



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Trends of Choosing Job Sectors after Graduation at Can Tho University

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ARTICLE INFO**ABSTRACT**

Received: May 9, 2024

Accepted: Aug 19, 2024

Keywords

Vietnam
University Graduates
Private Economic Sector
Higher Education

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Vietnam has experienced multiple changes in its economy and job sectors. However, a gap persists in the research on trends of choosing job sectors after graduating from university. A survey was conducted on graduates of Can Tho University (CTU), a long-standing and prestigious university in the Mekong Delta, Southern Vietnam, to investigate trends in choosing and changing job sectors. The study of 22,659 CTU graduates reveals that the number of students in favour of working in the private economic sector tends to increase gradually over the years. In contrast, a decline has been observed in the number of students who prefer to work in state organisations, joint venture companies, or start their own business. This study enables education managers to modify strategies, build training programmes, intensify soft skills, and connect private enterprises to meet practical requirements.

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutes (HEIs), in addition to training high-quality labour resources, are responsible for tracking their graduates' employment statuses, which is a top priority in programme development and quality assurance.

In Vietnam, universities and colleges realise this issue and conduct annual surveys on the students' employment statuses. To understand students' perceptions and provide suitable orientations to help them acquire jobs after graduation, CTU has long implemented various studies on graduates and alumni as well as employment requirements and recruitment activities of the labour markets within and outside the Mekong Delta as well as Vietnam.

Following the expansive trend toward global integration, the economic sectors have become increasingly diversified into various employment sectors, including the state, private, and foreign investment sectors. In this context, the labour market has also been diversified into different job domains and opportunities for workers. However, due to the diversification and abundant job opportunities, the trends of the labourers' employment choices have become an area of great interest. While having their employment choices, labourers consider several influential factors, such as their exceptional knowledge, development, job positions, promotions, and, more importantly, incomes.

High-quality workers who have been trained at HEIs have ample job opportunities. However, some graduates with good or excellent qualifications still cannot find their favoured employment due to a lack of awareness and support in their job-seeking processes.

CTU is a long-standing and influential university in the Mekong Delta, with more than 15,000 students graduating yearly in different disciplines, training forms, and levels. Therefore, providing job opportunities to students after graduation has always been a top priority. The institution has been implementing concrete strategies to determine the domestic labour market requirements, based on which appropriate training strategies are devised to ensure that their students can acquire proper knowledge to satisfy the market requirements and changes.

This study addresses a gap in the existing research literature, both internationally and in Vietnam. Preparing students for their future career is important, but is not meant to stop when their study program ends. Therefore, it is the authors' interest to investigate graduates' rate of success in choosing their career. This study examines the job-finding trends of graduates from HEIs to establish appropriate training strategies in CTU. This study aims to identify the trends in choosing and changing job sectors by CTU graduates. It may also contribute to examining the job-finding trends of graduates from HEIs to establish appropriate training strategies in CTU.

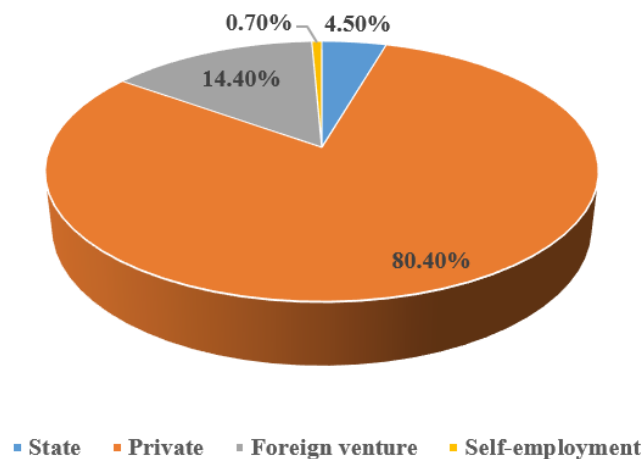
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In Vietnam, studies from many educational institutions on the employment realities of students after graduation have also provided an overview of current employment trends. Fully aware of the responsibility and importance of employing students after graduation, HEIs in Vietnam have deployed and implemented surveys on the job demands of the economic sectors as well as the job-finding needs of graduate students.

First, the report of the annual survey in 2017 on the employment realities of the students from Foreign Trade University (FTU), one of the long-standing, prestigious HEIs in Vietnam, indicated that 1331 students were employed one year after graduation, constituting 94% of total students, while 4% did not find jobs, and 2% of the students continued with their higher studies.

