

Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission



Research Cell

Influencing Policy & Practice of TVET in Sri Lanka

A STUDY TO IDENTIFY ISSUES RELATED TO FULFILLING FOREIGN EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE MASONS TRAINED IN THE GOVERNMENT TVET SECTOR INSTITUTIONS

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ABBREVIATIONS

TVEC	- Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission
TVET	- Technical and Vocational Education and Training
NAITA	- National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority
NYSC	- National Youth Services Council
VTA	- Vocational Training Authority
LMIS	- Labour Market Information System
SLBFE	- Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Today, foreign employment is the largest net foreign exchange earner of the country. Middle-East countries are the major market for Sri Lankans' labour since 1970 and foreign employment has been growing steadily since 1980. From 1970 to 2000 the highest numbers of departures for foreign employment have been recorded for housemaids. However from the beginning of the 21st century it changed dramatically. Middle-East countries as well as some of the Asian and European countries face shortage of skilled labour in their labour market. Hence there is a large demand for Sri Lankan skilled labour from those countries and they are paid higher salaries than unskilled labourers. Among them we can identify that there is a remarkable demand for craft level workers with comparing the other job categories. From the craft level related category the Masons got the highest demand.(According to the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment and Labour Market Information Bulletin)

When we consider the TVET sector of Sri Lanka, Technical Colleges, NYSC centers, NAITA and VTA centers are conducting courses for masons. In addition, government grants funds for teacher training, curriculum development and learning resource development. Also government has been supplying allowance for the trainees. In reality, it has not been able to provide with skilled personnel qualified to fulfill the local and foreign demand.

In this study, we try to identify the main issues related to fulfilling foreign employment opportunities for the mason trained in the government TVET sector and suggest remedies (reforms) for those issues.

The study is mainly focused on following four objectives;

- To identify present supply of mason trainees from Government TVET institutions.
- To identify present opportunities of employment for Government TVET institutions trained masons from foreign countries.
- To identify issues of matching the demand and supply related to government TVET trained masons in relation to foreign employment.
- To suggest measures to improve foreign employability of trained masons from government TVET institutions

The population of this study consisted of present and past students of masonry courses conducted by the government TVET sector institutions, Trainers/ Training managers/ Job placement officers of government TVET sector institutions in the mason trade. In addition, we have taken the points of views of Foreign Employment Bureau and other foreign employment related agencies in to the consideration. We obtained data from 163 randomly selected students of masonry courses (83 present students and 80 past students) and 30 Trainers/ Training managers/ Job placement officers of government TVET sector institutions in the mason trade. Data has been collected through structured questionnaires and direct interviews.

According to the results of the study conducted, the students do not select a masonry course with a main intention to have a foreign employment. They do not have a satisfactory awareness about foreign job market.

It is found that, although the institutions use various methods to make the students aware of their courses, they have not been able to communicate information effectively. Students continue to get information by informal sources.

Four factors are identified by this study as obstacles for having a foreign employment in masonry field. Lack of English knowledge, not using updated technology and tools, lack of communication about foreign job opportunities and financial problems are the factors identified.

Remedial suggestions for the aforementioned problems have been briefly stated in the detailed report. It is found that there is a high possibility of getting the foreign employment agencies involved in the activities of making the people aware of foreign employment opportunities, effectively.

Chapter 01 – Introduction

1.0 Introduction

Migrating of Sri Lankans for overseas contract employment has proved to be a significant feature in the socio-economic factors in Sri Lanka. It was only in mid-1970s that Sri Lankans started joining for overseas employment in large numbers. Prior to this, such engagements were limited to several hundreds and were dominated by professional and technical personnel destined to developed countries. After Sri Lanka launched its open market policies and with employment opportunities opening up in the oil-rich Gulf states, Sri Lanka's migration increased rapidly and steadily. The Government recognizing the importance of labour migration, in 1985 set up the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) to facilitate safe migration.

