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The Impact of Structural and Educational Challenges on Career Readiness and Employability of Female Business Administration Students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

Dr. Maimoona Saleem

Lecturer, Department of Management Sciences, ICP Email:
maimoona.saleem@icp.edu.pk

Sajid Ali

MPhil Scholar, Department of Economics, ICP, Email: orakzai.sajidali@gmail.com

Dr. Mohib Ullah

Assistant Professor, Institute of Business Studies and Leadership, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan

Dr. Azhar Khan (Corresponding Author)

Professor, Institute of Social Policy and Research, Peshawar

Email: azhar5896081@gmail.com & <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6616-0662>

ABSTRACT

The issue of graduate employability has gained importance among the higher education institutions, especially in the developing world that is characterized by fewer opportunities in the labor market. Women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan are experiencing multiple impediments which impact career preparedness and job marketability after graduating into Female Business Administration. These issues are high unemployment, absence of definite job ideas, insufficient hands-on activities, and absence of project-based training, unavailability of government employment and insufficient investment prospects and poor governance. The present study is based on the Human Capital Theory that defines employability as a consequence of education, skills, experience, and support of the institutions. The paper forms a conceptual framework to analyze the effect of the combination of these factors on the career readiness and employability of female Business Administration students in KPK. Available literature indicates that academic knowledge does not necessarily guarantee employment and that practical exposure, awareness of career and favorable conditions of the labor market are critical in equipping graduates with working. The female students tend to face problems in putting their education into productive work in the areas with limited job possibilities and poor institutional backing. The suggested research methodology is a quantitative one that will be used to empirically verify the correlations of the specified factors with career readiness and employability. This research study will be useful to universities, policy makers and curriculum developers as it will discuss the need to ensure that practical training, project based learning, good career guidance, and better governance are employed to ensure that the female graduates become more employable. Since this study is conceptual in nature, further studies ought to be centered on obtaining primary data and coming up with a measurement scale that is context-specific to look empirically into career readiness, and employability among female Business Administration students at KPK.



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Keywords: Career Readiness; Employability; Human Capital Theory; Female students; Business Ad knowing; Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Background of the study

Graduate career readiness and employability now have emerged in the spotlight of alarm among educators, policymakers, and employers across the globe as institutions of higher learning do their best to create work prepared graduates in a progressive competitive labor market. The general meaning of employability describes a complex of skills, attributes, and competencies that allow one to find a job, work efficiently, and adjust to changing workplace needs (Ahmed et al., 2023). According to the most recent studies, the meaning of employability goes beyond academic success and includes also soft skills, practical experience, and the correspondence between the curricula and industry requirements (Ahmed et al., 2023; Alwi and Abdul Karim, 2025).

The issue of transitioning education to employment has critical structural and skills-based challenges that affect the graduates in the context of Pakistan, especially business degree holders. Researchers have discovered vast deficits in employability skills like communication, team work, problem-solving, and work experience, that lead to prolonged job market hunches and scarce career preparedness (Ahmed et al., 2023; Riaz et al., 2025). As an example, a study of Pakistani university graduates noted that lack of required skills was one of the biggest obstacles to the effective entry into the labor markets (Ahmed et al., 2023). In the same line, mixed-methods studies revealed that graduates are misaligned with industry expectations because of their academic preparation and consequently have difficulties with employability (Riaz et al., 2025).

The research undertaken in Pakistan also highlights the importance of soft and practical skills in improving the employability outcomes. The competencies of fresh graduates described by employers in business fields include communication, confidence, and readiness to learn as the factors that guarantee their success in the interview process and integration into the workplace (Khattak et al., 2023).

