QUALITY OF PAKISTANI UNIVERSITY GRADUATES AS PERCEIVED BY EMPLOYERS: IMPLICATIONS FOR FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated perceptions of employers about the quality of Pakistani university graduates in terms of intellectual development skills, personal development skills, professional development skills, and social development skills as sub-scales. How Pakistani employers were viewing the quality of university graduates; which areas of development skills were relatively stronger; which sectors of industry were more satisfied or worried about the quality of university graduates; and what were its implications for faculty development, were the questions answered in the study. Managers of 65 companies from 12 sectors of industry listed with Lahore Stock Exchange constituted the sample. Data were collected through a 30-item survey scale. Mean scores and correlations were calculated for the four sub-scales. One-Sample t-test, Independent samples t-test, and one-way ANOVA were employed for significance and variance analysis. The study found that employers from sample sectors of industry unanimously pointed out that they were not fully satisfied with the quality of Pakistani university graduates in all the four areas of development skills. Personal development skills were found relatively strong whereas social development skills were at the lowest count. There is a low to moderate degree of need for faculty development at Pakistani universities in instructional, professional and organizational development areas to help them play their mandatory roles in preparing students for job markets taking it as an implication of the study. Employers are not fully satisfied with the quality of Pakistani university graduates. This situation reflects curricula, instruction, and professional competencies of university teachers below the job market standards. Serious improvement initiatives on part of universities to produce quality graduates included in the major recommendations.

Key terms: Employers' perceptions; Generic skills; Intellectual development skills; Personal development skills; Professional development skills; Social development skills; and Faculty development.

INTRODUCTION

The internationalization of higher education and growing students' population in this sector has increased competition in job-markets (Becket & Brookes, 2006: Saunders, & Zuzel, 2010). As a reflection of this competition, employers have raised their demand for quality of recruits (Saunders & Zuzel, 2010) who apply for jobs. For complying with high quality standards, students are reconstructing their perceptions about university education (Lawrence & Sharma, 2002) and demanding knowledge that meets world-wide acceptable standards (Nagy, 2006) of graduate quality. Consequently, universities are reshaping their curricula and teaching process and enhancing professional competencies of their teachers in line with the job-market conditions (Sohail & Daud, 2006) and students are eager to select those universities which are responsive to these needs (Song-Ae, 2005). The current study explored perceptions of employers about the quality of Pakistani university graduates and discussed their implications for faculty development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Quality being the measures of excellence; observable and interpretable attributes; or the adherence to measurable and verifiable standards (Business Dictionary, 2010) could be best understood only when one compares these characteristics with requirements of the user, a question of degree to which the former comply with the later (Praxiom Research Group, 2010). The quality of university graduates thus could be measured through the perceptions of users of the products i.e. the employers (Karatepe, Yavas, & Babakus, 2005) who pay the price.

The population of qualified university graduates is increasing day by day (Government of Pakistan, 1998; Ehrenberg, 2005; Shaw, 2011) because they perceive a university degree as a source of employability skills (Saunders, & Zuzel, 2010). But job market is still thin and cannot absorb all graduates universities are pouring in the job market (Shaw, 2011) creating a gap between demand for and supply of applicants. This situation provides power to the employers to raise the demand for quality of graduates (Raza, Majid, & Zia, 2010; Saunders, & Zuzel, 2010).

This quality is being measured through the perceptions of employers about generic skills or "range of qualities and capacities" (Hager,

Holland, & Backett, 2002:2) of university graduates categorized as intellectual development skills, personal development skills, professional development skills, and social development skills (Raza, Majid, & Zia, 2010) which employers are demanding from students to compete for jobs instead of their qualification grades (Yorke, 2006) of the graduates. This demand is based on the desire of the employers to get 'business ready' or 'ready for work' graduates (Saunders, & Zuzel, 2010) instead of those having good qualification grades but lacking personal marketable attributes.

