



Bridging the Gap

Analyzing the gap between vocational business graduates and sustainable employment.

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Master's thesis

November 2020

Master's Degree in Business Administration

International Business Management

ABSTRACT

Tampereen ammattikorkeakoulu
Tampere University of Applied Sciences
Master's degree in Business Administration
International Business Management

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Bridging the Gap: Analyzing the gap between vocational business graduates and sustainable employment.

Master's thesis 65 pages, appendices 7 pages
November 2020

The employment trends for youth in Finland nowadays are changing and shaping the future in many ways that have not been seen before. Young adults today have increasingly been engaging in part-time 'gig work' rather than committing to full-time employment and this is going to be shaping the paths of future generations to come. This generation that is growing up into the work force are a massive source of innovation, ideas and solutions and have been pushing strongly for change. Newly graduated young adults have the energy and great potential to generate positive changes in this modern-day world. The ideology behind working, careers and professional success is being modified and changing constantly.

The objective of this master's thesis is to provide insight into a trend that has become more apparent in recent years. Recent graduates have been challenging the traditional notion of working and committing to a full-time job. As this age group of 18 to 25-year-olds is becoming the largest fraction of the world's current and future workforce, more and more businesses are struggling to understand the demands and work ethics this age group possesses.

From the perspective of vocational school graduates and business leaders in the Pirkanmaa region, this research project provides insight into what is influencing this new working culture. Is it because they no longer value the traditional means of long-term employment? As young adults leave their childhood behind and take the steps into building their career and adult life, they are eager to embark on new experiences.

Key words: graduates, employment, vocational education, commitment, Finland

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	5
1.1	Research topic	6
1.2	Research questions	7
1.3	Literature review.....	8
1.4	Literature review.....	9
2	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	10
2.1	Literature review.....	11
2.2	Synthesis of theories.....	11
3	METHODOLOGY.....	13
3.1	Methodology approach.....	13
3.2	Data acquisition methods.....	15
3.3	Analysis methods	16
4	RESEARCH RESULTS	18
4.1	Background information	18
4.1.1	Survey participants	18
4.2	Research questions and answers	20
4.2.1	Education satisfaction.....	25
4.2.2	Practical training participation.....	27
4.2.3	Certificate validation	29
4.2.4	Continuing education.....	30
4.2.5	Employment trends.....	31
4.2.6	Obtaining employment.....	33
4.2.7	Employment options and choices	36
4.2.8	Employment contracts available	39
4.2.9	Traits in the workplace	40
4.2.10	Reasons for unemployment.....	41
4.3	Professional perspective	42
4.3.1	Experiences with internships and employment	44
4.3.2	Expectations.....	45
4.3.3	Required skillsets.....	47
4.3.4	Employment opportunities.....	48
4.3.5	Recruiting methods	49
4.4	Synthesis of results	50
5	DISCUSSION	52
5.1	Discussion of results	52
5.2	Contribution to previous research	54

5.3 Practical conclusion	54
5.4 Critical evaluation of the research design and implementation	55
REFERENCES	56
APPENDICES.....	59
Appendix 1. Survey sent to businesses in Pirkanmaa (Fin/Eng).....	59
Appendix 2. Survey sent to vocational graduates (Fin/Eng)	61
Appendix 3. Interviews: Vocational school business graduates:.....	63
Appendix 4. Interview, Kalliokoski.....	64
Appendix 5. Avenues for future research.....	65

1 INTRODUCTION

Young people today are changing the world. They are a massive source of innovation, ideas and solutions and have been pushing strongly for change. Young people have the energy and great potential to generate positive changes in this modern-day world. The ideology behind working, careers and professional success is being modified and changed all the time (Kalenius, A. 2014). Are we keeping up with that change? From the answers of the young adults and fresh graduates, as well as from the perspective of the local management leading large and small organizations that have answered the surveys, this Thesis is going to piece together where the gap in this situation lies.

Graduates from many different fields of expertise anxiously anticipate their graduation day and have high hopes of starting their careers immediately. Why is it that is not always the case? The answer is not necessarily based on laziness or lack of trying, rather the challenges of finding a 'dream job' that fulfills high expectations and settling for alternative options (Alatalo, 2016). One of those 'options' is bouncing around from place to place, trying different positions and workplaces. In recent years, it has been more obvious that vocational school graduates tend to move around, sometimes changing jobs a couple of times before deciding what their niche is or whether they continue their studies. This age bracket and education level can lead to uncertainties being that it is not usually the final step in settling in their career, but rather a steppingstone between options and opportunities. This Thesis will explore the factors the influence and impact that society has on upcoming generations and the ideology behind long-term employment and commitment. This topic has been weighed and adjusted as years have gone by with the ever-changing societal fundamentals and as generations evolve (Ursin, J. 2017 p. 83).

In recent years, it has been more difficult than ever for graduating students to obtain meaningful employment after graduation. Is this because the fresh graduates are too picky and expect too much? Or is it because employers are hesitant to offer permanent employment and take a chance on these youngsters? Although the quality of education at the vocational level is high, and these students

have gone through years of studying and learning, are the skills learned applicable to the ever-changing business industry (Ahola, S & Kivelä, S. 2007 p. 217)? Despite the unconventional employment patterns that are slowly shaping the future amongst these young graduates, the educational institutions do provide phenomenal opportunities with on-the-job trainings, job fairs, introducing optimal and potential workplaces (Tredu website, 2019).

1.1 Research topic

The employment trends for youth in Finland nowadays are changing and shaping the future in many ways that have not been seen before. Young adults today have increasingly been engaging in part-time 'gig work' rather than committing to full-time employment and this being our future working generation, is going to be shaping the paths of the future generations that come after them. Or is it so? It may just be that the long-term or permanent employment is too far out of their reach, and they need to work somewhere, so it looks as though they are choosing to work in temporary or short-term positions. Amongst the young graduates in Finland, this is an increasing trend that has become more and more apparent in the recent and current economic situation. It is a rare commodity nowadays that anyone stays in the same position or line of work for forty years.

With high expectations and minimal commitment, the traditions of long-term employment have been turning a curve. What is the influence? The purpose of this thesis is to provide insight to a trend that has created challenges in youth and the new age working culture. In general, younger people, ages 18-25 are more likely to change their jobs more frequently with less commitment than those in an older age group or generation (Komsu, A. 2017). Below in Figure 1, the chart excerpted from (Riipinen, K. 2020) depicts a quick glance into the trend of unemployment rates and the increasing percentage throughout the years.

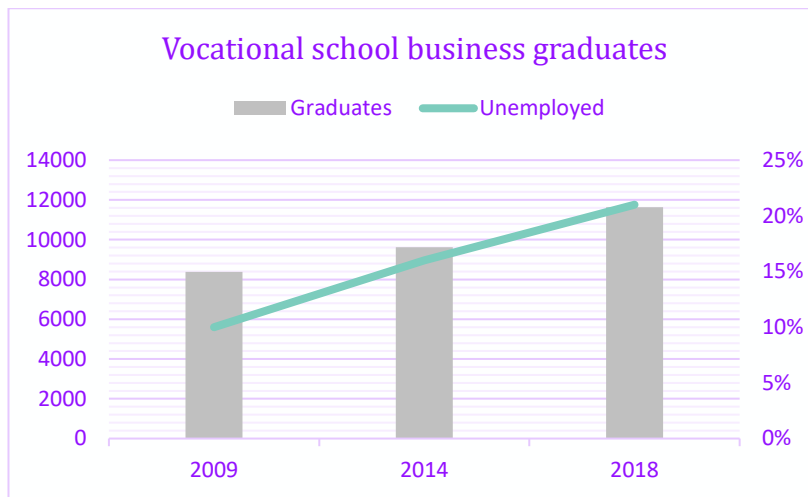


FIGURE 1. What is your future occupation?

(Riipinen, K. Taloustaito 7/2020, Mikä on tulevaisuuden ammattisi?)

The lack of long-term commitment is becoming more apparent and the reasons behind it are rather unknown. All these factors do shed light on the fact that there is a disconnect between the public sector of education and the private sector of the working industry and employment (Berman, J. 2008).

Young adulthood is a transitioning period of moving from the security of the education platforms and moving on to professional employment. Navigating this journey is important and the life management and social skills assist their transition. From the perspective of the young graduates themselves and business leaders in the Pirkanmaa area, the current employment trends will be assessed. With the plentiful responses, the data and figures are detailed and analyzed in the following chapters. In addition to gathering the qualitative and quantitative data, insight gathered through numerous interviews will be brought in and analyzed later in the thesis.

1.2 Research questions

With a shift in employment trends happening over the last few years, the common focus has been on the aspect of what is influencing young adult's decision making and path to transitioning from education to employment? What are these young graduates looking for? Do their decisions impact further education, technical education, or apprenticeships? And has this had an impact on improving employment opportunities?

How are the skillsets learned in education facilities today keeping up with the professional industry? As the industries evolve and develop, education platforms are facing the obstacle of keeping up and maintaining a curriculum that is relevant. This leads into the next topic of discussion: Should modern education curriculums be more focused on current trends and work practices versus classroom lectures and teaching? This has been weighed and evaluated already to some degree in certain fields but not as much in the business sector. This question has room for more discussion and the answers regarding this are somewhat divided. Lastly, the discussion regarding postgraduates and their capability in finding employment based on their education and qualifications. If this is so, why are they changing jobs so frequently and non-committal to full-time or permanent employment? Are organizations and businesses not offering full-time positions as much as they did in the past, or what is the missing link between postgraduates finding permanent employment and what are the businesses looking for?

1.3 Research approach

This study has thoroughly explored the avenue between the education platform and the professional world and how the transition between the two is navigated by the graduates from vocational level education. There are some missing aspects that were not accessible for this research project to obtain, for example, inside information from Tredu (Tampere Vocational College Tredu) or similar education platforms. The opportunity to collaborate with a facility was not possible due to COVID-19 so all information and data in this thesis is based on the survey's, interviews and supporting information. In order to gather valid and reliable information and data, the survey's conducted were well-planned and constructed in such a way to retract as much information as possible. Unfortunately, there is not a multitude of existing research material on this subject and that was undoubtedly the most challenging aspect to compiling information to support the data.

In constructing the surveys and putting the questions together, it was valuable that certain questions were multiple choice, partially to confirm certain suspicions that were already obvious. This was the case based on certain information that was vital to get, but there was some flexibility in the combination of answers. Multiple choice answers have fast processing times and there is not room for

specific subjectivity. You can technically ask more questions this way because the answer time is so quick. The answerer has the option to focus on content rather than trying to think of a suitable answer. The surveys had to be the most informative in the shortest amount of questions to ensure that the answerers would answer them and not be turned off by the length. Certain answers were left as 'open-ended' and the survey respondent could write in their own interpretation to the answer. The open-ended aspect allows an infinite number of possible answers, gives qualitative data and collects more detail and originality, provides different insights and perspectives and shows more depth to how the respondent thinks (Straus, A., & Corbin, J. 1990).

