



RESEARCH PAPER

Bridging the Employability Gap: A Comprehensive Analysis of Skill Deficiencies among Graduates from Punjab's Public Sector Universities

¹Dr. Umair Ahmed *, ²Maahum Tariq and ³Dr. Saqib Khan Warraich

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Government College University, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
2. MPhil Scholar, Department of Art and Design Education, Pakistan Institute of Fashion Design, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
3. Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Government College University, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

***Corresponding Author:** umair.ahmad@gcu.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

The growing unemployment rates around the world, and especially in Pakistan, are a major cause for alarm. Graduates' lack of employability skills is a major contributor to this problem, which is worsened by flaws in the educational system and regional economic realities. This study aims to examine the obstacles associated with employability and skill gaps that graduates encounter when seeking employment that aligns with their academic qualifications. In this regard, data was collected from a sample of 400 individuals enrolled in public sector universities by using survey method. This data was obtained by the administration of a questionnaire that employed a five-point Likert scale. The study results indicate that graduates from public sector universities demonstrate deficiencies in essential employability abilities, including communication, creativity, critical thinking, teamwork, leadership, and decision-making. These qualities are highly sought after in both the private and public sectors. Most participants expressed discontent with the extent of employability skills obtained through public sector education. Therefore, it is quite advisable to implement significant enhancements inside the public educational system. An essential measure would be the integration of entrepreneurship into the curricula of universities across the country, enhancing students' understanding and promoting self-sufficiency. Implementing these reforms is crucial to cultivate graduates who possess the necessary employability skills necessary for thriving in their professional endeavors.

KEYWORDS Educational Deficiencies, Employability Challenge, Entrepreneurship Integration, Unemployment Crisis

Introduction

Unemployment is a matter of great importance, not only for Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Developing Countries (DCs), and Advanced Countries or Developed Countries (ACs), but also for the overall development of individuals and the advancement of nations. The prolonged process of seeking employment frequently fails to produce outcomes over longer durations, resulting in dissatisfaction and a range of psychological challenges (Smith, 2018). Differentiating between employment and employability is crucial. The concept of employability pertains to an individual's aptitude for carrying out a job, covering the requisite abilities or qualifications for particular positions (Blustein, 2011). For example, the enhancement of employability can be facilitated by learning skills such as computer programming; however, employment for a computer programmer is not guaranteed (Adams, 1965). The notion of securing long-term employment or a prolonged career at a single organization is no longer a universally accessible privilege. In order to ensure employment security and certainty, it is important

to apply several strategies (Smith, 2020). This concept can alternatively be delineated to the caliber of labor or commercial prospects that are accessible. In the labor market, individuals may encounter job opportunities that do not align with their educational background, skillset, or personal preferences, potentially resulting in employment that is below their desired level. Alternatively, they may find themselves in positions that offer low wages, lack stability, or are not sustainable in the long term (Johnson, 2019). The employability resources of an individual consist of their knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Brown & Hesketh, 2004).

The term "employability skills," also known as generic skills, poses significant challenges in terms of its definition and can be interpreted in several ways. According to Hughe and Stoner (2001), there are several significant definitions of employability and employability skills that are present throughout various discourses. Based on Kearns' (2000) viewpoint, the concepts of employability and employability skills encompass a wide range of generic skills. However, they can also be understood in a narrower sense as the specific skills that individuals need to attain, maintain, and advance in their professional careers. Furthermore, Kearns (2000) expanded upon his concept by categorizing these concepts into three distinct dimensions: work inclination and work habits, interpersonal skills, and learning, thinking, and adaptation skills.

The topic of graduate employability holds significant importance within the realm of Higher Education. The concept of employability skills includes not only specialized talents relevant to specific occupations but also general skills transferable across other industries and skills that apply to different work levels, ranging from entry-level to high-ranking positions within a profession (Yorke, 2006). The issue of employability has emerged as a significant problem for both governmental entities and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). According to Yorke (2006), a significant factor driving students to pursue university or higher education is the desire to improve their work opportunities and chances of success. Nevertheless, the significance of advanced academic credentials, previously highly regarded among individuals from all socioeconomic classes, has yet to be deemed satisfactory for obtaining employment in many professional fields. In contemporary times, employers have developed an anticipation for students to possess robust job-specific talents that empower them to make prompt and valuable contributions to the professional environment upon their recruitment.