Table 1 shows the economic sectors in the employment field in which these students participated

Economic sector / Field of employment	Frequency	%
State	56	4.5%
Private	1010	80.40%
Foreign venture	182	14.4%
Self-employment	9	0.7%



The economic sector/field and employment proportion of the students are presented in Figure 1.

A large-scale survey of 4,952 students by the Vietnam Agriculture Institute reported graduate employment in 2018. The employment in different economic sectors was as follows: 372 students worked in the state economic sector, 3,055 students worked in the private economic sector, 206 created jobs for themselves, and 527 students were employed by foreign-invested enterprises.

Another survey conducted on the employment realities of students from Van Lang University one year after graduation in 2018 indicated similar results. Among 1587 surveyed students, 97 worked in the state economic sector, 1074 students worked in the private economic sector, 76 created employments for themselves, and 230 students worked for foreign enterprises.

In addition, in 2018, 1,141 students participated in the survey on the employment realities of the graduated students from the Medicine and Pharmacy School, Hue University. Of them, 756 students worked in the state economic sector, and 234 were employed in the private economic sector. The findings indicated that no students created jobs for themselves, and only 26 students worked for foreign enterprises.

Finally, the research conducted by our colleagues at the University of Technology and Education, in Da Nang University, on the employment realities of their students graduating in 2017 also revealed that 88% worked in the private economic sector. This information reflects their student competencies, with positive feedback and assessment of the enterprises in the Central Region of Vietnam. Moreover, in that academic year, many private enterprises showed their recruitment demands, publicised their job requirements, contacted the University to employ their newly graduated students, and invited the students to participate in internship or apprenticeship programmes at their enterprises. The research also showed that within the state economic sector, only electronics and construction technology engineering had higher employment success rates than the other majors. The students were mainly employed by agencies such as the construction department and the offices and departments of the Electricity Company. For joint-venture and self-employment, a low proportion of employment was evident; however, the tendency showed an increase compared to the year 2016. It may suggest that the shift of choosing careers from public to private sectors in Vietnam has recently formed and developed.

Several international studies have been conducted on students' employment choices. Woo and Teng (2019) examined the factors influencing students from private universities to seek public employment after graduation. This study included 1,290 final-year students from a private college in Malaysia. The findings indicated that factors such as job characteristics and some fundamental and individual characteristics of the respondents significantly determined their expectation of employment from the government. Their survey also showed that awareness of discrimination against minority groups and job promotion in the public economic sector was common among respondents. This study provided useful data for policymakers and employers regarding proposing appropriate measures for recruiting suitable candidates. It also helped career consultants to conduct occupational training for students to develop their professional plans.

Another study on employment in the national economic sectors conducted in Switzerland by Emery and Giauque (2005) revealed an insight into the tendency to mix state and private economic sectors. In particular, this study focussed on a broader outlook on the similarities and differences between employment in the public and private economic sectors. Most reforms in the public economic sector in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) were inspired by the principles and tools used by private enterprises. Due to the financial and budget crises, most countries preferred modernising their public administration to make it more successful and effective. Although such emergent issues were new in the public economic sector, they were familiar in private businesses. The authors analysed the impacts of this trend on unifying public and private economic sectors. This unification increased the competitiveness and productivity and the customers who were the users/taxpayers favoured it. Simultaneously, political and moral issues were also entailed

because such a mixture created a new environment and management approach. Government officials also tried their best to develop a novel appearance and driving force but simultaneously had to implement new moral values in the public economic sector.

Dougherty (2010) assessed the unequal income levels between the public and private economic sectors in Jordan and their impacts on the labour supply sources, particularly on labourers with low skills in the private sector. The general salary levels in the public economic sector were assessed for appropriateness. However, determining whether the payment levels in the public economic sector were high or low compared to the private economic sector was a complicated task for several reasons. First, a difference existed in the job classification system, payment system, bonuses for the packages, and mechanism for the payment determination between the economic sectors. The targets of these two economic sectors also differed in salary payment activities. In the public economic sector, salary was considered a means to influence the behaviours of the staff, aiming at a guarantee to provide good quality services to the public. In the private economic sector, payment was defined as the costs for competencies, contributions, or impacts by individuals to an organisation or a company. This important factor determined competitiveness and labour costs. The ownership capital was also a distinguished feature of the payment system in the public economic sector. This accounted for the gap between the lowest and highest salaries in the public economic sector, which was often lesser than that in the private economic sector. Second, income in the public economic sector must be within the so-called equitable level; however, creating inflation based on expenditure cut-offs or threats of weakening fiscal stability was unallowed. Last, the availability and quality of the data and statistics were fundamental factors for an exact visualisation of the scale, reason, and impacts related to salary differences in the public and private sectors.