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The structure of this Thesis is organized according to the guidelines issued by TAMK. After the initial abstract, table of contents and the introduction, the research questions will be introduced. Following this, the research questions, research approach and thesis layout is expanded on to give clear understanding what the overall Thesis is focusing on. In the second chapter, the theoretical framework, literature review and the synthesis of theories are written out in detail. This, in hindsight, will give background and existing information regarding the Thesis and why this topic is being researched yet again. Chapter three introduces the methodology and its approach and data methods. This gives very detailed insight to the importance of the Thesis and how it has been constructed and analyzed. When the research results are analyzed on a deep level in chapter four, this will offer the reader clarity and understanding. The research questions are answered by combining the information brought forward by interviewees and the statistics gathered through qualitative data gathering. This chapter is very important in this Thesis and will determine the depth of results and how valid they are, or if there is not much change regarding previous researches. At the end of this Thesis, the conclusion will conclude the overall research and give deep insight into relevance and validity. There are figures and tables spread throughout the thesis that offer visuals of the research methods and questions. These are geared towards providing a quick glance at statistics and changes in statistics.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The unemployment rate amongst vocational school business graduates has always been a topic of concern. Since 2011 it has been on a slow but steady decline and the reason behind this is still unclear (Virolainen, M & Stenström, M-L, 2014). This phenomenon is not relevant regarding some of the other occupations, for example, practical nurses, mechanics, and electricians have as much work as they want (Kalenius, A. 2014). The focal group of this thesis is directed towards Centennials, also known as people under the age of 25 (more exactly, ages 18-25). Growing up between the uncertainties of the future, trying to build their life after vocational school and securing employment, this generation is in line to inherit a strong economy with diversity, acceptance, loyalty and unity. This group has been known for being more educated, well-behaved, motivated and determined, as well as stressed and depressed compared to those generations before them (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). They have grown up in a world where terrorist attacks happen, world-wide pandemics and racial injustices are a real struggle. They are very aware of the world around them and technology and social media bring the current events to their fingertips. Employment and the current trends regarding this amongst our young adults have been evolving in a direction that is new and confusing. Gone are the days of working in one place for forty years and gone are the days of settling down at an early age.

Tampere Vocational College offers business studies in Finnish and English. This education plan provides the basic skills for Customer service, Sales and Marketing, and communications on an international level. These studies also include project participation, teamwork, entrepreneurship, and event planning. There are practical studies and training carried out in the workplace and the intention is to provide real-time training and exposure to working in business (Komsu, A. 2017). There has been research done on vocational school graduates in general and how they integrate into the work force, but not as specifically as how the business students find work.

Demonstrating an understanding of the theories and concepts behind this phenomenon is going to be introduced in this thesis. Identifying the generalizations will be a key variable in data analysis and explanations. The data used is based

entirely on two separate surveys conducted, one for young adults that have graduated from vocational level education and one for business leaders and employer in the Pirkanmaa area. The lack of research material on this specific topic was very minimal and therefore the answers and theories are based mainly on the interviews and survey results.

2.1 Literature review

The literature obtained to support this research project is going to be briefly introduced and analysed in this chapter. Firstly, the overall struggle to find valid and relevant, as well as current and supportive context, was somewhat challenging. This specific topic based on the business programs in vocational school facilities has not been widely researched in depth, or if it has, the material has not been readily published. Despite the narrow and detailed scope of the topic, a lot of supporting literature and information about vocational level education, fresh graduates moving into the work force, employment trends and expectations; have been published throughout the years. Despite the challenges, piecing together information from different viewpoints has provided incredible perception in this area. Being that this topic and research project is based mainly in Tampere, (briefly touching other parts of Finland as well), the most relatable and relevant material was in Finnish. These sources, such as Taloustaito and Aamulehti, as well as documentation and statistics straight from the vocational school websites and archives were originally in Finnish and have been translated by the author of this Thesis.

2.2 Synthesis of theories

The conclusions gathered from the various methods of research and data gathering do show some conflicting results. The conflict lies between the information concocted on the graduates and young adults and the local businesses that are ready to hire these graduates. Early research on the employment trends of the vocational school graduates focused heavily on the inconsistency and non-committal attitude. Several scholars have pointed out the trends that have been taking shape in recent years pointing career building and long-term employment in a new direction. The notions of old, where men and women alike would stay in the

same field of work for their entire career are dissipating and that concept is no longer the norm in today's society (Aaltonen, K, Isacsson, A, Laukia, J & Vanhanen-Nuutinen. 2013). This research was based in Finland, so focusing on the vocational school graduates and how they transition into sustainable employment is a topic of discussion and should have more insight provided. There is not an abundance of research on this topic, although it has been addressed and this Thesis has attempted to provide some direct clarity on where the graduated young adults stand and what their goals and intentions are. As well as focusing on the flip side of the whole aspect is the employers who run the local organizations and businesses and what they are looking for in these young adults and potential employees.

3 METHODOLOGY

In this thesis, the research topic is analyzing and evaluating the global employment trends for youth nowadays are shaping the future in many ways that have not been seen before. Young adults today have increasingly been engaging in part-time 'gig work' rather than committing to full-time employment and this being our future working generation, is going to be shaping the paths of the future generations that come after them. What is the influence? The focus groups were selected, as were the preferred research methods because the study was focused on uncovering detailed information regarding employment trends amongst the young business graduates from vocational institutions. To reach the desired target groups and collect the valid data, two surveys were conducted, and 310 surveys were sent to young adults (born between the years of 1998 and 2003) and 122 responded. The data collected in this research has been configured and analyzed starting in the fourth chapter, research results.

In addition to the survey sent out to the vocational school graduates, another survey was conducted that was directed towards business professionals. This survey was sent to 200 businesses in the Pirkanmaa area and 47 responded. With these plentiful responses; the answers, the data and figures are detailed and analyzed in chapter four. In addition to gathering the qualitative and quantitative information, part of the research method was conducting two interviews and those will be detailed further in later in this Thesis.

3.1 Methodology approach

The approach used in obtaining information valid for this research project was straightforward and antiinvasive. The goal for gathering such a quantity of data with quality as the objective, great thought was put into the method to be used. The choice to use a questionnaire formatted survey was the optimal one. To gather the most direct and valid information available, the focus was mainly based on Quantitative and Qualitative research.

- a. Quantitative research: When conducting the quantitative research, one of the most effective methods was to participate in interviewing three postgraduates from the business program from Tredu and one business

associate from Company X in Tampere. The reason behind this was to gather perspective and data from both sides of the evaluated research topic.

- b. Qualitative research: To reach a larger demographic and pinpoint the desired target group, formulating a survey with well-thought out questions with open-ended answers was the right method for this (Straus, A., & Corbin, J. 1990). Two separate surveys were sent out, one to the younger fresh graduates' audience, and one survey sent out a multitude of businesses in the Tampere region.

The benefits of Qualitative and Quantitative methods are shown below in Table 1. One type of data is more objective, conclusive as well as to-the-point. The other type is more subjective, interpretive, and exploratory (Smith, W. 2008). Quantitative data can be counted, measured, and expressed using numbers while qualitative is more descriptive and characteristic.

TABLE 1. Model retrieved from: Straus, A., & Corbin, J. 1990.

Qualitative:	Quantitative:
The reasons this method was beneficial to my project:	The benefits to using this method:
This method will help reveal and draw out the answerer's thoughts. How they describe, see, feel and talk about things.	Reliable and objective. Accurate. This is a more direct form of gathering data and information.
This is a personable approach to answering questions and gathering information. People will talk about what matters to them, their lives and families, experiences, etc.	The main form of conducting quantitative research is through surveys, polls and questionnaires. It is valuable and the answers provide valid statistics.
It's exploratory and gives the answerer room to express their opinions and experiences, in ways that the interviewee doesn't always think to ask.	With a survey, it is more possible to narrow down the target group and you can get the exact information you want with multiple choice answers.
It is a great source for voluntary information and when in comfortable settings, the interviewee may open up and share more thoroughly.	Results are clear and it is easy to analyse.
A more open-ended approach offering multiple perspectives that a survey or questionnaire may not always provide.	Pinpointing the projected demographic helps narrow down the target group.

Conducting a survey is an inexpensive method of gathering data and information in a relatively short amount of time. Surveys can be administered in many formats and models which promote many levels of flexibility and offers the answerer the opportunity to remain anonymous if they so wish. The anonymity of this method will undoubtedly encourage more candid and honest answers, as well as promote more accurate data (Smith, 2008). Because administering these surveys through the internet and via social media are in retrospect relatively new, it is unreasonable to expect everyone to answer. The main reasons for conducting surveys regarding gathering data for research projects are convenience, cost-efficiency, time, accessibility, target groups, anonymity, and quick results (Smith, 2008).

3.2 Data acquisition methods

The data collected for this research project was gathered through qualitative and quantitative methods. With the distribution of two separate surveys and conducting interviews via Zoom, data was acquired in a structured and organized way. It was insightful and valuable to be able to conduct interviews through Zoom. At first it was somewhat disappointing to not be able to meet in person, but due to COVID-19, we improvised. By late spring and summer, everyone was familiar with online meetings and sessions, so plans moved forward as planned.

The level of response to the surveys was satisfactory and sufficient. The 40% response rate from the survey sent to the young graduates born between the years of 1998 and 2003 was valuable vital information for this research project. The response rate was remarkable considering that the databases through Tredu and comparable institutions were not available. Through years of working with young adults and graduates, helping them integrate into the work force, accessibility to respondents was not an issue. Through personal contacts and sharing the link through social media, the survey reached enough of the targeted age group to suffice in this study.

The survey sent to businesses in the Pirkanmaa region were chosen from a variety of categories. 30% of the chosen businesses were large corporations such as Kalmar, Cargotec, Stockmann, Pihlajalinna, Framery Tampereen Messut Oy,

and so on. 30% of the chosen businesses were chain corporations and restaurants, such as S-ryhmä, Pancho Villa, Kesko, H&M, Espresso House, Hesburger and many more chain or franchised businesses. 30% were small businesses that are not chains such as IT businesses, beauty consultants, financial consultants and private bankers. The last 10% of the businesses who received the survey for answering were small independent business owners who generally work alone with interns assisting or then have up to three employees. By spreading the survey out amongst a variety of businesses types with a massive variety of practices and business positions, the answers accumulated gave a broad spectrum of answers. Overall, the amount of responses gathered from these organizations was only 23%. Working with the data received offered valuable insight and structured feedback regarding how the graduates move through their internships and practical training.

The process of collecting research material for this thesis project was relatively complicated. The reasons behind this are solely based on the lack of previous research on this topic. Although TREDU did not have the opportunity to work together on this project, they did offer a few pointers of valuable insight:

- This topic of employment struggles amongst business graduates will be needing more attention from the perspective of education professionals and institutions.
- While the Associates degree curriculum at TREDU mimics the BBA program at TAMK, some students who have gone through both programs suggest that some courses should be accredited or then just attend High School and then straight to the BBA program, if possible.

Those two points of interest are not discussed in this Thesis because they are out of the realm of expertise here please see Appendix 5 for further mention on this topic.

3.3 Analysis methods

The data needed to perform such a research project was made up of the survey results. Successful qualitative research will fully determine the accuracy of gathered data. Qualitative research tends to be harder to analyse and evaluate than quantitative data. The information attained was valuable statistics regarding the

research questions. All information attained was vital in analysing the current trends that have been witnessed throughout the recent years. The intention behind conducting interviews is to give context that is not generally possible to gain through surveys. With an interview, the topics can wander, and additional and valuable information tends to arise (Agee, J. 2009). The data collection plan created to analyse the data gathered is described in the table below:

Table 2: Data analysis plan for qualitative research.

DATA COLLECTION	DATA REDUCTION	DATA DISPLAY	CONCLUSION
Observations Interviews Surveys	-Selection of usable data. -Focusing on the direction the data brings the research. -Simplifying the data.	-Using Excel to formulate charts and graphs. -Organizing the context and data in an understandable format.	-Confirming the data and giving meaning to the conclusive answers that validate the objective.

Qualitative analysis methods have numerous benefits, and the inductive analysis will provide more of a nuanced finding meanwhile deductive will provide more categories (Straus, A., & Corbin, J. 1990). The guide used for the questionnaire/survey, was designed, and structured through Microsoft Forms. This was a very easy, but professional way to design a survey with multiple options of how to collect data. Some of the questions that were on the survey had multiple choice answers. This technique was used because there were certain aspects and viewpoints that were vital to learn from the graduates. In addition to this, there were multiple questions that had open-ended answers and through this, the data received was very valuable and provided detailed insight. The fieldwork consisted of the interviews with the graduates from vocational school's business programs and the interview with a Tampere-based business owner. As the data collection and analyzation phase evolved, the patterns and themes of the data became clearer. What kind of information was there to formulate and how realistic and probable was this project? The data was analysed using Excel charts and percentage evaluations. Mapping out the variety of informative answers into sections and segments, gave clearer understanding as to how the trends are moving and what the reality of the situation is.