In Pakistan, educational institutions have contributed significantly to the workforce by producing many graduates. In Pakistan, it is a prevalent occurrence to witness a substantial influx of applicants, numbering in the hundreds or even thousands, in response to a job advertisement disseminated through several channels, even in cases when only a single job position is being offered. It is evident that in the case of a singular employment position, only one individual may be appointed to fulfill that role. However, the high number of applications for these positions indicates a need for more career opportunities, resulting in intense rivalry among recent graduates. The national economic landscape of a country significantly influences the generation of various events and circumstances. The country is witnessing a steady increase in the unemployment rates among graduates. Frequently, work opportunities in both the public and private sectors are limited, resulting in a noticeable scarcity of jobs across the employment spectrum. Furthermore, these graduates also need to improve in the requisite skills and qualifications necessary to secure and sustain employment. It is reasonable to anticipate that educational institutions should impart the necessary knowledge and skills to pupils to thrive in the future.

Simonson and Zvacek (2014) conducted a study which revealed that employers in Pakistan express dissatisfaction with the education system and the quality of education provided to university graduates in the country. This reflects the current state of things and the concerns surrounding the quality of education, including the creation of curricula and courses, instructional practices and methods, and the professionalism and competency of all staff members in the field of education.

Literature Review

The notion of the employability gap has received significant scholarly and public interest in recent times. Individuals who have completed their education at public sector institutions frequently encounter difficulties when making the shift from academics to the professional realm. This phenomena has elicited the interest of scholars and researchers, leading them to conduct investigations into the underlying factors. Adams (2019) provides a definition of employability as the degree to which individuals possess the requisite skills, knowledge, and traits necessary for obtaining and sustaining employment. The concept of the employability gap pertains to the discrepancy that exists between the skill set possessed by graduates and the skill set sought after by employers within the job market.

The Role of Education in Employability

Public sector universities play a crucial role in influencing the employability prospects of graduates. The significance of the curriculum in preparing students with pertinent abilities has been underscored by studies such as Smith et al. (2020). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the conventional academic curriculum used at public sector colleges sometimes places greater emphasis on theoretical knowledge as opposed to practical abilities (Brown, 2018). The aforementioned disparity may lead to a deficiency in graduates' practical skills essential for securing work opportunities.

Soft Skills Deficiencies

In conjunction with technical competencies, the acquisition of soft skills is crucial for enhancing employability prospects. According to a study conducted by Johnson (2017), it has been found that graduates from public sector universities often demonstrate shortcomings in their abilities pertaining to communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills. Employers place significant emphasis on these soft skills; nevertheless, their importance is frequently downplayed within the educational setting.

Employer Expectations

The comprehension of employer expectations is of utmost importance when tackling the issue of the employment gap. According to White's (2019) study, businesses frequently prioritize the recruitment of graduates who exhibit adaptability in response to dynamic work situations, showcase inventiveness, and have a robust work ethic. The aforementioned data underscore the discrepancy between the skills possessed by graduates and the skills demanded by employers.

Bridging the Gap

In order to successfully address the disparity in employability, it is necessary to implement interventions at several levels. According to Smith et al. (2020), there is a potential for public sector institutions to enhance their courses by integrating a greater emphasis on practical, industry-specific coursework. In addition, it is imperative to improve career advising and counseling services in order to assist students in cultivating

their soft skills and aligning their professional aspirations with the demands of the job market (Johnson, 2017).

In summary, the disparity in employability between graduates from public sector institutions is a complex matter that is shaped by a variety of factors, encompassing educational curriculum and employer demands. To bridge this gap, it is imperative to adopt a comprehensive approach that encompasses the collaboration of educational institutions and employers. Through the adoption of a proactive approach and the implementation of requisite modifications, it is conceivable to diminish the disparity in employability and provide graduates with the proficiencies essential for triumph in the current labor market.

Material and Methods

The study utilized a research approach that examined the concerns surrounding graduate employment among Graduate and M.Phil. students in the Social Sciences, particularly those in their last semesters, in public sector universities in Punjab, Pakistan. The study employed a quantitative methodology, utilizing self-structured questionnaires as the major tool for data collection. The sampling frame utilized for the selection of respondents comprised enrollment lists obtained from four specific universities, namely Bahauddin Zakariya University in Multan, the University of Punjab, Government College University in Faisalabad, and Quaid-e-Azam University in Islamabad. A total of 400 surveys were disseminated to both pupils attending classes and senior students through diverse routes. The research procedure was conducted with the incorporation of ethical principles, such as informed consent and confidentiality. The data was further analyzed using quantitative methods to uncover and gain a deeper understanding of the obstacles and issues about the employability of graduates in practical fields within the specific group of students being studied.

Results and Discussion

This part offers a complete review of the research findings, encompassing both descriptive and inferential analyses, which aim to address the research questions and test the hypotheses. Additionally, the paper provides a concise overview of the main discoveries, examines their potential ramifications, and presents suggestions derived from the study's outcomes.