Moreover, a study on higher education programmes has revealed that it is necessary to increase industry connections and experiential learning elements in the curriculum to enhance graduate preparedness to labor market (Alwi and Abdul Karim, 2025). In spite of this increased literature, a research gap exists which specifically examines how combined structural restrictions, including unemployment, job ideas, and practice exposure, project exposure, formal employment opportunities, low investment climate, and weaker governance are combined in affecting career readiness and employability. This disparity is even more noticeable when it comes to female students of Business Administration in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), as the population might face an increase in compounded barriers, which the gender norms, cultural restrictions, and regional socioeconomic differences might compound.

The current research, thus, aims at knowing the influence of this combination of issues (as the independent variable) on career readiness and employability (as the dependent variable) of female Business Administration students in KPK. This study is expected to create more subtle knowledge to inform future interventions in education, change of policy and more specific support systems to help the Pakistani region increase graduate employability success rates through their research.

Problem Statement

Employability and graduate career readiness have emerged as serious issues in the higher education systems especially in the developing economies whose labour markets cannot



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absorb the increasing flow of university graduates. Employability has ceased to be the result of employment but a set of skills, work experience, career awareness, and adaptability that help the graduates to move successfully out of school to work (Yorke and Knight, 2006; Jackson, 2016). According to the always present empirical evidence, graduates with no practical exposure programs, project-based education, and career planning skills are exposed to long unemployment and underemployment (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005).

Graduate unemployment has been continuously very high in Pakistan, and one of the main structural factors that have continued to hinder the labor markets in Pakistan is the lack of sufficient job opportunities, poor politics, low level of investments, and a declining base of public sector employment (World Bank, 2023; ILO, 2023). These issues are especially acute among business graduates, the employability of which strongly depends on real-world experience and applied skills, as well as exposure to a real-world project (Jackson, 2016). Research by Pakistan researchers shows that there are pronounced skills gaps between higher education programs and labour market demand, so higher education graduates ended up having low career readiness loosely speaking despite their official qualifications (Haider and Hussain, 2015).

Women graduates bear double disadvantages in such a setting. The lack of employment opportunities in women is also exacerbated by gender inequalities in labor participation, fewer contacts into professional circles, lack of access to entrepreneurial opportunities, and sociocultural problems which in turn reduces women employability potential, particularly in such provinces as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (ILO, 2023; World Bank, 2023). To the female Business Administration students, unemployment, lack of job ideas, no practical and project work, dwindling government jobs, low investments by the private sector, and low perceived good governance may seriously impact the career readiness and employability.

Although such issues are crucial, the literature that has been conducted has mostly analyzed these factors individually. The study has an empirical gap in comprehending how these structural and educational barriers coupled together to likely affect the career preparedness and marketability of female students taking Business Administration at KPK, and this gap requires specialized investigation.

Research Objectives

To assess the degree of career preparedness and employability in female students of the field of Business Administration in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK).

To investigate the impact of structural and educational factors together and including unemployment, ideas of jobs, a lack of practical experience, project work, government jobs, investments, and poor governance among others on the career readiness and employability of KPK female students of the Business Administration course.

Research Questions

How career-ready and employable are the female Business Administration students at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK)?

How far do the structural and educational aspects compound to affect career readiness and employability of female students of Business Administration in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK)?

Significance of the Research

The research can be important at several different levels, where it will help fill a serious



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gap in the existing empirical research on the career preparedness and employability of female students of Business Administration in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). The qualitative study of employability as a dependent variable also provides the contribution to a more in-depth understanding of the correlation between a combination of structural and educational policies to determine how unemployment, job ideas, lack of practical experience, project work, declining government job opportunity, low level of investment and weak government can be combined to yield an overall effect on employability.

Academically, this study helps to enhance the employability literature, by offering current frameworks a regional and gender-specific situation, which is not well represented in empirical research. Majority of the previous studies have considered employability factors as a standalone aspect or as a national sample. This paper contributes to the literature of employability among female business students by analyzing these issues as a synergized construct to provide a more comprehensive and context-oriented explanation of the phenomenon.

In practical terms, the results will be evidence-based data to institutions of higher learning and universities and business schools within KPK will be able to restructure the curriculum, reinforce project-based learning, and practical exposure to meet the needs of the labor market. The findings can also inform career development centers to come up with specific interventions to develop career readiness amongst female students.