4 RESEARCH RESULTS

The findings that have emerged while conducting the multiple surveys that were circulated through the two chosen target groups were very informative. The results influenced many new perspectives and guided insight to the research questions and intentions. These findings briefly touch on the challenge's fresh graduates from the vocational education levels transitioning from the classroom to the workplace. Although the trends of the freshly graduated and young generation are becoming more apparent, the need for employing this age group remains a priority. They have been raised and taught in the education system with a curriculum supporting capabilities that have not been seen before. The potential that they possess is promising, technically advanced and adapting to the modern world.

4.1 Background information

After years of experience working with youth and young adults, helping them integrate into the workforce, this topic of research was years in the making. The initial reasons that slowly came together to create such a unique research project were based on a personal level. As cultures come together and traditions start to fade, changes happen and society changes with it. Young adults, especially the young graduates have had a variety of struggles regarding this integration process. Although it is a fact that everyone needs to work hard to finish school and find work, but no matter how hard you try, there are still challenges being faced. What are these challenges and obstacles stemming from? When this research project started to come together, the questions asked were designed to help understand the gap between education and employment.

4.1.1 Survey participants

The survey reached many post vocational school graduates, targeting the ones with a degree in business. Out of 310 surveys emailed out, 122 responses were received. Most of the answers were from graduates that had graduated between one to three years ago. The intended age group for this survey is undoubtedly a young generation with minimal work experience, but this is the demographic area

that was wanted for the specific information that will be analysed. Out of the survey respondents, 43 were male and 79 were female. It was obvious when the survey responses started coming in quite quickly, that most of the answers were from females. This was not a surprise, as it has been noted before in various areas of research that women will generally respond to surveys quicker than men (Smith, 2008).

The overall goal to be achieved from these surveys and interviews was to provide up-to-date insight as to how the transition from education platforms into the professional working life advance.

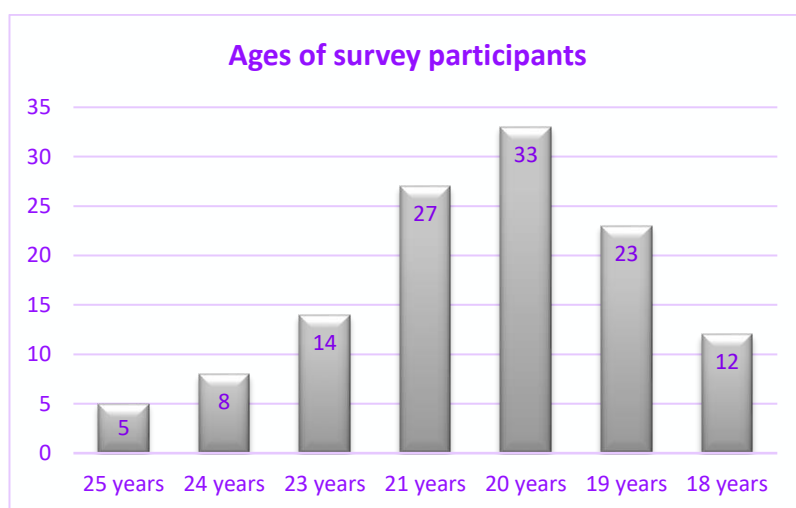


FIGURE 2. The ages of survey participants.

Initially, the goal for this survey was to target the graduates of Tredu and keep the research in the local Tampere area. It was not possible to collaborate with Tredu on a commission, but we were able to privately access a decent percentage of their previous graduates. For comparative purposes, the survey reached graduates who had studied at other comparable institutions. The data received from graduates from other institutions was used to confirm that the employment trends are not only changing in the Pirkanmaa region but also elsewhere in Finland. The fact that insight was brought in from various areas added more depth and perception to the study.

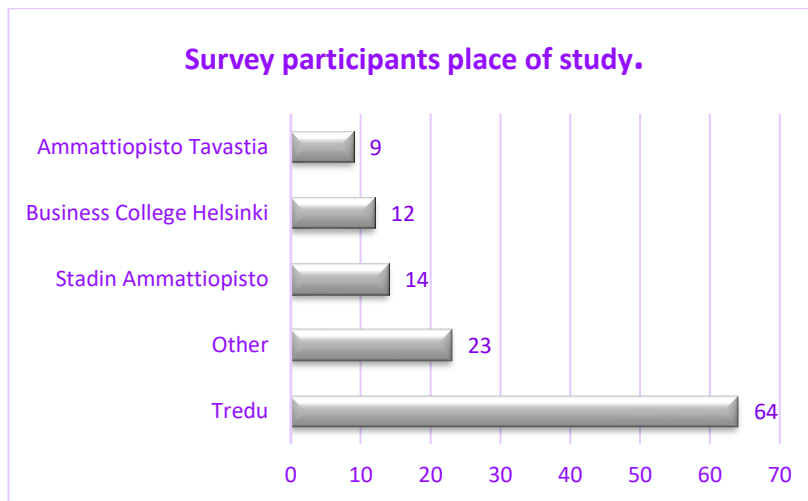


FIGURE 3. The places of study amongst the survey participants.

One of the ongoing situations that is becoming a topic of discussion is the fact that many of the students who graduate from the vocational school level with their business degree, go straight to (or within a year or two) TAMK (Tampereen Ammattikorkeakoulu aka Tampere University of Applied Sciences) or a comparable institution to obtain their bachelor's degree in business. Or then they change their profession altogether but generally go on to the University of Applied Sciences at some point. For some of these students, the vocational school programs are easier to get into than High School is and therefore the route to higher education tends to go through this channel.

As discussed in the interview that I had with Keränen, O. (interview 7/2020), she is an example of this exact situation. She is a graduate of Tredu, where she did her double degree finishing her high school diploma and her associate degree in international business. Now she has been accepted to TAMK and will start her first year of the business program in August. With the current curriculum, she will be participating in courses during her first year that are quite parallel (at least by title) to the ones that she just completed.

4.2 Research questions and answers

1. What are the influences on young adult's decision making and transition from education to employment?

Career and professional development are technically a lifelong process of engaging in education, employment, society, and experiences. The opportunities that young graduates embark on are influenced by many factors, including the context in which they live, their personal aptitude, peer influence, education, and interests (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001).

Cultural and societal trends have a large influence on young graduates and their outlook on post-graduate employment. The notion of long-term employment and staying with one employer for the duration of a career is slowly turning into history and new trends are evolving. The younger generations in which this group of young graduates falls in, has been creating the ideology that it is okay to have more than one career, as well as it is to change careers farther down the road. (This notion does not necessarily apply to skilled tradesmen such as electricians, plumbers, nurses, etc.)

a. What are graduates looking for?

Young graduates are initially looking for employment in their area of expertise that simultaneously fulfils their need to feel successful. The fear of not finding a job after graduation can be crippling for some graduates and the longer they go without a job, the wider the gap grows. Young graduates want to step into a position immediately after graduating that provides job security, the opportunity to learn something new and flexibility. On the other hand, they do not want to be tied down to a permanent long-term position but rather the flexibility to move from workplace to workplace, trying different options out, while 'deciding' what the right fit for them is. This is where the 'gig-work' and 'temporary' come in because in this age group, it is rare for someone to be ready to settle down (Viro-lainen M & Stenström, M-L, 2014).

2. What impact does further education, technical education or apprenticeships have on improving employment opportunities?

Apprenticeships and on-the-job-training promote skilled workers for the future. The ideology behind educational institutions encouraging

internships and apprenticeships is to improve the skills of the graduate, gain experience in the desired field and ensure that the skills that are learned and developed, match the need of the future potential employer (Virolainen M & Stenström, M-L, 2014). These learning opportunities have a large impact on employment, largely in fields with specific skillsets and expertise.

a. Are the skillsets learned in education facilities today keeping up with the professional industry?

It is very important for employers nowadays to understand that the graduates coming from vocational schools, especially from the business line, are educated in that area of expertise, but they are not professionals. Although they have studied, worked hard to gain knowledge and experience, done internships and on-the-job-training, they are not experienced professionals and will still need sufficient training and time to learn their new position in employment. The skills learned in an education platform are vital for mastering the trade studied, but there is a big divide between the classroom and the potential place of employment (Örn, T. 2019).

Here are the main key points that employers have brought up regarding fresh graduates coming into entry level employment:

- Young adults are very eager to find a place to work but are not necessarily always ready to commit 100%. They always seem to have an 'out' which is generally keeping their eyes open for a better opportunity. The problem that the organizations have with this, is the amount of time and money spent on training new workers and then potentially and/or continuously losing them.
- Young graduates are looking for exciting jobs with a good paycheck. They must realize that hard work is necessary to achieve such a goal.
- Young adults today are extremely talented, gifted and have so much to offer. Why do they jump from place to place? That aspect continues to puzzle employers. One employer had the theory that there is such high competition amongst today's working genera-

tion, that young adults are still trying to 'be better' and 'more successful' and they generally will not settle into longer-term employment until their late 30's for 40's. There is not necessarily anything wrong with this trend, it just hasn't been fully explored nor understood.

- From the perspective of employers, students could and should spend most of their last year of school in training in their field of expertise. They are more ready to enter the work force while integrating into the professional world that much faster and with more experience and confidence (Örn, T. 2019).

- b. Should modern education curriculums be more focused on current trends and work practices versus classroom lectures and teaching?

This question has raised a lot of concern and debate over the past couple years. How do and how should vocational institutions manage the curriculum to provide both sides to the education suitably? The focus should remain on both aspects. Classroom teaching cannot be diminished or reduced. The practice of going to school, being on time, living with a routine and schedule as well as being held accountable are some of the most vital aspects in teaching youth and young adults' 'responsibility' and 'adulthood' while going to school and growing up. Whether or not the classroom and contact teaching be increased or condensed during the first two years and the practical training periods focused more on the third year of the vocational learning program, the consensus is such that the classroom teaching and theory should be explored thoroughly and deeper while the practical training be professional learning experiences and 'job-training' (Kalliokoski, A. Interview 2020). Hands-on supervised learning is vital for ensuring quality education in young adults.

- c. Are postgraduates finding employment based on their education and qualifications? If so, why are they changing jobs so frequently and non-committal to full-time or permanent employment.

This question relates to what quite a few employers addressed in the survey regarding the frequent changes in employment amongst the

young adults. This new trend has not been entirely explored in depth as it is new and becoming more obvious and widespread in the recent years. There will always be a proper percentage of graduates that do work in a field that complements their education and degree. The question of 'are they finding employment based on their qualifications' is a relative question because what we do not know is, how hard do they work to find a job. As observed in the survey, the number of graduates that find employment in their area of expertise is still quite high. The survey concluded that 70% of the respondents do in fact find employment in their area of expertise and when comparing this to a similar survey done by Taloustaito 7/2020, their result was 69% find employment with their qualifications.

3. Are organizations and businesses not offering full-time positions as much as they did in the past, or what is the missing link between postgraduates finding permanent employment?
 - a. What are the businesses looking for?
 - i. The answers to question 3 and 3a come directly from the answers of the survey that was sent out to the businesses in the Tampere Metropolitan area. Businesses are looking for graduates and young adults who have enthusiasm and interest in working and learning something new and have many positions open for application, although most of them are not permanent options. Most of the businesses do offer internships to students while they are still finishing their business degree and have generally had a good experience doing so. Four 'main answers' came back with many business owners and employers emphasizing the same things:
 - ii. It largely depends on what kind of student comes to intern. Internships require a lot of effort from the employer and when the student is a good enthusiastic worker with a positive attitude, it makes it worth it.

- iii. Most of our business' experiences have been good, it is all up to the attitude of the student and knowing that they are experiencing an opportunity.
- iv. All the good students usually end up with at least a part-time job, if not full-time after they graduate. We like to train the students to suit the needs of our business practices and when they are eager to learn, have respect and good work ethic, we will always try to find them a job with our company.
- v. Students are generally very motivated to learn new things and their eagerness is infectious and everyone in the building usually enjoys a fresh face and new energy.