For fulfilling this demand, universities need development and application of specific quality standards (LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1997; Dinham, 2006) for instruction and curricula (Seah & Edward, 2006) such as provided by The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) and Education Sector Reforms Action Plan 2001-2004 (Government of Pakistan, 2001) to respond to international standards in higher education and its implications for universities (Seah & Edward, 2006). Universities are under pressure to meet standards (Nagy, 2006; Mishra, Koehler, & Zhao, 2007) for quality assurance as Higgs (2007) suggested universities to reach a level of quality of employability skills of students acceptable to the employers.

In order to inculcate employability skills in the students to fulfill the demand of employers, curricula, instruction, and teacher competencies need improvement for which universities have to carry out extensive faculty development activities (Formo and Reed, 2008) as a continuous process that leads to the personal growth and self-actualization (Shroyer, (1990) of teachers for improving their conceptual, human, and technical skills (Sisodia, 2000). These competencies of teachers could be better developed taking this initiative in its holistic sense covering instructional, professional, and organizational components (Bell & Gilbert, 2004; California State University, 2007) of the faculty career. Cramer (2006) reported practices of successful universities in improving their curricula, instruction and professional competencies of teachers to enhance employability skills of graduates.

Cranny (2004), Stephens and Hamblin (2006), Ali (2008), Archer and Davison (2010), and Saunders and Zuzel (2010) reported their own and other studies trying to find out perceptions of employers about employability skills of graduates. These reports are related to UK, USA

and other developed countries. Raza, Majid, and Zia, (2010) reported perceptions of Pakistani university students regarding their development skills. But what Pakistani employers perceive about the quality of local university graduates, remains a question to be answered. Emphasizing the value of development skills of the students and employers' demand for quality university graduates, the current study was designed to investigate perceptions of employers about the quality of students of Pakistani universities in terms of intellectual development skills, personal development skills, professional development skills, and social development skills; compare these perceptions of employers in terms of gender; sector; designation; qualification; and experience as independent variables; and discuss implications of these perceptions of employers for faculty development. To pursue these objectives, the study answered these questions:

1) What are perceptions of employers about the quality of students of Pakistani universities in terms of intellectual development skills, personal development skills, professional development skills, and social development skills?
2) Is there any significant difference in the perceptions of employers about the quality of students of Pakistani universities in terms of intellectual development skills, personal development skills, professional development skills, and social development skills?
3) Is there any significant difference in the perceptions of employers about the quality of students of Pakistani universities in terms of gender; sector; designation; qualification; and experience as independent variables? and
4) What are the implications of perceptions of employers about the quality of students of Pakistani universities in terms of intellectual development skills, personal development skills, professional development skills, and social development skills for faculty development?

METHODOLOGY

There were 37 listed sectors of industry (Lahore Stock Exchange, 2010) out of which 12 (1/3) were randomly selected. In these 12 sectors of industry there were 188 companies. Randomly selecting one third companies from heterogeneous number of companies of each sector, a sample of 65

companies was constituted. Hence, 65 managers were conveniently selected to fill the survey questionnaire.

Raza, Majid, and Zia (2010) used a survey scale build on 30 employability skills and reported its four significant factors namely intellectual development skills, personal development skills, professional development skills, and social development skills generated through principle component factor analysis. They reported the Cronbach's alpha reliability of the instrument as 0.948. For the purpose of this study, the same questionnaire was adopted for data collection and found reliable at 0.901 Cronbach's alpha at piloting stage.

Data were collected by the second researcher. The responses were quantified as 5 for strongly agree; 4 for agree; 3 for partially agree; 2 for disagree; and 1 for strongly disagree over the quality of students of Pakistani universities in terms of intellectual development skills, personal development skills, professional development skills, and social development skills. Taking mean score 3 as a cut-point (Aksu, 2003; Raza, Majid, & Zia, 2010), mean scores 3 and below were taken as reflecting inadequate quality whereas mean scores above three were taken as describing adequate quality of university graduates as perceived by employers.