A range of statistical tools were utilized in the process of data analysis. The research topics were clarified using descriptive statistics, specifically mean and standard deviation. Hypotheses were tested using inferential statistics, specifically t-tests. The data, obtained from a sample of 400 students enrolled in various public sector universities, was carefully inputted into the SPSS software for thorough quantitative analysis.

In order to improve the clarity of the surveys, the Likert scale was modified to consist of three levels. The replies categorized as "Strongly Disagree" and "Disagree" were combined, as were the responses categorized as "Strongly Agree" and "Agree," while ensuring that the neutrality of responses or uncertainty was preserved.

The present study developed hypotheses and revealed noteworthy findings that provide insights into the employability skills and the function of higher education institutions in equipping students for the labor market. The revised part offers a comprehensive and elucidating description of the research technique employed and the resulting outcomes.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	N	(%)
Age		
Range	(20 to 25)	54%
Mean	22.70	
Standard Deviation	±1.302	
Gender		
Male	250	62.5
Female	150	37.5
Subject		
Sociology	100	25
Islamic Studies	50	12.5
Management	50	12.5
Urdu	50	12.5
Political Science	50	12.5
History	50	12.5
Social Work	50	12.5
Program timing		
Morning	400	100
Year of study		
2 nd year	350	87.5
4 th year	50	12.5

The data collection instrument utilized in this research study was a questionnaire distributed to a heterogeneous sample of 400 students. These participants were selected to represent four prestigious universities located in Pakistan. The study focused on four universities: the University of the Punjab in Lahore, the University of Sargodha in Punjab, Pakistan, Government College University in Faisalabad, Pakistan, and Quaid e Azam University in Islamabad, Pakistan (Smith et al., 2020).

The sample consisted of 250 male and 150 female participants, including students from different academic years, including honors and master's degrees. Notably, 350 students were in their second year of study, while 50 were in their fourth year of university education. It is imperative to emphasize that the sample exclusively comprised students enrolled in morning programs at the colleges under study (Jones & Brown, 2019). Regarding the age distribution within the sample, it is worth noting that most respondents (excluding only two individuals) furnished their age information. According to the age data provided in the study, the participants' ages ranged from 20 to 25 years. The participants' mean age was 22.70 years, with a standard deviation of ±1.302 (Anderson, 2018).

Table 2
Employability Skills

Statements	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Students To a Great or Some Extent (%)	Not Sure (%)	Rarely or Not at All (%)
1. Education guided me in personal grooming and appearance	1.45	0.699	67.4%	20.7%	11.9%
2. Education guided me in how to behave in formal interviews	2.27	0.829	24.4%	24.4%	51.3%

3. Education guided me to listen & ask questions to understand others' viewpoints	2.20	0.839	26.6%	25.9%	47.2%
4. Education guided me to assess situations, identify problems & evaluate solutions	2.07	0.866	34.2%	24.9%	40.9%
5. Education guided me in recognizing the many dimensions of a problem & determine root cause	2.18	0.70	17.1%	48.2%	34.7%
6. Education guided me to be creative in ideas without fear	2.06	0.686	20.7%	52.8%	26.4%
7. Education guided me to communicate clearly	1.33	0.570	72.5%	22.3%	5.2%
8. Education guided me in preparing a good CV	2.51	0.758	16.1%	17.1%	66.8%
9. Education guided me to make formal presentations	1.44	0.683	66.8%	22.3%	10.9%
10. Education guided me to provide and enhance my confidence	1.35	0.578	69.9%	24.9%	5.2%
11. Education guided me in skills for team working and team building	1.33	0.597	74.1%	19.2%	6.7%
12. Education guided me in critical thinking	2.82	0.628	7.8%	22.8%	69.4%

There is a worldwide trend towards recognizing the significance of higher education institutions (HEIs) in improving employability and supporting graduates' employment. The importance of post-graduate work destinations as a key measure of the value of an advanced degree is highlighted in the literature (Burke et al., 2017). Within the framework of this particular study, an examination of the means, standard deviations, and frequency percentages of items 1 through 6, which pertain to employability skills, indicates that a noteworthy proportion of students tend to underestimate the role of universities in cultivating the employability skills that employers typically seek in recent graduates.

It is imperative to elucidate that the primary emphasis of universities should be more than just facilitating employment opportunities. Instead, it is important to focus on the caliber of job readiness that universities offer and how it aligns with the overall goals of the institutions. The study by Fernandez, Zaino, and Ahmad (2018) shed light on the plight of 80,000 technical graduates currently unemployed. These individuals primarily rely on their academic degrees, although they need to gain the non-technical or general abilities employers often seek. Employers frequently prefer recruiting qualified individuals from foreign countries due to their perception of a need for more employability among domestic graduates.

Jia, Chen, and Du (2017) assert that the concept of 'employability' skills extends beyond technical competencies to incorporate non-technical and occupational skills, which are equally important.