At a policy level, the research can assist policymakers and government agencies dealing with higher education, employment and development of women with valuable empirical evidence in policy making. The awareness of the role of structural labor market constraints on employability can be used to design more gender-responsive employment policies and entrepreneurship support initiatives and investment strategies to enhance the participation of the female labor force in KPK.

All in all, this study enhances informed decision-making that will help to reinforce graduates employability, curtail the woe of female unemployment and establish sustainable working conditions in the land.

Operationalization of the Study Variables.

Dependent Variable (DV)

Work Preparedness and Work Employability.

Empirical Definition: The concepts of career readiness and employability are related to the extent to which students have skills, competencies, and attributes needed to find and succeed in the job area and career planning, finding and solving problems, communicating, working, and performing, as well as practical business (Jackson, 2016; Alwi and Abdul Karim, 2025). Structured questionnaires evaluating self-reported readiness to face challenges at the workplace, available practical skills, and confidence in job-seeking skills are most often used in the measurement in the context of empirical research.

Independent Variables (IVs)

Unemployment

Empirical Definition: The unavailability of jobs in the labor market which corresponds to the qualification of the graduates (Fasih, 2025). Unemployment is empirically determined by the perception of the students towards the lack of employment opportunities in their future career and the lack of employment opportunities upon graduating.

Lack of Job Ideas

Empirical Definition The lack of career planning or merely understanding of possible



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employment opportunities among students (Ahmed, Tariq, and Warraich, 2023). It is gauged by the uncertainty among the students on career choices, entrepreneurship and career choices as reported by the students.

No Practical Experience

Defined Empirically: This is lack of practical work experience or internship or exposure to actual business activities where students can put theoretical knowledge in practice (Riaz, Tarar, Tarar, and Arif, 2025). Empirically measured as survey items which determine the student involvement in practical assignments, internships and real life projects.

No Projects

Empirical Definition: No involvement in systematic academic or industrial-based projects that train applied skills (Alwi and Abdul Karim, 2025). Measured by the degree of the frequency and project work done in the course of studies.

No Government Jobs

Empirical Definition: Access to employment facilities in the public sector in access of the graduates which is limited (World Bank, 2023). Expressed in the feelings of the students about the accessibility and competitiveness of government jobs in their area.

No Investment

Empirical Definition The lack of financial resources or funding to back up entrepreneurial activities or business projects among students (Shair et al., 2024). Which are empirically gauged by the perception of students regarding their access to startup capital, business loans, or institutional support of entrepreneurship.

No Good Governance

Weak X Empirical Meaning Weak institutional policies and administrative practices refusing to facilitate both educational-to-employment and female workforce transitions (ILO, 2023). The indicator was the judgment of the students regarding how effectively the government is in offering employment policies, vocational support, and regulatory transparency.

Literature Review

Graduate employability and career readiness have become the primary issue in higher education studies all around the world and in South Asian context. Employability has been discussed in general terms as the collection of skills, knowledge, and personal qualities that facilitate graduates to get a job, stay in the workforce, as well as prosper in their line of work (Yorke and Knight, 2006, as cited in the literature). This becomes an even greater problem in developing economies such as Pakistan because structural constraints on the labor market are coupled with education system problems, which combine to affect the processes of moving academia to effective jobs.

Empirical studies conducted in Pakistan indicate a substantial shortage of skills and problems of employment by tertiary graduates. A recent quantitative experiment discovered that issues like a weak fit between the curriculum and the demands of the industry, insufficient practical exposure, and underdevelopment of skills would have a severe impact on the outcomes of employability of graduates (Fasih, 2025). The research noted that industry co-operation and skills enrichment, they were found to explain a significant proportion of the degree of graduate employability, and evidently, historical academic training was not enough to equip students with directional training in the labor market (Fasih, 2025). In the same fashion, Riaz et al. (2025) recorded a high level of dissatisfaction among the employers with the work-readiness of graduates, especially in the areas of practicality in terms of skills, communication, and problem solving skills.