Contribution to the GDP from Migration Overseas job opportunities for the Sri Lankan labour force continued to be a vital source of employment. Year 2008, recorded 252,021 employment migrations which was 16% increase compared to previous year persons migrated for foreign employment which was 217,306 in 2007(TVEC sources). This was predominantly a result of the increase in skilled and unskilled labour migrants during this period. The second highest source of foreign exchange in Sri Lanka is the remittances by the migrant workers (private remittance) earning a total of Rs.316118 million in 2008. Middle-East countries are the major market for Sri Lanka labour since 1970 and foreign employment has been growing steadily since 1980. From 1970 to 2000 the highest number of departures for foreign employment has recorded for housemaids. However from the beginning of the 21st century it has been changed.

The Global Construction Industry in 2006 construction was a \$4.6 trillion global industry and currently Asia constitutes the largest portion of that market with the bulk of its activity situated in China. According to the Asia Business Council, “Every year, more than half of the world’s new buildings are constructed in Asia. China is the world’s largest construction market that occupies 40 billion square meters in existing buildings and adds an additional two billion square meters of floor area each year, almost half the global total. The Korean construction market was valued at \$8.3 billion in 2004 is expected to grow to \$230 billion by 2020. Construction is equally important to Canada

where it was a \$156 billion industry in 2006. In addition some of the world's largest construction companies such as Samsung Engineering and Construction are located in Korea. Samsung has been the contractor on such mega projects as the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur and the Bur Dubai in the United Arab Emirates.

Aligning with the global trends for growing construction industry, the forecasts predict good job prospects for masons. Demands are rising for new masons as a result of retirements and career changes as well. The number of new jobs available is expected to increase at the average rate for all jobs through 2012. Most new jobs will be created by the rising population, which demands more houses, hospitals, high-rise buildings, factories, schools, etc. Demand for masons will also be increased by the need for restoration of historical buildings.

Previous research shows that most masons in Sri Lanka have not formally schooled but acquire on-the-job training. Some attend vocational schools or courses provided by the industry or government. Others become formal apprentices, which provides an on the job training. Those who acquire on-the-job training usually start as assistants to experienced workers. They might also be labourers or mason tenders. Their work might consist of transporting materials, building or transferring scaffolds, or mixing mortar. As they perform these associated tasks they will pick up skills and knowledge. Those bricklayers who work primarily on professional and public buildings are usually employed by contractors, who often provide extensive training as apprentices in all areas of brick or stone. Bricklayers who work primarily on residential structures are more likely to be employed by smaller contractors and usually focus on one or two areas of masonry. With experience they might be promoted to laying the stone or brick themselves.

Masons can find opportunities for advancement to supervisory positions through extra training. They might even come to own businesses, and oversee the work of many masons rather than working themselves. Alternately, masons can transfer to associated fields and become construction managers or building inspectors. This process requires a formal apprenticeship than on the job training.

The Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC) is responsible for the planning, coordination, and development of technical and vocational education and

training (TVET) in Sri Lanka. TVEC was established by the Tertiary and Vocational Education Act No. 20 of 1990. Maintaining a labour market information system (LMIS) and paying grants and subsidies under contract to private sector training providers are two other major functions of the TVEC. The curriculum of institutions attached to TVEC (Technical Colleges, NYSC, NAITA and VTA) also include vocational trainings in the field of masonry. The apprenticeships can last up to two years and involve practical experience. Being an apprentice requires that applicants are older than eighteen and are physically capable to meet the demands of masonry.

Statistics of Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment shows that Job orders received to Sri Lanka from foreign principals in 2007 for the general Mason profession was 13,967. Out of the Foreign Jobs in High Demand, General Mason category was the second highest. This can be justified observing the following tables.

Job orders received from foreign principals (2005, 2007)
Craft and Related Occupations

Job Category	Job Orders (2005)	Job Orders (2007)
Tailor	6,189	28,114
Mason-General	5,719	13,967
Electrician-General	4,308	11,610
Fitter-Plumber/Pipe	4,206	8,720
Welder-General	3,640	8,758
Carpenter-Joiner	3,563	6,868
Fixer-Steel	2,855	4,367
Mechanic-General	2,394	5,619
Painter-General	2,104	4,634
Carpenter-Furniture	1,551	4,326

(Source: Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment – Labour Market Information Bulletin)

The masons supply from Sri Lanka for foreign employment was high as 2,360 in 2005. However a year after it falls down to 1,178. Foreign Employment placement for selected craft and related workers from 2001 to 2007 are presented below.