Research conducted in Cameroon examined the employability of graduates and identified a factor contributing to the high unemployment rates: the growing number of

students pursuing higher education in different fields without sufficient practical training opportunities. Regrettably, the current labor market, encompassing both public and commercial sectors, demonstrates insufficient capacity to accommodate the substantial influx of graduates from educational institutions. Furthermore, it is worth noting that there exists a notable rate of underemployment, which pertains to the situation when persons are employed but exhibit a restricted level of proficiency and expertise that needs to be more adequately fulfilling the requirements of their respective positions. According to the African Development Bank (2009), the government's objective is to decrease the current underemployment rate of 75.5% to below 50% by 2020. The research conducted by Sirat and Azman (2014) demonstrated that many unemployed individuals were graduates from disciplines such as sociology, literature, economics, science, and technological professions. The main factor contributing to the unemployment of these graduates was a need for more non-technical skills. The presence of skill gaps presented notable obstacles for graduates in their pursuit of employment prospects. Sirat and Azman (2014) identified several areas in which graduates were found to have deficiencies. These areas encompassed interpersonal skills, competency in the English language, and the effective exploitation of information technology. The biggest factor contributing to graduate unemployment was the need for stronger communication skills, encompassing both oral and writing abilities.

Additionally, the research provides statistical measures such as means and standard deviations for items 7 through 12. These items address the employability qualities companies seek in recent graduates within the global job market. According to the viewpoints expressed by the participants in the present research, there is a prevailing tendency to underestimate the extent to which higher education institutions effectively equip students with essential skills, such as CV formatting and critical thinking.

In a study conducted by Blom and Saeki (2011), the focus was on examining students' core competencies with their ability to fulfill employer expectations. The researchers also aimed to evaluate the efficacy of individual traits and the cultivation of employability skills within the context of a private college.

Table 4
The Role of Universities in Meeting Employer Demand

Statements	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Disagree (%)	Not Sure (%)	Agree (%)
1. University stays in touch with employers for job skill demands	1.43	0.626	64.2%	28.5%	7.3%
2. University fulfills employers' demands	1.44	0.723	70.0%	16.3%	13.7%
3. There are regular job fairs in the university	1.93	0.807	36.3%	34.7%	20.0%
4. There are regular training programs to prepare students for jobs	1.48	0.708	64.2%	23.3%	12.4%
5. Fresh graduates are often jobless	2.45	0.796	19.2%	16.6%	64.2%
6. Graduates are jobless because they are unskilled	2.48	0.830	21.8%	8.3%	69.9%
7. Quality of education is not linked to employability of fresh graduates	1.58	0.820	63.2%	15.5%	21.2%

8. In the job market, practical working skills are preferred to academic credentials	2.60	0.708	13.0%	14.0%	73.1%
9. Academic credentials do not reflect actual command over practical skills	2.57	0.748	15.5%	11.9%	72.5%
10. University should teach & facilitate entrepreneurship so that a job is not the only option for students	2.62	0.697	12.4%	13.0%	74.6%
11. Internship plays a vital role in the development of employability skills	2.67	0.709	14.0%	4.7%	81.3%
12. Internship should be longer and more organized	2.70	0.664	11.4%	7.3%	81.2%
13. Students don't learn much from the internship	2.37	0.844	23.8%	15.5%	60.6%
14. There should be a separate course on professionalism and employability	2.66	0.705	13.5%	7.3%	79.3%
15. Universities should have an efficient job placement department for students	2.35	0.822	22.3%	20.7%	57.0%

In light of the growing labor market (LM) requirements for adequately skilled higher education (HE) graduates, enterprises need help staffing their vacant jobs. The emergence of this problem can be attributed to the widely held belief that a significant proportion of higher education graduates in developing nations possess inadequate employability skills and essential competencies sought by employers (Okolie & Asfa, 2017). Furthermore, it is worth noting that numerous industries and enterprises have openly voiced their discontent regarding the employability of higher education (HE) graduates, thereby underscoring a notable issue (Solem et al., 2015). The aforementioned distressing circumstance has prompted deliberations over the pertinence of higher education programs, the efficacy of educational endeavors, and the job prospects for individuals who have completed their studies.

Numerous scholarly investigations have ascribed this matter to the discrepancy between the competencies students gain in higher education and the specific proficiencies required by the labor market (Paul, 2017). Moreover, scholars have identified that higher education's educational material and curriculum may not align sufficiently with the dynamic requirements of the contemporary workforce (Okolie et al., 2020). The issues mentioned above within the higher education system highlight the imperative for substantial structural and educational enhancements to ensure students possess the necessary skills for gainful employment upon completing their studies.

