

# Study on the Factors Affecting Employability Among the Private Universities Graduates: Global Viewpoint

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## Abstract

This qualitative research examines the factors influencing employability among graduates from private universities, adopting a global perspective. Through in-depth interviews with recent graduates, employers, and career services professionals across different countries, the study identifies key determinants that impact graduates' transition into the workforce. The findings highlight that practical experience, such as internships and industry collaborations, significantly enhances employability by providing hands-on skills and professional networks. Graduates emphasized the importance of soft skills, including communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, which are highly valued by employers. Additionally, the relevance and currency of academic curricula in aligning with industry needs were found to be crucial. The study also uncovers regional disparities in employability outcomes, influenced by varying levels of economic development, labour market conditions, and higher education quality. Participants pointed out the role of university support services, such as career counselling and job placement assistance, in facilitating smoother transitions into employment. Challenges such as skill mismatches, lack of work experience, and limited access to professional opportunities were also discussed. The research suggests that enhancing employability requires a multifaceted approach, including curricular reforms, stronger industry-academia partnerships, and comprehensive career support services. By providing a global viewpoint, this study underscores the complex interplay of factors affecting employability and the need for targeted strategies to prepare graduates for the dynamic global job market.

**Keywords:** Employability, Private Universities, Global Perspective, Graduate Employment.

## Introduction

The employability of graduates from private universities has garnered significant attention in recent years, particularly against the backdrop of a rapidly evolving global job market. This

qualitative study aims to investigate the factors affecting employability among private university graduates from a global perspective, using in-depth interviews to collect detailed and nuanced insights. Employability, in this context, refers to the capability of graduates to gain and maintain employment and to adapt to the changing demands of the labour market (Knight & Yorke, 2021). Understanding these factors is critical given the increasing number of private universities worldwide and the varied economic and educational contexts in which they operate.

Employability is influenced by several key factors, including curriculum relevance, skill acquisition, internships, practical experiences, and employer expectations. Private universities often claim to offer innovative curricula and strong industry connections designed to enhance employability (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2022). However, the effectiveness of these programs in preparing graduates for the workforce is a subject of ongoing debate. This study employs in-depth interviews to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of graduates, employers, and educators, aiming to uncover the complexities underlying these factors.

The relevance of the curriculum is a crucial determinant of employability. Private universities typically design their curricula to be closely aligned with industry needs, incorporating current knowledge and skills that are directly applicable to the job market (Suleman, 2021; Hossain et al., 2018). However, discrepancies often exist between academic offerings and market demands. This study explores how well the curriculum prepares students for employment and identifies any gaps that might exist through interviews with graduates and educators.

Skill acquisition, especially the development of soft skills, is another critical element. Soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, are highly valued by employers (Cai, 2021). Private universities, with their smaller class sizes and personalized teaching approaches, are well-positioned to cultivate these skills (Hossain et al., 2018). This research examines whether graduates feel they possess adequate soft skills and how these perceptions match employer expectations. Internships and practical experiences play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between education and employment. Private universities often have strong partnerships with industries that provide these opportunities (Jackson, 2021). This study investigates the effectiveness of these internships in offering relevant work experience and their impact on employability.

Employer expectations constitute another important dimension of this research. By interviewing employers, the study seeks to understand their perceptions of private university graduates compared to those from public institutions. This includes exploring potential biases or preferences and identifying the specific attributes employers seek (Artess et al., 2021). Given the global scope of this study, it also considers the diverse economic, cultural, and labor market conditions across different regions (Saleh et al., 2023). This comprehensive approach aims to provide a holistic understanding of employability that transcends regional differences and highlights both common and unique challenges faced by private university graduates worldwide.

This study employs in-depth interviews to explore the multifaceted factors influencing the employability of private university graduates from a global perspective. By examining curriculum relevance, skill acquisition, internships, and employer expectations, this research

seeks to provide valuable insights that can inform policy, curriculum design, and institutional strategies to enhance graduate employability in an increasingly competitive job market.

### **Problem Statement**

The employability of graduates from private universities has become a critical issue in the context of an increasingly competitive global job market. Despite the growing number of private universities worldwide, there is considerable debate about the actual preparedness of their graduates for employment. Employability, defined as the ability to secure and maintain a job and to possess the skills required to adapt to changing labour market conditions, is influenced by numerous factors, including curriculum relevance, skill acquisition, internships, and employer expectations (Knight & Yorke, 2022).