Job Category	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Mason-General	656	1,230	1,229	1,368	2,360	1,178	1,341
Electrician-General	552	704	815	1,045	1,804	1,103	1,270
Welder-General	501	589	669	758	1,760	751	878
Mechanic-General	446	581	788	642	1,607	519	723

Carpenter-Jointer	230	430	544	824	1,199	854	794
Fitter-Plumber/Pipe	239	490	443	597	878	670	873
Painter-General	148	258	304	335	855	344	436
Fixer-Steel	92	220	284	351	523	526	299
Tailor	2,656	2,821	2,772	748	431	187	148
Carpenter-Furniture	518	663	650	545	363	118	409
Fabricator	106	157	129	140	262	112	45
Painter-Spray	94	208	123	127	247	195	219
Tinker	43	74	99	89	166	83	72
Electrician-Auto	78	148	96	64	153	35	85
Bar bender	10	13	17	58	119	60	48
Fitter-General	40	51	64	35	60	58	14
Mason-Tile Fixer	22	68	48	30	57	68	58
Painter-Auto	12	41	34	18	19	-	-

(Source: Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment – Labour Market Information Bulletin)

According to the above table the higher number of foreign employment placements were recorded in Mason and it has seen a significant increase in job placement from 2000.

Comparative studies on the supply and demands show that the supply of masonry profession for the foreign employment opportunities has been less than 30% of the demand. Therefore the importance of this research is justified and the results may make out Masonry profession as an untouched opportunity while emphasizing the need of a series of initiatives to exploit the hidden opportunity.

1.1 Research Problem

It is noted that there has not been sufficient studies accomplished to investigate the gaps and reasons behind such shortfalls whilst masonry trade has been the second highest field among the demands for foreign craftsman professions from Sri Lanka. This research will be looking to the prevailing problems in the TVET sector and suggest suitable solutions to be implemented in order to produce professionally qualified personalities to the world.

1.2 Objectives of the study

- To identify present supply of mason trainees from Government TVET institutions.
- To identify present opportunities of employment for Government TVET institutions trained masons from foreign countries.
- To identify issues of matching the demand and supply related to government TVET trained masons in relation to foreign employment.
- To suggest measures to improve foreign employability of trained masons from government TVET institutions

Chapter 02 - Methodology

2.0 Literature Survey

A direct study of this matter has not been conducted in TVET sector before. But some of the previous researches show that most masons in Sri Lanka have not attended formal schools education or vocational training but acquired on-the-job training. Some have attended vocational schools or courses provided by the industry or by government.

2.1 Population

For this study, our sample consists of following categories.

- Students who are presently following masonry courses at government TVET institutions
- Students who have completed masonry courses conducted by government TVET institutions
- Trainers/ Job Placement Officers/ Training Managers of the government TVET institutions

In order to enrich the study, we have also taken points of views of foreign employment agencies into consideration.

2.2 Sample of the study and collection of data

For this study we obtained sample from government TVET institutions of several randomly selected districts, representing the whole country.

Structured questionnaires were used as the tool for primary data collection. Based on the experience of the pilot survey, the questionnaire was further modified and presented to the TVEC for approval. Data were collected from present students and trainers by giving a questionnaire personally by research team members. Postal questionnaires were used to collect data from past students. Direct interviews were held to obtain data from some of the selected foreign employment agencies. The secondary data was collected from the websites and publications of the related authorities such as TVEC, Ministry of Labour & Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Central bank of Sri Lanka, Department of Senses and Statistics.

It was decided to collect Data from 100 present students, 100 past students and 50 Trainers/ Job Placement Officers/ Training Managers.