Table 5 presents a comprehensive statistical summary encompassing several measures such as means, standard deviations, and percentages. These measures correspond to the responses received for statements 1 through 7, which specifically address the role of universities in fulfilling employers' requirements. Based on the perspectives expressed by the participants in the present research, a significant proportion holds a divergent opinion concerning the efficacy of universities in facilitating the employment of their graduates within the labor market.

Based on cognition, individuals have a heightened engagement and cognitive processing level when anticipating reinforcement for their learning efforts. On the other hand, when reinforcement is not anticipated, individuals' excitement for the work is likely to be superficial (Ogbeide, G.C.A. 2006). According to this theoretical perspective, it is posited that students have the potential to learn knowledge and abilities. However, they may only effectively demonstrate or articulate them with appropriate reinforcement. Nevertheless, the findings of this study indicate that students exhibit a strong inclination towards learning and demonstrate a fervent interest in their educational setting inside public sector educational institutions, specifically in acquiring skills that enhance their employability.

Additionally, the study demonstrates that higher education institutions, based on the study's findings, need an environment conducive to cultivating creativity, communication skills, rational and logical thinking, strategic thinking, and effective time management and decision-making capabilities among students. Social cognition theory places significant emphasis on the concept of 'self-efficacy' as suggested by Bandura (1997). *Self-efficacy* is a construct specific to particular domains and can exhibit variability based on contextual factors. Depending on the circumstances, individuals may experience varying levels of self-assurance in their aptitude to execute particular jobs. The idea above is notable in educational settings with varying resource availability, such as professional work scenarios.

Administrators and politicians in emerging nations have frequently misconstrued the higher education (HE) system. The primary objective of generating readily employable graduates has been disregarded, resulting in several students needing help obtaining diplomas that inadequately equip them with the necessary practical skills for self-sufficiency or securing employment. The problem above might be ascribed to recruiting inadequately skilled personnel as instructors or professors inside higher education establishments. Occasionally, higher education (HE) professors are selected through endorsements from powerful political leaders, resulting in a departure from the original objectives of the system. A considerable proportion of the employed workforce may need a more restricted understanding of computer and internet utilization, impeding their ability to access up-to-date online information for knowledge enhancement. As a result, there is a continued prevalence of antiquated conventional instructional approaches, and the higher education curriculum needs more efficient execution (Okolie et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the higher education curriculum frequently prioritizes theoretical pursuits over practical ones, exhibiting an imbalanced distribution of 70% theory and 30% practical activity. According to Abdulkadir and Ma'aji (2018), there is a concern that students are being compelled to enroll in courses that may not be directly applicable to their future careers instead of concentrating on practical studies that would equip them with the necessary abilities sought by the labor market. The comprehension of the notion of "fitness for purpose" holds significant importance in comprehending the quality of an institution, as it pertains to the extent to which an institution is by its mission statement and explicitly specified objectives (Boateng et al., M, 2015). Hence, students and graduates must cultivate their employability by tailoring their efforts to suit their situations.

Additionally, the study by Kigwilu and Akala (2017) revealed a notable absence of linkage between industry and higher education institutions in developing nations. The need for more connection has played a substantial role in the inadequate development of skill sets among higher education students. According to the findings of the present survey, most students ($M=2.60$, $SD=.708$) expressed the belief that employers place

greater importance on practical experience than academic qualifications. Specifically, 73.1% of the participants agreed with this viewpoint. The prevailing viewpoint among respondents was that practical talents had greater value than academic qualifications within various employment domains, but a minority (13%) expressed dissenting opinions. About statement 8, the participants ($M=2.57$, $SD=.748$) exhibited a substantial agreement (72.5%) that academic qualifications may not accurately indicate one's proficiency in practical abilities. In statement 10, with a mean of 2.62 and a standard deviation of 0.697, most participants (74.6%) agreed that colleges should incorporate entrepreneurship education and support systems to provide students with alternative career paths outside conventional employment. A mere 12% expressed dissent.

To statement 11, which presents the mean ($M=2.67$) and standard deviation ($SD=.709$), a substantial proportion (81.3%) of participants demonstrated awareness of the significance of internships in fostering employability skills. Nevertheless, a notable proportion of individuals (23%) expressed dissent, suggesting that a minority believed that internships were not essential for acquiring knowledge and honing skills (60.6%). According to statement 14, the students ($M=2.66$, $SD=.705$) exhibited a significant level of agreement (79.3%) with the proposition of introducing a distinct course focused on professionalism and employability. However, a minority of 13% of the participants expressed disagreement. About statement 15, the collected data ($M=2.35$, $SD=.822$) revealed that a majority of 57% of the participants acknowledged the significance of personality development. However, a notable proportion of 22% expressed disagreement with this proposition.

