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Search for Employability Skills: Employers, Novice Workers and HEC Approved Curriculum of BS Economics: A Qualitative Analysis

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
History: Accepted 07 March 2021 Available Online March 2021	<p><i>Universities are improving their policies and curriculum to meet the changing needs of job market. At the same time the employers look complaining about the skills and the characteristics a graduate comes with for employment. Considering this, underlying research investigates the glimpses of development of employability skills in curriculum of discipline of economics implemented in higher education institutions of province of Punjab. For the purpose of fulfillment of the aim of study, this research adopted the qualitative research design. The proposed study has explored, by content analysis, role of higher education institutions, and curriculum of economics to address development of employability skills in graduates in universities. By using qualitative interpretive design, sub themes were sorted out followed by broader themes. Broader themes emerged from sub themes. The study explored that regarding development of most of the skills, the curriculum of economics had suitable content. Moreover curriculum has enough content to meet educational needs of students with diversity. A few needs of students regarding employability skills remained unfulfilled. The study recommended for teachers to have increased understanding of students needs to practice good pedagogy and revise curriculum to fulfill their academic needs as well as to increase the employability skills by universities in Pakistan.</i></p>
Keywords: Veteran Employers, Novice Workers, Employability Skills, Human Capital, Critical Thinking, Curriculum of Economics	
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1. Introduction

Relation among employees and employer is very old. Both depend upon one another. Where employers pay back to workers in the form of salary, wages and other benefits, there employees use their brain, learned skills and experiences to perform their best in organizations to yield maximum product or output. Employers provide conducive working

environment to workers along with attractive salaries. Moreover, other related benefits are also given to employees. There is clear difference that can be seen among the benefits of new workers and old trained and experienced workers. No doubt that an experienced employee is far better for the organization as compared to a new or novice worker. Experienced workers perform better as they have built up employability skills and understand the working environment of the organization. Also they have developed work related skills by working there since years and years.

But it is also fact that organizations need new workers too to maintain number of work force and they require to run their organizations. Recruitment of new workers can be due to multiple reasons. This reason can be expansion of business or organization, opening of new branches or franchises etc. Organizations also need new workers as old workers get retired, go on leave, switch their jobs to other organizations or for such other reasons.

Ideally it is assumed that university graduates after earning the required degree, have developed in them such valuable skills which are necessarily required to an organization for its smooth functioning. Skills required for initial job requirements include interpersonal / communication skill, decision making skill, critical thinking, synthesis, analysis and application of knowledge at work place. But studies show that university graduates usually do not possess those characteristics which are desired or required by veteran employers and of course these are the skills which are required for a particular job for particular organization.

2. Literature Review

Literature on the topic shows that new workers do not possess those skills which are required by employers. Employers complain that higher education institutions are not producing these skills among graduates. So when the graduates come to join organizations, they take sufficient time to develop employability skills at workplace. Hence, there is a combat among workers and employers on the skills necessary for job market. Present study discusses this matter in detail that the skills new workers come with, are really according to the needs of employers and job market or not, and what can be the remedies or the solutions of this problem.

2.1 Human capital theory

There is an assumption that economic prosperity and the functioning of the nations always depend on the human capital and human capital development. This is the concept of human capital theory (See Baker, 1975). Classical economics has the base for the origin of human capital theory. When it appeared in the form of human capital theory, Schultz (1961) recognised human capital theory as one factor that takes part towards the growth of economy (Kown, 2009).

Human capital theory is based on the assumption of economics prosperity. It also has basis for the functioning of nation. There are two ways by which the human capital can be conceptualized. According to the available literature on the topic human capital can be considered as a labour force. According to this concept additional values can be added to economy by using labour force like other productions factors, for example machinery and land. Whereas there is a second concept about the human capital. This concept is that human capital

as investment. The investment which people do to in themselves for increasing their productivity, for example as knowledge and skills (Rosen 2004; Gardner and Gardner 2012). They argue that human capital should not be considered as uni dimensional. In fact it has two dimensions. These two dimensions of human capital are mental and physical. Latter different studies expressed that investment on the cognitive and mental qualities and capabilities have lead to better economic growth as compared to physical labour of human capital. (Gardner and Gardner 2012; Little 2003). According to these two concepts, the concept of human capital which is related to mental and physical, the mental aspect is more important then the physical. (Beach, 2009). If we study the literature, the education is widely used as a source which develops capabilities, specially the mental capabilities (Rastogi, 2002). According to human capital theories in literature , education is a primary and important device which performs its role in the development of economics and this role is done with the help of gained knowledge and learning skills.