2.3 Composition of the sample

The followings are the numbers of actual responses received

Present students	83
Past students	80
Trainers/ Job Placement Officers/ Training Managers	30

Table 1- Composition of sample

Our sample consists of 39% of present students, 38% of past students and 23% of Trainers/ Job Placement Officers/ Training Managers

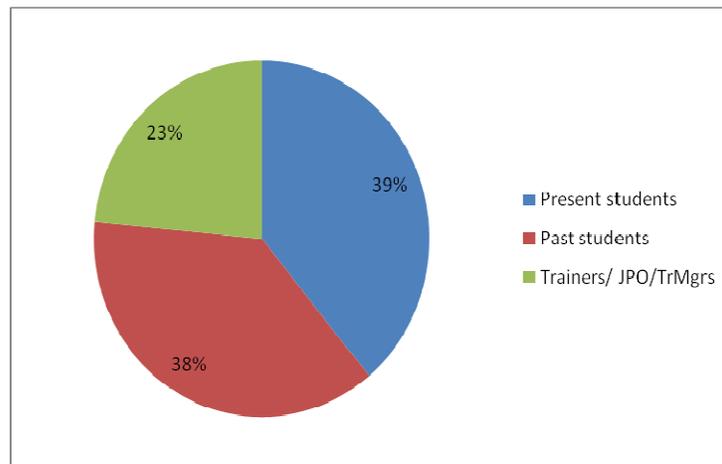


Figure 1- Composition of sample

Chapter 03 – Analysis and Presentation of of Data

3.0 Analysis of Data

By our questionnaires (see appendix 1), we mainly addressed following research questions with respect to the masonry courses conducted by government TVET institutions.

- Various methods used by the institutions to make students aware about the available masonry courses
- Mode of awareness of students about the available masonry courses
- Reasons for selecting a masonry course (from students and trainers view)
- Satisfaction about the existing curricula of the course
- Adequacy of time received for practical training
- Availability of adequate tools equipment and material
- Other issues which negatively affect to the fulfillment of foreign employment opportunities for the masons trained in the government TVET sector institutions

Both the students' questionnaire and trainers' questionnaire consist of questions to obtain the responses about the above statements. To analyze the responses, a combination of both the questionnaire has been used.

3.1 Various methods used by the institutions to make students aware about the available masonry courses

The following table shows the various methods and the usage of those methods by the training institutions to make students aware about the available masonry courses.

Response by 30 trainers	Yes	No
Paper advertisement	13	17
Career Guidance at Vocational institute	20	10
Career Guidance at school	17	13
Awareness programme at village level	21	9
Awareness programmes with various institutes	8	22
Gazette	3	27
Radio	2	28
Exhibition	2	28

A graphical representation of the above data can be expressed as follows.

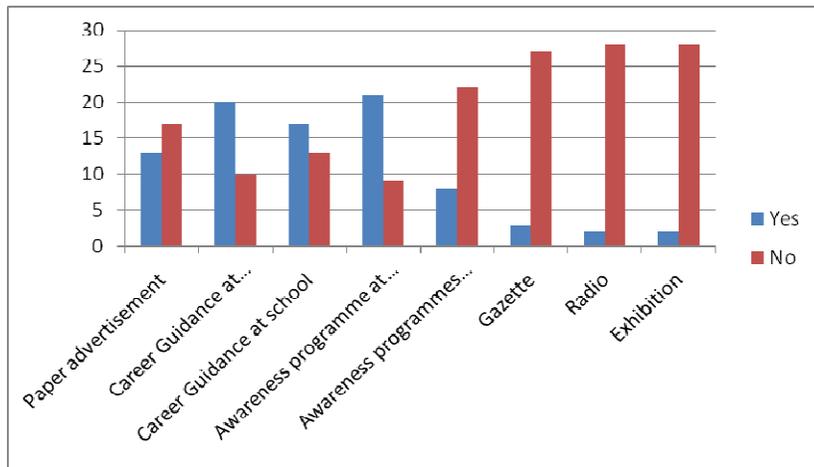


Figure 2- Methods used by the institutions to make students aware

It is observed that the institutions use various methods to distribute information about their masonry programmes. Some institutions use more than one method. According to the above analyses, career guidance programmes and awareness programmes are most widely used.