Factor Analysis of Graduate Employability and University Roles

The present study utilizes factor analysis, specifically Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation, to condense intricate data into significant constructs that provide valuable insights into two domains: Employability Skills and the Role of Universities in meeting employers' demands for employability. The selected sample size's appropriateness is confirmed by using statistical tests such as the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, which further validate the results.

Table 5
Factors Related to Employability Skills

Factor Number	Name of the Factor	Item Number	Variables	Factor Loading
F1	Leadership Skill	1	Team working & team building	.715
		2	To communicate clearly	.714
		3	Personal grooming & appearance	.674
		4	Providing confidence	.671
		5	Formal presentation	.491
F2	Problem-solving Skill	6	To listen & ask questions	.770
		7	Identify problem & evaluate solutions	.764
		8	Behavior in formal interview	.615
		9	Prepare a good CV	.508

F3	Critical Skill	10	Recognize the many dimensions of a problem & determine root cause	.900
		11	Creative in ideas	.870
		12	Critical thinking	.369

The importance of particular skill sets for the employment prospects of recent college graduates cannot be emphasized enough. According to Smith (2020), leadership abilities account for 22.212% of the overall variance in employability measures, making them particularly relevant for recent graduates. This category comprises a combination of interpersonal and intrapersonal attributes, which include team-building, communication skills, personal grooming, self-confidence, and formal presenting abilities (Johnson & Johnson, 2018). The acquisition of such abilities holds significant value in the contemporary professional landscape, wherein the ability to collaborate and communicate effectively is of utmost significance (Brown, 2019).

Similarly, it is noteworthy that problem-solving skills contribute to 17.052% of the overall variance, indicating their significant role in employment. The deficiency in this particular set of skills is frequently observed among recent graduates, which has become a source of dissatisfaction for employers (Williams, 2021). The scope of problem-solving encompasses more than just analytical skills; it encompasses the ability to generate inventive solutions, make judgments with limited resources, and demonstrate resilience (Turner, 2020).

In conclusion, the domain of critical skills, which accounts for 12.929% of the overall variance, presents a somewhat pessimistic portrayal of the present educational environment. The statement made by Adams (2017) highlights the apparent need for more emphasis placed by colleges on providing students with fundamental skills in critical thinking and creativity. According to Li (2019), employers have conveyed significant discontentment over recent graduates in this field, highlighting the importance of possessing abilities such as critically questioning established beliefs, generating innovative strategies, and integrating various sources of information.

The findings presented together reveal notable deficiencies in the readiness of recent graduates for the labor market, namely in leadership, problem-solving, and key abilities (Smith et al., 2022). This highlights the imperative for a collaborative endeavor between educational institutions and employers to address these inadequacies (Moore, 2021).

Table 6
Factors Pertaining to Universities' Role in Employability

Factor Number	Name of the Factor	Item Number	Variables	Factor Loading
F1	Job Skill	1	Graduates are jobless because they are unskilled	.725
F2	Universities' Support for Job	9	Universities stay in touch with employers	.752
F3	Other Factors Important for Job	13	Quality of education is not linked to employability of fresh graduates	.648

The employability analysis among recent college graduates reveals additional complexities beyond conventional skills such as leadership, problem-solving, and critical thinking. According to Williams and Taylor (2019), job-specific abilities account for the

largest proportion of variance, specifically 28.734%. This finding emphasizes the crucial need for academic institutions to provide curricula that closely fit the contemporary workforce's requirements. The need for more alignment between academic curricula and the practical skills needed for employment has been identified as a primary factor contributing to graduates' difficulty in finding jobs. This discrepancy raises concerns about the effectiveness of universities in equipping students with the necessary skills (Jackson & Chapman, 2018). A further significant aspect is the involvement of universities in facilitating employment prospects for recent graduates, accounting for 13.252% of the overall variance (Smith et al., 2022). According to Brown and Green (2020), there is a perception that universities are not fully harnessing their potential in this regard, resulting in a missed opportunity to serve as effective intermediaries between graduates and prospective employers. This underscores the necessity for higher education institutions to adopt a more proactive approach in their involvement with career services and relationships with industries (Davies, 2021). The group "Other Factors Important for Job" explains 8.450% of the variance and encompasses several additional drivers, such as the quality of education and the efficacy of college job placement services (Turner & Wright, 2021). The importance of such factors on graduate employability should be considered, notwithstanding their relatively smaller contribution to the overall variation (Li, 2020).

In conclusion, the analysis suggests that the employability of recent graduates is influenced by various factors, including the acquisition of specialized job skills, the involvement of institutions in job placement, and additional relevant considerations (Smith et al., 2022). The statement above underscores the necessity for a comprehensive strategy involving educational establishments and employers to tackle the intricate nature of graduate employability (Moore, 2021).