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These results highlight the idea that the theory-practice gap remains one of the barriers facing career preparedness in the Pakistani system of higher education (Riaz et al., 2025). The studies paying closer attention to the aspect of employability skills development also imply that graduates are frequently deprived of transferable and technical employers-demanded skills, which include such aspects as collaboration, managerial and inventive capabilities (Ahmed et al., 2023). When applied with regard to education graduates, specifically employers have found a dearth between the university education and performance in the workplace, pointing to further exposure, better-aligned curricula, and assertive involvement of the student as the way to enhance the outcomes of their employability (Arif, Mir, and Gul, 2023). Although such studies target general populations of the graduates, its outcomes suggest that such issues are applicable to business students, who need not only the appropriate knowledge of their candidates but also practical skills to get employment after graduation.

The other critical dimension of discourse in employability in Pakistan is connected to gender and labor market. The Pakistan Labor Force Survey has shown that women are also more likely to take part in formal wage labor as their education level rises, still, female graduates are still viable in formal and stable jobs as compared to men—a fact that emphasizes the structural discrimination of female graduates in the Pakistani workforce (Shair et al., 2024). These obstacles are associated with sociocultural norms, work discrimination, and professional development prospects that have a direct effect on the level of career preparedness and transforming educational achievement into productive work in the case of women.

Though a cumulative development of literature on graduate employability in Pakistan exist, there are limited research studies, which have simultaneously analyzed the structural (e.g., unemployment, insufficiency of available jobs at government, insufficient investment, poor governance) and educational (e.g., absence of practical experience and projects) issues that affect the overall results of employability, specifically in respect of female Business Administration students in areas such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). Since regional economic inequalities and gender limitations in the labor force overlap in an attempt to define graduate outcomes, there is a need to conduct more specific studies to discover these multidimensional forces in order to make policy and institutional reactions.

Graduate Employability and Career Readiness

Employability refers to the set of skills, knowledge, and personal characteristics where the graduates can acquire employment, retain, and advance in their jobs (Jackson, 2016). The concept of career readiness is directly related to the willingness of graduates to start successfully using their academic knowledge in the workplace (Yorke and Knight, 2006). The studies in Pakistan have repeatedly shown that graduates do not always seem to have the skills to make the transition between education and a job, thus leading to a late start in the job market and underemployment (Riaz et al., 2025).

Influence of Unemployment and Non-ideas of incorporating a job.

The situation of unemployment has long existed in Pakistan and especially among the recent graduates. Unemployment rates are high, and this means that female graduates do not have a chance to exercise their skills and get a meaningful job (Fasih, 2025). Moreover, insufficient guidance and formal career planning programs limits the amounts of job opportunities and entrepreneurial paths or opportunities, restricting students in choosing a career (Shair et al., 2024). The obstacles have the negative effects of reducing



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career readiness and limiting the growth of professional self-efficacy among female students.

Inadequate Practical Experience and Project Exposure.

Development of employable skills such as problem-solving skills, teamwork and business acumen is heavily dependent on practical experience and project-based learning. Research suggests that Pakistani business students frequently graduate with very little exposure on internships, live projects, and experience learning opportunities, which creates some discrepancies between the theory and the workplace demands (Alwi and Abdul Karim, 2025; Ishaq and Asghar, 2025). There are also competencies that cannot be displayed by students with the lack of projects.

Structural Constraints: Government Employment, Investment and Governance.

KPK female graduates are further disadvantaged by the absence of employment in the state and low rates of investment by the populace, and poor governance in the labor markets (World Bank, 2023). These institutional attributes cut off job opportunities, deter entrepreneurial activities, and influence the general employment marketability situation among women. These difficulties are made worse by issues in governance that include inappropriate policy application and failure to support women, who need to participate in the workforce (ILO, 2023).