3.2 Mode of awareness of students about the available masonry courses

In previous question, we got an idea about how the institutions spread information about their courses. The following table shows the details about how students use those sources to obtain information about available masonry courses at government training institutions.

Source	Number of students	Percentage
Newspapers	22	13.5
Friends	57	35.0
Parents	27	16.6
School CG unit	48	29.4
Gazette	09	5.5
Total	163	100

Table 3- Mode of awareness of students about the available masonry courses

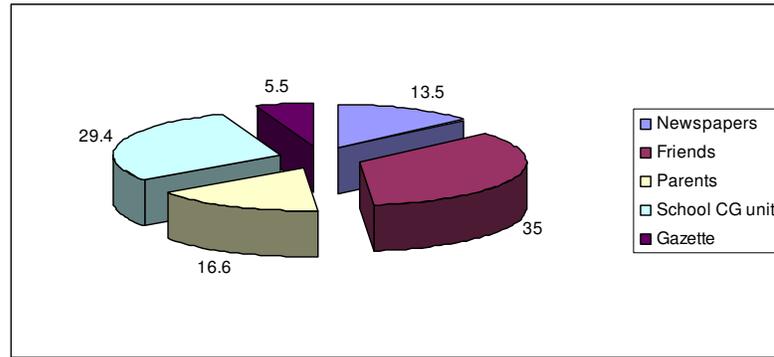


Figure 3- Mode of awareness of students about the available masonry courses (percentages shown)

According to the analyses, it is interesting to observe that although the institutions use various expensive methods to distribute information about their courses, still 35% of the students get information from their friends. It seems that there does not exist a trend of getting information from formal information sources like news papers, gazette... etc.

3.3 Reasons for selecting a masonry course

Reasons for selecting a masonry course were asked from both present and past student. Also trainers were supposed to tell their view about the aforementioned problem.

The following table shows a summary of students' responses about their reasons for selecting a masonry course.

Reasons	Number of students	Percentage
Willingness to be a mason	13	8.0
To improve skills	83	50.9
Family inherent	18	11.0
Influences of friends/ teachers/ parents	14	8.6
Get a chance for foreign job	35	21.5
Total	163	100

Table 4- Reasons for selecting masonry course (Students' view)

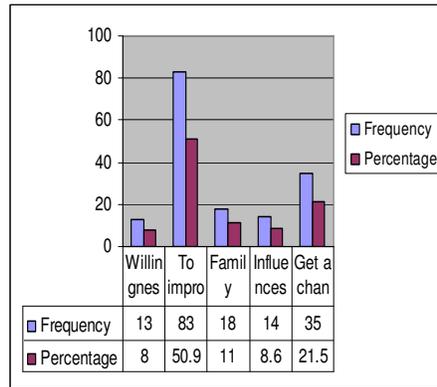


Figure 4- Reasons for selecting masonry course (Students' view)

The above analysis indicates that most of the students follow masonry courses in order to improve their skills. That is 50.9% of the sample said they selected a masonry course just to improve their skills. Only 21.5% of the sample have selected a masonry course with the purpose of having a foreign job.

Trainers' view

The following table shows a summary of trainers' view about why students select masonry courses.

Response by 30 trainers	Yes	No
Willingness to be a mason	12	18
Family inherent	12	18
Get a chance for foreign job	11	19
Less education qualification for selection	21	9
Local demand for masonry	13	17
Basic qualification for another course	3	27
Many vacancies are available at army forces	1	29

Table 5- Reasons for selecting masonry course (Trainers' view)

When analyzing students' responses it is found that most of the students follow masonry courses in order to improve their skills. But according to the *Table 5* that is trainers view, students select masonry courses mainly due to the fact that they selection need less

educational qualifications for selection. Both analyses indicate that the demand for foreign jobs in masonry field does not make a significant influence on selecting a masonry course.

