UNIVERSITY GRADUATES UNEMPLOYMENT IN PAKISTAN: EMPLOYABILITY STRATEGY FOR THE UNIVERSITY GRADUATES

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ABSTRACT

The research paper has focused its study on analyzing the situation of university graduate unemployment situation in Pakistan. It has discussed the causes of the unemployment of university graduates. The study has tried to answer following research questions;

- 1. What are the main causes of increasing unemployment of the university graduates?
- 2. How the employability created for the University Graduates?

The research study has focused its scope on the enhancing the employment skills and knowledge of the university graduates for obtaining the jobs in the private and public organizations. The study has thoroughly studied the employability programs introduced by three Asian countries such as Singapore, Australia and Malaysia. These countries have been very much successful in enhancing the employability of university graduates in seeking the employment in the public and private organizations. Keeping in view the critical situation of the unemployment status of university students graduated each year, the author has proposed Model of employability that aimed to reduce the unemployment amongst the university graduates with the aim of preserving their abilities and potential for the human resource development of the country. In the last, the study has presented the proposed implementation framework for the employability of university graduates.

 $\textbf{\textit{Keywords}: } \textit{Unemployment, University Graduate Employability, Employability Models, Implementation Framework.}$

Introduction:

There are many definitions of Graduate employability. The Higher Education Academy of the Australia has used following definition of the Employability. It is deemed more accurate descriptions of employability of what graduate aspire to have (CWA, 2007).

"Employability is a set of achievements, such as skills, understanding and personal attributes that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be a successful in their chosen occupation which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy".

The concept of Employability has been applied in different context to both work and those seeking work. According to the definition given by the Confederation of British Industry; "Employability is the possession of qualities and competencies by an individual required to meet the changing needs of employers and customers and thereby help to realize his or her aspirations and potential in work (CBI, 1999).

Similarly, UK Government has arrived at definition of Employability where Individual skills are at the centre of the concept. According to the description of UK Government:

"Employability means the development of skills and adaptable workplaces in which all those capable of work are encouraged to develop the skills, knowledge, technology and adaptability to enable them to enter and remain in employment throughout their working lives (HM Treasury, 1997).

Describing the distinction between employment and employability is that, the employment is synonymous with having a job, whereas employability is associated with possessing the capabilities that facilitate and enhance employment opportunities. It is very important that a university graduate should be equipped with skills that maximize their potential for a successful career. In the employability, a degree alone is not enough. Employers are looking for more than just technical skills and knowledge of

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degree discipline. The employers value skills such as communication, team working and problem solving. Aside from generic employability skills, the employers are increasingly going global. Hence, they need graduates who have experience of different countries and culture and are able to work with overseas customers and clients.

In Pakistani universities, employers and professional bodies are agreed that there is a need of developing professionals who should be equipped with skills and knowledge to face the challenges of increased competition at national and international level. These professionals should be responsive to economic, social, cultural, technical and environmental changes and can work with flexibility and intelligently across business contexts. (Ahmed, 2012)

Keeping in view the competition at National and international level, the Pakistan need to acquire new graduates who understand their part to play in building their organizations, specially governmental organizations and have practical skills to work effectively in their roles. The real combination in the workplace means more than having the necessary technical skills. It means engaging with the organization and its goals, understanding the dynamics of the workplaces and taking up a job role with an informed knowledge of all its requirements. The graduate workforce is a key part of talent pool, a public and business organizations draw from to further these objectives. The universities are the platform where to produce graduates with skills that are highly regarded by employers to contribute to the prosperity of country (Amjad, 2006).

Literature Review:

Graduate unemployment is unemployment among the people with an academic degree. Unemployment is one of the critical problems of Pakistan. Due to high unemployment ratio, human resources are wasted and people's incomes are depressed. During such periods, economics distress also spills over to affect people's emotions and family lives. The socio economics system of Pakistan and institutions has failed to provide employment to the increasing university graduates graduated each year from the universities in various disciplines. In 2008, about 3 million people are estimated as unemployed (Ahmed, 2004). In Pakistan, the importance of Human resource management as a full functional department has been ignored not only in the business organization but also in the public organization; moreover, the role of Human Resource Management (HRM) is still evolving tremendously around the world in small and large organizations (Khan et al., 2011). The public organizations are still adopting traditional administrative functions in firing, hiring and training of the employees. The committees, boards or heads of the organizations carry out the hiring, firing, training and promotion of the employees (Amjad, 2004).