However, exact results could not be found that only aimed at researching whether the salary levels in the public economic sector were appropriate. One possible reason was that some issues requiring a more in-depth analysis were not identified. Such issues resulted from the current realities of recruitment. For instance, teaching staff could not be selected as expected, and the salary disadvantage was present in the public economic sector for the labourers with basic educational levels compared to those with lower high-school standards. These situations, along with better working conditions in the public economic sector, would make jobs in the private economic sector unattractive for Jordanians with low skills and discourage some from further pursuing their education. The author indicated that even if both the state and private economic sectors provided appropriate payment, almost no immediate impacts would occur on the chronic unemployment that Jordan was facing, provided that such unemployment is caused by the weak total labour demands.

Nasir (2000) conducted a study in which differences in income between both economic sectors were examined within the context of Pakistan. The private economic sector was further divided into official and unofficial economic sectors. The Pakistani private economic sector employed and expanded the human force capital model to determine important factors deciding the incomes in each economic sector. Standard income specifications were divided into two parts: the difference caused by individual characteristics and that caused by the income structure of an economic sector. Nasir (2000) showed that the labourers in the public economic sector had higher incomes than those in the private economic sector in both official and unofficial sectors. These incomes were higher because of their considerable individual human resource capital. However, the salary structure of the public economic sector did not support them. Pakistani labourers in the unofficial economic sector had lower incomes than those in the public and official private economic sectors due to their individual characteristics and salary structure.

Giordano et al. (2011) investigated salary differences in public and private economic sectors in ten countries in the Euro Region (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain). The authors calculated the differences in the job characteristics between the

two economic sectors using the micro-data borrowed from European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC). Their findings showed that salary differences in the public economic sector were usually higher for women in education and public administration than those in the medical profession. Remarkably, the difference in insurance payment was higher in the public economic sector in Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, and Spain.

Glick et al. (2015) researched employment specialising in job opportunities in different economic sectors. They investigated the roles of the private economic sector in projects and plans for youth skills development and employment promotion in countries with low and average incomes. This study clarified the possibility of high profits with the participation of private companies. In many cases, this participation was considered the essential factor for success. Several findings were prominent in public and private careers.

First, the public-private relationship for developing skills (including the ones through the educational system) for the demands of the current and future labour market was a core component of the successful strategies in industrialisation and growth in some countries, such as Korea and other European economies, during the last decades. These required remarkable government competencies for implementation. Second, the participation of private suppliers in providing skill training for youth within a competitive framework proved to have effective improvement potential as well as coverage quality and degrees. Limited evidence indicated similarities in the employment services provided by the private sector and start-up training. The effective supervision of the private suppliers was essential for this approach. As the skill-training providers tended to focus on the youth for easy training to gain their profits, supervising organisational activities of the skill-training providers ensured the satisfaction of demands by the disadvantaged youth. Third, the private economic sector could be a resource of creative technological measures to employ youth, such as using text messages to provide job information.

Recognising the utilities from the effective participation of the private economic sector requires adequate (and effective) participation of the companies. There are three basic types of enterprises: large international or multi-national groups (official), domestic enterprises, and small and medium domestic enterprises (usually unofficial). Regarding profits, the multi-national companies could be promoted by the community of enterprises whose social responsibility was much more important than their profits which would affect all kinds of initiatives they might sponsor or participate in. Other (domestic) companies were promoted mainly by their concerns about productivity and profits, which were recognised in the planning-related programmes. Although the companies were aware of their profits in participating in the training initiatives or the youth employment, they frequently had to cope with the financial expenditures or time; this was true even for the activities supported by the public economic sector or the sponsors.

Other factors could have led to the success of the partnership relationship towards youth employment, as well as those limiting the success. These factors comprised trust or lack of trust in the government from enterprises, various expectations and operation methods of the companies and the public partners, slowness in achieving the results in the partnership or cooperation relationship, potential imbalance in the rights to make decisions, inadequate resources, and problems regarding the instability.