3.4 Satisfaction about the existing curricula of the course

The following two tables show the responses of students and trainers about the content of curricula of existing masonry courses conducted by government training institutions. Percentages of the respective responses are shown by the two figures.

Factor	No of students	Percent age
Highly satisfied	40	24.5
Satisfied	97	59.5
Moderately satisfied	11	6.7
Unsatisfied	2	6.7
Extremely Unsatisfied	2	1.2
Not Commented	2	1.2
Total	163	100

Table 6 – Satisfaction about the existing curricula of the course (students)

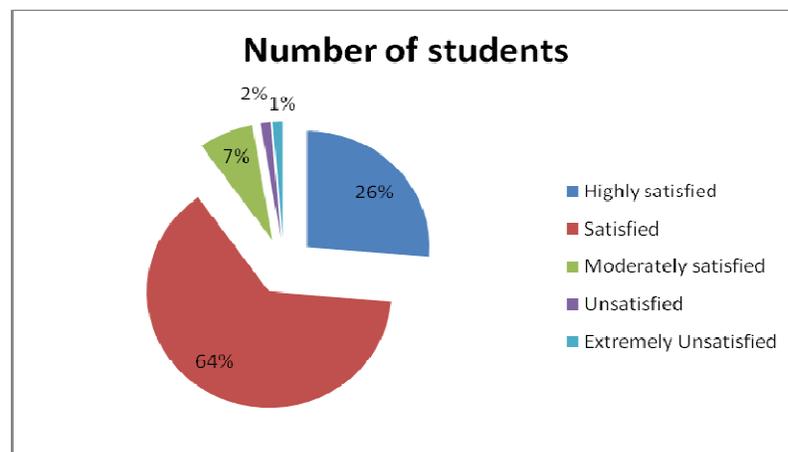


Figure 5 – Satisfaction about the existing curricula of the course (students)

Factor	No of trainers	Percent age
Highly satisfied	4	14
Satisfied	19	63
Moderately satisfied	4	14
Unsatisfied	1	3
Extremely Unsatisfied	1	3
Not Commented	1	3
Total	30	100

Table 7- Satisfaction about the existing curricula of the course (Trainers)

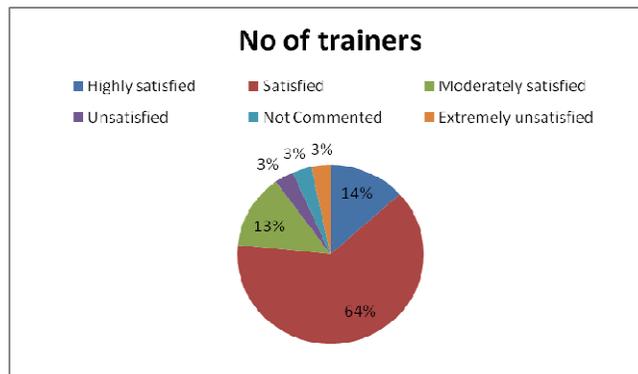


Figure 6- Satisfaction about the existing curricula of the course (Trainers)

The above analysis indicates that the majority of respondents (both students and trainers) are satisfied about the content of the curricula of masonry courses.

3.5 Adequacy of time received for practical training

The following table gives the summary of the students responses about the time received for practical training.

Factor	Number of Students	Percentage
Highly satisfied	78	47.9
Satisfied	81	49.7
Moderately satisfied	3	1.8
Not Commented	1	.6
Total	163	100

Table 8- Adequacy of time received for practical training (students)

Trainers responses on the above question are as follows.

Factor	Number of Trainers	Percentage
Highly satisfied	6	20
Satisfied	21	70
Moderately satisfied	2	6.7
Not Commented	1	3.3
Total	30	100

Table 9- Adequacy of time received for practical training(Trainers)

The above analysis indicates that the time received practical training is adequate in masonry courses conducted by government training centers as the majority of students and trainers are satisfied about the available time.