In Pakistan, Human Resource Management is mainly practiced by the only Multinational companies. There are

some enlightened local companies who are practicing some Human resource function intermingled with administrative function but not well defined. There is increasingly trend of outsourcing the Human Resource functions, like recruitment and selection, training and development. In many organizations western models are applied irrespective of cultural, infrastructure differences and size of the organization (Amjad, 2004).

Employment situation in Pakistan:

Several thousands of students are graduated every year from the different universities of Pakistan. In the past, various governments have initiated employment policies but no policies have been able to provide substantial result with the growing number unemployment problem at the national level. Most of the employments are being provided on the political affiliation basis.

In the public sector employment, the merit does not come at the top while considering a candidate for employment. Most of the jobs are filled through personal connections of the candidates within the organization thus passing over the quality of recruitment. Pakistan is a high context society and tribal and ethnic fraternities among people are influential enough to weaken the system of merit in recruitment. Another interesting factor to secure a job is the Alumni Network of certain institutes. For example, in Karachi, an informal but very influential network of graduates of IBA (Institute of Business Administration) is in operation that tends to prioritize graduates of this institute for employment. Similarly, Alumni Networks of Lahore University of Management Sciences and the Punjab University are operating in Lahore (Ahmed, 2012). In the private organizations, there is a tendency in the line managers requesting for an employee is to use a mix of gut and objectivity to select a suitable employee. Traditionally the line managers are not ready to accept the idea that a systematic and scientific procedure is more reliable to help them find a suitable staff member. They normally act in order to judge a candidate by evaluating his fitness in the so-called organizational culture and the corporate strategy. They term the formal and standard HR selection and recruitment practices as bureaucratic, clerical and a waste of paper and time (Amjad, 2006).

In a country of 180 million people, one in 20 Pakistanis are enrolled in higher education - about 5% for males and less than 3% for females. The Pakistan government plans to increase this to 10% by 2015 and subsequently to 15% by 2020. The nation's universities produce some 1.2 million graduates each year and the government has announced \$1 billion spending plan over the next decade to build six state-of-the-art science and engineering universities. The Higher Education Commission will administer this scheme (FBS, 2008).

The following table shows some facts about the projected unemployment in country.

Table 1: Projected Unemployment statistics

Year	Unemployment rate	Rank	Percent Change	Date of Information
2003	7.80 %	119		2002 est.
2004	7.70 %	122	-1.28 %	2003 est.
2005	8.30 %	75	7.79 %	2004 est.
2006	6.60 %	65	-20.48 %	2005 est.
2007	6.50 %	72	-1.52 %	2006 est.
2008	5.60 %	71	-13.85 %	2007 est.
2009	7.40 %	92	32.14 %	2008 est.

The above table shows the unemployment facts from 2003 to 2009. The data in the tables demonstrates that during 2003 and 2004, the unemployment rate was almost same but in 2005 it has increased from 7.70% to 8.30%. In 2006 and 2008 it has dropped to 6.60% and 5.50%, where as in 2009, it has again increased to 7.40%.

Unemployment Rate:

In the December, 2009, the unemployment rate was reported at 5.50 percent. And from 1990-2009, the unemployment rate averaged at 8.27. The following chart shows the unemployment rate of Pakistan from 2000 to 2010 (FBS, 2012).



Graph-1: Yearly Unemployment Rate in Pakistan **Source**: FBS, 2102.

Following are major issues that have contributed towards unemployment in Pakistan.

- 1. Firstly, the instability of the government and each government deploying its own people in all major organizations.
- 2. The bribery menace leaves little space for educated people with good degrees.
- 3. The jobs are not offered on the basis of experience and qualification but rather to please higher officials by offering it to their relatives or to the people they recommend.
- 4. The graduate with MBA degrees do not want to take just any meager job, they wait and hope for a better one that suits their educational qualifications. This results in an increase in the unemployment rate. Pakistan has reached a critical stage and joblessness is increasing daily.
- 5. Moreover, downsizing in many government offices and within the private sector have exacerbated the problem.

In such situation, the common students graduated from the universities are not sure that after completion of their degrees they could be able to get jobs on the basis of their qualification and potential. Currently due to economic crisis and engaged in war against terrorism in the country has created alarming situation of unemployment.