Businesses are looking for new employees who have potential, good communication and teamwork skills. It was somewhat surprising to see the answers come in and realize that the employers were not as interested in their new workers having experience in the field: that can be taught and trained over time. But rather, how well do they work with other people, treat other people, how they respect their job and how they manage practical skills. Being trustworthy, dependable, committed, and accountable are the key strengths in a good employee and that is what the focus is on now.

4.2.1 Education satisfaction

It can be very hard to choose a career and not everyone's first choice will be their permanent choice. Every career carries an importance and learning the skills and experience to be successful is the reason for going through vocational programs (Subrahmanyam, Gita, 2014). Not everyone is going to get accepted into the school they dream of and will have to settle for another option and/or alternative. This can lead to resentment, lack of motivation and possible disinterest (Viro-lainen, M & Stenström, M-L, 2014). On the other hand, it might be a blessing in disguise and provide them with more than anticipated. Part of the survey was to depict these reasons and information gathered and they are as follows. The 77% of the graduates were 'satisfied' and the reasons behind their answers are:

- Vocational schools offer a double degree, finishing High School and a three-year degree simultaneously is a great start to a professional career.
- My place of study required an internship and although I graduated many years ago, I now have a full-time position in that same organization.
- The required internships have been the best experience and I learned more from the practical training than I have in the classroom. But that is because I am a visual learner, and I struggled a lot with homework.
- I enjoyed the school experience but wished that the level of education was a bit higher or then the classroom teaching would have delved deeper into theories and practices. More classroom time with instructors rather than group work would have been so much more beneficial.
- Studying does not fully prepare you for the working life, but the place of study is usually a good platform for helping find the internships and potential employment connections. That was the best part in my opinion.
- The school was fine, the variety of classes was interesting but wished we would have dug a bit deeper and done more business-related training, theoretical and hypothetical learning, and hands-on experiences.

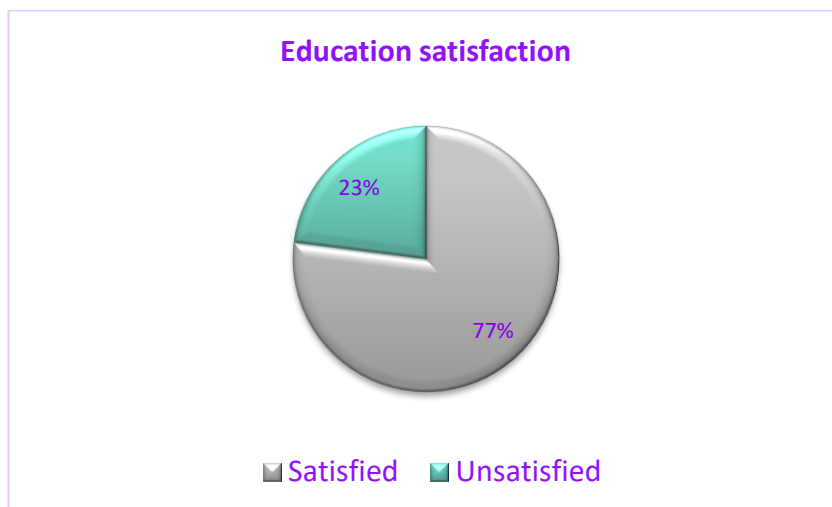


FIGURE 4. Are you satisfied with your education?

Regarding the 23% of the survey answers that were not satisfied with their education experience are as follows:

- The level of education at this institution was not what I was expecting and was not challenging. It felt that they were just trying to push us through school to get our degree and out the door. Now I feel like I should continue my studies and I already did three years at Tredu and now three more at TAMK for a 'business degree'. How much sense does this make? How much will I have to 're-do'?
- I feel like I am satisfied with what I studied, but the difficulties in finding work is a real struggle and a three-year vocational degree does carry much prestige in certain fields. I feel like I kind of wasted my time.
- The campus where I studied did not have a very high standard of education and I felt like I learned everything I learned from the work practices I participated in or the independent studies we did on our own or in groups. More class time with teachers, please.
- I felt that the standards and expectations were not great. We had a lot of 'senseless' work that took a lot of time but the overall concept and what was learned was minimal. I felt we could have learned so much more if the curriculum was more developed and the teachers would put more effort into the classroom studies and real-life examples.

4.2.2 Practical training participation

Work-integrated learning is an important aspect of the vocational education curriculum and continuing education. In general, a vast majority of students at the vocational school level participate in practical training opportunities. Every year, business graduates all around Finland are eagerly looking for summer jobs and full-time employment. It has become more apparent that the inexperienced have much more difficulty even obtaining interviews or recognition overall. The trend with semi-experienced graduates having participated in internships, has shown that the small amount of hands-on experience will give them a better chance at securing job over those who do not participate in the required internships.

When a graduate has graduated with a degree in a very specific field, such as a nurse or as an electrician, they will undoubtedly find employment quite quickly. When the degree is as broad as business, or international business, it tends to be much more challenging, and the competition is much fiercer. The business degree covers more ground as well and the options are broad. For example, there are graduates that are more interested in finance or marketing, sales or customer service. Those interests will lead these graduates in different directions, and they may not find their job of interest very quickly. In Figure 5, it depicts a contradicting percentage of students who did not in fact participate in practical training during their studies, but a brief explanation brings clarity to this. A small percentage of students will not participate in practical training periods outside of the school. For example, this may be due to a health condition or an agreement otherwise made between student and supervisor. This is common, but usually only touches a small amount of the students. The percentage in this survey and the results was a bit higher than expected, but being that this survey was issued for answering in the Spring of 2020 and COVID-19 was raging around the world in a pandemic, some of the students graduated without ever starting or then without finishing their scheduled practical training. If this question were asked last year or before that, the percentage balance would have most likely been different.

In any case, the practical training periods are highly recommended and generally required to receive their degree.

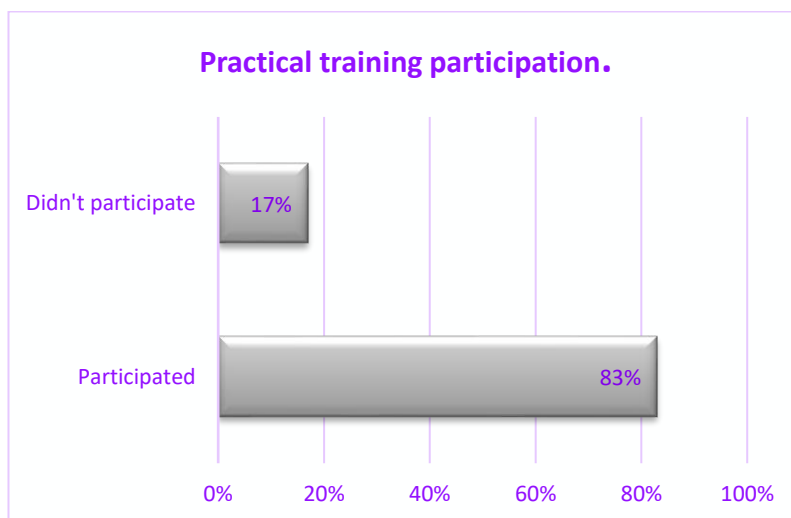


FIGURE 5. Practical training participation.

4.2.3 Certificate validation

In Finland today, it is challenging to obtain employment without an educational certificate or qualification. Employers will always respect the fact that the applicant has made an honest effort to get an education and has worked hard to complete an actual degree. Having some expertise in a trade that has potential for long term employment is always a respectable thing. Vocational school certificates are quite valuable, and students do find work with these degrees in hand. It has been apparent that they must work hard to find the jobs and obtain proper contracts. This situation aside, the big question is, are their degrees and certificates valued in the professional world by employers? Most employers do respect the work and efforts the students have put forth to graduate and start their careers (Pisio, A. 2012). As young adults are making more of an effort to procure higher degrees and better qualifications, the lower level degrees are losing some of their value in certain fields. Graduates and young adults have really noticed that if an applicant has a business degree from Tredu (or comparable institution) or an applicant has a bachelor's degree in business from TAMK, the bachelor's graduate has a much better chance at securing employment. This is a fact that has become increasingly more obvious. As the amount of business students and graduates has significantly increased over the past few years, the employers are able to pick and choose (Riipinen, K. 2020).

The percentage of the graduates that did not feel their degree helped them get a job are working in positions that do not require a degree overall. These come from Prisma, H&M and a call center. There are surely more but they were not specified in the survey open answer section. The 77 who felt their completed education and qualifications did in fact play a role in their job security do feel their efforts are respected by their employer. In Finland overall, qualifications are vital for most of all employment options, whether it is for cleaning, business, or something more specific.



FIGURE 6. Employment options after obtaining a degree.

4.2.4 Continuing education

As these fresh graduates have their degree in hand and no job, what should they do? Based on KELA's website and their current information, the number of unemployed graduates has been increasing (Moilanen, H. 2017). The supporting programs through the unemployment office have also been increased in trying to get these graduates out in the working world. The levels of unemployment and monetary amounts will vary due to motivation and ambition in applying for work and participating in interviews. A very small percentage of these unemployed graduates do not want to be unemployed and are willing to work or then continue their studies.

Most of these survey participants have the desire to continue their education and strive for a higher degree, especially if they do not find work in their field, right away. This interest in continuing education may also be an underlying factor that these graduates do not commit to long-term employment. As the ones that have chosen not to continue their education have likely found permanent employment in their area of interest and or family businesses where they are satisfied to stay. The percentage of survey participants who are not sure about their next steps yet, feel that they have not yet gained enough experience in their area of interest to know if that is in fact the field they wish to remain in and continue further in. It is common that after a year or two of not finding an ideal or interesting place of employment, some of these business graduates have gone on to study new professions, for example, teaching or engineering. This age group of youth are also

young enough that they do not necessarily have a clear idea of what they specifically want to do as a long-term career.

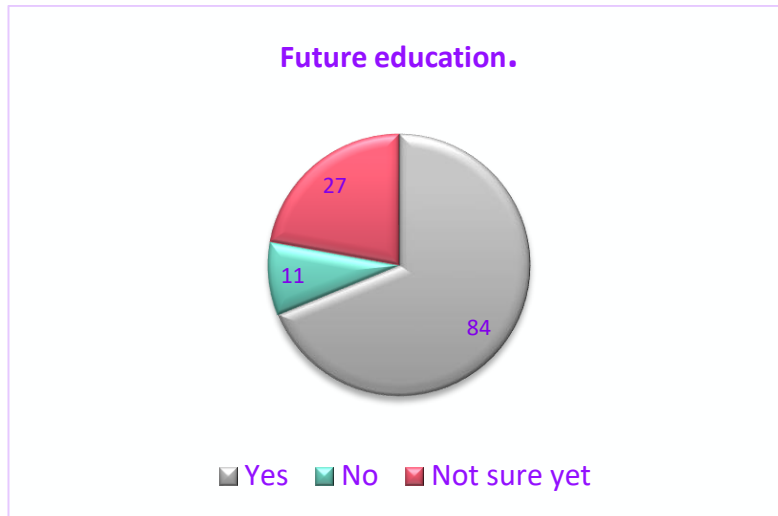


FIGURE 7. Future education options.

In reference to vocational school graduates, most of them will continue their education and the largest majority of those will stay in the business field and go on to study their bachelors at TAMK, whether in Finnish or in English. This is based solely on the survey and what Tredu business graduates were planning to do after graduation.

4.2.5 Employment trends

Vocational school graduates are eager and motivated to find work. They have a certificate in hand and skills to use, but is it as easy as it sounds? In many trades the on-the-job-training is a requirement that gives them real-life experience and teaches them first-hand what is going to be expected of them, whether they are going to be in working in marketing or as a plumber. This is an obstacle that almost all vocational school students and graduates have had to face. Even if you have found an organization to offer you a practical training position, but you have no previous experience working otherwise, it can be difficult for fresh graduates to find a job in their area of expertise and they are going to have put effort into their search (Riipinen, K. 2020).

