



Role of Universities in Developing Employability in Afghanistan

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of universities in the development of employability in Afghanistan, focusing on the perceptions of faculty members, students, and employers regarding work-related skills across public universities. Using a qualitative research design, the study employs semi-structured interviews with 73 participants selected through convenient sampling from Nangarhar, Laghman, and Kunar universities. The interview data are analyzed thematically using manual techniques. The findings reveal a generally positive perception among teachers regarding the role of universities in fostering employability. They believe that the current curriculum integrates employability skills, aligns with market needs, and delivers job-related skills effectively through various teaching methods. Most students also feel that the Afghan curriculum aligns with current employment market demands, although they acknowledge certain challenges and offer constructive suggestions. In contrast, employers' perceptions differ, indicating that while recently graduated students are eager and possess some job-related skills, they still lack essential employment skills. Recommendations for curriculum improvements are provided based on these findings. In conclusion, while the Afghan university curriculum is designed to help students acquire employment skills and secure jobs in their field of study, it requires updates to better meet current job market needs.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Development, Employment, Job-relate Skills, Roles of Universities.

Introduction

The higher education system in Afghanistan faces numerous challenges, including issues related to quality assurance, employability of graduates, and socio-cultural barriers. The country is coping with the need to modernize its education system in a rapidly changing world, while also addressing persistent socio-economic challenges. Quality assurance in Afghan higher education institutions is hindered by poor communication between educational institutes and industries, lack of scientific research, and administrative challenges (Badshah, n.d.). These issues contribute to the overall poor quality of education and dissatisfaction among stakeholders. Additionally, the country faces challenges in terms of unemployed graduates, highlighting the need for better alignment between education

and labor market demands (Mbeteh & Pellegrini, 2018). Overall, the current situation of higher education in Afghanistan reflects a system in transition, striving to overcome socio-economic challenges while working towards improving quality and employability for its graduates.

Employability refers to an individual's ability to gain and maintain employment, encompassing a combination of subject-specific knowledge, soft skills, and personal qualities (Hansen & Daniels, 2023; Heijde, 2013). It is crucial for Afghanistan as the country faces significant challenges in its labor market, including a large refugee population and limited job opportunities. For Afghanistan, enhancing employability is essential for several reasons. Firstly, it can help address the socio-economic challenges faced by Afghan refugees who are recently returning to Afghanistan, improving their earnings and employment status in host communities (Aziz, 2019). Secondly, it can contribute to the overall development of a skilled workforce, which is vital for the country's economic growth and stability. Lastly, focusing on employability can help bridge the gap between education and industry needs, potentially reducing unemployment and underemployment in the country (Katyal & Arora, 2012).

Universities in Afghanistan can play a crucial role in bridging the gap between education and employment by aligning their curricula with industry needs and fostering practical skills development. The current misalignment between university programs and job market demands in Afghanistan is evident, with insufficient attention given to developing soft skills essential for the 21st-century workforce (Atif & Wisal, 2024). This gap highlights the need for universities to adapt their educational approaches to better prepare students for professional life. To address this issue, Afghan universities can implement several strategies. Firstly, they can integrate technology into classrooms, particularly in fields like accounting, to enhance the learning experience and equip students with relevant skills (Thottoli et al., 2024). Secondly, universities can collaborate with industry stakeholders to develop specialized programs that align with specific job requirements, as seen in the healthcare sector (Chowhan et al., 2024). The establishment of new, workforce-oriented degree programs, such as the food technology department at Herat University, demonstrates the potential for universities to address specific industry needs (Ebner et al., 2017). Thus, this research aims to analyze the role of Afghan universities in developing employability and related factors, to draw conclusions that address the challenges faced by Afghan higher institutions. The following sections describe the theoretical and empirical insights of this study.

Material and Method

The study aimed to explore how Afghan universities can contribute to the employability of their fresh graduates. This research work was qualitative in nature and the researchers interviewed with experienced university lecturers from Afghanistan's Eastern zone, students and stakeholders. The study employed telephone and email, maintaining a consistent format with semi-structured questions. Interviews were conducted informally to encourage participants to share their knowledge and experiences freely, ensuring a smooth flow of conversation with the least guidance. The questions were made to gather detailed

information on the primary research topics, allowing for the collection of rich data for the study.