On the pattern identified by Raza, Majid, and Zia (2010), the study assumed that higher the level of this agreement of employers, the lower would be the degree of need for faculty development and vice versa as depicted in figure 1 below.

←	Level of employers' agreement on quality of graduates			→
Strongly agree	Agree	Partially agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Very low	Low	Moderate	High	Very high
←	Degree of need for faculty development			→

Figure 1: Quality of Graduates Vs Need for Faculty Development

Mean scores and correlations were calculated for factors of the scale. One-sample *t*-test, independent samples *t*-test and one-way ANOVA were employed for significance and variance analysis.

RESULTS

The respondents' profile revealed that they included 42 (76.4%) males and 13 (23.6%) females. From Sugar 9 (16.4%); Banking 8 (14.5%); Food 7 (12.7%); Cement 6 (10.9%); Auto 5 (9.1%); Leasing 4 (7.3%); Synthetics 4 (7.3%); Glass & Ceramics 3 (5.5%); IT 3 (5.5%); Oil & Gas 2 (3.6%); Paper & Board 2 (3.6%); and Tobacco 2 (3.6%) managers responded. Among these 12 (21.8%) were operation managers; 9 (16.4%) production managers; 8 (14.5%) finance managers; 8 (14.5%) HR managers; 7 (12.7%) marketing managers; 6 (10.9%) accounts managers; and 5 (9.1%) quality managers. As for as the qualification of these managers was concerned, 10 (18.2%) managers were graduates and 45 (81.8%) were master degree holders. None of them was MPhil or PhD. However, 12 (21.8%) mangers possessed 0-5 years; 24 (43.6%) 6-10 years; 12 (21.8%) 11-15 years; and 7 (12.7%) above 15 years of work experience.

The correlations between intellectual development skills, personal development skills, professional development skills, and social development skills as factors and the whole scale are given in table 1.

Table 1: Correlation of Factors with the Whole Scale for Development Skills

Categories	IDS	PerDS	ProDS	SDS
Whole scale for development skills	0.927*	0.860*	0.880*	0.853*
Intellectual development skills (IDS)		0.567*	0.4938*	0.459*
Personal development skills (PerDS)			0.468*	0.399*
Professional development skills (ProDS)				0.432*

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The correlations between intellectual development skills, personal development skills, professional development skills, and social development skills (SDS) are weak whereas the correlations of these factors with the whole scale for development skills are strong.

An inclination of employers towards the agreement over the quality of students of Pakistani universities in terms of intellectual development skills, personal development skills, professional development skills, and social development skills is evident from mean scores for the four factors as shown in table 2 that range from 3.509 to 3.703.

Table 2: One-Sample t-Test for Development Skills

Factors	Mean	SD	Df	*t*-values	Alpha
Personal development skills (PerDS)	3.703	0.578	54	9.024*	0.828
Professional development skills (ProDS)	3.634	0.706	54	6.663*	0.723
Intellectual development skills (IDS)	3.602	0.726	54	6.147*	0.806
Social development skills (SDS)	3.509	0.584	54	6.466*	0.622

*P<0.05

Here, the personal development skills (3.703) got the highest position whereas social development skills (3.509) factor was at the lowest position. Professional development skills and Intellectual development skills were at almost same position. The alpha values for all the factors are above 0.6 that verify their significance in this study too.

Against open-ended question, only 17 out of 55 managers responded in three coded categories. Nine (52.9%) mangers pointed out deficiency in market exposure; six (35.3%) mangers highlighted lack of adoptability; and two (11.8%) managers marked inflexibility in the university graduates.

Analysis of the background variables (sector; designation; gender; qualification; and experience) revealed no significant difference of opinion among the respondents over the quality of university graduates.