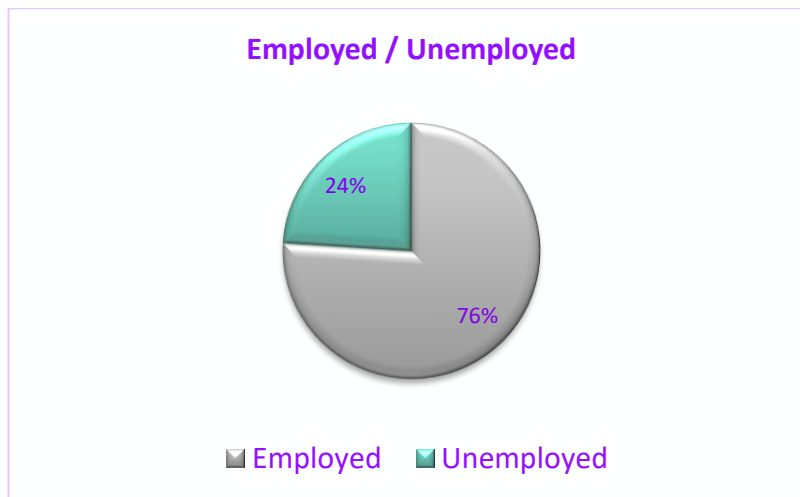


FIGURE 8. What is your current status?

Youth unemployment rate in Finland regarding the age group of 18-25 is relatively high. According to the Suomen Tilastokeskus, in June of 2020, the unemployment rate for youth and young adults between the ages of 15-24, was 20.9% (Holappa, P. 2020). This percentage has stayed relatively the same for the past five years. In June of 2016, the unemployment rate in the same age group was 20% and in June of 2017, 21.7%.

The above pie chart above, is based off the survey results and does not depict a clear relation to the overall situation in Finland. This does not directly mean that they are all unemployed in this age group, but are studying, serving in the army, on parental leave or even on sick leave. Generally, a truth behind the difficulty in finding a dream job and not settling for less, is one reason for unemployment in this age group. 14 out of 29 unemployed graduates were unemployed because they have not yet found a (dream) job. With the trend in this growing generation, it is sometimes more of a status or reputation-based trait that influences the attitudes behind applying and/or accepting work. If the job does not meet some personal goal or standard an individual is working towards, or looking for, they may rather choose to remain unemployed than to accept a position that they consider 'uncool'.

The percentage of those who do not want to work, is overall very small. Out of the 29 unemployed answerers in the survey, three of them were of the mindset that they are not interested in working right now at all. In addition to all this, as

this research project is being done, we are in a worldwide pandemic and that has affected employment opportunities in Tampere and all over Finland.

4.2.6 Obtaining employment

This was a topic that created a lot of interesting answers in which will be analysed without any preconceived research or hypotheses. Recent graduates had a lot to say about this and out of the 93 that are currently employed, the variety of answers are plentiful. The following opinions and answers are answered by the graduates who felt that it was easy finding employment, whether it was based on their qualifications or not:

- It has been easy, especially if you are determined enough and have good references.
- It is easy to get a job, but it is hard to keep the job. Employers are only going to keep and promote a very small percentage of their new employees. The entry-level positions can be so monotonous and boring, it is hard to see past that and envision yourself moving up. This answer was based on a fast-food restaurant worker and a call-center phone sales position.
- Easy enough to find work when you try hard and do not give up. A fresh graduate cannot be too picky and must be open to new opportunities.
- It is easy for business graduates to find work in stores, especially. But store work is not necessarily my dream job or a long-term option.
- Stores will always hire business students, at least on a temporary basis.
- I had a good job until COVID-19 fired me.
- It is easier to find internship positions and when you are good, they will hire you after you graduate. That path was an easy one, but it only works for a small percentage of graduates.

The percentage which expressed difficulty had very valid points:

- It has been difficult because so many business students are unemployed.
- You must have good references to get a job, how do you get your first job after graduation if you have not worked before?
- Very difficult in Tampere. Too many unemployed but qualified youth.
- Employers tend to be hesitant and have a long list of requirements that make it very challenging to get a contract.

Figure 9 below depicts a visual of the status on graduates finding employment.

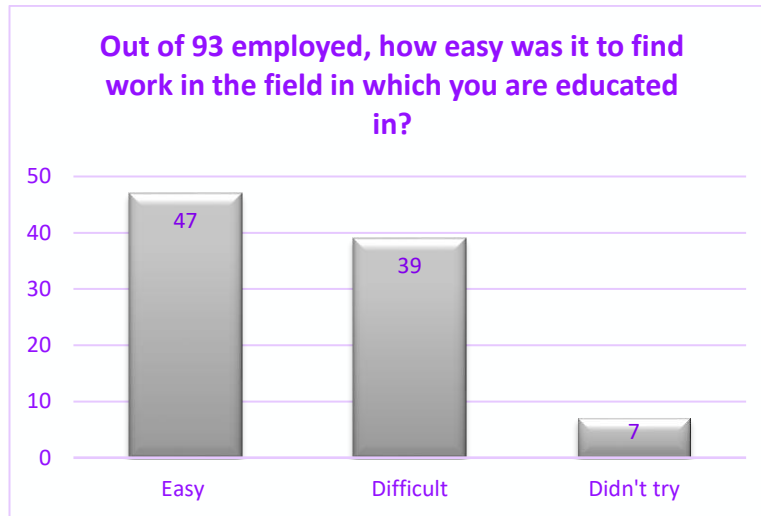


FIGURE 9. How easy is it to find work?

Figure 10 below is a comparison percentage chart that gives basically the same survey results as the survey this study did. The relevance in the chart below is the Associates degree graduates (69%) finding work within their first year after graduation (Riipinen, Taloustaito, 2020 p. 49).

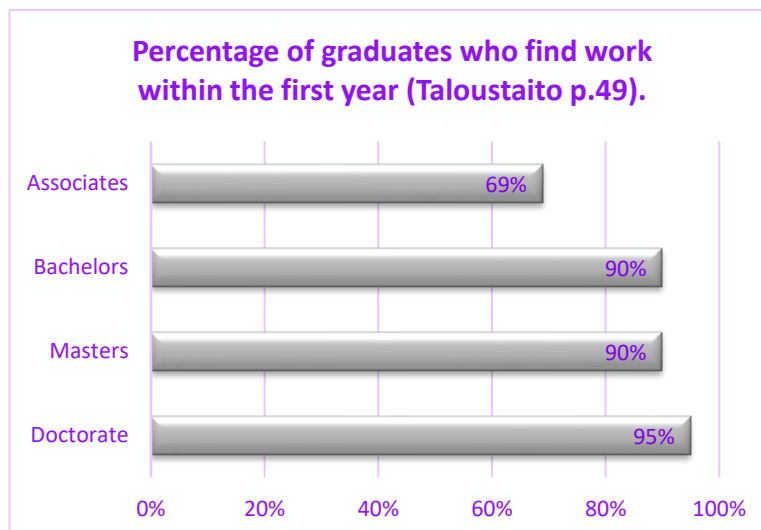


FIGURE 10. How many find work after graduation?

As for the information that was gathered through the survey, and now shown below in Figure 11, depicts what channels and routes the graduates have

taken to procure employment. This is very interesting since it is a part of everyone's life at some point. Everyone goes through the process (struggle) of finding work, interviews, rejections and trying again and again. Going through the list as to what has been the best route for ensuring employment after graduation has undoubtedly been going back to the places where the practical training was done. This does not always mean that they have long-term employment with this option, but it is an optimal place for them to start their professional careers right after graduation. The option of 'other' which ended up being a big percentage was a bit of a disappointment because there was very little expansion on that answer and little insight was given as to what the 'other' entailed. The ways that jobs were found through 'other' options was:

- going back to a previous workplace
- a friend helped them get a job
- a parent/neighbour/relative hired them into a family business
- in-person inquiring (in stores, restaurants, etc). No other information was gathered on that aspect.

As for the following routes that have been beneficial for graduates to find work after graduation have been the work experience and staying with a place that they have worked at before, applying for work through job listings on the internet, personal contacts were a small percentage and using help from the career guidance counsellor or job fairs was fairly minimal. With the help of Figure 11, it is easy to see what has been useful and successful.

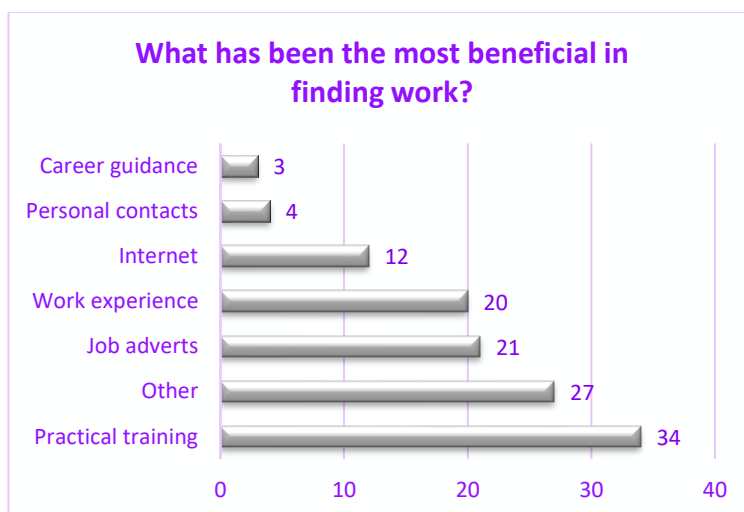


FIGURE 11. How have you found work?

4.2.7 Employment options and choices

There are a multitude of reasons why people accept jobs and how they end up in the positions they are in. Some graduates are working in their dream field and will stay there for a long time, but they are a small percentage. It usually takes some time and working in a few different places before settling down. Based on the results of the survey, a small percentage of the unemployed answerers choose to be unemployed rather than working in positions that do not fulfil their interests or expectations. At this age, most of these graduates are working in positions that are temporary and convenient for them for the time being. They will change their job numerous times depending on their current situation and how it changes, and it will take some years before they decide to settle down and commit. Shown below in Figure 7, is a depiction as to the reasons why a graduate is working in the position in which they are. Although there are always so many reasons why young graduates accept a job, 65% admit the number one reason is money. They do not always care where they work or what kind of work it is if they are earning money to support their current situation. As their life evolves and their situations change, they will become more serious about committing to a long-term permanent position.

A professional degree in hand or not, young adults tend to work in low-end, dead end jobs in the service sector. These consist of malls, fast-food restaurants, movie theaters, warehouses, grocery stores and retail outlets. With the increase in the shopping trends and new malls and shopping centers being built all the time, it is generally an easy place for fresh graduates to find work while they 'keep looking' for something more related to their field of expertise. These are not 'bad' jobs so to say, but most of them tend to be a position in where growth and advancement are not a high probability. A small percentage commit to this 'low-end' job long enough to move up and get promoted into a management position.

As seen in figure 12 below, out of 93 employed graduates, 65% percent of them work in a position that they accepted only for the sake of financial support and security. This figure also includes graduates working in their field of expertise but considering the choices, they are presumably working in that position more out of financial support rather than their interest and satisfaction in the job. Due to

COVID-19, this 2020 spring and summer have been discouraging and job opportunities have been minimal. With the current pandemic in mind, this overall survey has surely been influenced. When analysing this chart in more detail, a mere 12% have found a job in their area of expertise, nine percent are working in a position for temporary purposes and a shy ten percent are working because of the opportunity and not necessarily because of expertise, money or any significant reason. As trends have shown in previous years and throughout society, graduates go to work with their expectations high, their dreams clear in their minds and a lot of hope.



FIGURE 12. Why did you accept the job you have?

