



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

*Dr. Shaukat Ali Raza*

Lecturer/In-Charge, Department of Business Education,  
Institute of Education & Research (IER),  
University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.



Dr. Shaukat Ali Raza is Lecturer/In-Charge, Department of Business Education, IER, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan. He is a business teacher trainer and provides consultancy to local business schools. His major areas of interest include Accounting & Finance, Management, and Faculty Development. He has contributed articles to HEC recognized journals and presented papers in national and international conferences. Dr. Shaukat is part of a local network that guides young researchers in planning, conducting, and evaluating academic and business research.

E-mail: shaukat\_ali\_5@yahoo.com  
Cell #: 0300 430 86 14



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*Dr. Shaukat Ali Raza*

Lecturer/In-Charge, Department of Business Education, IER,  
University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

*Syed Abir Hassan Naqvi*

Lecturer, Department of Technology Education, IER,  
University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

### ABSTRACT

#### **Purpose:**

University graduates are facing difficulty in entering in the job market owing to their failure in fulfilling the demands of employers. Consequently, students are seeking university education that may help them get the job. Responding to the requirements of the job market, universities are switching from teacher-centered education to student or employer-centered educational processes. To explore the situation in Pakistan, 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, social development skills as sub-scales. Perception of 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.

#### **Design/methodology/approach:**

Managers of 65 companies from 12 sectors of industry listed with Lahore Stock Exchange constituted the sample. Data were collected through an adopted, 30-item survey scale which was found reliable at 0.9568 Cronbach's alpha. 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.

#### **Findings:**

The study investigated 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 stronger whereas social development skills were at the lowest count. There is a low to moderate degree of need for developing teachers of 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.

**Relevance/contribution:**

This situation reflects performance of Pakistani universities in general and their faculty in particular to be below the job market standards. Serious faculty development initiatives on part of universities to produce quality graduates are 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) and as a reflection of this competition; students are reconstructing their perceptions about university education (Lawrence & Sharma, 2002) and demanding knowledge that meets world-wide acceptable standards (Nagy, 2006). Consequently, universities are reshaping their teaching process as according to the job-market conditions (Sohail & Daud, 2006) and students are keen to select those universities which are responsive to these needs (Song-Ae, 2005).

For this purpose, 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) in response to transnational trend in higher education and its implications for universities (Seah & Edward, 2006). Universities are under pressure for meeting standards (Nagy, 2006; Mishra, Koehler, & Zhao, 2007) for quality assurance as Higgs (2007) suggested universities to reach a level of quality acceptable by the stakeholders. This quality of higher education is being measured through the 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.

For the purpose of imparting these skills to students to meet the demand of employers, the universities need 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) as a consequence of instructional, professional, and organizational development (Bell & Gilbert, 2004; California State University, 2007) of the faculty.

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 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?
- 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?
- 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 were randomly selected. Then from these selected sectors, the managers of 65 out of 188 randomly selected companies constituted the sample.

Raza, Majid, and Zia (2010) used a 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 0.9481. For the purpose of this study, the same instrument was adopted and found reliable at 0.90134 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. 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 perceived by the researchers in figure 1:

Figure 1

Quality of Graduates Vs Need for Faculty Development

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

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 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%). The managers who responded, 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%) managers 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) obtained 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 the same position. The alpha values for all the factors are above 0.6 which verifies their significance in this study as well.

Against open-ended question, only 17 out of 55 managers responded in three coded categories. Nine (52.9%) managers pointed out deficiency in market exposure; six (35.3%) managers 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. 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 as well. The correlations within these factors were weak and correlations of these factors with overall scale were strong that further enhances 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 to 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 the lowest level. One possible reason of this situation might be consciousness of students to grow in person and in this category they had to move largely on their own (Lawrence & Sharma, 2002). Professional and intellectual development skills need more faculty intervention which is below the desirable level (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 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 the 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 is corroborated 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.

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, adaptability, and flexibility in the graduates, further affected the confidence of employers. These findings are consistent with Khan, (2005), Song-Ae (2005), Zieber (2006), Higgs (2007), Tierney (2008), and Doyle (2008). This situation reflects the relative inability 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 their incompetence in these areas.

This state of affairs highlights the implications for faculty development. 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 regarding quality of university graduates of the scale. As per criterion laid in the methodology section, this situation reflects a low to moderate degree of need for faculty development in its instructional, professional and organizational components that provides 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 indicates that the performance of Pakistani universities is below the standards of job market and lack of instructional, professional and organizational competencies of the faculty of universities required for preparing quality graduates on the other. 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 indicative of potential weakness of Pakistani university graduates to play a major role in the economic development of their country. The universities in general and their faculty in particular are responsible for this state of affair. Based on these findings,

there arises a low to moderate degree of need for developing teachers of Pakistani universities in instructional, professional and organizational areas.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study provides the basis for recommending Pakistani universities 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 the students for job markets in order to realize the national higher education objectives.

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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