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A Comparison of Self-Perceived Employability of Graduates from Public and Private Universities of Punjab

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Abstract

The study aimed to compare the level of self-perceived employability of public and private sector university graduates. It was a descriptive and cross sectional survey. Population of the study was university graduating students enrolled in final year/ semester. Multi-stage purposive sampling was used to collect data from ten universities; five public and five private universities were taken with eight matching departments. All students from selected department filled up the questionnaire. Each university (main campus) was taken as a sample. A total of 2411 graduating students were sample of the study. Self-developed 23 items Self-Perceived Employability (SPE) instrument was used to collect data with five point likert type scale. Independent sample t-test was applied for comparison of public and private sector graduates. Results showed positive self-perceived employability in graduating students. Private university students' self-perceived employability was higher than that of the public university students. But, students' perception of employability on the basis of department was significantly different. Self-perceived employability for male and female was the same. Two-year program graduates had higher self-perceived employability than those of the four-year degree program.

Keywords: Self-perceived employability (SPE), Graduating students, Public and private universities

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Introduction

Perception of employability is changing. In the past, employees were more loyal to the organization, and employers were responsible for job security, career development, training and development, and help the employees in problematic times (Baruch, 2001; Zinser, 2003). Modern concept of employability is based on a psychological contract that develops hope in employees to locate opportunities in challenging environment with more diversity of skills. Now, employees are responsible to secure successful careers on their own. Current situation of the job market create a more destabilized employment relationship from the past (Baruch & Peiperl, 2000; Baruch, 2001).

For the purposes of this study, during primitive screening it was found that literature covers the feedback obtained from employees, university institutions, government officials. However, little research has been conducted on university graduates, so that is the primary focal point of this research study. Students face an uncertain future, despite spending time and money on their education (Praskova, Creed, & Hood, 2015). Today, in 21st century, graduates are more trained, more self-defined and confident (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004); consequently, they have more challenging time in locating employment. Level of motivation of students affects their goals setting (Seijts, Ltham, Tasa, & Latham, 2004).

Little and Arthur (2010) found that skills are important for graduates' employability. Soft skills like communication, initiative, work in teams, and analytical skills are lacking in graduates, but these are very important for entry positions. (Washor, 2015). Education is the key to help students develop these necessary skills (Crebert, Bates, Bell, Partirick, & Cragnolini, 2004; Lees, 2002).

According to National Education Policy (2017) higher education is responsible to produce leadership for all sectors in economy. Higher education is the best place to inculcate employability in a realistic and effective way (Tymon, 2013). Higher education plays important role in developing the workforce according to the changing demands of industries (Lim, Fadzil, Latif, Goolamally, & Mansor, 2011; Dickinson, Binns, & Divan, 2015). It is the responsibility of universities to develop and implement curriculum in such a way that inculcates employability in their graduates. But universities are lagging behind (Tymon, 2013; Washor, 2015; Gao, Wang, & Cui, 2014). There is a need for educational reform to bridge the gap between education and the employment world (Ramirez, Cruz, & Alcantara, 2014). Universities should offer a career development course covering the job-hunting skills, guidance about occupation; career planning; creating a resume and obtaining a job. Additionally this course should also focus on the uncertainty in the world today, and the skills those are necessary to navigate this change. There should be some frustration confronted by the graduates so they can improve their capability to adapt according to the job market (Peng, 2014) for which supporting policies should be developed (Al Samman & Fakhro, 2017).

We cannot always expect graduates to be able to identify the relationship between professional lives and the knowledge they seek out during studies (Schomburg, 2007). Prior and after graduation, students need an opportunity to be mentored in a work environment through an internship or an apprenticeship (Al Samman & Fakhro, 2017). Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is a good tool that can help the graduates to adjust at their workplace (Jackson, 2015).

Lacks of skills affect, Gross Domestic Product, economic development and employability of new graduates (Mirza, Jaffri, & Hashmi, 2014). Employers are reporting that recent graduates do not possess many of the important skills for the workplace (Lim, Fadzil, Latif, Goolamally, & Mansor, 2011; Mirza, Jaffri, & Hashmi, 2014). Pfeffer (2015) identified the low quality of education, skill deficiencies, weak university and industry linkage, low involvement in community services, and gender-based discrimination as some of the reasons behind this lag. Many researches revealed that the soft-skills are more critical in today's world than technical skills (Mirza, Jaffri, & Hashmi, 2014).