Sampling

The selected sample of this study are n=73 participants from eastern provinces of Afghanistan which are purposively selected for this study. n=24 participants were purposively selected for for the semi structured of this study. n=7 university students, n=7 lectures, and n=10 employers were selected from Nangarhar province. Similarly, n=7 university students, n=7 lectures, and n=10 employers were selected from Laghman province and n= 8 university students, n=7 lecturers, and n=10 employers from Kunar province were selected as a part of interview. (See Table 1). The variation in the sample is based on the existing numbers of participants, in some university sin which the population is paramount, an increasing has been selected since this a qualitative study in which the number of the participants are limited (Creswell, 2000).

Table 1. Sample of the study

Province	Category	Number of Participants
Nangarhar	University Students	7
	Lectures	7
	Employers	10
Total of Nangarhar		24
Laghman	University Students	7
	Lectures	7
	Employers	10
Total of Laghman		24
Kunar	University Students	8
	Lectures	7
	Employers	10
Total Kunar		25
Grand Total		73

Data collection

The data for this was gathered through a semi-structured interview from participants. The email also invited interested participants to contact the researchers if they wished to be involved in the study or had any doubts. The interviews were conducted through telephone and face to face from the target participants. Due long distance, the telephonic interviews were used to ease the process of data collection.

Data analysis

The data from the semi-structured interview were thematically analyzed. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, with key research questions guiding the identification of

significant themes and discussion points (Wengraf, 2001). Interviews were conducted informally to encourage participants to share their knowledge and experiences freely, ensuring a smooth flow of conversation with the least guidance. The questions were made to gather detailed information on the primary research topics, allowing for the collection of rich data for the study.

Results

This study aimed to explore the roles of universities in developing employability in Afghanistan. Following are the results found from the interviews with three types of participants including teachers, students, and employers which are presented on the objectives based on this study:

To investigate faculty members' perceptions of the effectiveness and implementation of employability programs offered by public universities in Afghanistan.

The first objective of this study is to explore faculty members' perspectives on the effectiveness and application of employability programs provided by universities in Afghanistan. After critically analyzing the interview data from the faculty members it is concluded that they incorporate employment-related skills into their course and teaching method; gathering and using feedback from students from sustainable evaluation of curriculum to market, alignment of courses with the current market, demands, and workplace requirements; delivery of course through a different method, and current challenges and limitation toward employment of graduated students.

Integrating Employability Skills in University Curriculum

After critically analyzing the interview data from the participants, it is concluded that the content of the curriculum and teaching methodologies are aligned to foster employment skills among students throughout their education journey. They utilize and adopt work-related skills into their courses and teach them throughout their courses of study and provide students with extra working-related capacity-building programs through different technical workshops, training, and seminars. In addition, most faculty members claim that the content of the courses and teaching methodologies are adjusted to the practical working environment. Hence, they become skilled graduates after completing their bachelor's degree at university. Following are the quotations derived from the participants as the supporting point of this finding:

"Yes, there are many workshops based that provide students with methods to work in these workshops immediately after graduation, facilitating their employment opportunities." –

P1

"For the subjects I teach, I generally adjust the course policy and teaching methodology to relate each topic to practical work environments." – **P4**

Alignment of Curriculum with Market's Needs

The second major theme was discovered by interview participants about the courses taught at the university. It results that their courses and teaching methods are designed in a manner that can meet the current demands and workplace requirements. As a matter of fact, engineering students are trained and taught in their technical field according to the demands and needs of the current market in Afghanistan through the provision of different workshops and seminars. Economic students are nurtured in managerial, business, and online business skills, leadership, communication, and decision-making skills so they perform better in the future once they are exposed to the market. All in all, if the course content and materials are not offered through work-related skills then the quality of the teaching could be worsened. In addition, students from the faculty of languages can work in the market as interpreters and translators. They translate written books, material, and contents from English to Pashto and Dari and vice versa which is a clear outcome of suiting students with needs of the market. That is why, students with strong knowledge and skills learned throughout their educational journey have brilliant futures in terms of employment. Following are the quotations derived from the participants as the supporting point of this finding:

"My department is a work-related field. Whenever a student graduates from the civil engineering department, they can work as a field engineer or in other higher positions because the engineering faculty always strives to transfer market demand knowledge to students through seminars and workshops." – P7

"It is clear that if work-related skills are not present, the quality of teaching deteriorates." – P10

Delivering employment-related skills through teaching method

The analysis of the interview showcased, that most of the faculty believed that they are playing a crucial in imparting both theoretical and practical skill through various teaching methods and effective tools. They deliver work-related skills through effective teaching methods such as lectures, question and answer sessions, discussions, seminars, group work, and other effective ones. They teach Human Resource management subjects in which students gain all required skills related to recruitment. Furthermore, the effective teaching tools used to enhance students' working skills are also imparted to the students including whiteboards, projectors, and individual and group projects. Therefore, such teaching can enhance students' employment skills through methods and tools used during the teaching and learning process in Afghan universities. Nevertheless, It also resulted from the interviews that besides effective delivering and applying employment-related skills to the students across public universities in Afghanistan. However, a small problem exists among faculty members that hamper them in imparting job-related skills to the students with job market standards. One of those challenges is overloaded teaching in the classroom caused to rely on the traditional way of teaching in which work-related activities and skills are not

effectively implemented. Following are the quotations derived from the participants as the supporting point of this finding:

“Various teaching tools are used, such as whiteboards, projectors, and field forms, as well as individual and group assignments for students.” – P11

“We typically use methods such as lectures, questions and answers, discussions, seminars, group work, and others in our courses.” – P14

To investigate students' perceptions of how the curriculum influences the development of their employability skills in public universities of Afghanistan

The second objective of this study is to examine students' perceptions of how the curriculum influences the development of their employability skills across public universities in Afghanistan.

Effects of Curriculum on Students' Employment

Most of the students believe that the curriculum they are learning is aligned with the market's needs and prepares them to be professional employees after graduation. In the meantime, it was asserted that the faculty members perceived the current curriculum as the students do. From the students of economy, it is revealed that the subjects they are learning guide them toward marketing in which they can sell goods in the market and help them find jobs in the region. Furthermore, students from education and literature claim that the current curriculum and the courses they learning lead to be good teachers in the future. However, the minimum number of participant asserted that their curriculum aligned with their profession but needed slight updates to meet the contemporary needs of an advanced society. Moreover, the data from the interview reveals that the current curriculum enables them to apply theoretical knowledge in practical situations, particularly in their forthcoming careers. Most of them assume that the current curriculum helps them gain enough knowledge in their field and later practice them in their professional life. During their regular classes, they are taught practical activities that are practicable outside and inside the organization. For instance, in engineering faculty, students are taught practical projects that are applicable in the market. Research and writing subjects also helped potential students get enough technical and practical knowledge they find relevant jobs in the market. Finally, very limited numbers of students asserted that within the landscape of their curriculum still some shortages exist and they suggested solutions for enhancing it to better prepare them for the workforce. The current curriculum taught at the university there have been deficiencies that may not prepare them for employment after graduation since it is not aligned with everyday life and market needs. Another deficiency they noticed is the low integration of technology in their curriculum particularly those of subjects that have practicality in career life. Some of the courses are complex and include topics that are not aligned with our profession. In addition, due unavailability of qualified faculty members across public universities causes students to be low in their practical and theoretical knowledge and some of the universities hire contract-based lecturers who have low

expertise in the field and the course cannot be taught effectively. Consequently, some of the students to trouble finding jobs after graduation. To remove such shortages in their curriculum they proposed that some of the course content should be aligned with contemporary market needs, incorporating technology throughout the subject which technical, and difficult topics should be removed to a perfect and effective curriculum. Following are the quotations derived from the participants as the supporting point of this finding: Following are the quotations derived from the participants as the supporting point of this finding:

"Yes, because it shows us all the ways of selling ourselves in the market." – P2

"Yes, the curriculum we are taught at the university will help us in the future with teaching English." – P12

"Our curriculum is aligned with our profession, but it needs more updates." – P21