The current situation as of May 2020 (per Survey 2020) broken down into what type of work places the graduates have found and where they have chosen to work for the time being, is shown below in Figure 8. As previously mentioned, most of the graduates are working in the business field to some degree. For example, 17 graduates work in Retail and Sales. This area of business is considered to be a relatively 'easy' area to work in but is also known to be a temporary or dead-end position for most of the young adults. Very few will stay and move up the line of command. The reasons for this are because the seasons dictate the busier moments for Retail and almost all the ones working in this field currently have a temporary and a 0 contract. They may have four hours a week or up to 20, but rarely are they offered a full-time job in a store such as Lindex or Zara. Young adults are not lazy, and they will work for money, but the places of

employment are not long-term, and they do not entice the employees to stay for more than six months to a year. One example of this is as follows and this information comes from the interview with the graduates of Tredu, Keränen, Kankkonen and Haataja. This information was based on a study they did through their schooling and that Aamulehti was a part of. Unfortunately, Aamulehti did not publicly publish this article as a comparative study. Being this study was mentioned as an example by the three interviewees, it was worth mentioning in this thesis as well. A warehouse in Sarankulma was hiring numerous new employees to package goods to be mailed for their online orders. The work was tedious, busy, and paid quite well compared to a job at H&M or Zara. The job was temporary and the opportunity to move forward and up in the business was not an option. Because of this, three out of the seven workers worked for three months and the other four worked for six to nine months, but none of them lasted a whole year. These are the temporary positions that students and graduates work in just for the money until they find something else. These employment trends also stem from this sort of pattern. Work, earn money, look for something better, repeat. It takes a real enticing position and a dedicated worker to see past the beginning and commit (personal communication/interview, Keränen, Kankkonen, Haataja, 2020).

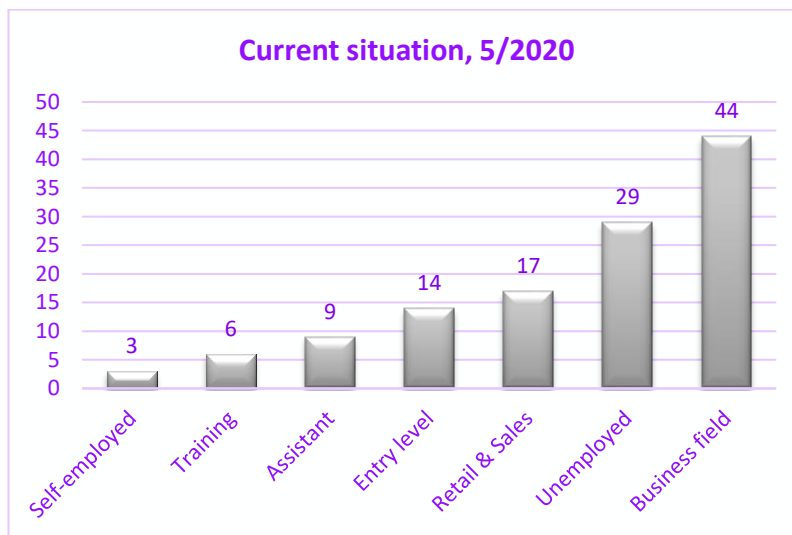


FIGURE 13. The current employment areas.

4.2.8 Employment contracts available

The competition for finding a job overall and the difficulties in getting the young adults in this age group to stay committed and loyal, create a challenging dynamic for the employers in today's industries. This had helped shape their lack of flexibility and willingness to offer permanent contracts. There are plenty of opportunities to find full-time employment, but a large majority of the contracts are temporary. This meaning that the working young adults are largely contracted with a year-by-year contract. Another contract type that increasingly becoming more popular, especially in retail, is the '0 contract', meaning an employee works on an as-needed basis and the employer has very few obligations nor commitment to the employee. This has become much used now especially during COVID-19. In the chart below, it shows the current situation amongst the employers and their organizations that answered the survey in 2020. As it may seem confusing, the answers that came through in the survey were: Full-time work (35-40 hours a week), with a temporary position (1-12-month contract). Substitute is based more on a temporary contract on an as-needed contract, filling in when the company needs. Part-time is based on a contract that is not full-time. This was the second-most common work status amongst the graduates.

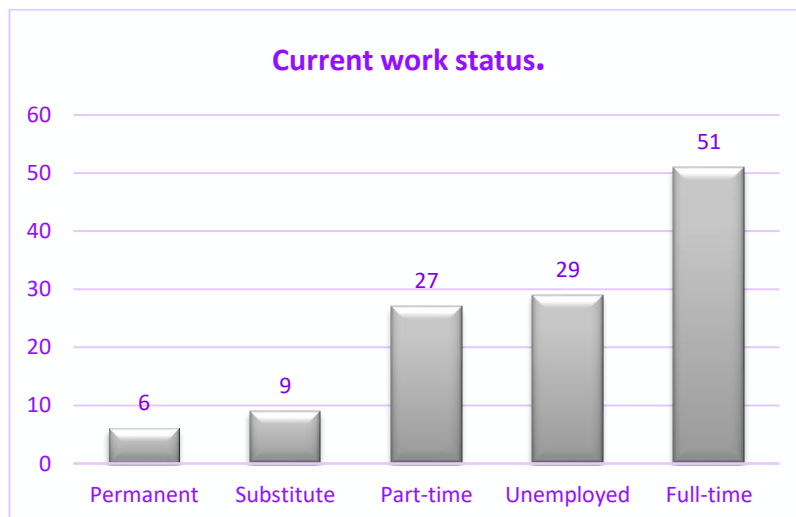


FIGURE 14. The current employment situation.

4.2.9 Traits in the workplace

Vocational education is largely based on practical training and preparing young adults for specialized occupations. Vocational education will train a student to be qualified in a technical field and between the classroom teachings and the practical training, the development and skillsets acquired will help the youth excel in their professional life (Subrahmanyam, G. 2014). This chapter was a very interesting one to write and analyse, because what kind of workers are wanted? Everyone strives to be a good worker and every employer wants a good worker, but what kind of person makes a good worker? These answers were answered by graduates who have been working already and what they feel their employer values in them.



FIGURE 15. What qualities are valued in the workplace?

Practical skills are by far the most valued. But what does that mean? It means 'skills performed by hand'. As we know, business degrees from the vocational education platform, does not require work and skills learned only by hand, but also knowledge and performance. The practical skills that are valued, this means the ability to carry out practical skills and practices in the working life. Everyday tasks, abiding by rules, sticking to schedules and routines, manners, common sense and capability to perform at work. Those practical skills are what employers' value in their freshly graduated employees. The experience and know-how are learnt on the job. These answers are coming from the perspective of the graduates who participated in the survey and later on in this Thesis, the same question

answered by employers throughout Tampere is analysed and comparing the differentiating answers is very interesting!

4.2.10 Reasons for unemployment

Young adults who have graduated from the business program from the vocational schools have many valid points when finding employment. Some of their reasons for unemployment are as follows:

- Sales positions have a fluctuating income especially if it is based largely on provision. Sales jobs are potentially risky for young adults just starting out as they rely on stability to move forward.
- A surprising amount of available positions are part-time and low pay. Fresh graduates are more interested in full-time work (not necessarily permanent) as they have just finished school.
- Entry level positions tend to have very low pay and even with a business degree, some graduates work odd jobs in construction/moving companies, for example, just because of the better hourly wage.
- The education institutions of today do not always meet the criteria for larger businesses and organizations. This meaning that the business world evolves faster than the education institutions can keep up.
- Unwillingness to travel far to accept new work positions.
- The cost of living is too high in Finland, especially the Tampere (and Helsinki) area that graduates are not willing to move for work unless it is financially beneficial.

The reasons for unemployment are unlimited and hard to pinpoint. Some of the survey respondents did not wish to specify their reasons and it can be a sensitive subject for many, but in reality, it is a serious situation and the longer one remains unemployed, the harder it can be to actually find solid employment.

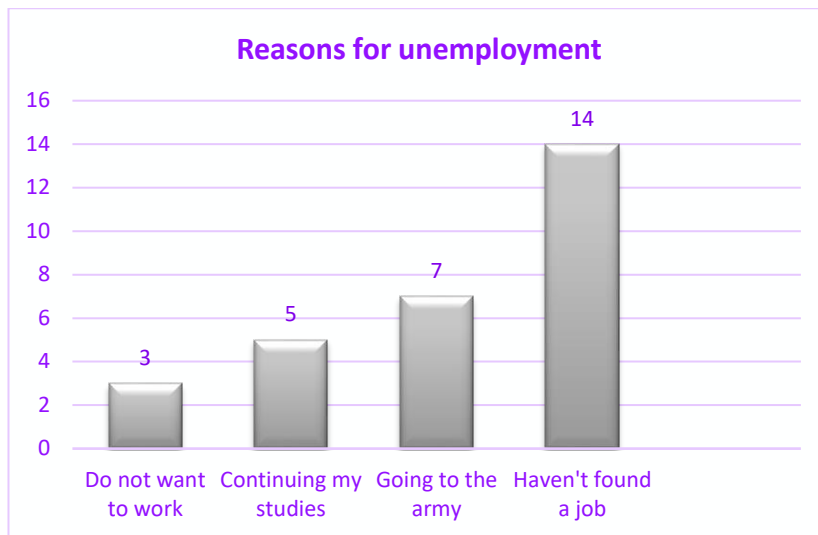


FIGURE 16. What are the reasons for unemployment?

4.3 Professional perspective

In order to gain real-time information and the perspective from the employers who hire these young graduates, a survey was sent to 200 businesses in the Pirkanmaa region and 31 responses came back. With high hopes of receiving more responses than this, understandably, a large percentage of these businesses were either temporarily closed or operating minimally during the spring due to COVID-19. Regardless of the low percentage of responses received, the data was very valuable and gave important information and a perspective from the professional standpoint.

The businesses and employers that answered the survey do provide practical training and internship opportunities for students in the Tampere area. The experiences have ranged from mostly positive to very few negative ones. The percentage of businesses that do not offer practical training placements for students are either a one-man-shop or do not have the time or resources to train and actively teach young adults right now (Berman, J. 2008) . That is perfectly normal that not all places provide the service for the students.



FIGURE 17. Do companies offer practical training?

Figure 18 gives direct insight to what options for employment are available right now in the Pirkanmaa region. It is very self-explanatory, and the situation right now is what it is. Temporary positions are the most available with permanent being marginally less. Full-time positions are being offered in some employment sectors but not necessarily meaning permanent. There is a big difference with that and full-time and temporary or part-time and temporary are the most used and signed contract options.

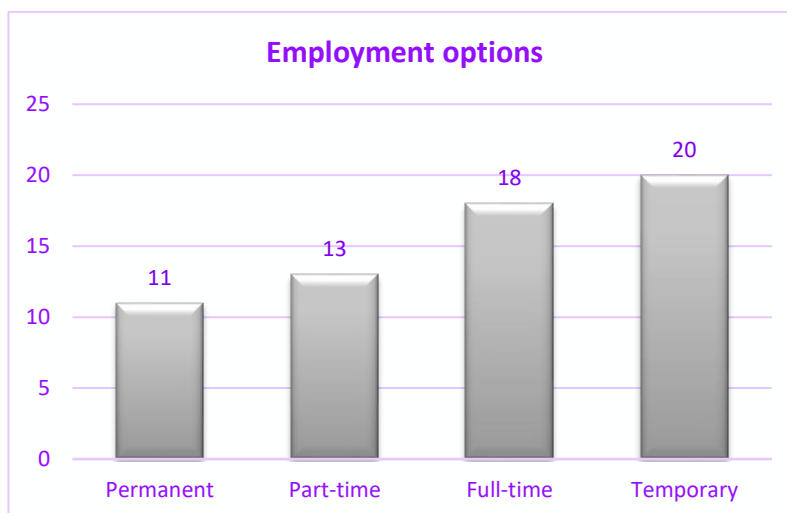


FIGURE 18. What positions do companies offer?

4.3.1 Experiences with internships and employment

Internships and work placements are valuable practical learning experiences that give students and graduates insight to the opportunities available in a very competitive world. The chance to see first-hand and work in the environment that a student or graduate has envisioned for themselves, is in fact the only way to have any insight if the potential field is suitable for them or not.