In Pakistan, there is strong competition for public and private university graduates for getting jobs (Zafar & Mat, 2012). According to National Education Policy (2017), out of 163 universities in Pakistan 44% universities are from private sector; and 14% students are enrolled in private sector universities. Private sector was allowed to establish higher education institutions in Pakistan (National Educational Policy, 1998-2010). Registration Authority is responsible for registration of the private sector universities under Punjab Private Educational Institution Promotion and Regulation Ordinance No. II of 1984 (National Education Policy, 2017). According to regulations in Pakistan all private sector universities are required to get chartered by Higher Education Commission before issuing their degrees. Chartered is given on the basis of quality indicators so the gap of public and private sector institutions can be reduced (Niazi & Mace, 2006). Now, the private sector is considered to be an important contributor in higher education especially in area of Management Sciences, Computer Sciences, and Engineering.

There currently is a debate on the quality of education at the public and private universities in Pakistan. Some studies found that public sector is preferable at the time of hiring (Singh & Singh, 2008). Whereas another study revealed that private sector graduates are performing better than the public sector (Saher, 2014). It is well established that the private sector universities are focusing more on soft skill development than at some public universities (Washor, 2015; Abdulla, Naser, & Saeid, 2014; Robles, 2012).

In the literature, two types of self-perceived employability are highlighted, the first one, is structural and the second one, is individual. Structural self-perceived employability is about external factors that affect perceptions of graduates (Forrier & Sels, 2003; Vanhercke, Cuyper, & Peeters, 2014). The individual self-perceived

employability is about individual characteristics, skills, abilities and attitude (Tomlinson, 2012). Employability is about graduates' preparedness, their capability to gain initial employment, maintain employment, obtain new employment if required, adaptability in skills, knowledge, and attitude according to needs of economic requirements. The current study was planned to compare the public and private sector graduates' self-perceived employability.

Objectives of the Study

1. To compare the public and private sector university graduates' self-perceived employability.
2. To conduct program wise (subject area) comparison of public and private sector university graduates' self-perceived employability.
3. To compare the self-perceived employability on the bases of degree duration and gender.

Research Hypotheses

Null Hypotheses were formulated and tested for each objective:

Ho1: There is no significant difference in self-perceived employability of public and private university graduates

Ho2: In Department of Statistics, there is no significant difference in graduates' self-perceived employability in public and private universities.

Ho3: In Department of Physics, there is no significant difference in graduates' self-perceived employability in public and private universities.

Ho4: In Department of Mathematics, there is no significant difference in graduates' self-perceived employability in public and private universities.

Ho5: In Department of Engineering, there is no significant difference in graduates' self-perceived employability in public and private universities.

Ho6: In Department of English, there is no significant difference in graduates' self-perceived employability in public and private universities.

Ho7: In Department of Management Sciences there is no significant difference in graduates' self-perceived employability in public and private sector universities.

Ho8: In Department of Economics, there is no significant difference in graduates' self-perceived employability in public and private universities.

Ho9: In Department of Computer Sciences there is no significant difference in graduates' self-perceived employability in public and private universities.

Ho10: There is no significant difference between self-perceived employability on the basis of duration of the program.

Ho11: There is no significant difference between self-perceived employability on the basis of students' gender.

Research Methodology

This descriptive study aimed to compare self-perceived employability of public and private sector university graduates. The population of the study included all the graduating students of two and four-year programs from universities in the province of Punjab. At the first stage, all the (43) universities chartered by the Government of the Punjab were taken. At second stage, all departments present in those universities were cross matched for the purpose of comparison. As a result, eight similar departments i.e., Management Sciences, Economics, Statistics, English, Mathematics, Computer Sciences, Physics, and Engineering were found common in five public and five private sector universities. At third stage, Cluster (whole class) of final semester students were taken as a sample of the study.