Requests for Potential Professional Development Programs

The analysis from the student's perspective about the effects of the current curriculum on their professional development skill shows that most of them request more practical training and skill development, technology integration, enhancement of communication skills, research and analytics, self-confidence, and motivation in learning is required within the current curriculum of Afghanistan. Most of the students expressed their concern that they require more practical training skill development programs during courses of their studies which are aligned with their professional goals. They ask for the conduction of different practical programs such as workshops, and seminars which prepare them for real-world challenges. They further highlighted that within their curriculum there should be integration of technology and modern tools. They assume that learning about technologies such as computers, software applications, and internet usage is significant for their professional growth and future job expectations. Likewise, they expressed to accelerate the potential communication skills including report writing, presentation skills, and email communication through seminars, workshops, and training within their curriculum. Furthermore, there is a dire need for research and analytical skills in their education. They suggest that the curriculum should include more opportunities for conducting research, writing proposals, and developing critical thinking abilities. They believed that building motivation and self-confidence is crucial for academic success. They suggest that the curriculum should include programs that enhance these personal attributes, as they are essential for professional growth. Finally, it is also suggested that they need practical experience and internships during their studies. They believe that internships and hands-on training will better prepare them for the job market, allowing them to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings. Following are the quotations derived from the participants as the supporting point of this finding:

"At the university, any training related to our profession is effective for us. Each student should be provided with relevant seminars and training related to their profession once or twice a week." – P26

"Students should be taught computer programs and technology in advance because, in the current era, understanding technology has become essential alongside any profession." – P27

To investigate employers' perceptions of graduated students about their job skills offered by the Afghan public universities

The third objective of this study was to explore employers' perceptions of those employees who are graduated from Afghan public universities and currently working with different governmental and non-governmental organizations. After analysis, we have found that most of the employers believe that graduated students are meeting the job-market standard but need to further enhance their theoretical and practical skills. Following are the major themes explored from the interviews with the employers:

Curriculum impacts on graduates' job skills about current job-market demands

Data from the interview reveals that most of employers assume, there are positive impacts of employment skills on recent graduates but the current Afghan university needs further nourishment. The limited shortages are a lack of inadequate skill development in the curriculum, the need for more advanced practical and capacity-building training, and differences in gained skills. First of all, based on our findings, it is asserted that some of the employers recognize the potential and strong interest of newly graduated students who are employed at different organizations. The further highlights that, if graduated students are given opportunities then they can show good skill and enthusiasm for their roles in organizations. Secondly, however, there is a minor problem exists between the skills taught in the Afghan university curriculum and the practical needs of the job market. They believe that the current educational system fails to adequately prepare students with the required practical and professional skills in some private university fields. Thirdly, most of employers emphasize the need for practical training and capacity-building programs to further enhance their job-related skills. They often lack practical experiences and extra training to meet the demands of the current job market. Finally, there are discrepancy toward one specific field of studies in the skill level of graduated students from various institution which challenge employers in assessing a uniform competency across universities. Following are the major themes explored from the interviews with the employers:

"New graduates are very eager for jobs. They put in a lot of effort to learn new things in the workplace. In short, they are very dedicated to their jobs." – P29

"Currently, there are many private universities, and they have admitted students who don't actually have the capacity, and their competence and skills haven't been considered. They've

graduated, but such individuals don't have the sense that they should acquire skills to serve society." – P1

Employers' perception of the lack of skills among graduated students

Data from the interview discloses that most of the employers perceived some challenges during working period with graduated students from universities. These shortages are a lack of practical experience, limited technical and computer skills, low English language proficiency, and poor administrative and professional skills. It is exposed, that employers are concerned that graduated students possess little hands-on experiences which affect their ability to perform well in the market. There are some deficiencies in technical skills and computer abilities related to their field of studies among some of the recent graduates which hamper their employment rate. Employers address the lack of proficiency in English and other languages among graduates are also one of the pitfalls that deter their employability. They note that inadequate language skills hinder graduates' ability to communicate effectively and perform administrative tasks. In the end, they also observe that recent graduates often lack key administrative and professional skills. This includes understanding administrative principles, effective management, and problem-solving abilities. Following are the major themes explored from the interviews with the employers:

"First, the lack of practical professional skills as the world is continuously advancing, and our curriculum remains outdated. Second, recent graduates' unfamiliarity with the work environment, meaning they do not know what to do." – P3

"Graduates face many problems and challenges in the practical field. If they had practical experience during their university studies, many of these problems would be resolved." – P9

"Many graduates from Afghan universities are not proficient in computers. Since written communication in the workplace is primarily in English, they face language barriers." (R10)

Employers' suggestion for designing the curriculum to the market's needs

At the end interview analysis form the employers about the suggestions that could improve the current problems exist within the curriculum of Afghanistan. Most of them suggest that there should be integration of practical experience, curriculum modernization, collaboration with industry, and enhancing faculty and resources in the existing curriculum of Afghan public universities. Firstly, universities needs to incorporate practical learning opportunities into the curriculum with emphasis on hands-experiences acquisition rather focusing too much on theoretical understanding. Universities needs to update their curriculum to reflect current markets demand and technological advancement which includes revision in content and teaching method to better adjust to industry requirements. They further suggest that higher educational institutions should interact with industry stakeholders and experts to ensure that educational programs meet current job market requirement which includes sustainable partnership, conducting joint projects, and incorporating industry feedback into the curriculum development. Finally, there should be strengthening of the academic

capacity of faculty and provide required resources and they believe that improving the quality of teaching and resources is crucial for aligning educational programs with job market needs. Following are the major themes explored from the interviews with the employers:

"Provide practical learning opportunities for students." – P18

"In my view, each faculty should teach specific skills relevant to their field." – P31

"Assess the job market and adjust university activities according to those needs." – P10

"Regular meetings with stakeholders, incorporating feedback from partners into strategic planning, involving students in practical programs and projects." – P7

Discussion

Following key discussions support the roles of universities in developing employability in Afghanistan which are detailed discussed below:

Faculty members' perceptions of the effectiveness of employability programs

Most of the faculty members asserted that the content of the curriculum and teaching methodologies are aligned to fostering employment skills among students throughout their education journey. They can utilize work-related skills in their course and teach them throughout their courses of study and provide students with extra working-related capacity-building programs through different technical workshops, training, and seminars. The Ministry of Higher Education of Afghanistan motivates affiliated universities across the country to conduct different workshops, training, and seminars to enhance students, teachers, and employees for a sustainable education of the students' learning outcome. The content of the courses and teaching methodologies are adjusted to the practical working environment. Hence, their students become skilled graduates after completing their bachelor's degree. It is observed that Outcome Based and Students-Centered Learning (OBE & SCL) are broadly conducted on faculty members across public universities in Afghanistan to help them enhance their teaching expertise through which students learning outcomes is further boosted. The aim of such workshops is to help students gain potential workplace-related skills to the students.

Alignment of Curriculum with Market's Needs

Most of the faculty members asserted that the courses and teaching methods are designed in a way that is aligned with the current demands of the workplace. A potential student with enough work-related skills is capable of finding jobs after their graduation. Engineering students are trained and taught in their technical field according to the demands and needs of the current market in Afghanistan through the provision of different workshops and seminars. Economic students are nurtured in managerial, business, and online business skills, leadership, communication, and decision-making skills so they perform better in the future once they are exposed to the market. Students from the faculty of languages can work in the market as interpreters and translators. They translate written books, material, and contents from English to Pashto and Dari and vice versa which is a clear outcome of suiting

students with the needs of the market. In the Afghani landscape, students who have outstanding performances during academic journeys, are motivated to master the technical aspects of their field of studies and are inspired to boost their family's economic condition, thus through such factors, they can find jobs after their graduation.