It is acceptable in most of the western countries that human capital is always based on the skills and knowledge that they acquire through education (Kwon, 2009; Rastogi2002). The conceptualization of human capital as knowledge, competence, behaviour and attitude are embedded in graduates through education. Other researches also support this concept that human capital is very much related to knowledge and skills building.

2.2 Employment and Employability

For the first time the term employability was used by Beveridge (1909) but it did not gain much spread till 1970. “Emergence of economy at global level has changed the concept of employability, and day by day changing demands of job market require new and novel skills of job. Now employability is not mere getting a job and perform duties, but to perform it excellently and too, sustain it till end of work life. This new concept is widely acceptable for both of the stakeholders of employers and employees. Where employees demand better benefits from the employers, the employers also search useful and positive skills in workers. It is a common belief, and consensus about employability skills that these should be taught in formal educational institutions. A report in USA by the Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS, 1991) emphasized on educational institutions to put focus on imparting necessary and important workplace skills to future job seekers. Present study deals with the debate of employee, employer and employability skills available in higher education commission approved curriculum which are necessarily required to boost up business in competing market”.

2.3 Employee, Employer & Mutual Dependency

The persons work for an institution or an organisation or a company are called the employees of that company. These employees can be full-time employees, or they can be part-time employees. These employees get benefits in the form of salaries and they render services against the salaries on given terms and conditions and according to contract made among the employees and the organisations. However all the persons who work for them or provide services to organisations or companies and get benefits of salaries against the services they provide, all they cannot be called or considered employees. An employee can be defined as a person who is recruited for services or jobs or for labour and he or she does his work for that firm or renders services for that organization. Mostly for the employers ,there is difference

between the contractor and employee. A contractor is a person who does his work with his own will and independently whereas the employer has full control on the employee and employee performs his duties according to the will of the employer. Another difference is that an employee has a salary package as a fix form of wages and he is bound to perform the services according to the contract made between the employer and employee. That contract can be written or it can be implied or that can be verbal. The institutions, or all the companies which hire the employees, they do have full control on the employees and those companies have the right to control the work which is required to be done by the employee.

Let's see now who is employer. Employer can be a company or an organisation or an institution who gets work done from the employee. The employer hires the services of the workers. The employers can be a small business, employer can be a government entity, an individual and agency or store or a firm or institution. The employer has to get the services from the employee according to contract agreement.

The employees have to perform duties according to the contract on which both (employees & employers) are agreed upon and according to the employment contract and according to the policy of the organization. According to the contract, the employer has to pay in form of salary on the basis of weeks, months, days or so. Employers and employees depend upon one other as both have their own benefits and targets and they, therefore, have a mutual contract to gain the benefits from one another. This factor of mutual benefits enables the employer and the employee to sustain their relations. Employees depend on the employers and employers depend upon the employees for the execution of different services and tasks. In this way they achieve their goals which they have set for the businesses and in this way they make sure that their businesses are running smoothly. In the same way the employees also depend on employers as they pay them handsome and attractive packages of salaries and thus they make them able to spend their life which is financially supportive for not only for the employees but also for their families. In the same way when the individuals feel that they are not being paid according to their services they can end up their business contract or the job.

2.4 Employability Skills Desired by Employers & HEC Approved Curriculum

Education providers are responsible for the development of employability skills among graduates as per the requirements and desires of job givers. This will eradicate the miss match present among the employers and employees. In this regard, different studies have been carried out to know the requirements of employers. In formal education, along with academic courses content, students also acquire other valuable skills and practices like team work, decision making and problem solving skills. In curricula at university level various skills related to employability and workforce are embedded as described by Fallow and Steven (2000).