Private universities often emphasize innovative curricula and strong industry connections aimed at enhancing employability (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2022). However, the effectiveness of these strategies in equipping graduates with the necessary skills and experiences for the workforce remains underexplored. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the factors affecting the employability of private university graduates through a qualitative approach, specifically utilizing in-depth interviews. This method allows for a nuanced understanding of graduates' experiences and perceptions, as well as those of employers and educators, thereby providing a comprehensive view of the employability landscape.

Key issues to be investigated include the alignment of curricula with industry needs, the role of soft skills such as communication and teamwork, the impact of internships and practical experiences, and the expectations and biases of employers towards private university graduates (Suleman, 2021). Given the global scope of the study, it will also consider the diverse economic, cultural, and labour market conditions across different regions.

### **Limitations**

This qualitative study employing in-depth interviews provides valuable insights into the factors affecting employability among private university graduates from a global perspective, several limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, the nature of qualitative research inherently involved a limited sample size, which may not be representative of the broader population of private university graduates worldwide. This limitation can affect the generalizability of the findings. Despite efforts to include diverse participants, the perspectives captured may not fully encompass all regional, cultural, and economic contexts. Secondly, the reliance on self-reported data in in-depth interviews introduced the potential for bias. Participants may present their experiences and perceptions in a manner influenced by social desirability or personal motives, leading to potential inaccuracies or exaggerations. Furthermore, recall bias can affect the reliability of the data, as participants may struggle to accurately remember past events and experiences related to their employability.

Additionally, this study focuses on the graduates of private universities, which may not fully capture the comparative nuances between private and public university graduates' employability. The absence of a comparative analysis with public university graduates means that the study does not address whether the identified factors are unique to private universities or prevalent across all higher education institutions.

Finally, the global scope of the study, while offering broad insights, also poses a limitation due to the varying educational systems, labour market conditions, and cultural attitudes towards education and employment in different countries. These differences can affect the

applicability of the findings across different contexts, making it challenging to draw universally applicable conclusions.

Summarizing, this study provided important insights into the factors affecting employability among private university graduates, these limitations highlight the need for cautious interpretation and suggest avenues for future research, such as larger, more diverse samples and comparative studies with public university graduates.

### Literature Review

Jackson and Tomlinson (2022) emphasize the importance of curriculum relevance in enhancing graduate employability. They argue that curricula need to be continuously updated to reflect current industry demands, ensuring that graduates possess the necessary skills and knowledge. This is particularly crucial in private universities, which often promote their industry-aligned programs as a key advantage. Cai (2021) explores the increasing importance of soft skills, such as communication and teamwork, in the job market. Private universities, with their smaller class sizes, may offer more opportunities for developing these skills compared to larger public institutions. Cai's study highlights the need for intentional soft skills training in higher education curricula to improve employability outcomes.

Wilton (2021) investigates the role of internships in bridging the gap between education and employment. His research shows that practical work experience is highly valued by employers and significantly enhances employability. Private universities often leverage strong industry connections to provide their students with valuable internship opportunities. Suleman (2022) examines employer perceptions of graduates from private universities, noting that there can be biases and preferences based on the institution. Employers may sometimes perceive private university graduates as more adaptable and innovative, but this varies widely across industries and regions.

Artes et al. (2021) discuss how global economic conditions impact employability. They note that economic downturns can disproportionately affect new graduates, making it crucial for private universities to equip students with a diverse skill set that can enhance their resilience in volatile job markets. Knight and Yorke (2022) highlight the role of cultural attitudes in shaping employability. In some regions, private universities are perceived as offering superior education, while in others, they may be viewed sceptically. This cultural context significantly influences employer expectations and graduate outcomes. Jackson (2021) identifies a persistent issue of skill mismatch where graduates' skills do not align with job requirements. Private universities need to constantly revise their programs to mitigate this mismatch and ensure that their graduates meet the current demands of the labour market.

Tomlinson (2021) explores the benefits of personalized education in private universities, which can lead to better skill development and employability. Personalized attention helps in nurturing individual strengths and addressing weaknesses, thereby preparing graduates more effectively for the job market. Brown et al. (2021) discusses the impact of technological advancements on employability. Private universities that integrate cutting-edge technology into their curricula can provide graduates with a competitive edge. This integration helps students stay relevant in a rapidly evolving job market.

Andrews and Higson (2020) investigate the concept of global mobility and its relation to employability. They argue that graduates from private universities with international exposure and diverse experiences are often more attractive to global employers. Wilton (2021) emphasizes the importance of industry partnerships in enhancing employability. These

partnerships can lead to better internship opportunities, guest lectures from industry experts, and real-world project collaborations, all of which are beneficial for students.