The research showed that the factors of success or 'the best method' included full planning and sufficient time to develop the relationships with the partners in the private economic sectors, clearly-defined roles, expected outcomes, time, mutual commitment to changes, the presence of the leaders having an appropriate influence on the change of the effects, persistence (therefore the practical timeliness for the outputs, and the achieved final targets), and the frequent interaction among partners.

From the studies above, it is obvious that in the Vietnamese context, the trend of choosing jobs has changed in favor of the private sector. However, there are other options such as start-up or jobs in joint-venture businesses between Vietnam and foreign companies. Our research focuses on two main questions:

1. In what sector did graduates work?
2. How did they feel about their training and work choice?

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. Research design

This study was a random employment survey among graduates with their first bachelor's degree in the public training system. Data and responses were collected via telephonic interviews, face-to-face interviews, and delivering questionnaires at alumni meetings. Respondents agreed that the questionnaire, interviews, responses, and data could be used for research purposes. The study was done with the consent and direction of CTU Rectorate, Department of Academic Affairs, Department of Administration and Planning, and Cooperative Training Center.

3.2. The questionnaire

The data for this study were obtained by asking the graduates various questions about their time spent searching for jobs, working sector or environment, whether the job was suitable between the job position and their trained major, the scope of their working environment, their income conditions, the opportunities of promotion and further training, and higher study.

To assess the study targets, the questions on the markets and employment economic sectors were designed following the Likert scale of satisfaction with five degrees of very satisfied/suitable, satisfied/suitable, normal, not satisfied/suitable, and very unsatisfied/unsuitable. For instance, what is your degree of satisfaction/suitability with the recruitment policies of the state agencies? What is your degree of satisfaction/suitability for the job opportunities in the joint-venture economic sector? What is your degree of satisfaction/suitability of the labour market and the private employment economic sector? What is your degree of satisfaction/suitability in your thinking about start-ups?

The questions with various choices about working environments could help determine the students' preferences for choosing their jobs after graduation. For example, what is your perception of the state of the working environment? What are your reasons for choosing to work in the private sector? What is your expectation of a working environment in a joint venture? Why do you choose to create a start-up?

3.3. Participants

Annually, approximately 10,000 students graduate from Can Tho University with various forms of training (both full and part-time). The authors implemented a tracking activity and conducted a random survey of these graduates. Multiple participants were interviewed for five consecutive years, and responses were collected. The numbers varied as 3715 students in 2015, 4124 students in 2016, 4384 students in 2017, 438 students in 2018, and 6055 students in 2019.

3.4. Data collection

Data collection was done through statistical analysis of the questionnaires sent through email via Google Forms. This process was performed automatically and anonymously. After gathering all responses from the survey, the data were synthesised and analysed.

3.5. Research hypothesis

To identify the job-choice trends of the students and the labour demands of the employers, the following hypotheses were proposed:

For the students

- Employment opportunities are preferred, which align with the initial employment choice of students after graduation.
- Employment opportunities are abundant but unsuitable for graduate students' criteria of employment choices.
- Employment opportunities are limited; however, jobs suit the targets of the graduate students' job finding.

For the employers

- The quality of training is suitable for the requirements specified by employers.
- The number of graduated students meets the labourer number demand by employers; however, the quality of training is questionable for the users.
- The quality of training completely satisfies employers; however, this number is quite limited, which raises difficulties for employers.

4. RESULTS

Using the collected data, the authors compared the graduates' job choices with those at other universities. The findings showed a shift in job choices due to the aforementioned factors. In particular, the difference was obvious, considering the decrease in state-sector jobs and a strong increase in the private, joint-venture, and self-employment sectors. This difference is evidence of Vietnam's regional and international transformation.

Table 2 shows the state, private, venture, and self-employment economic sectors/fields where the CTU graduates chose to work.

Employment economic sector	Graduates in 2015	Graduates in 2016	Graduates in 2017	Graduates in 2018	Graduates in 2019
State	28.21%	21.41% (↓)	15.81% (↓)	10.18% (↓)	9.71% (↓)
Private	52.62%	59.54% (↑)	63.18% (↑)	58.05% (↓)	65.16% (↑)
Joint-venture	13.24%	14.41% (↑)	14.60% (↑)	13.39% (↓)	12.50% (↓)
Self-employment	5.92%	4.63% (↓)	6.41% (↑)	6.35% (↓)	5.51% (↓)
	n = 3715	n = 4124	n = 4384	n = 4381	n = 6055

Among the four options in the survey, graduates working in the private economic sector accounted for the highest percentage, and the proportion of students who created jobs was the lowest. The percentage of graduates who chose to work in the private economic sector gradually increased yearly. In contrast, the percentage of those graduating from CTU who preferred to work in the state economic sector, joint-venture economic sector, and create jobs for themselves tended to decrease gradually.