In most of the studies, employers ranked communication skill as the most important and most desirable. Time management skill, team work, computer skills and problem solving skills were also given importance and priorities over other skills. Thus business education or workforce education is necessary for employees or novice workers. Lynch defines workforce education as the “general knowledge about contemporary workplaces and employability skills that are to be learned by all students in education programs” (Lynch, 1997, p. 70). All of the objectives in educational institutions are gained through curriculum. Curriculum is a tool which

is used to acquire particular skills, knowledge and understanding. In present case, it is necessary that curriculum of economics in higher educational institutions must have those glimpses for those aspects which are necessarily required for the development of employability skills. Such skills include critical thinking, communication skill, interpersonal skills, the civic competence, teamwork, application of knowledge and use of technology & gadgets. In curriculum of economics, implemented in higher education institutions, latent , implied and stated objectives have been included to develop employability skills among students.

Teaching at higher education level has multi-dimensional roles. It's not only process to impart the knowledge rather to meet the educational needs of the students to embrace their diversity and to-get skills required for job and work place. For this where curriculum, must have objectives and content for development of employability skills, there teachers have to use, while implementing curriculum, such pedagogical practices which may enhance employability skills of students. Exploring the role of various universities by implementing curriculum in promoting employability skills within the institutions may prove to be a significant contribution in developing and burgeoning leading to students' needs in their respective institutions. The purpose of this research was to explore the curriculum content and ways teachers are using for implementation of curriculum. to meet the individual needs of students studying at higher education level in their respective institutions. The present study aimed at highlighting the glimpses available in HEC approved curriculum of BS Economics necessary for the development of employability skills in university graduates in Pakistan.

3. Methodology of the Study

Qualitative interpretive approach was used to derive findings of the study. Content of curriculum of economics was analysed by using coding, recoding and deriving categories & themes. Moreover content was thoroughly read out to find about the glimpses of development of employability skills. Qualitative research approaches are particularly suitable in ascertaining the meaning out of content

3.1 Validity

The trust worthiness of research has been established through lengthy procedures for fact finding to bring valid data of the researchers (Patton, 2002). Focusing on the curriculum and research questions also increased trustworthiness .Trustworthiness has also estimated due to the originality of the results, representing open-mindedness and un- biasness of the researchers. The role of researchers was of outsider.

4. Data Analysis

Data was gathered by reading of content , coding , recoding and making phrases and themes. Phrases and themes were analyzed by using the thematic analysis (Alhojailan, 2012; Javadi & Zarea, 2016). In thematic analysis we can identify themes, based upon the categories. Identifying patterns in the data facilitates researchers to come up with important or interesting, themes and finally use these themes to address the research questions/hypothesis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data were summarized into different themes, keeping in view the six steps frame work of thematic analysis suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006). These steps includes 1) becoming familiar with the data,2) create initial codes,3) work for themes,4) analyze themes,5) define themes and 6) write- up. The data analysis was an ongoing process,

begun immediately and comprised of line by line and open coding. For the generation of codes, open coding through continuous reviews of the curriculum was made by thoroughly reading it. Later data analysis had been done. The skills which were considered to be included in this study were:

- Skills of Interpersonal & Communication
- Skills of Information Technology
- Skills of Critical Thinking
- Skills related to Integrity & Ethics
- Skills of Civic Competence
- Skills of Quantitative Reasoning

With the help of open coding method, data were coded under several titles corresponding to their content through continuous comparison of events (Gills et. al, 2016) and that appeared from curriculum. To reach the findings of our research questions, these categorized were merged and re-appeared into broader or major themes. These distinctive broad themes were relevant to employability skills under investigation. These themes are appeared after analyzing data both at semantic and latent level.

Table No. 1: Communication & Interpersonal Skills, Program Learning Objective (PLO): Ability to communicate in oral , written and graphical form about concrete questions

Sr. No.	Sub-Themes as Available in Curriculum	Major Themes	Presence of Relevant Content in Curriculum	
1	Effective Communication	Real Life Effective Communication	Course Title	Volume of Content
	Transportation & Communication skills		Communication Skill	Full Course of 03 Credit Hours
	Real life Communication Skill			
	Communication Technologies , Data Communication	Technologies & Communication	Introduction to Mass Communication	Full Course of 03 Credit Hours
	Verbal Communication	Ability to oral , Verbal & Graphical Communication	Information & Communication Technologies	Full Course of 03 Credit Hours
	Written Communication			
	Graphical Communication		Issues in World Economy	One Topic out of Eight

According to table No.1, seven sub themes were derived from curriculum. Out of which three major theme were formed. Theme “real life effective communication” revolves around day to day communication in the world around us. Theme “technologies and communication” is about the use of various equipments and gadgets used for communication purpose. Theme “ability to oral, verbal and graphical communication” is about the verbal and non-verbal communication skills. With respect to amount of content, two full courses and one topic in another course, relevant to communication and interpersonal skills, are available in curriculum of economics.