DISCUSSION

"What are perceptions of employers about the quality of students of Pakistani universities in terms of intellectual development skills, personal development skills, professional development skills, and social development skills?, was the first research question the current study had to answer. The mean scores for these sub-scales are inclined towards the agreement of the respondents over the quality of university graduates. But this agreement is weak as all the means are below 4.0 that reflect the situation where employers are not fully satisfied over the quality of university graduates. It means that graduates are performing below the job market standards. Obviously, there could be many reasons for this tendency such as curriculum, students' commitment etc. Similarly, one possible cause of this tendency could be the unsatisfactory performance of

university teachers in imparting these development skills to help students fulfill the requirements of the job market. These findings are consistent with Song-Ae (2005), Sohail and Daud (2006) and Higgs (2007) providing answer to the first research question that leads to the achievement of first objective of the study.

The second aspect of the study in question was the significant difference in the perceptions of employers about the quality of students of Pakistani universities in terms of intellectual development skills, personal development skills, professional development skills, and social development skills. These sub-scales have been found significant with alpha values (0.828), (0.723), (0.806) and (0.622) respectively (Gursoy & Umbreit, 2005) for the purpose of this study too. The correlations within these factors were weak and correlations of these factors with overall scale were strong that further enhance their significance (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Morgeson, & Humphrey, 2006). Intellectual development skills include generation and understanding of new knowledge through research, using it for solving problems and disseminate the same with confidence; personal development skills cover challenging the status quo through bringing change for continuous self-growth and confidence; professional development skills mean the demonstration of entrepreneurial abilities with innovation and creativity and performance in a versatile manner; and social development skills emphasize striving for improvement of society, grasping prevalent social conditions in international terms, commitment to social justice, exhibition of approved mannerism, and service of the community as the basics of the profession (University of Canberra, 2003; University of Sydney, 2004; Truckee Meadows Community College, 2007).

The findings of the study prioritized personal development skills (3.703); professional development skills (3.634); intellectual development skills (3.602); and social development skills (3.509) as perceived by employers. It means that though employers were not fully satisfied with the quality of university graduates (Khan, 2005; Song-Ae, 2005; Zieber, 2006; Higgs, 2007; Tierney, 2008; Doyle, 2008), they perceived that personal development skills of graduates were comparatively better. Their opinion about professional and intellectual development skills were almost at same level whereas they placed social development skills of university graduates at lowest level. One possible reason of this situation might be consciousness of students to grow in person and this was the category

where they need to move largely at their own (Lawrence & Sharma, 2002). Professional and intellectual development skills need more faculty intervention, such as more up-to-date curricula and teaching methods meeting world class standards (Hager, Holland, & Backett, 2002). The situation with social development skills needs special consideration as it reflects weak social interactions between faculty and students (Sahu, 2002; Fink, 2006; Gabriel, 2008). In this way study provided answer to the second question and achieved the second objective.

Similarly, the third dimension of the current study in question was to explore the significant difference in the perceptions of employers about the quality of students of Pakistani universities in terms of gender; sector; designation; qualification; and experience. Analysis of these background variables revealed no significant difference of opinion among the respondents over the quality of students of Pakistani universities in terms of intellectual development skills, personal development skills, professional development skills, and social development skills. The possible reason for this tendency may be the similar quality of university graduates or the problems employers with all these backgrounds were facing regarding the performance of these graduates. From here, the argument generated in previous part of the discussion that employers were not fully satisfied with the quality of university graduates get verified as employers regardless of gender; sector; designation; qualification; and experience expressed the same level of their perception and provided answer to the third question for meeting the third target.

Lastly, the current study was conducted to explore the implications of perceptions of employers about the quality of students of Pakistani universities in terms of intellectual development skills, personal development skills, professional development skills, and social development skills for faculty development in line with the criterion set in the methodology section i.e. higher the employers' rating of graduates, lower the need for faculty development and vice versa.