Delivering employment-related skills through teaching method

Most of the faculty members believe that they play an important role in conveying both theoretical and practical skills through various teaching methods and effective tools. They deliver work-related skills through effective teaching methods such as lectures, question and answer sessions, discussions, seminars, group work, and other effective ones. They teach Human Resource management subjects in which students gain all required skills related to recruitment. Teaching methods play a significant role in enhancing the employment skills of the students, currently, in Afghan universities there is a paradigm shift in teaching methods in which most of the faculty members strive to implement outcome-based education by conducting field research on students as a part of course requirements. Therefore, students' work-related skills are improved through such teaching which are currently applied but such methods are only implemented on the limited numbers of the students since the majority of the students are admitted with low educational backgrounds across public universities, particularly in the field of education and literature. Furthermore, the effective teaching tools used to enhance students' working skills are also imparted to the students including whiteboards, projectors, and individual and group projects. Therefore, such teaching methods can enhance students' employment skills through methods and tools used during the teaching and learning process in Afghan universities.

Nevertheless, it also resulted that along with effective delivery and applying employment-related skills to students across public universities in Afghanistan, however, a small problem exists among faculty members that hamper them in imparting job-related skills to students with job market standards. One of those challenges is overloaded teaching in the classroom caused to rely on the traditional way of teaching in which work-related activities and skills are not effectively implemented. Such a problem is rooted in the unavailability of enough faculty members across public universities and the large numbers of students in the classroom which is why delivering outcome-based education and research-based teaching could be delayed upon a large number of students since their very limited time for students to practice such methods. If the Ministry of Higher Education of Afghanistan increases the number of faculty members across different departments and decreases the ratio of students per teacher then the delivery of the mentioned method will be more effective and the outcome of the students will be enhanced.

Students' perceptions of curriculum on the development of employability skills

Alignment of the curriculum to the market needs

Most of the students believe that the current curriculum is aligned with the market's needs and prepares them to be professional employees after graduation. In the meantime, it was asserted that the faculty members perceived the current curriculum as the students do. Such

an assumption is only centered on the student's perspective since they are in a position that every subject they learn at universities predicts as a potential force for their future employment. From the students of economy, it is revealed that the subjects they are learning guide them toward marketing in which they can sell goods in the market and help them find jobs in the region. Furthermore, students from education and literature claim that the current curriculum and the courses they learning lead to be good teachers in the future. However, the minimum number of participant asserted that their curriculum aligned with their profession but needed slight updates to meet the contemporary needs of an advanced society. From the literature, it is revealed that so far no study found challenges toward the curriculum of Afghanistan's higher education but there is a related study only on primary and second education, it is discovered that numerous challenges still need to be addressed, particularly in spreading a new curriculum culture and in the writing, printing, and distribution of high-quality syllabuses and textbooks across all levels of education (Georgescu, 2007). Moreover, the current curriculum enables them to apply theoretical knowledge in practical situations, particularly in their forthcoming careers. Most of them assume that the current curriculum helps them gain enough knowledge in their field and later practice them in their professional life. During their regular classes, they are taught practical activities that are practicable outside and inside the organization. For instance, in engineering faculty, students are taught practical projects that are applicable in the market. Research and writing subjects also helped potential students get enough technical and practical knowledge they find relevant jobs in the market.

Problems in the curriculum

However, a limited number of students asserted that within the landscape of their curriculum still some shortages exist and they suggested solutions for enhancing it. The current curriculum taught at the university there have been deficiencies that may not prepare them for employment after graduation since it is not aligned with everyday life and market needs. In line with this, Sri Lanka has faced significant challenges in aligning its higher education curriculum with practical, career-oriented skills. A study on the curriculum reforms in Sri Lanka highlighted the introduction of career guidance and internship programs that aimed to enhance the employability of graduates (Little & Hettige, 2014). Another deficiency they noticed is the low integration of technology in their curriculum particularly those of subjects that have practicality in career life. Some of the courses are complex and include topics that are not aligned with our profession. In addition, due unavailability of qualified faculty members across public universities causes students to be low in their practical and theoretical knowledge and some of the universities hire contract-based lecturers who have low expertise in the field and the course cannot be taught effectively. Some of the students are in trouble finding jobs after graduation. To get rid of such deficiencies in their curriculum they proposed that some of the course content should be aligned with contemporary market needs, incorporating technology throughout the subject which technical, and difficult topics should be removed to a perfect and effective

curriculum. Afghan Higher education faces the challenge of preparing graduates for rapidly developing work environments. Many current markets didn't even exist a few years ago (Cappelli, 2014).