From the aforementioned findings, a decreasing proportion of employment in the state economic sector was seen. Regarding recruitment methods for this economic sector, the competitive examination method was applied for all the positions with similar examination contents without any competent assessment. However, these competitive examinations majorly excluded the students who had just graduated, as most examination courses were not taught at the universities. The state economic sector was also evaluated in the questionnaire as '*boring and having a lack of challenges*'. Simultaneously, the income levels in this economic sector could not attract the interest of the young

labour force, particularly the students who had recently graduated. Vietnamese state policies have been toughening the policies to enter the state workforce or economic sector, which also discourages students from finding jobs.

Concerning the geographical preferences of these graduates, the findings show that the majority of the graduates found their work in the following locations: in the south of Vietnam, including Ho Chi Minh City, Dong Nai, Binh Duong provinces, and Mekong Delta, all of which present a significant developing region in Vietnam. Regarding professional choices, a diversity of jobs in almost all fields, such as industry, agriculture, construction, and services, was seen. Teacher education graduates accounted for the highest percentage in the state sector (50-60%). Contrarily, almost all who favoured the private sector worked in industry and service fields. The joint-venture sector also showed a similar result, with more than 50% graduates. In the self-employment sector, agriculture and aquaculture accounted for 18.18% of total graduates. This result proves that Vietnam's economic structure underwent an actual change following its renovation policy.

Parallel with the state economic sector is foreign investment capital and the joint venture sectors. Although these two economic sectors have different characteristics, they share similar outcomes. In particular, work in this economic sector demands labourers to have multiple skills, especially soft skills. Following these requirements, labourers had to endure constant pressure from employers. Additionally, the labourers' competencies had to be confirmed through their qualifications and certificates of English and/or programmes, such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), and Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA).

The findings confirm that the private economic sector attracts the most employment choices from the graduated students. Job opportunities can most easily be found in the private economic sector. Graduates and employers arrive effortlessly at a compromise in the private economic sector than in the other economic sectors. The conditions for graduates to choose their careers in this economic sector are much more appealing because most of their demands regarding income, self-challenges, opportunities for promotion, salary, and flexible working time are met. Simultaneously, the requirements in this economic sector are much more agreeable than those in foreign investment capital by less demanding competencies, standards, and qualifications.

The self-employment or start-up group was different from the other groups, as the graduates did not need to satisfy the requirements of employers, but the students had to innovate. If students lack ideas or a stable knowledge foundation, the possibility of employment preservation is low. Possibly, due to this reason, many start-up projects could not continue to develop, causing students' start-up trends to decrease, as stated in the survey. However, this is also a potential economic sector where the policies and working environments could be changed and promoted. Much hope is present for it to develop into an effective economic sector in the future.

5. DISCUSSION

Due to Vietnamese political and social context, the private sector is a new but powerful player in the labour market. Unlike other regions in Europe Middle-East, where working in a private company has been considered a popular choice, Vietnamese youth come to contact with several new options besides the traditional public sector. This study identified the trend of an increasing number of graduate students choosing to work in the private economic sector. The findings suggest that the private economic sector has attracted most graduate students from Can Tho University. Therefore, the CTU must especially concentrate on enhancing its connections with the private economic sector to create various job opportunities for students and train labourers who can satisfy working requirements. Graduates' choice to work in the joint-venture sector is decreasing. This issue may lead to the proposal that CTU must concentrate on the specific employment requirements of the joint-

venture sector with foreign enterprises, establish cooperation with the enterprises to create favourable learning conditions for the students, improve students' working skills to familiarise with the workplace culture during their training, and ensure the foreign language proficiency of the graduated students.

With a low proportion of graduated students' self-employment, the CTU must intensify the diversified and in-depth activities of occupational guidance and start-ups through which students can improve their ability to create employment for themselves and others. The dramatic decrease in the number of graduates who chose to work in the state sector requires the CTU to conduct surveys on the demands of the labourer resources by the state economic sector, which need training for every field of employment.

This study serves as a foundation for future research on student support policies in finding jobs, initiating start-ups, altering training programmes and strategies that meet the trend of changing the working sectors, and creating more comprehensive cooperation among HEIs, enterprises, and companies.