The findings of the study revealed that employers were not fully satisfied with the quality of university graduates in terms of intellectual development skills, personal development skills, professional development skills, and social development skills. Analysis of the open-ended question also revealed lack of market exposure, adoptability, and flexibility in the graduates that shook further the confidence of

employers. These findings are consistent with Khan, (2005), Song-Ae (2005), Zieber (2006), Higgs (2007), Tierney (2008), and Doyle (2008). As stated earlier, there could be many factors responsible for this situation. But, in higher education, most of these factors are under the control of teachers (Raza, Majid, & Zia, 2010). They select the content, choose strategies for delivery, devise projects and allocate different evaluation weights for different sub-division of the total evaluation scheme. For instance, in University of the Punjab; 25, 35 and 40 percent weights are given to class-work, mid-test, and final semester test respectively. But what type of questions/problems etc are offered to students in all these categories is solely a teacher's discretion. It means that the quality of graduates produced may revolve around competencies of their teachers. Therefore, the current situation speaks of relative weakness of teachers of universities in playing their instructional, professional, and organizational roles (DeRuntz & Meier, 2004; Clayton & Ash, 2005; Lasley, Sciedentop, & Yinger, 2006; Zieber, 2006; Doyle, 2008; Tierney, 2008), required to inculcate development skills in the students, owing to lack of their competencies in these areas.

This state of affairs highlights the need for improvement in teaching learning process of universities for which teachers play their pivotal roles. The mean scores for intellectual development skills, personal development skills, professional development skills, and social development skills that range between 3.509 and 3.703; have pointed out that opinion of employers falls between partially agreed and agreed points of the scale regarding quality of university graduates. As per criterion laid in the methodology section, this situation reflects a low to moderate degree of need for faculty development which is composed of its instructional, professional and organizational components. Raza, Majid, and Zia (2010) also have reported a similar need for faculty development owing to the dissatisfaction of university students over the role of their teachers in developing the employability skills. These findings provide answer to the last research question for achievement of the fourth objective of the study.

CONCLUSION

Employers from sugar; banking; food; cement; auto; leasing; synthetics; glass & ceramics; IT; oil & gas; paper & board; and tobacco sectors of economy unanimously pointed out that they were not fully satisfied over the quality of Pakistani university graduates in terms of intellectual, professional, personal, and social development skills. This situation reflects that the performance of Pakistani universities is below the standards of job market. There could be many potential causes for this dissatisfaction ranging from an inadequate curriculum which fails to meet intellectual standards, pedagogy which focuses on rote memory and regurgitation rather than problem solving, questioning, and creativity, and perhaps the teaching ability of the faculty. Anyhow, all these causes could be wrapped up in instructional, professional and organizational deficiencies of the faculty of universities in preparing quality graduates. The issue of sub-standard quality of Pakistani university graduates becomes more complex when they are supposed to compete in the local as well as international job markets. This is not just a problem of satisfaction of employers; it is also a description of potential weakness of Pakistani university graduates to play a major role in the economic development of country and universities in general and their faculty in particular is responsible for that. As a consequence of these findings, there arises a low to moderate degree of need for developing teachers of Pakistani universities in instructional, professional and organizational areas of faculty development to help them play their mandatory roles in preparing quality students for job markets.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study provided bases for recommending Pakistani universities to up-date their curricula, instructional methods, and professional competencies of teachers in line with world-wide standards for improving the quality of graduates through enhancing their employability skills to help them enter the job market and grow on workplace positions. For materializing all such targets, they need to launch programs for developing faculty in all the three components i.e. instructional; professional; and organizational development that are complementary to each other, for helping teachers play their mandatory roles in preparing students for job markets.

Instructional development may cover course content; teaching strategies; presentation, evaluation, and feed-back skills and refresher courses are considered best in this regard. Linked with instructional development, professional development may focus on academic research and career development through learning research, researching new trends and issues in university teaching and acquiring career development skills. Similarly, mentoring, team building, conflict management, and stress management should be emphasized for organizational development of faculty that strengthens instructional and professional development components as one of its advantages.

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