Female Business Administration Student at KPK.

The combination of these issues, unemployment, and lack of job ideas, limp practical experience, and absence of projects, absence of government jobs, as well as low investment and strong governance form a special and compounded impediment to career readiness in female Business Administration students. Although individual issues have been studied elsewhere previously, not many have viewed them together and especially in the context of the region of KPK. This is the gap that has made the research a matter of the current research study, which will evaluate the overall effect of these structural and educational limitations on employability.

Human Capital Theory

The human capital Theory translates into the ability of people to be employable and career-ready because of investments in education, skills, training, and experience. According to the theory, the consequences of the inability may be the worsened employability when a person cannot accumulate the specific skills and the experience of the working process which may be caused by structural, institutionalized and economic factors (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964).

The Human Capital Theory is the most appropriate in this study

The Human Capital Theory explicitly justifies your dependent variable- career readiness and employability of female students in Business Administration in KPK, and makes rational sense to all the independent variables in your study.

Table 1. Clarification of variables with HCT

Study (IVs)	Variables	Clarification through Human Capital Theory
Unemployment		Receives low returns to human capital because of labor market imbalance.



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Study (IVs)	Variables	Clarification through Human Capital Theory
Lack of job ideas		Cites a low level of career-related knowledge and awareness of the labor market.
No practical experience		Outcomes of poor skills and inability to secure a job.
No projects		Constrained learning and skill impartation.
No government jobs		Lowers labor uptake of human resources.
No investment		Limits talent and entrepreneurship.
Poor governance		Undermines institutional structures in favor of the formation of human capital.

These constraints, along with others, decrease the impact of investment in education, hence the decreased career readiness and employability outcomes - especially in female students in underserved areas like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Theoretical Justification Statement

The research is also based on the Human Capital Theory that states that accumulated education, skills, mind-on-job experience, and institutional support are the outcomes that generate employability and career readiness. The theory presents an effective background to the study that shows how unemployment, lack of experience in learning, minimal investment, and poor governance combines to limit the development and exploitation of human capital, consequently, decreasing career readiness and employability among female students of Business Administration in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Proposed Hypotheses

H1: There is a negative relationship between unemployment and career preparation and employability among the KPK female B. Administration students.

H2: The negative influence of job ideas on the career readiness and employability of female students of Business Administration in KPK.

H3: Practical experience does not influence negatively on career readiness and employability of females studying Business Administration in KPK.

H4: Project based learning or the absence of projects negatively influences the career preparedness and employability of female Business Administration students in KPK.

H5: Another hypothesis is that government jobs scarcity has a negative impact on career readiness and employability of female students in the field of Business Administration in KPK.

H6: There is a negative influence of limited investment on career readiness and job-finding among Business Administration female students in KPK.