Suggestions for improving of curriculum

Most of the students requested more practical training and skill development, technology integration, enhancement of communication skills, research and analytics, self-confidence, and motivation within the current curriculum of Afghanistan. Most of them proposed that they require more practical training skill development programs during courses of their studies that are aligned with their professional goals. They ask for different practical programs that improve job-related skills through provisions of workshops, and seminars. Seminars and workshops are conducted across different public universities in Afghanistan but are limited in numbers, there should increases in the application of such programs that further enhance students' employability skills. it is suggested, Students participating in capacity-building programs often have the chance to connect with industry professionals, mentors, and peers, which can lead to valuable professional relationships and job opportunities (Hinds Jr, 2020). Students further suggested that within their curriculum there should be integration of technology and modern tools. They believe that learning about technologies such as computers, software applications, and internet usage is significant for their professional growth and future job expectations. In line with this, specialized software for particular courses should be placed within the current curriculum of Afghanistan's higher education since there have been many advances in integrating technologies with different fields of study.

Moreover, they expressed to accelerate the potential communication skills including report writing, presentation skills, and email communication through seminars, workshops, and training within their curriculum. There is a common need for the inclusion of writing skills across all disciplines across the current curriculum of higher education since most employers as for writing emails and reports which our students lack currently. Furthermore, there is a dire need for research and analytical skills in their education. They suggested that the curriculum should include more facilities for conducting research, writing proposals, and developing critical thinking abilities. Building motivation and self-confidence is crucial for academic success. They recommended that the curriculum should include programs that enhance these personal attributes, as they are essential for professional growth. Finally, it is also suggested that they need practical experience and internships during their studies. They ask for internships and hands-on training will better prepare them for the job market, allowing them to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings. Currently, in some public technical faculties and departments students are provided with internship programs in the final years of their studies in governmental organizations so can gain practical knowledge of their field which later helps them find relevant jobs future.

Employers' perceptions about graduated students about their job skills Impacts of curriculum on graduates' job skills

There are positive impacts of employment skills on recent graduates, but the current curriculum of Afghan universities needs further improvements. This finding contradicts the findings from the students' perceptions about the alignment of curriculum to the current market need. Students asserted that their curriculum is aligned with the workplace but from the employer's perspective, only newly graduated students have the potential of interest and employment-related skills. However, in most cases, they lack employment-related skills which is why they ask for the improvement of the curriculum in light of job-related skills. The limited shortages are a lack of inadequate skill development in the curriculum, the need for more advanced practical and capacity-building training, and differences in gained skills. Based on the literature, many programs include hands-on projects, internships, or simulations that provide students with real-world experience, enhancing their understanding of how to apply their skills in a professional setting (Brundiers et al., 2010). Conversely, there is a minor problem exists between the skills taught in the Afghan university curriculum and the practical needs of the job market. The current educational system fails to adequately prepare students with the required practical and professional skills in some private university fields. Employers emphasize the need for practical training and capacity-building programs to further enhance their job-related skills during students' academic journey. They often lack practical experience and extra training to meet the demands of the current job market. Finally, there are discrepancies in one specific field of studies in the skill level of graduate students from various institutions which challenge employers in assessing a uniform competency across universities.

Employers' perception of the lack of skills among graduated students

Most of the employers perceived some challenges during the working period with graduated students from universities. These shortages are a lack of practical experience, limited technical and computer skills, low English language proficiency, and poor administrative and professional skills. It is exposed, that employers are concerned that graduated students possess little hands-on experience which affects their ability to perform well in the market. In addition, there are some deficiencies in technical skills and computer abilities related to their field of studies among some of the recent graduates which hamper their employment rate. Employers address the lack of proficiency in English and other languages among graduates as also one of the pitfalls that deter their employability. They noted that inadequate language skills hinder graduates' ability to communicate effectively and perform administrative tasks. In the end, they also observe that recent graduates often lack key administrative and professional skills. This includes understanding administrative principles, effective management, and problem-solving abilities. Even at entry-level positions, employers often seek signs of leadership potential, such as taking on responsibilities, leading projects, or demonstrating strategic thinking (Chowdhury & Miah, 2016). Such pitfalls are rooted in schools since most of the students fail to grasp computer and English language skills and when they are admitted to the universities they face such problems. These capacity-building programs are limited across universities that why they

fail to gain employment-related skills after graduation from university. There should be strong attention during school levels in Afghanistan by the concerned organization and authority to educate students on the given curriculum of schools in Afghanistan later they may face problems in grasping the employment-related skills and techniques.