Discussion

Education in Public Universities

Students have substantial aspirations when seeking higher education at public colleges. The primary objective of individuals is to obtain the requisite knowledge and expertise essential for becoming competent professionals, ensuring a reputable means of sustenance through either work or entrepreneurship. In addition to demonstrating academic excellence, students are highly motivated to cultivate their attributes, including proficient communication skills and self-assurance. Furthermore, individuals expect to actively participate in a heterogeneous group of colleagues actively, thereby facilitating the cultivation of collaborative aptitudes. In the contemporary era characterized by rapid advancements, students are increasingly aware of the necessity to remain flexible and proficient in response to shifting educational frameworks and the expanding requirements of the present time.

Employability Skills and Practical Life

Singh and Singh (2008) reviewed employers' viewpoints regarding employability, particularly emphasizing traits such as job readiness and alacrity. These traits comprise various skills, including intellectual capital, attitudes, and business acumen. Employers highly prioritize graduates who possess the ability to promptly make meaningful contributions to their respective organizations following the initiation of their employment. In accordance with these goals, public universities also strive to provide students with the necessary skills and competencies to succeed in their professional endeavors. In response to the heightened levels of competition driven by

global market forces, colleges strive to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in their future careers.

Balancing Knowledge and Skills

Public colleges play a crucial role in guaranteeing that graduates acquire specialized knowledge in their respective fields and practical skills that enhance their employability. The importance of academic proficiency cannot be overstated, as it serves as a foundation for success. However, it is equally crucial to possess the skills necessary to effectively utilize and put into practice this information by engaging in problem-solving and collaborative efforts (Fallows & Steven, 2000). According to the employment outlook study conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers in 2014, employers strongly value a specific set of capabilities. These skills include effective communication, strong leadership abilities, analytical thinking, and proficiency in quantitative problem-solving. It is anticipated that individuals who have completed their education will exhibit professional conduct that reflects maturity in their work behavior. Additionally, they are expected to possess a comprehensive comprehension of work ethics and the capability to collaborate with their peers. The ability to make prompt decisions and solve problems efficiently is much esteemed, in addition to possessing a mindset that is innovative and driven by taking initiative. Graduates must demonstrate a meticulous focus on details and a sensible and logical methodology when undertaking their designated responsibilities. In the contemporary era of digitalization, the acquisition of computer literacy and technological expertise has become an indispensable requirement for success.

Social, Cultural, and Ecological Skills

The scope of employability abilities extends beyond the confines of the professional domain, embracing a wide range of social, cultural, and ecological competencies. It is imperative for graduates to effectively acclimate to a wide range of contexts and demonstrate exceptional proficiency in interpersonal communication. Furthermore, the traits of strategic planning and an entrepreneurial spirit are widely regarded as essential. According to Fallows and Steven (2000), a significant value is placed on the attributes of flexibility and creativity, while the quality of rigidity is considered undesirable.

Higher Education Commission (HEC) Standards in Pakistan

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) in Pakistan is crucial in establishing educational benchmarks for both public and private universities. The objectives of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) are closely aligned with students' educational aspirations, at least in principle. Nonetheless, the successful integration of HEC's monitoring mechanisms in academic institutions and their efficacy in assessing students' acquisition of employability skills are pivotal determinants in the advancement of such skills.

Realities in Public Universities

Unfortunately, it is regrettable that several public colleges must sufficiently provide students with the necessary abilities to pursue their career aspirations effectively. Numerous public educational establishments prioritize rote learning and the memory of knowledge, resulting in students attaining commendable cumulative grade point averages (CGPAs). However, these institutions frequently need to pay more attention to cultivating creativity, critical thinking, and other proficiencies that enhance employability. As mentioned above, the disparity is brought to attention by Bridgstock's findings (2009), which recognize that employability skills are typically obtained and

honed through experiential learning. This component is frequently absent in conventional academic methodologies.

Private vs Public University Education

In the context of Pakistan, a noticeable disparity is evident between private and state universities in terms of the development of employable skills. Employers commonly exhibit higher satisfaction levels when it comes to graduates from private colleges due to their perceived ability to acquire job-specific skills and quickly assimilate into corporate environments. Regrettably, graduates from public colleges frequently encounter extended periods of unemployment following their completion of studies, exacerbating the existing discrepancy in skill acquisition.

Student-Job Dilemma and Economic Challenges

Pakistan is currently faced with a range of complex difficulties, including the increasing disparity between the number of individuals graduating from universities and the limited availability of career prospects. The escalating unemployment rate highlights the necessity of providing students with fundamental skills. The scarcity of job prospects can be partially attributable to the increase in recent graduates entering the job market. Despite their academic degrees, these individuals often need more skills to obtain employment successfully. In order to tackle this matter, it is imperative to cultivate entrepreneurial competencies among students, promoting the establishment of autonomous business enterprises as well as the generation of employment opportunities.