A small example of this was shared by one graduating student: She had started her studies as a practical nurse and was very excited about all the opportunities to help others and experience the variety of jobs available. As soon as she started her first practical training in the hospital, she realized that working in the environment, caring for the ill and perhaps experiencing some of the more serious situations, was not for her. She could not handle the more complicated conditions and as much as she wanted to help people, helping the ill was not her strength. It was to her benefit that she realized this earlier than later and was able to change her profession. She now graduated as a business student and is working in customer service. There are many stories like this one and because of these experiences, it gives more credit and respect for the internships and practical training available.

Employers are very much in favour of providing practical training for students and graduates, but the likelihood of obtaining full-time and/or permanent employment afterwards varies and is not always a given.



FIGURE 19. Have the internships gone well?

4.3.2 Expectations

This was a question in which the answers were very much anticipated. What are the expectations out there? What do we need to know when entering the workforce? This was a multiple choice, multiple answer question on the survey and it was the most answered question. People are born with their personalities and some natures are easier to work with than others. Everything cannot be learned in the classroom and cannot be taught. You either have it in you or you do not. This was very interesting to see, that most of the employers valued personality traits over learned or trained skills. Good attitude and trustworthiness were the two top answers that came in on the survey.

What does it mean to have good attitude in the business industry?

Having a good and positive attitude in the workplace does not necessarily mean a person is better at their job but will help an employee move forward in their career with more success. Having a positive attitude in the workplace can rub off on others and can be infectious. Well-being in the workplace is also a health factor and keeps the individual healthy and motivated and the work atmosphere complimentary. When an employee exhibits good attitude, they are deemed approachable, they gain respect from other workers and team members as well as provide a sense of security and trust to those around them.

What does trustworthiness mean in the workplace, especially as a new and motivated employee?

Although 'good attitude' ranked number one in the survey, trustworthiness is almost the most important trait in all aspects of employment. This includes honesty, dependability, consistency and refraining from gossiping and spreading information that is not yours.

Trust is both cause and effect of the company culture (Pisioni, A. 2012). Being trustworthy means being honest. Employers want their employees to be respectful and honest towards one another and be

accountable and responsible. All this falls under the term 'trustworthiness'. An employee will be remembered and noted for being honest and dependable and they will be referred to as being trusting and credible. Being consistent with work and your words and actions are a way to show others that you are trusting. Trust helps avoid and eliminate bureaucracy, something that inhibits innovation and slows the process. By building trust in their workers, organizations can create high performing teams (Ontell, M. 2012)

When the employer values 'expertise', what does that mean?

No one will be hired for a specific position in a specific field if they do not possess some form of knowledge or expertise. Having expertise means the individual has studied a certain area and generally has a degree in said field. When applying for work, the employer is going to be highly interested in what level of expertise a candidate holds and how are they able to communicate that knowledge and know-how. The business world for example is so diverse that in retrospect, new employees are almost always trained into their position. It is next to impossible to have the 'expertise' beforehand when entering a new position and or workplace. Every workplace is individual in its practices and culture, and every new employee needs to learn those things.

Eagerness to learn:

This area goes hand in hand with the expertise one. No one will be an expert when entering a new position, they have a basis of knowledge and cater and learn as they go, creating the 'expertise'. In order to gain this, the employee will have the eagerness to learn. Being ambitious about taking command of all the new knowledge necessary to learn to perform in said position, is what will stand out to employers and other workmates.



FIGURE 20. The expectations of the employer?

4.3.3 Required skillsets

In one article that was issued in the *Taloustaito* (Riipinen, K. 2020), the knowledge and skills possessed in probable and capable candidates, are the following (in order of most important to least important):

- Ability to express and show own skills and know-how
- Previous work experience
- Area of expertise
- Contacts and networking
- Additional courses and/or certificates
- International connections/experiences
- Internships
- Ambition and determination to learn
- Social media and technical skills

The information for this article was accumulated over the course of the years 2017-2018. The information conducted in the survey's that were sent out was current and in real time, and this information is already two to three years old. The comparison is shown below in Figure 20 with the responses from business employers and what they require from their employees. Currently with the usage of social media and the lack of human interaction, the number one requirement most of the employer's value and place high importance on; is social skills. People skills, communication, discussion skills, and overall manners are all included

in social skills traits. Teamwork is the second highest valued trait that employers encourage their employees to have/use. Even in the education scene, a lot of stress is put on the teamwork aspect all throughout the duration of the program. Being able to work together with different types of people is a valued asset and extremely vital in order to succeed. With all the internationalism and the nationalities merging and moving around, it is now one of the most highly respected traits in the business world (Parker, K & Igielnik, R. 2020).

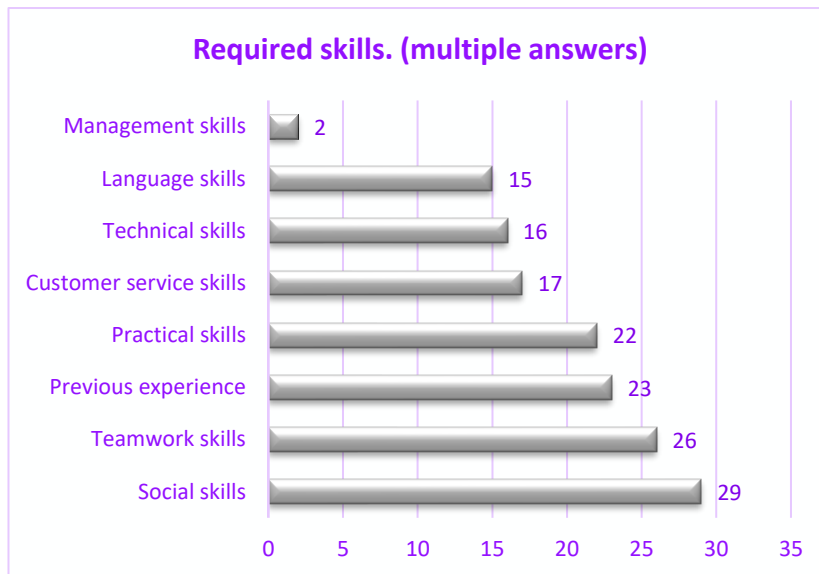


FIGURE 21. What skills are required when entering the work force?

4.3.4 Employment opportunities

Although the interview with A. Kalliokoski from Company X (personal communication via Zoom, May, 2020), gives us clear insight as to what form and type of positions are available now in the Pirkanmaa area, the survey results were inevitable for finding out data regarding the current employment situation. With the responses gained through the survey it is quite clear that even with a degree of some kind, the entry level positions are the ones that are available to fresh graduates, post-graduates, and even semi-experienced workers. It is rare that anyone jumps straight into a higher position. As the interview went on in greater detail and depth, one more interesting piece of valuable information: that most of the time, management positions tend to be filled by internal transfers and/or business-to-business transfers. Of course, a fresh graduate can and occasionally does get hired into a management position, but it is quite rare, especially at the

vocational school level. Employers are not as willing to take risks since the training is costly and timely, and prospective employees bounce from position to position or workplace to workplace much more readily than before. This is the very reason for hesitancy and carefulness on behalf of the employers in larger corporations.

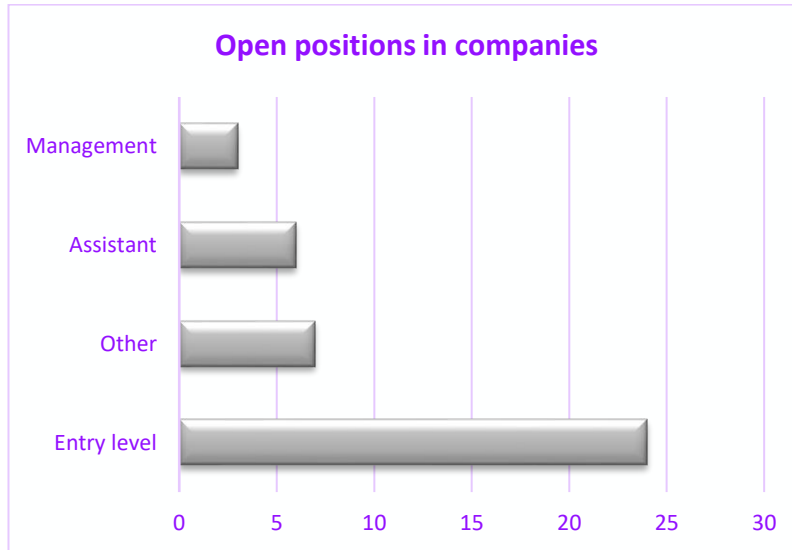


FIGURE 22. What positions are being offered?

4.3.5 Recruiting methods

The internet of today has turned into the most valued source for recruitment purposes for all employers. The newspapers have gotten thinner and smaller with the growth of the worldwide web and the increasing usage of social media. As one of the employers that I interviewed confirmed, they have saved a lot of money in advertising and have been able to invest that so-called leftover coverage to invest in training and furthering education for their employee's (Kalliokoski, A. personal communication, May 2020).

The advantages of using the internet and social media for recruitment are; low costs, demographic targeting, global marketing, convenience, automation and tracking. The traditional methods require too much time, paper and are costly. Based on question number six in the survey that was sent out to businesses asking how their recruiting practices work, the following will outline the answers (with the influence based on online recruitment and why):

- Timesaving: Job advertisements can be posted anytime with internet access.
- Minimized hiring costs: Labour costs in recruiting are generally high in terms of advertising, travel expenses and third-party recruiter fees and as a result, the hiring process takes up too much time and money.
- Effective: Online recruitment can go a long way with matching the right candidate and employer in a much faster and efficient way.
- Shortened hiring process: Online recruitment streamlines the process of deciding which candidate moves forward or not, thus saving time and not needing to meet with all the potential candidates individually.
- Accessibility: Job adverts will reach a wider range of potential candidates and employees in a faster and more efficient manner.
- No hassle and flexibility: The convenience is a major bonus because online recruitment offers flexibility

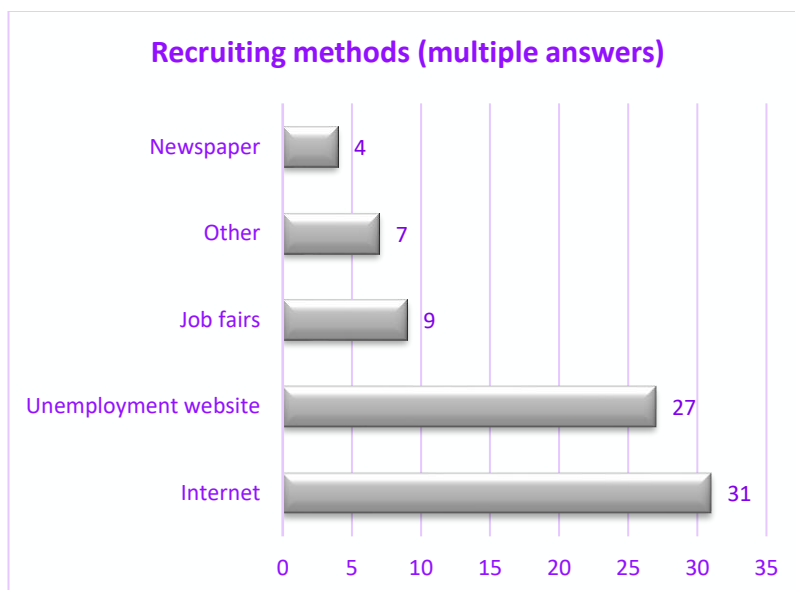


FIGURE 23. What methods are used for recruiting?