6. CONCLUSION

This research was carried out to investigate graduates' career development; however, it covered mainly those from CTU. The scope of research was limited mainly in the South of Vietnam. Data from other universities were also included, but it did not mean to show a complete picture of Vietnamese university graduates' tendency in choosing their jobs. For better and more accurate findings, a further and more extended study should be done.

The findings of the study have indicated a significant change of careers from the state and joint-venture economic sector to the private economic sector in the job-finding trend of thousands of graduates from Can Tho University in particular and the students graduating from all the HEIs in Vietnam in general.

To provide support to students in finding job opportunities after graduation, CTU conducted research on the job-finding trends by students and alumni, employment recruitment agencies, and related national and international studies. Based on this study, recommendations related to university training activities are proposed to support students in finding jobs after graduation.

The world is changing too fast for graduates to adapt, especially in their career development. This study undertook the first step in examining the trends, shifts, and career orientation of graduates in Vietnam. The study also informs about the world and domestic job markets. The Vietnamese economy has opened ample ways for graduates to move from the state economic sector to the private sector. The findings from the survey of thousands of graduates may clarify their expectations regarding the job market after graduation. We recommend frequent orientation activities such as meetings, seminars, workshops, and talks held within the university to build business relationships.

The CTU desires to deal with the issue of finding employment for students after graduation. Therefore, its mission and responsibility must devise some specific strategies. Simultaneously, some concrete steps should be implemented to connect closely with the enterprises by making contacts and calling for employers to participate directly in developing the training programmes so that students can meet the job requirements of the labour agencies immediately after graduation. Furthermore, the CTU should expand its range of activities to include a higher frequency of meetings, seminars, workshops, and engaging talks delivered by accomplished alumni in the startup realm. This approach seeks to provide students with enhanced guidance, nurturing their aspirations for startups and empowering them to realize their ambitions of securing meaningful employment, aligning with their personal aspirations, familial expectations, and societal aspirations.

Funding details: No funding

Disclosure statement: The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

Authors' contributions: Tam Phuong Pham conceived the idea, designed the project and wrote the manuscript. Tan Nguyen Minh performed and statistical analysis. Minh-Thanh Nguyen, Thai-Huu Nguyen, Thi Hoa Nguyen participated in the design of the study and helped in writing the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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APPENDIX

TABLES

Table 1: The proportion of employment in the economic sectors of the Foreign Trade University (FTU) students

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Self-employment	9	0.7%

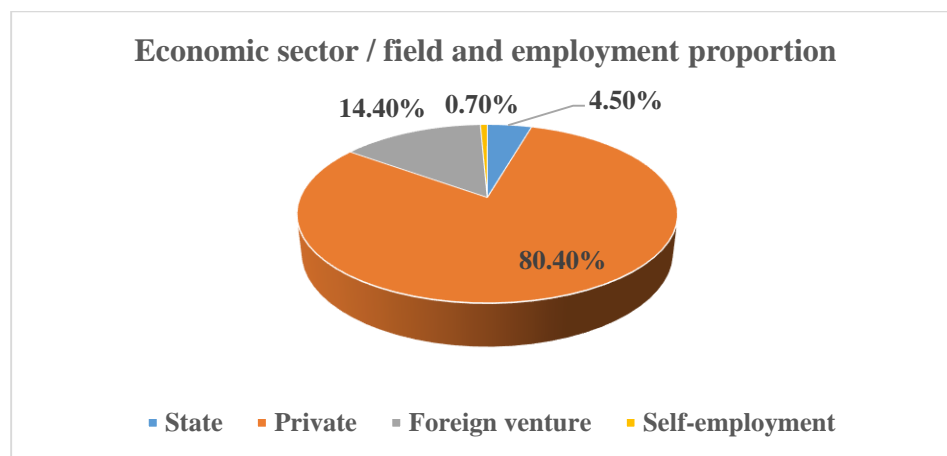
(Source: <https://www.ftu.edu.vn/images%20file/TTVL/TTVL-2017.pdf>)

Table 2: The proportion of employment in the economic sectors of the CTU students

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(Source: Results of research and survey by Can Tho University – Vietnam)

FIGURES

**Figure 1: Employment proportion in the economic sectors of FTU students**

(Source: <https://www.ftu.edu.vn/images%20file/TTVL/TTVL-2017.pdf>)