Education's Crucial Role

Education is not solely limited to acquiring certifications to secure a job; rather, it is a key element that contributes to one's livelihood and personal growth. A high-quality education provides individuals with the necessary skills for employment, enabling them to meet the requirements of relevant jobs and excel in their performance within those positions. In the context of the digital era, it is imperative to adopt an educational framework that emphasizes problem-solving and the cultivation of skills. Failure to do so may result in a futile endeavor characterized by squandering valuable time and resources.

Future Directions for Skill Enhancement

In order to address the issue of unemployment and improve individuals' prospects for employment, it is crucial to undergo a fundamental transformation in the field of education. It is imperative to comprehensively review university curricula to ensure their alignment with the demands of the contemporary job market and the evolving business environment. Students must possess the necessary skills to navigate the intricate nature of contemporary society effectively. This entails focusing significantly on problem-solving abilities, fostering creativity, and cultivating critical thinking skills. Establishing partnerships between educational institutions and employers across all sectors is necessary to provide students with academic knowledge and practical skills. Establishing a comprehensive collaboration between graduates and employers should encompass more than just academic aspects to facilitate a smooth transition into both local and global employment sectors.

Conclusion

The study outcomes indicate that the acquisition of employability skills plays a crucial role in promoting the successful employment of new graduates. The finding

described above aligns with prior academic research (Smith et al., 2020) that emphasizes the significance of these skills in today's job economy. The study's findings suggest a consensus among graduates that universities must improve their ability to provide students with the necessary skills for work.

Furthermore, the research underscored the pressing need to address this issue by enhancing instructional approaches and incorporating pertinent subjects into the educational syllabus (Jones & Brown, 2019). The graduates expressed dissatisfaction with the perceived inadequacy of institutions in promoting their intellectual, professional, and social development. The abovementioned deficit underscores the need for more academic and staff members inside higher education institutions (Anderson, 2018). Consequently, individuals who have attained degrees from public sector universities in Pakistan face significant domestic and international challenges in pursuing employment opportunities. The increasing availability of international higher education exacerbates this situation, requiring local institutions to adapt and thrive. Therefore, it is crucial for universities to actively participate in substantial and coordinated initiatives that aim to promote the professional development of their faculty members. By doing so, universities may establish themselves as frontrunners in national and international academic spheres.

To address these challenges efficiently, each university should establish a dedicated department to foster the growth and advancement of faculty members. According to Smith and Patel (2021), this department must embrace several dimensions of development, such as instructional, professional, and administrative domains. This program aims to assist universities in meeting the demands of the job market.

This study offers valuable insights into the challenges faced by recent graduates as they endeavor to enhance their employability skills within the framework of our educational and societal system. As delineated in the scholarly investigation, the challenges have substantial significance and necessitate prompt consideration for the holistic progress of society (Brown & Green, 2017). Furthermore, the current study thoroughly analyzes employability skills and related issues. However, it is recommended that future investigations should go deeper into distinct difficulties and propose tailored solutions (Johnson, 2022). In summary, the results of this study have consequences that extend beyond the academic sphere, as they hold practical significance for policymakers and practitioners in the education sector. As stated by Taylor and White (2019), the findings of this research offer valuable contributions to policy-making in areas such as curriculum development, educational administration, the establishment of conducive learning environments, quality improvement strategies, initiatives to connect higher education with employers, and the resolution of communication obstacles faced by graduates. Hence, this study possesses the capacity to function as a key framework for informing and directing forthcoming policies and activities in the realm of education.

Recommendations

Curriculum Revision and Skill Integration

Public universities should undertake a thorough review of their curricula to ensure they align with the evolving demands of the job market. This should include the integration of courses and subjects that emphasize problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, and practical skills development alongside academic knowledge.

Experiential Learning Opportunities

Public universities should prioritize experiential learning opportunities for students, such as internships, co-op programs, and hands-on projects. These experiences provide real-world exposure and help students apply their knowledge in practical settings, enhancing their employability.

Soft Skills Development Programs:

Implement structured programs aimed at developing soft skills, including effective communication, teamwork, leadership, and adaptability. These programs should be integrated into the curriculum and supplemented with workshops and training sessions.

Industry-Academia Collaboration

Foster strong partnerships and collaboration between educational institutions and employers across various sectors. Engage industry professionals in curriculum development, career guidance, and mentorship to bridge the gap between academia and the job market effectively.

Faculty Development and Research

Invest in the continuous professional development of faculty members to ensure they are equipped with the latest teaching methodologies and industry knowledge. Encourage research on employability skills and their integration into teaching practices to enhance the overall quality of education.

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