Self-structured instrument about self-perceived employability 23 items scale with Cronbach's Alpha .85 reliability was used for the study. Likert type five rating scale was used for responses. Instrument was developed on the basis of the available literature, questionnaire included indicators i.e. employer's preference, university repute, curriculum, worth of the degree program, social value, career opportunities, skills, knowledge, employers and university links. The instrument was validated by the three experts (more than 20 years experienced), discriminant validity (item difficulty) was also calculated. Collected data were cleaned and screened with the help of SPSS. Data finally included for analysis were from 2411 students, which included 1069 students from two-year and 1342 students from four-year degree programs. Respondents belong to the eight matching departments from both the five public and five private sector universities. Normal distribution tests were applied for data analysis because respondents were in hundreds. Elliot and Woodward (2007) concluded that if data size is greater than 40 than we can use parametric procedures even if it is not normally distributed. Data analysis included independent sample *t-test* for comparison. Data analysis were done on the bases of objectives and hypotheses.

Table 1

Independent sample t-test to compare the graduates' self-perceived employability on the basis of sector

Variables	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*df*	*p*
Public	1775	3.73	0.50	-4.40	2409	.001
Private	636	3.83	0.53			

Significant level = 0.05

Table indicates that the private sector graduates (M = 3.83, SD = 0.50) possess higher self-perceived employability than public sector graduates (M = 3.73, SD = 0.53), $t(2411) = -4.40$, $p = .00$. In the light of the finding, the hypothesis that there was no significant mean difference in self-perceived employability of public and private sector universities' graduates was rejected. The private university graduates mean value was higher than the public sector university graduates.

Table 2

Independent sample t-test to explore the department wise difference in the graduates' self-perceived employability on the basis of public and private sectors

Departments	Sector	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*df*	*p*
Statistics	Public	217	3.69	0.46	-3.492	263	.001
	Private	48	3.96	0.57			
Physics	Public	212	3.73	0.57	-1.677	285	.095
	Private	75	3.85	0.52			
Mathematics	Public	214	3.74	0.51	.033	282	.974
	private	70	3.73	0.50			
Engineering	Public	131	3.80	0.52	-1.632	179	.104
	Private	50	3.94	0.51			
English	Public	241	3.83	0.46	-.924	304	.356
	Private	65	3.88	0.50			
Mgt. Sciences	Public	324	3.57	0.50	-6.879	474	.000
	Private	152	3.92	0.54			
Economics	Public	236	3.72	0.52	-.770	303	.442
	Private	69	3.78	0.50			
Comp. Sciences	Public	200	3.83	0.48	3.139	305	.002
	Private	107	3.65	0.57			

Significant level = 0.05

Table 2 depicts that in Physics, Mathematics, Engineering, English, and Economics Departments there was no significant mean difference in public and private sector university graduates' self-perceived employability. In Departments of Management Sciences, Computer Sciences, and Statistics the self-perceived employability of graduates was significantly different. Tukey HSD was applied to see the difference more clearly that reveals the public sector universities were performing better in area of Computer Sciences whereas private sector was better in Statistics and Management Sciences areas.

Table 3

Independent sample t-test to compare the self-perceived employability of graduates on basis of program duration

Duration	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*df*	*p*
Two-Years	1069	3.79	0.74	3.02	2409	.003
Four-Years	1342	3.73	0.71			

Significant level = 0.05

Table 3 indicates that there is significant mean difference existed between two-years and four-years students' self-perceived employability. Two-year program students perceive high employability than those of four-year program students.

Table 4

Independent sample t-test to compare the graduates' self-perceived employability on basis of Gender

Variable	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*df*	*p*
Male	1164	3.75	0.53	-0.37	2360.85	.708
Female	1247	3.76	0.50			

Significant level = 0.05

Table 4 shows that there is no significant mean difference in self-perceived employability of graduates on the basis of gender.

Discussion and Conclusion

The hypotheses 1, 2, 7, 9, and 10 were rejected and 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 11 were accepted. In the light of findings, the following discussion and conclusions are proposed.

