, which were job agencies (3.6%) and the university (10.9%). 27.9% of participants did not have any aids from any source and 3.9% got an offer from employers. The external supports were likely common for graduates in their job application.

### 3.3 Influential factors on graduates' assessment of their job sustainability in three years

#### 3.3.1 Monthly salary

The sustainable level of employment status was a major concern of graduates. This status was influenced by a variety of factors, including job position, tasks, promotion opportunity, working environment, colleagues, and especially salary. Salary rate was acknowledged as one of the main reasons for participants to change their jobs (table 5).

**Table 5:** Relationship between monthly salary and the sustainability of job status in the next 03 years

The sustainable level	Monthly salary							
	Under 3 million VND		From 3 to 6 million VND		From 6 to 9 million VND		Over 9 million VND	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very sustainable	10	14.9	25	10.9	11	16.4	0	0.0
Sustainable	31	46.3	120	52.2	39	58.2	7	77.8
Less sustainable	12	17.9	62	27.0	14	20.9	2	22.2
Not sustainable	14	20.9	23	10.0	3	4.5	0	0.0

(Phi measure, p value = 0.05, correlative level = 0.213)

The findings demonstrated that there was a positive relationship between monthly salary and the sustainability of job status in the next 03 years. Particularly, a higher salary was often associated with a higher sustainable level of employment status. For example, 77.8% of participants in the group of high salary, which was over 9 million VND, assessed their employment status as sustainable in comparison to 46.3% of participants in the group of fewer than 3 million VND salaries. This trend was popular among graduates from the rural areas because they had to pay for housing and other living expenses. With a low salary, many of them still received financial support from their parents or other relatives. Gradually, after a few years, some of them had to return to their hometown to find a job that they can live with their families in order to save money.

#### 3.3.2 The suitable level of the current job and training background

In addition to salary, the suitable level of the current job and training background was considered important to

the sustainability of participants' employment status. Table 6 showed a positive association between these two variables ( $p = 0.05$ ) (table 6). The more suitable level participants reported when assessing their current jobs, the more likely they thought that they would attach those jobs in the future. The insuitability of current jobs with training background would predict the possibility of job change of participants in the future.

**Table 6:** Graduates' assessment of the suitability of the current job with their training background and the sustainability of their job status in the next three years

The sustainable levels of job status in the next three years	The suitability of the current job with the training background							
	Very suitable		Suitable		Less suitable		Not suitable at all	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very sustainable	20	31.3	15	10.8	11	9.1	0	0.0
Sustainable	40	62.5	91	65.5	48	39.7	18	36.7
Less sustainable	4	6.2	31	22.3	38	31.4	17	34.7
Not sustainable	0	0.0	2	1.4	24	19.8	14	28.6

(Phi measure,  $p$  value = .000, correlative level = 0.500)

### 3.3.3 Information resource of job opportunity and the sustainability of employment status

**Table 7:** The relationship between information resources of job opportunity and the sustainable levels of job status in the next three years

Information resources of job opportunity	Sustainable levels of job status in the next three years							
	Very sustainable		Sustainable		Less sustainable		Not sustainable at all	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Parents, relatives	21	46.7	84	42.4	11	12.9	4	10.0
Friends, colleagues	9	20.0	61	30.8	34	40.0	11	27.5
Teachers, the university	9	20.0	24	12.1	7	8.2	3	7.5
Job advertisement	11	24.4	47	23.7	34	40.0	17	42.5
Direct application	3	6.7	15	7.6	7	8.2	2	5.0
Job agencies	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.2	5	12.5
Others	1	2.2	5	2.5	1	1.2	0	0.0

(\*Multiple choices question)

Participants also emphasized the importance of information source of job opportunity in the engagement level with their current jobs. Table 7 indicated that most of the participants who got their jobs through the introduction of their parents and relatives believed that their employment status would be very sustainable or sustainable with 46.7% and 42.4% of participants choosing respectively. Most of other groups of information sources did not showed that self-reportedly high level of job sustainability. Thus, parents and relatives likely influenced graduates' employment situation in different aspects, including job searching, application, and the level of job engagement.

#### 4. Recommendations

There are some recommendations to improve the efficiency of students' job-seeking in social science sector. First of all, the educational program should be changed to meet the labor market and employer's requirements that avoids unemployment and wastage of labor resource. One of some ways directs this change is to build the model of training institutions and employers combination. Besides, employers should organize professed and transparent recruitment, and it should be the mismatch between professionals and vacancy. Secondly, to improve the adaptation of students to the real working environment, improving the soft skills is indispensable. Therefore, soft skills training should be held in the universities or they can be improved through social activities and group activities. Thirdly, students can cultivate employment's information as much as possible which come from their close social networks such as family, relatives, friends and so on because according to this survey results, the lack of information and social relationships are the greatest difficulties in accessing employment of students. There are important sources of social capital in providing the necessary supports and ensuring the stability of job.

#### 5. Discussion and conclusions

Overall, graduates in the fields of social sciences and humanities at USSH, VNU, Hanoi, often got their first job during the first six month after graduating. A majority of the participants in this study worked at governmental offices. The average salaries of participants were reported approximately from 03 to 06 million VND. Although most participants indicated a highly sustainable level of employment status, they demonstrated that their current jobs did not fit their training background.

The study findings revealed some influential factors on graduates' employment situations. Family was acknowledged as one of the most key determinants in participants' job searching, applying, and maintaining their employment status. Additionally, hometown and the suitable levels of current jobs with training background also had some influences on graduates' job opportunities and sustainable level of their employment status. Last but not least, low salary was determined as stimuli leading participants to change their jobs.

However, this study was implemented with a small sample size and only focused on an educational institution. In the future, we expect to conduct further studies on influential factors on the employment situation of graduates in the fields of social sciences and humanities across the country.

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