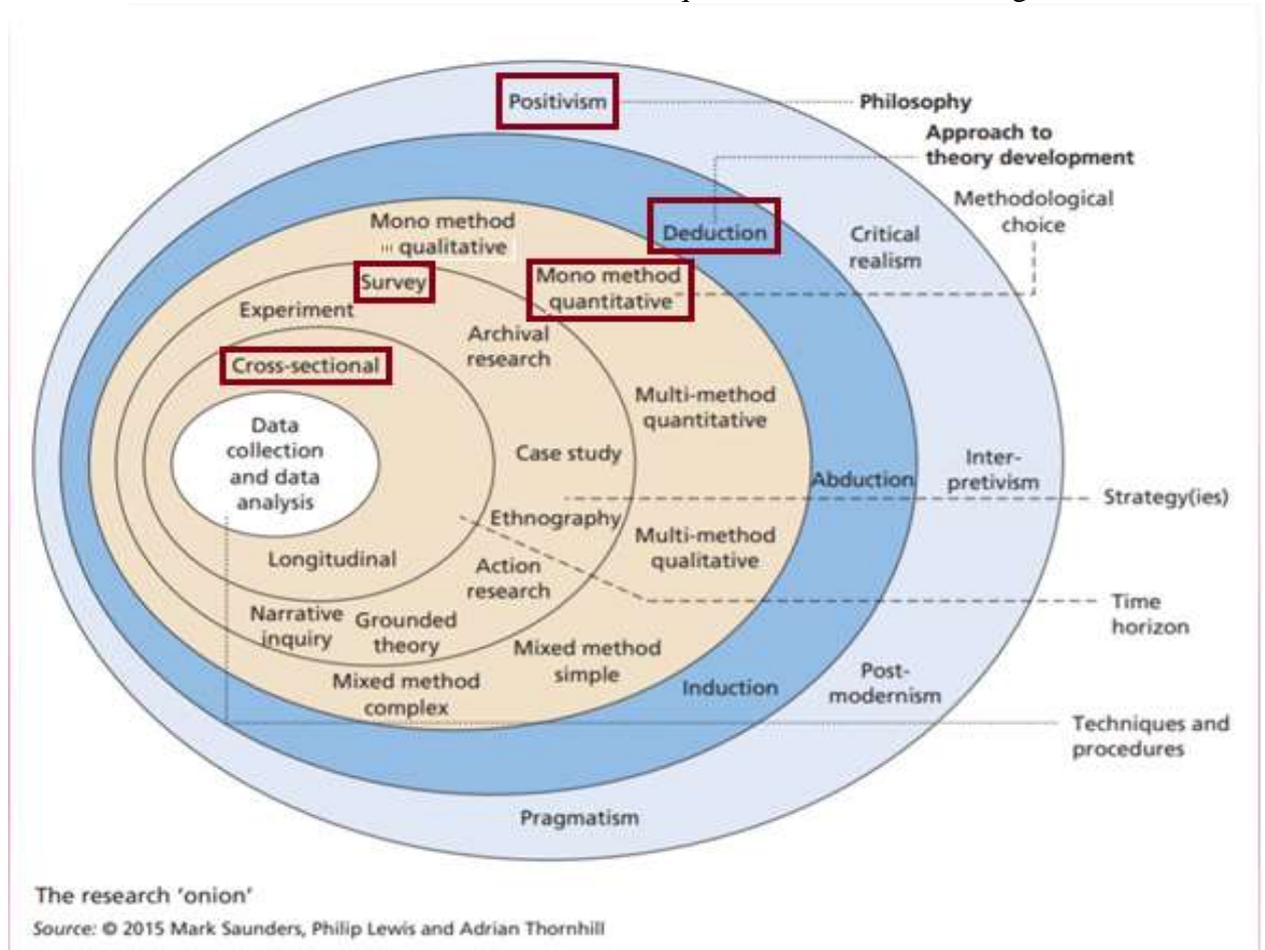
H7: The career readiness and employability of female students of Business Administration at KPK depend negatively on poor governance.

Research Methodology

The proposed study uses the Research Onion Model by Saunders (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2019) to inform the research methodology in order to design and conduct empirical research. The model consists of layers and each layer depicts a crucial decision made in the process of research such as research philosophy, approach, strategy, method



choice, time horizon, and techniques of collecting data.



Research Philosophy

The research philosophy used in this study is positivism research philosophy that builds upon the objective measurement of social phenomena and is based on observable, quantifiable data. The positivism paradigm will also be the suitable one since this research aims to investigate the effects of integrated structural and educational constraints (unemployment, job idea, lack of practical experience, no project availability, lack of government jobs, poor investment, poor governance) on the employment readiness and employability of female students of Business Administration in KPK on empirical basis. The positivism suggests testing hypothesis and statistical analysis of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables (Saunders et al., 2019).