The research study undertaken has proved that the unemployment is devastating phenomena in the lives of the national of the country and is considered definite indicators of institutional ineffectiveness and inefficiency. It was found that an increasing number of graduates were in an unemployed occupational situation. However, the incidence of underemployment among the graduates is much higher in the country. The graduate unemployment is due to a several factors raising unemployment and employment opportunities available to them. If the only benefit of a degree is improved workplace productivity, this represents a wasteful investment of scarce resources. The concept of employability has brought fruitful results in reducing the unemployment in the Asian countries like Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and European countries like UK and had generated sustainable human resource capital for the country (Harvey, 1999)

Objectives of Research:

The research study is aimed at enhancing the employability of the university graduate to improve their professional skills and knowledge that makes them capable for obtaining the employment in the public and as well in private organizations. The objective of this research study is to explore the Model of Employability for the university graduates in Pakistan that help in reducing the increasing unemployment amongst the university graduates.

Research Methodology:

This research study is based on the secondary sources of data. The data has been collected from annual reports issued by the ministry of human resource, academic journal of human resource management, government website and higher education commission and related material from the various government organizations under study. The research study has analyzed employability programs adopted by the three various countries, i.e. Australian, Singaporean and Malaysian governments and has explored the viable framework for the Employability of University Graduates in the country.

Employability Models used in Australia, Malaysia and Singapore:

Australian Graduate Employability Model:

The Australian chamber of commerce, Industry, and Business Council of Australia have developed employability skill framework. This framework provides an excellent starting for any discussion of employability skills in higher education. The Employability framework presents the findings of extensive research conducted by the Business Council of Australia (BCA) and Chamber of

Commerce and Industry Australia (ACCI) in 2001. The research report indentified personal attributes of employees required in this century and as well as eight employability skills (DEST 2002a).

'Employability skills are defined as skills required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise so as to achieve one's potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions (DEST 2002a). These skills are deemed to have relevance to both entrylevel and established employees. It was also recognized that skill presented in the framework would be prioritized and adopted to suit various job-roles. The research has indentified following eight skills;

- 1. Communication skills that contribute to productive and harmonious relations between employees and customers.
- 2. Teamwork skills that contribute to productive working relationships and outcomes
- 3. Problem solving skills that contribute to productive outcomes.
- 4. Self-management skills that contribute to employee satisfaction and growth.
- 5. Planning and organization skills that contribute to long-term and short-term strategic planning.
- Technology skills that contribute to effective execution of tasks.
- 7. Life-long learning skills that contribute to ongoing improvement and expansion in employee and company operations and outcomes.
- 8. Initiatives and enterprise skills that contribute to innovative outcomes.

The universities in Australia are taking many different approaches to ensure that their graduates are prepared to meet their professional responsibilities, and they can start their careers with the skills that workplaces need. The higher education sector is characterized by diversity of course and student profiles are different. The universities aim to develop students with distinct characteristics or attributes (Huges. 2009)

Australian universities work to develop employability skills in their students by providing academic staff with relevant support and resources, integrating these skills into curriculum and course design. They are providing students with work placements and exposure to professional settings and providing advice and guidance through career services. Furthermore, universities offer students opportunities to develop themselves through participation in clubs and societies and university life. Most of the students are concurrently developing these skills through part-time employment, volunteer work and community participation ((CWA, 2007). The following framework present above indentified eight employability skills.



Figure 1: Australian Employability skills Model

The above framework simply presents a generic suite of skills and attributes that are common across the industries and applicable to the business of all sizes and types. It also applies to all levels of people in any given business enterprise from the most junior to the senior employees.

In 2004, States and Australian Government Education Ministers agreed that identified eight skills in the framework covered the skills required by young graduates. Since 10 years, the universities in Australia have been working with the concept of graduate attributes. Graduate attributes defined by the Australian Technology Network as qualities, skills and understanding a university community expected from its students to develop during their time at the institution that shape the contribution to their profession for the career employment (CWA, 2007).

In the report findings, some employers believe that universities are providing students with strong knowledge base without the ability of how intelligibly apply that knowledge in the work settings. International Research also backs this up. The employers expressed a willingness to more deeply engage with the universities particularly in the provision of work-related experiences for university graduates. The interviewers in universities also saw it as important to build strong links with the industry and employers.