Self-perceived employability of both the sectors was positive but not so high. Employability is affected by external and individual factors on the basis of findings it can be concluded that given factors are not so much supportive that they can formulate a good sense of hope for employability in graduates.

In Department of Statistics and Management Sciences, private sector had higher self-perceived employability than that of the public sector. There was no difference found in self-perceived employability of students from departments of Physics, Mathematics, Engineering, English, and Economics. In department of Computer Sciences, public sector graduates rated higher than those of private sector so we can sum it up as quality of institutions varies on the basis of areas. For example, some areas are better in the public universities and others areas are more successful in the private universities.

On the base of over all SPE the graduating students from private universities had higher self-perceived employability than those of the public university students. Results show that the private universities were more concerned about employability of their students as compared to the public universities. This difference can be attributed to the quality of the academic environment, up-to date curriculum, cross border collaboration, English language literacy, market driven programs. Additionally, private sector may be more flexible and able to adjust their programs faster than that of the public universities.

Around the globe, higher education is viewed as a private sector enterprise rather than the public responsibility (Altbach & Knight, 2007). They provide more quality service as compared to the public sector as found by Rehman (2016). He says that the private universities' libraries provide more quality service than the public universities libraries do. It was also found by Rizwan, Azad, Ali, and Mahmood (2016) who conclude that there is a difference in classroom management, staff members' availability for consultation, supervision of students in public and private sector, and service quality.

They found that the private universities are providing more quality services than that of the public sector institutions. But because mean difference is not significant so we can conclude that both universities are performing side by side.

Graduates of two-year programs had higher self-perception about their employability than four-year program graduates. They were more confident about their acceptability into the job market than students of four-year programs. Findings showed that four-year students in Pakistan were behind the two-year program graduates because of their acceptability in the job market. Other reason may be four-year programs are relatively new in Pakistan. Many departments have launched this four-year degree program in the last few years. Male and female students' SPE was same so we can conclude that gender does not play role in perception about employability.

Recommendations

Following recommendations are proposed on the basis of findings:

1. Both the public and private sector universities can rethink the process of developing their graduates because both are on moderate level in self-perceived employability. Private sector is performing better in self-perceived employability of the students in some areas. Therefore, this recommendation would focus on this gap and begin to examine each component within public universities and make them more accountable. For this purpose, advertisement, policy matter, curriculum, implementation, or strategies can be focused on priority basis. Same is the case for private sector universities because in some departments public sector is ahead of them. Strengths of universities can be determined on the basis of specialization not on generalization.
2. Collaboration within the public and private universities can help in enhancing the quality of higher education. They can exchange the faculty, library resources, online resources, teaching learning materials and also share their management expertise in their strengthened areas of specialization.
3. Another important finding was that graduating students of Management Sciences and the Department of Statistics had lower self-perceived employability in public sector. It is suggested that some study be conducted to rethink their departmental objectives; courses; faculty; facilities; culture, and process of teaching and learning. Possible reasons behind may be the private sector dominance is that management sciences are hot selling service of private sector. So, they concentrate on it in their marketing strategies.In department of Computer Sciences there is need to extend the study in private sector to find out qualitative and more detailed information to explore the reasons of this gap.
4. Clear employment policies by the Government can help the four-year graduates to increase their perception about employability.

5. Higher education department and university, both should consider perception of their students while developing their programs' objectives and formulating strategies, training, guidance, and counselling facilities to university students may be provided on the multi-dimensional basis. More hands-on practices, i.e. apprenticeship and internship opportunities can be provided to improve their skills level that will enhance their self-concept and develop confidence.
6. The psychological aspects of our graduates should be a focal point in the curriculum, similar to the Australian Governments' model where student success is a part of the policy set as the aim of attaining aspiration in their students is one of the objective of their policy (Sellar, Gale, & Parker, 2011). So, this aspect can be included in ranking indicators of the universities in Pakistan.
7. Gender wise, there is no difference in self-perceived employability. So, we can say that there is no need to make separate significant universities for males and females also supported by (Rothwell, Herbert & Rothwell, 2008; Rothwell, Jewell & Hardie, 2009).

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