Research Approach

This uses a deductive method where theoretical postulations based upon the literature on employability and career readiness are made and the theoretical postulations are verified quantitatively via hypothesis-driven analysis. This will help the determination of cause and effect relationships between the cumulative challenges and the employability outcomes (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

Research Strategy

The research strategy is a survey-based research design, where structured questionnaires will be used to gather the data of the representative sample of female Business



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Administration students at KPK universities. Surveys will be appropriate in seizing high scale, measurable possessing on perceptions, experiences, and preparedness levels (Bryman, 2016).

Research Choice and Time Horizon.

The quantitative design is chosen to be a mono-method one and all numerical data will be used to conduct a statistical analysis. The research is based on the cross-sectional time horizon whereby information accumulated at one point in time is used to evaluate the current level of career readiness and the impact of the joint challenges (Saunders et al., 2019).

Data Collection

The data will be obtained through a structured questionnaire which will contain Likert-scale items to measure career readiness, employability and perceptions of the seven independent challenges. The effect of independent variables on the dependent variable will be determined using statistical methods that include multiregression analysis.

To conclude, the use of the Onion Model presented by Saunders makes the research systematic and strong, with an opportunity to produce reliable and generalizable results on the employability of female Business Administration students in KPK.

Conclusion of the Study

The purpose of the study was to theoretically analyze the relationship between factors that affect career preparedness and employability of female students studying Business Administration in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) in Pakistan. Combining several structural and educational issues, i.e. unemployment, a lack of job-opening ideas, absent practical experiences and project-based learning, the absence of government employment, insufficient investment opportunities, and poor governance, the study has brought to the fore the extensive and inseparable obstacles that female students are struggling to overcome during the transition between higher education and employment. The results of the literature reviewed suggest that the factors that define employability are not restricted to academic qualifications only; in fact, it to a great extent depends on the opportunities of practical learning, the conditions of the labor market, the support of the institution, and the effectiveness of the governing.

The paper highlights the fact that KPK female students of Business Administration are especially susceptible because of the circumstantial factors such as the lack of exposure to practical training, limited access to the resources of the entrepreneurship, a very competitive and unpredictable employment environment. All these issues undermine the confidence, skills application and general career preparedness of students. The fact that the study targets the career readiness and employability as the dependent variable allows qualifying it to make further contributions to the concept of systematic and educational deficits working together towards influencing the employability outcomes of female graduates in a developing regional environment. In general, the research offers a theoretical basis of the upcoming empirical research on the issue of employability among female university business graduates in KPK.

Implications of the Study

The research also has a number of valuable implications on higher learning institutions, policymakers and curriculum developers. First, it has given prominence to the requirement of shifting away theoretical teaching and incorporation of practical learning,



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project learning, internship opportunities, and liaison with industry in Business Administration courses. These interventions can be of great assistance in terms of improving career preparedness, and labour market competitiveness of the students.

Second, the results demonstrate that governance and policy frameworks determine graduate employability. To enhance the chances of female graduates securing employment opportunities, it is important to have good government policies, recruitment systems, and youth and female entrepreneurship. The research also suggests that career counseling and systematized career guidance needs to be reinforced to deal with the students having no idea of what they want to do in life and their career orientation. Lastly, the study will provide context-relevant information that can be used to develop gender-accessible job and education policies in under-served areas by targeting female students in KPK.

Future Directions

Irrespective of its contributions, this research is conceptual in nature and creates a number of avenues that can be researched in future. One of the directions that exist in the future is the empirical test of the suggested framework by the application of the quantitative methods of collecting of primary data among the female students of Business Administration at KPK. This type of empiric analysis would be able to validate the postulated relationships between the independent variables and career readiness and employability.

The second direction that should be developed and validated in future is the context-specific scale of measurement** to determine the employability issue and career readiness among KPK female business students. The current scales might not be able to capture all the regional, cultural and structural facts of the study environment. Furthermore, these could be explored later through mixed-methods designs or longitudinal designs to increase the scope of changes in the employability of students over the years and to learn more about the reality of experience of the students. Further studies on other disciplines or provinces can also help to further generalize the findings.

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