It is recognized that universities has to play a role in developing professionals who have required discipline specific knowledge. It is acknowledged by the universities, as well as by employers that employability skills are acquired and developed through experiences (Huges, 2009).

Malaysian Graduate Employability Model:

The Malaysian Government has introduced Graduate Employability Scheme (GEMS), which is a capacity-building initiative to quip unemployed graduates with commercial used skills, and experiences that would enhance their employability. This scheme is a part of 7 billion-stimulus package to mobilize human capital to support the country's economic growth (GEMS, 2012).

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Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato Sri Mohd Najib Razak has launched the Graduate Employability Management Scheme (GEMS) program on 13 March, 2009 in Putrajaya. GEMS has the manadate to train 12000 graduates over the two years period. This program is based on the Graduate Employability Enhancement Program (GREEN) that was organized by Khazanah Nasional Berhad (Khazanah) with the support of various Government linked companies. This Graduate Employability program is divided into two parts.

- In the first part, the university graduates will go under 2 months and 15 days in-house training whereby, they will be exposed to skills and qualities that will help them to improve their confidence and ability to communicate, as well as manage task and responsibilities that are important in their work life.
- In the second part, university graduates will go under six-month On-the-Job training at various organizations and institutions. This part provides university graduate a valuable working experience and knowledge to support their future growth.

An Organization, which is interested to be part of the GEMS program, can participate by applying to become a "Participatory Organization". The GEMS secretariat will get in touch with company's representative once they receive application (GEMS, 2012).

Benefits of the Participation:

- 1) Added manpower for a six months periods
- 2) All the participants are degree holders who have been graduated from various universities.
- 3) Monthly allowance for all participants will be paid.
- 4) Provide support in helping nurturing the country's human capital.

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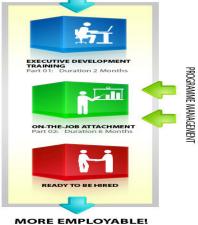


Figure 2: Malaysian Employability Model **Source**: GEMS, 2012.

Responsibility of the Participatory Organizations:

- The organizations are responsible to provide opportunity to develop real working experience suitable for executive level employees and provide basic workstation and tools.
- Provides on-the-Job training or coaching relevant to functional areas.
- Manage Report on performance of the participants' onsite.

According to the Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia that, under the Graduate Employability program, 75% of the graduates has been employed in the sectors relevant to the qualification, skills and tools within six months upon their graduation (GEMS, 2012).

Singaporean Graduate Employability Model:

The Singaporean Government has introduced a graduate employability scheme that based on Workforce Skills Oualification System (WSO). The Singaporean workforce skills qualification (WSQ) is a national credentialing system. It train, develop, assess and recognize individuals for competencies, they are looking for. This system is based on national standard developed by Workforce Development Authority in collaboration with the various industries. The Workforce Skill Qualification comprises industry sectoral framework, which serves professionalize the industry, enhance labor market flexibility and skills portability in growing industry with high demand of skilled workers and professionals. All Skills are recognized by the respective industries for enhancing the competitiveness of Singaporean workforce (WDA, 2011).



Figure 3: Singaporean Employability Model **Source**: (WDA, 2011)

The introduced system builds up university graduate's skills into two aspects; Foundation Skills and Industry Specific Skills. The foundation skills comprises a range of skills, knowledge and attributes that are essential to every individual, such as skills enable all to better adopt to new job demands and changing work environment. The industry and occupational skills framework covers skills that equip individuals with the "know-how" to perform specific jobs well. The WSQ system is designed to be practical, accessible and affordable that enabling every individual to take charges of your own career and advancement. It is also a powerful business tool for employers to assess and maintain a skilled workforce thus

enhancing their businesses. The WSQ is an underpinned by a strong quality assurance framework. A structured and systematic system has been put in place with the aim of building a strong training infrastructure to support the development of Singapore's workforce (WDA, 2011).

Proposed Employability Model for the University Graduates in Pakistan:

It has been analyzed that there is profound political and bureaucratic involvement in the process of employment on the political and nepotism basis. The political interference in the employment process has not only damaged the culture of merit but also discriminated the capable and talented graduates of university for seeking the employment. The right person for the right job with having related qualification has been forlorn concept in the employment of public as well as private organizations. The outcome is minimal in providing the job opportunities, in comparison input of the resources involved in it. This employment situation has multiplied by the increasing unemployment ratio amongst university-graduated students in the country.

