

Research over replication

Usama Abdul Rauf | 01st Jan 2025



Pakistan produces an estimated half a million graduates annually. However, according to the research done by PIDE in 2022, the unemployment rate of fresh graduates is hovering around 31%, and even higher among female graduates, the education-to-employment pipeline reveals a critical gap. This gap exists in part due to a mismatch between the skills graduates possess and the demands of a rapidly changing job market. Although Pakistan is producing graduates, including around 13,000 with MPhil degrees, the quality and relevance of their education remain problematic, leaving many without the skills necessary to succeed in a competitive landscape.

In the modern era, economic success often correlates with the availability of a skilled human capital base. While Pakistan's young population gives it a potential demographic advantage, the country struggles to harness this energy due to systemic educational issues. Despite the high enrollment in university programmes, Pakistani graduates often lack the skills and innovative drive required in fields like technology, management, and science, which are essential for economic development.

Several factors contribute to Pakistan's lack of skilled human capital. First, the quality of education remains inconsistent. Public universities, which account for the majority of student enrollments, often focus on traditional methods that emphasize rote learning over critical thinking. Instructors and professors sometimes discourage original research, preferring students to reproduce existing studies with slight modifications. This approach limits students' exposure to innovation and the exploration of new ideas, leading to a generation of graduates who may have theoretical knowledge but lack practical problem-solving abilities.

Ambition is another element at play. While Pakistani youth are passionate and ambitious, societal and economic challenges often dampen their drive. Many young Pakistanis are drawn to social media as a means of expression and social engagement, which can sometimes lead to distraction from educational and professional growth. Additionally, the national psyche tends to lean on a "saviour complex" — the idea that one strong leader can single-handedly solve all of Pakistan's issues. This outlook may undermine personal accountability and discourage youth from taking initiative in their own professional development.

Beyond these social dynamics, the structural problems within academia exacerbate the issue.

Fresh graduates in Pakistan frequently enter university with a desire to contribute meaningfully, pursue groundbreaking research, and tackle unique challenges. However, many are met with restrictive academic environments that discourage innovation. Professors often guide students to conduct “safe” research that does not challenge the status quo. Students are advised to base their projects on established studies, swapping out variables rather than creating novel frameworks or exploring under-researched areas.

This approach limits the potential for academic contributions to address local challenges or propel Pakistan forward in fields like environmental science, digital technology, or public health.

The publishing requirements for faculty promotions is also a major issue which makes some professors prioritize quantity over quality, encouraging students to produce research that can be published quickly rather than work that addresses substantial issues or fills knowledge gaps. This practice often results in the production of numerous papers with minimal impact, while students miss opportunities to develop skills for critical analysis and independent inquiry.

The cumulative effect of these factors leaves Pakistan’s education system and workforce in a challenging position. While there are promising graduates in fields such as engineering, computer science, and medicine, a significant number remain underprepared for the practical demands of the job market. Reforms are needed not only in curriculum content but also in pedagogical approaches and faculty incentives. Emphasizing quality research, critical thinking, and application-based learning can empower students to meet the needs of the global economy while fostering innovation at home.

Pakistan’s educational and employment challenges require a multifaceted approach. While it is essential to acknowledge areas where youth could show greater ambition and responsibility, the onus also lies

on academic institutions to cultivate an environment that values original research and real-world skills. Only by addressing these gaps can Pakistan truly benefit from its young, growing workforce and drive economic progress. The success of any nation depends on its human capital; fostering an educational system that values both innovation and practical skills is essential if Pakistan is to unlock its full potential.

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