Table No. 2: Critical Thinking, Program Learning Objective (PLO): An ability to optimally apply economic analysis to everyday economic problems in the real world

Sr. No.	Sub-Themes as Available in Curriculum	Derived Major Themes	Presence of Relevant Content in Curriculum	
1	Think Critically	Critical Thinking	Course Title	Volume of Content
	Thinking and Ethics		Statistics 1	OneTtopic out of Eight
			Development Policy	One topic out of Ten
	To analyze critically	Creative Thinking	Functional English	one topic out of Eight
	Develop deep thinking		Issues in Pakistan Economy	One sub topic out of Etwelve
	Creative Solutions			

According to table No.2, five sub themes were derived from curriculum. Out of which two major themes were formed. Theme “Critical Thinking” is related to creativity, problem solving and novel ideas. Theme “Creative Thinking” is about the use of reason and logic to deal with day to day problems of various nature. With respect to amount of content, three topics relevant to critical thinking with one sub topic in four different courses are available in curriculum of economics.

Table No. 3: Integrity & Ethics, Program Learning Objective (PLO): No program learning objective is available in curriculum

Sr. No.	Sub-Themes as Available in Curriculum	Major Themes	Presence of Relevant Content in Curriculum	
3	To work ethically	Basic Ethics & Values	Course Title	Volume of Content
	Economy, Ethics and Regional Values		Islamiat / Ethics	Full Course of 03 Credit Hours
	Values and Ethical Principles		Economy, Ethics and Universal Values	Full Course of 03 Credit Hours
	Ethics and Values	Universal Ethics & Values	Islamic Banking	One Topic out of Ten
	Equity based on Business Ethics		Islamic Economics	One topic

According to table No. 3, five sub themes relevant to integrity and ethics were derived by thorough study and analysis of curriculum of economics. From sub themes two major themes were formed. Major theme “Basic Ethics & Values” is about the basic behavior and dealings of persons in society. Theme “Universal Ethics & Values” according to content of curriculum, is about values and behaviors expressed at global level. In program learning objectives, description of integrity and observing of ethics has been made. With respect to amount of content, two full courses and two more topics in other two courses relevant to integrity & ethics have been included in curriculum of economics

Table No. 4 : Teaching Competence, Program Learning Objectives (PLOs): Not Available

Sr No.	Sub-Themes as Available in Curriculum	Major Themes	Presence of Relevant Content in Curriculum	
4	Solve complex problems	Analyses and solution of complex problems	Course Title	Volume of Content
	Make the complex analysis		Statistics 1	Two topics out of eight
			Macro Economics	One Topic out of Six
			Complexities of Human Behavior	Issues in Pakistan Economy

According to table No.4, three sub themes relevant to teaching competence were derived by thorough study and analysis of curriculum of economics. From sub themes a major theme was formed. Major theme “analyses and solution of complex problems” is about the skill relevant to expression and making others understand about complicated and complex concepts. With respect to amount of content, four topics in three different courses, relevant to teaching competence skills, have been included in curriculum of economics.

Table No. 5: Civic Competence, Program Learning Objective (PLO): The graduate shall be prepared to respect diversity and endeavor to work ethically

Sr No.	Sub-Themes as Available in Curriculum	Major Themes	Presence of Relevant Content in Curriculum	
5	Society's Environmental Resources	Values & Society	Course Title	Volume of Content
	Importance of Ethics and Values in Society		Islamic Economics	One topic out of Eight
	Welfare of a Society	Society Welfare	Advance Macro Economics	One topic out of Twelve
	Role of Government for Better Society		Advance Monetary Economics	One Sub-Topic out of Four Major Topics
	Society and Social Structure	People and Society		
	Role of Civil Society			

According to table No. 5, six sub themes relevant to civic competence were derived by thorough study and analysis of curriculum of economics. From sub themes, three major themes were formed. Major theme “Values & Society” is about the basic values and behavior of persons in society. Theme “Society Welfare” according to content of curriculum, is about the tasks and actions made for the betterment of peoples living in a society. Theme “People and Society” again is about the individuals residing in a society. In program learning objectives, description of performance of ethics and good behavior has been made. With respect to amount of content, two topics and one sub topic in three different courses, relevant to civic competence, have been included in curriculum of economics.