In view of the critical state of unemployment and resource constraints of the country, the author s has developed an Employability Model for the university graduate students. This model is developed by refering the Employability Models of the two countries ie. Malaysia and Singapore. The study understands that this Model of Employability could be able to reduce the unemployment amongst the university graduate student. The study has explored following model for the employability of university graduates. The following figure demonstrates the three steps of Employability Model from bottom to the top.



Figure 4: Proposed Employability Model for University Gradautes

The above Employability Model is displaying the three stages of employability for the university graduates. The university graduates may be placed under the employability program soon after the graduation from universities in the relevant field sector organization. In the first stage, university graduates are place in building up their foundation competencies in the relevant field for the 2 months. In the second stage, they may be placed in learning the industry specific competencies for 2 months.

In the last stage, they may be trained in specific skills required to perform the specific job in the industry for two months. The training may be provided to only regular degree holders who have been graduated from various universities. All the participants should be provided monthly allowance to meet their living expenses.

Benefits of Employability Model:

- 1) Enhancing the knowledge and practical experience of the university graduates
- 2) It provides support in helping nurturing the country's human capital.
- 3) It helps capable university graduates to obtain employment in the private or public organization.
- 4) It establishes a sense of entrepreneurship amongst the university graduates who have investment capability.
- 5) It will eliminate the sense of desperation and discrimination amongst the university graduates of the country.

Recommended Implementation Framework:

The following framework demonstrates the mechanism for enhancing the employability skills of university graduates.

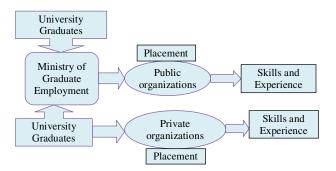


Figure 5: Framework for Implementation Employability Model.

The above implementation framework has proposed the establishment of Ministry of Graduate Employment in each province of the country. This Ministry should work in coordination with the public and private universities of the country. The universities are made responsible to send the list of Master holder graduated in various disciplines each year. Ministry of Graduate Employment in coordination with the various industrial organizations provides placement to the university graduates in the relevant sectors of organizations in which they are graduated. The public and private organizations are made responsible to entertain number of university graduates each year. The following table shows the number of public and private universities in the country.

Table-2: Total number of Public and Private Universities in Pakistan

Region	Universites	Public	Private
AJK	4	2	2
Balochistan	8	6	2
Federal Area	16	13	3

Gilgit-Baltistan	1	1	-
Khyber- Pakhtoonkhwa	24	15	9
Punjab	40	22	18
Sindh	39	14	25
Total	132	73	59

Source: FBS, 2012.

The above table shows that there are total 132 universities in the whole country. Amongst them, there are 73 public universities and 59 private universities.

Table-3: Total universities and total university graduated Students passed Yearly.

Total Number of public and private organizations in various industries	Total Number of student Graduated Masters every year	
various muustries	Masters every year	
350	40,000	

According to the government statistical information, every year approximately 40,000 Master level students are graduated from the all universities in all disciplines. The table shows 350 numbers of public and private organizations where university graduates students can be provided placement for learning employability skills in the related fields.

Large public and private organizations such as banks and multinational organizations have many branches around the country. The number of students could be placed in each branch of the organization for the 6 months under the employability skills program. In this manner, the available human resource can be utilized in a proper manner and alleviate the sense of bleak future amongst the fresh university graduates. This employability skills program has been divided into three steps. Each university graduate student should be trained in three steps to increase their skills and knowledge related to fields of the job in which they are graduated.

Conclusion:

Keeping in view the unemployment situation especially amongst the university graduates and resource constraints of the country, the employability model has been proposed for the employment of university graduates.

The university graduates placed under the employability skills program will be able to enhance foundation competencies, industry competencies and occupation competencies during the six months period. After the completion of six months period, candidates can be able to obtain employment in the public or private organization or either case, the candidate will be having a sufficient skills and knowledge to get job at abroad. For the successful implementation of the employability program, it is proposed that the industrial organizations should be provided some tax relief benefits in return of training the employability skills to the university graduates. The government for meeting the employment demand of the university graduates every year can utilize the information

generated from the database of Ministry of Graduate Employment.

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