3.6 Other issues

In order to identify other obstacles which negatively affect for finding a foreign employment, we inquired the idea of both students and trainers about the following issues.

Other issues (%)	yes	no	Not commented
Mismatching of curricula	26.9	33.2	39.9
Lack of practical skills	38.9	61.1	
Lack of English competency skills	74.6	25.7	
Use of out dated technology and tools/ equipments	64.2	35.8	
Lack of quality of courses	19.7	21.8	58.5
Not receiving government help	38.9	61.1	
Violence against foreign employment	43	57	
Absence of good foreign employment policy	26.4	73.1	0.5
Lack of communication about foreign employment	48.7	27.5	23.8
Financial problems.	72.5	27.5	

Table 10- Other issues

When carefully analyzing the above responses, four obstacles for finding a foreign employment in masonry field could be identified from students' and trainers' view. Those are,

1. Lack of English language skills
2. Use of outdated technology and tools/ equipment in training
3. Lack of communication about foreign job market
4. Financial problems

Chapter 04 – Recommendations and Discussion

4.1 Research Findings

- According to the information received in this study we have identified that there is a huge gap between demand and supply of foreign employment in masonry field.

The following table shows the information about demand and supply for foreign employment in masonry field in years 2007 and 2008.

Factor	Year 2007	Year 2008
Demand	13967	15827
Supply	1341	2500

Table 11- Demand and Supply

Although both demand and supply have increased in year 2008, the gap between demand and supply of year 2007 has been further increased by year 2008.

This is further illustrated by the following graph.

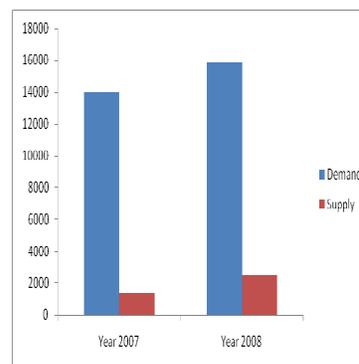


Figure 7 - Demand and Supply

Although the gap between demand and supply has increased, it is a positive feature that the percentage supply has increased in year 2008.

Percentage supply in 2007	9.6%
Percentage supply in 2008	15.7%

Table 12 – Percentage in supply

Also it should be noted that the percentage increase in demand is 13.3% in 2008 with respect to 2007.

- Institutions use various methods to distribute information about their courses, but those are not much effective as expected.
- There is no sudden need of changing the content of existing curriculum documents for the masonry field.

Identified key factors which can be considered as big obstacles for finding a foreign employment in masonry field.

- Lack of English language skills
- Use of outdated technology and tools/ equipment in training
- Lack of communication about foreign job market
- Financial problems

Direct discussions were held with some of randomly selected foreign employment agencies to enrich our study. But it is observed that there is no good interrelation between government training centers and foreign employment agencies. Their awareness about the accepted courses in this field is found to be less satisfactory.

4.2 Recommendations

- Although institutions use various methods to distribute information about their courses still students find information from informal sources such as from friends, parents etc. Therefore actions should be taken to distribute information about courses more effectively, efficiently and in reliable ways.
- Organize English programs to improve the English knowledge and communication skills.
- Opportunities should be given to use modern technology/tool/ equipments in TVET institutions.
- Awareness programs should be launched about foreign job market.

- A good communication network should be built up between training centers and foreign employment agencies so that there will be a flow of information about foreign job vacancies.
- Methods should be implemented to get the financial assistance for required people.
- Active contribution of the foreign employment agencies should be obtained when organizing awareness programs.

4.3 Discussion

This study was conducted to identify issues related to fulfilling foreign employment opportunities for the masons trained in the government TVET sector institutions. Study should have been conducted for all the fields for which Sri Lanka provides labour to the foreign job market. But due to the financial and time constraints we had to limit this study only for masonry field. Also in this study we have considered masonry courses conducted by government TVET institutions. But the private sector institutions should also have been taken into the consideration. As the future development of this study one can consider other job fields and both government and private sector training institutions so that the above shortcomings could be eliminated.