Table No. 6: Quantitative Reasoning Skills, Program Learning Objectives (PLOs): Ability to use empirical evidence to assess validity of economic argument. This shall involve use of statistical data and methodology

Sr No.	Sub-Themes as Available in Curriculum	Major Themes	Presence of Relevant Content in Curriculum	
6	Statistical methods	Statistical data analysis	Course Title	Volume of Content
	Statistical data analysis			
	Statistical procedures		Monetary Economics	Two topics
	Cash management	Financial management	Issues in Pakistan Economy	Three topics
	Economics management		Advance Micro Economics	One topic
	Risk management			
	Management of resources			

According to table No.6, seven sub themes relevant to quantitative reasoning skills and two major themes of mentioned skills have been derived from the under study curriculum of economics. Major theme “Statistical data analysis” is about the basic information and its analysis by using statistics. Theme “Financial management” according to content of curriculum, is about the skills of handling financial matters. In program learning objectives, description of the skill has been made as ability of validating economic argument. With respect to amount of content, six topics and one sub topic in three different courses, relevant to quantitative reasoning skills, have been included in curriculum of economics.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

As per content analysis of HEC curriculum of BS economics regarding employability skills under investigation adopted the procedure as discussed in above lines. In the beginning, program learning objectives have been provided which state purpose of construction of curriculum of BS economics. Forty four courses have been included in this curriculum including 17 common courses (nine compulsory courses, eight general courses) and 27 discipline specific courses. After the intensive study of the whole curriculum including course objectives and learning outcomes, themes related to employability skills were derived and analysed.

It is fact that employers give very serious consideration to employability skills and employability skills are developed by university education. Employers give it much importance that what kind of employability skills graduates have. In some studies, employers have ranked different employability skills. They have ranked communication skill as the fore most and important skill. Personal attitude, motivations follows it. Employers also say that graduates lack some of the skills like they have poor knowledge about job title, interview skills and information about organization. Even they do not know how to prepare C.V and job application. Universities are making efforts to impart employability skills in graduates. Curriculum is a medium by which these skills can be imparted in students. In current study researchers have analyzed curriculum of economics and found as stated follows. With respect to interpersonal and communication skills, after analysis of sub themes and major themes it had been noted that enough content is available in the curriculum for the development of oral, written and non-verbal communication skills in graduates. In program learning objectives, ability to

develop communication skills in oral, verbal and graphical aspects has been described. Relevant to interpersonal and communication skills, major categories and themes are available in the curriculum of economics.

With respect to critical thinking skills, after analysis of sub themes and major themes it had been observed that less amount of content is present in the curriculum of economics for the development of critical thinking skills. A few more content items related to this skill are suggested to be incorporated in curriculum. In program learning objectives, description of critical thinking skill has been made. This shows that critical thinking was the priority of curriculum being taught at higher education institutions. With respect to integrity and ethics, suitable amount of content , as is evident from sub themes and major themes, is available to develop integrity and ethics among students at local and global level. It shows that integrity and ethics were included in the curriculum and was the priority of universities to teach the graduates.

With respect to skill of teaching competence, suitable amount of content of curriculum, as it is evident from sub themes and major theme, is available to train students about teaching competence which shows that teaching competence was included in the curriculum and was the priority of universities to teach the graduates this skill. Theme also suggests that teaching competence skill was being taught in higher education institutions. If we consider civic competence skills, enough content of curriculum, as it is evident from sub themes and major themes is available to teach students how to behave and live in a society. Inclusion of the content in curriculum related to civic competence shows that priority of universities is to teach the graduates this skill. With respect to quantitative reasoning skills, content of curriculum, as it is evident from sub themes and major themes, is available to teach students quantitative reasoning. Universities have priority to teach the graduates quantitative reasoning skills. However, volume of content available in curriculum is less. There should be addition in available volume.

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