Employers' suggestions for designing the curriculum to the market's needs

At the end of our study, most of the employers were asked to offer effective suggestions for improving working skills of graduated students. Most of them suggested that there should be integration of practical experience, curriculum modernization, collaboration with industry, and enhancing faculty and resources in the existing curriculum of Afghan public universities. Universities are suggested to incorporate practical learning opportunities into the curriculum with an emphasis on hands-experiences acquisition rather than focusing too much on theoretical understanding. According to the current curriculum of higher education in Afghanistan, every student at the final of their study is obliged to take a year practice or internship session with a belonging organization. However, the culture of internship and practicum is weakened in Afghanistan due to the large number of students and internship opportunities across government organizations (Atifnigar et al., 2022). National and international NGOs should also cooperate with Afghan universities in providing internships a practical programs for potential fields. Internships, co-op programs, or project work that provides real-world experience can set graduates apart by showing their ability to apply academic knowledge in practical settings (Alfeld et al., 2013).

Universities need to update their curriculum to reflect current market demand and technological advancement which includes revision in content and teaching methods to better adjust to industry requirements (Mian et al., 2020). Currently, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has initiated a massive milestone to update and upgrade the current curriculum of Afghanistan's higher education. Most of the faculty's curricula are updated, and they will be soon implemented across universities in Afghanistan. The current curriculum is designed to the current needs of the world, market, and technology. They further suggest that higher educational institutions should interact with industry stakeholders and experts to ensure that educational programs meet current job market requirement which includes sustainable partnership, conducting joint projects, and incorporating industry feedback into the curriculum development. Finally, there should be a strengthening of the academic capacity of faculty members and provide required resources, they believe that improving the quality of teaching and resources is crucial for aligning educational programs with job market needs.

Advanced education establishments in Afghanistan assume a critical part in creating employability abilities, however enhancements are required in the educational plan. The current curriculum and teaching methods, according to the faculty, provide students with essential job skills through coursework and additional training. Nonetheless, a few holes stay in completely coordinating these abilities with market guidelines. Understudies for the most part concur that the educational plan sets them up for work, however they recognize

lacks in viable preparation, innovation mix, and relational abilities. They call for increased emphasis on report writing, presentation skills, and email communication, as well as more hands-on instruction. While employers acknowledge the positive impact of the skills taught, they emphasize that the curriculum must be regularly updated to keep up with industry trends. They feature an absence of functional experience, specialized abilities, English capability, and expert capacities among graduates. Managers suggest incorporating more useful encounters, refreshing the educational program to reflect mechanical headways, and encouraging joint effort with industry to guarantee instructive projects meet work market prerequisites. Reinforcing personnel capacities and assets is additionally viewed as need might arise.

Conclusion

Advanced education establishments in Afghanistan assume a critical part in creating employability abilities, however enhancements are required in the educational plan. The current curriculum and teaching methods, according to the faculty, provide students with essential job skills through coursework and additional training. Nonetheless, a few holes stay in completely coordinating these abilities with market guidelines. Understudies for the most part concur that the educational plan sets them up for work, however they recognize lacks in viable preparation, innovation mix, and relational abilities. They call for increased emphasis on report writing, presentation skills, and email communication, as well as more hands-on instruction. While employers acknowledge the positive impact of the skills taught, they emphasize that the curriculum must be regularly updated to keep up with industry trends. They feature an absence of functional experience, specialized abilities, English capability, and expert capacities among graduates. Managers suggest incorporating more useful encounters, refreshing the educational program to reflect mechanical headways, and encouraging joint effort with industry to guarantee instructive projects meet work market prerequisites. Reinforcing personnel capacities and assets is additionally viewed as need might arise.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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