4.4 Synthesis of results

Conducting such a research project provided invaluable insight to a trend that has been becoming more apparent and obvious in this upcoming working generation. The employment trends for youth in Finland nowadays are changing and

shaping the future in many ways that have not been seen before. Young adults today have increasingly been engaging in part-time 'gig work' rather than committing to full-time employment and this being our future working generation, is going to be shaping the paths of the generations that come after them. They are a massive source of innovation, ideas and solutions and have been pushing strongly for changes and evolution. Newly graduated young adults have the energy and great potential to generate positive changes in this modern-day world. The ideology behind working, careers and professional success is being modified and changing all the time. Are we keeping up with that change? The objective of this master's thesis is to provide insight to a trend that has become more apparent in the recent years: fresh and recent graduates have been challenging the traditional notion of working and committing to a full-time job. As this age group of 18 to 25-year-olds is becoming the largest fraction of the world's current and future workforce, more and more businesses are struggling to understand the demands and work ethics this age group possesses.

Analysing the results based on the survey's that were conducted, there is an obvious gap between the classroom and business organizations. Why is this? The answers are not obvious nor easy to determine. Finding the missing link through practical and real-time research is valuable in giving insight to what the issues are currently and how to potentially navigate through the challenges.

5 DISCUSSION

The biggest surprise with this whole research project was the fact that so many businesses are offering internships and apparently very eager to hire these young graduates with fresh knowledge and motivation. So why are the graduates not snapping up these workplaces? This was the biggest contradiction that came up and was a very positive attribute to the study. That is a new avenue that may need to be studied further. Initially the misconception that there is not valid employment available for the vocational school graduates but based on the survey answered by the businesses in the Pirkanmaa area, there is and should be. It was a pleasant surprise to see the positive results from business leaders. So, there is an obvious link missing between the school setting and the business world and although this thesis does cover a lot of ground and the practicalities surrounding the situation, it is not fully conclusive. This broad of a topic and the magnitude in which these new trends are moving, it was almost impossible to grasp the whole concept in one research project. This is good groundwork for this situation and with more accessibility with the schools themselves, this could have been more detailed and had a different perspective.

5.1 Discussion of results

The significance of this research project overall was to shed more light on the trends that are growing in the employment world amongst the business graduates from vocational schools. The data gathering process did bring valuable information that helps clarify some of this, but there is a lot of ground left uncovered. As an independent research project, this broad topic was not possible to cover wholly, and the segments chosen were felt to be more valid and current in society today.

The influences on young adult's decision making and transition from education to employment are largely based on their aptitude and determination for finding sustainable employment. Adulthood comes fast with the diploma in hand and the big question for most of the graduating students is, 'now what?'. What are these fresh and post-graduates looking for? They are initially looking for employment in their area of expertise that simultaneously fulfils their need to feel successful. The fear

of not finding a job after graduation can be crippling for some graduates and the longer they go without a job, the wider the gap grows. Young graduates want to step into a position immediately after graduating that provides job security, the opportunity to learn something new and flexibility. On the other hand, they do not want to be tied down to a permanent long-term position but rather the flexibility to move from workplace to workplace, trying different options out, while 'deciding' what the right fit for them is. This is where the 'gig-work' and 'temporary' come in because in this age group, it is rare for someone to be ready to settle down. This criteria that they hold themselves to is not always in a realistic spectrum and the failure and downfall they experience when their wishes are not met, can be extremely damaging to their confidence and affect their employment searches in the long-term.

No matter what field or area a student is studying, but especially business, the practical training opportunities should be prioritized. This is the real-life experiences that students are exposed to in the real professional working life. Developing skills and abilities that support their profession and putting them into practice in a real time setting has been one of the most valuable learning experiences. The skillsets that are learned in education facilities today are on the fast track to keeping up with the professional industry and more than ever, the practical training is important for keeping the graduates and the educational institutions up-to-date on how the professional world is evolving and continuously developing.

However, Classroom teaching cannot be diminished or reduced. The practice of going to school, being on time, living with a routine and schedule as well as being held accountable are some of the most vital aspects in teaching youth and young adults' 'responsibility' and 'adulthood' while going to school and growing up. Whether or not the classroom and contact teaching be increased or condensed during the first two years and the practical training periods focused more on the third year of the vocational learning program, the consensus is such that the classroom teaching and theory should be explored thoroughly and deeper while the practical training be professional learning experiences and 'job-training'. Hands-on supervised learning is vital for ensuring quality education in young adults. The high standards need to stay, and the quality of education needs to be

reinforced to ensure that the vocational students are making use out of their three-year programs and are being prepped for the future professional life.

5.2 Contribution to previous research

This specific topic has had little research done on it and the biggest reason why is that this changing trend is considered a new phenomenon and it has not been officially researched in depth. A lot of speculation and articles have been written regarding and questioning the employment trends amongst youth and young graduates and why they are not consistent nor sustainable. Most of the research that was used on this thesis as supporting literature is based on vocational education and the working patterns amongst the fresh graduates and young adults. One valuable channel of knowledge was learning how vocational schools have created the business program and how their curriculum has been shaped over previous years. As this was such a specific project attempting to find the reasons why the graduates from the business program are really struggling to

5.3 Practical conclusion

The employment trends for youth in Finland nowadays are changing and shaping the future in many ways that have not been seen before. Young adults today have increasingly been engaging in part-time 'gig work' rather than committing to full-time employment and this being our future working generation, is going to be shaping the paths of the generations that come after them. They are a massive source of innovation, ideas and solutions and have been pushing strongly for changes and evolution. Newly graduated young adults have the energy and great potential to generate positive changes in this modern-day world. The ideology behind working, careers and professional success is being modified and changing all the time. Are we keeping up with that change?

No, society is not necessarily keeping up with the change. This thesis struggled with the fact that there is not much information available regarding this whole topic and changing pattern. Being that the author was only able to access a very small percentage of qualifiable resources, such as the graduates themselves and the local businesses, this thesis overall has a small margin of relevance. At the

same time, it is relevant to a real-time situation and needs to be considered when the curriculums are updated and modified to keep up with the ever changing and evolving business industry and world.

Hopefully, this thesis can be used as a building block of information for future reference regarding these issues in education and employment. The employment trends of late are not going to return to what they once were in previous decades. Lifestyles are changing and evolving, people move around so much more than before, businesses operate on a much more international level than they did in years past and so on. There are so many reasons why graduates are being pickier about where they work and what they commit to as well as the business leaders having stricter criteria for their future and potential employees. There is work to do in this regard and with the right mindset and planning, graduates will find the right workplace that suits their skillsets and their expertise.

5.4 Critical evaluation of the research design and implementation

With further research and covering a wider spectrum, this research paper lays the groundwork for future needs. The direction in which these employment practices are moving are going to be affecting and shaping the future years, decades, and generations to come and this cannot be ignored. The business leaders in the area are puzzled as to why they do not have more graduates applying for work and the graduates are feeling discouraged that their dream job is not at their fingertips. Finding a job overall is not necessarily the problem but committing to longer term employment and maintaining employment is the bigger issue at hand with the centennial generation. There is so much hope and optimism in this generation and this gap is fixable and can be welded together.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Survey sent to businesses. (Fin/Eng)

Accessible through the following links:

English: <https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=r0Rp-nzM2EyRVMARM-nmJEM7LMXFVBpRKqHeW4tpx4rZUQUdFRDgwN0E3VDkxVjBWTlpVQlhZTkiQWC4u>

Finnish: <https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=r0Rp-nzM2EyRVMARM-nmJEM7LMXFVBpRKqHeW4tpx4rZUNzY2M0RQMzBGMFFWR0RGOUIUVDY4U0pDRi4u>

Business students entering the workforce.

1. Does your company offer internships for business students?

- Yes
 No

2. What is your experience with students' internships and job training?

3. Does your company have positions open for application? What kind of contracts are being offered (full-time, part-time, substitute, etc)?

4. What interests you when identifying potential employees? (more than one answer allowed)

- Ambitiousness
 Thoroughness of the CV
 Strong academic success
 Years of work experience
 Internships

5. What qualities stand out in potential employees?

- Communication skills
 Teamwork
 Technical skills
 Leadership skills
 Potential management

6. What methods does your business use to recruit fresh graduates and entry level workers?

7. When your organization has an opening, is it: (more than one answer is allowed).

- Management position
- Consulting
- Human resources
- Administrative
- Sales
- Marketing
- Retail
- Customer service

8. What is one thing your company requires from new employees?

Appendix 2. Survey sent to graduates. (FIN/ENG)

Accessible through the following links:

English: <https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=r0Rp-nzM2EyRVMARM-nmJEM7LMXFVBpRKqHeW4tpx4rZUMFRRTUpDR1NRUTJKRlowTDJWOTZWUEVKNi4u>

Finnish: <https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=r0Rp-nzM2EyRVMARM-nmJEM7LMXFVBpRKqHeW4tpx4rZUOFdTNzVKVki0ODFRUDFRRkZPSUIQVEhVMi4u>

Bridging the gap.

1. How old are you?

2. Are you male or female?

- Female
- Male
- Rather not answer.

3. Where did you study? What year did you graduate?

4. Are you satisfied with your degree and do you feel you got what you were hoping for? Feel free to explain your thoughts.

5. Are you currently working?

- Yes
- No

6. Is your job...(you can choose more than one of the following if applicable)

- Part-time
- Full-time
- Temporary
- Substitute position
- Permanent
- I am not currently working

7. Do you feel your employer values your degree?

- Yes
- No

8. Did you participate in any internships or on-the-job-training? If so, where? What was your experience?

9. Did your internship lead to potential employment?

- Yes
- No

10. What has been the most beneficial at helping you find a job?

- Practical training
- Other work experience during studies
- Personal contacts
- Job advertisements
- Career guidance (from school or the unemployment office)
- Business websites
- Recruiting offices
- Other

11. Do you plan to continue your studies?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

12. Which of the following qualities benefit you in your current workplace?
(choose more than one if applicable).

- Practical skills
- Linguistic skills
- Customer service
- Communication and social skills
- Teamwork
- I am not currently working

13. Which of the following applies?

- I work in an entry level position
- I am currently training for a job
- I work in retail and sales
- I am an assistant
- I work in the business field
- I do not work in the business field
- I am self-employed
- I do not work

14. If you are unemployed, do you care to share why?

Appendix 3. Interviews with vocational school business graduates:

Keränen, O.

Kankkonen, J.

Haataja, R.

These interviews were conducted via Zoom 5/2020 and 7/2020.

1. Were you satisfied with your three years at Tredu?
2. Do you feel that the business courses were relevant and were they covered sufficiently?
3. Where have you done your internships and what was your experience?
4. What is your experience with finding work during/after school?
5. What is your experience with working in the business industry?
6. What kind of contracts have employers offered you?
7. How do you feel about starting at TAMK and continuing your studies?

Appendix 4. Interview, Kalliokoski

This interview was conducted via Zoom in May of 2020.

Company X. Kalliokoski, A.

1. Does the company you work for offer internships to students?
2. Does Company X offer employment to fresh graduates?
3. With the current industry, do you feel that the graduates are well prepared for permanent and long-term employment?
4. Do you have advice for the education institutions as to what might be missing from their curriculum?
5. What is something you wish the graduates would carry with them as they transfer from education to employment?
6. What do you expect from fresh graduates?
7. Does your company invest in training new employees?
8. How does the company feel when employees bounce around, come and go? Any advice for these employees who do not commit to a more stable, long-term employment?
9. What is the best route to recruitment and finding the good quality workers the industry needs?

Appendix 5. Avenues for future research:

The process of collecting current and relevant research material for this thesis project was semi-complicated. The reasons behind this are solely based on the lack of previous research being done on the business program graduates from vocational schools. Although TREDU did not have the opportunity to work together on this project, their graduates did offer a few pointers of valuable insight:

- This topic of employment struggles amongst business graduates will be needing more attention from the perspective of education professionals and institutions.
- While the Associates degree curriculum at TREDU mimics the BBA program at TAMK, some students who have gone through both programs suggest that some courses should be accredited or then just attend High School and then straight to the BBA program, if possible.

Is there something that could be done for the percentage of vocational school business graduates who go on to study business at the universities of applied sciences? Are the programs that similar?