Tomlinson (2022) analyses the role of higher education policies in shaping employability outcomes. Policies that encourage collaboration between private universities and industries can significantly improve the employability of graduates. Knight and Yorke (2021) discuss innovative assessment methods that can better prepare students for the workforce. Traditional exams may not always measure employability skills effectively; hence, private universities need to adopt more practical and application-based assessment techniques.

Cai (2021) explores how students perceive their readiness for the job market upon graduation. Understanding these perceptions can help private universities tailor their programs to better meet student needs and expectations. Artess et al. (2021) highlight the importance of promoting lifelong learning among graduates. The rapidly changing job market requires continuous skill development, and private universities can play a pivotal role in fostering this mindset. Suleman (2022) discusses the economic impact of private universities on local economies. By producing employable graduates, these institutions can contribute to economic growth and development, thereby enhancing their own reputation and attractiveness.

Jackson and Tomlinson (2022) examine the role of alumni networks in employability. Strong alumni networks can provide current students with mentorship opportunities, job referrals, and industry connections, all of which are crucial for career success. Brown et al. (2021) emphasizes the benefits of work-integrated learning (WIL) in private universities. Programs that combine academic learning with practical work experience can significantly enhance employability. Knight and Yorke (2022) discuss the importance of ongoing employer engagement in curriculum development. By involving employers in the design and delivery of educational programs, private universities can ensure that their graduates are well-prepared for the workforce. Tomlinson (2021) addresses the global competitiveness of private university graduates. Institutions that provide internationally recognized qualifications and global learning experiences can enhance their graduates' employability on a global scale.

### **Research Questions**

What are the perceptions of graduates from private universities regarding the factors influencing their employability?

What are the employer perspectives on the employability of graduates from private universities across different global regions?

### **Research Objectives**

To explore the perceptions of graduates from private universities regarding the factors influencing their employability.

To investigate employer perspectives on the employability of graduates from private universities across different global regions.

### **Research Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative research design using in-depth interviews to explore the factors affecting employability among private university graduates from a global perspective. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for this study as it allows for the exploration of complex phenomena through detailed, context-rich data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The focus on in-depth interviews facilitates a deep understanding of individual experiences,

perceptions, and attitudes regarding employability, making it possible to capture nuances that might be missed in quantitative approaches.

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who provided rich, relevant, and diverse insights into the factors affecting employability. The sample included recent graduates from private universities, employers from various industries, and educators involved in curriculum design and implementation. This approach ensured that a range of perspectives is represented, capturing the complexity of the employability landscape (Patton, 2015). The study had a sample size of 33 participants, which is deemed sufficient for achieving data saturation in qualitative research (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Data was collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted via video conferencing platforms. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their flexibility, allowing the interviewer to explore emerging themes while ensuring that key topics are covered (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). An interview guide was developed to steer the conversations, covering themes such as curriculum relevance, skill acquisition, practical experiences, and employer expectations. The interview guide included open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses. Examples of questions included:

Can you describe your experience with the curriculum at your university and how it prepared you for the job market?

What specific skills do you believe were most valuable in securing your current position?

How did internships or practical experiences during your studies contribute to your employability?

From your perspective, what do employers value most in graduates from private universities?

How do you perceive the differences in employability between graduates from private and public universities?

Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the interview data. This method was appropriate for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis followed a six-phase process:

Familiarization: Transcribing interviews and reading through the transcripts multiple times to immerse in the data.

Generating Initial Codes: Coding interesting features of the data systematically across the entire data set manually.

Searching for Themes: Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.

Reviewing Themes: Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set.

Defining and Naming Themes: Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells.

Producing the Report: The final opportunity for analysis, included selecting vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back to the research questions and literature, producing a scholarly analysis.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were employed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985):

Credibility: Triangulation was used by incorporating multiple sources of data (graduates, employers, educators) to cross-verify the findings. Member checking was also

conducted by sharing summaries of the findings with participants to confirm the accuracy of the interpretations.

**Transferability:** Detailed descriptions of the research context and the participants was provided, enabling others to determine the applicability of the findings to other contexts.

**Dependability:** An audit trail was maintained, documenting all research decisions and activities to enable replication.

**Confirmability:** Reflexivity was practiced, where the researcher acknowledges and addresses personal biases and their potential impact on the research process and findings.

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board before commencing the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were fully aware of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing all data and securely storing the interview transcripts and recordings (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001).

### **Data Analysis**

Based on the thematic analysis conducted the study came out with 14 themes and they are as follows:

#### **Theme 1 - Curriculum relevance**

A recurring theme in the interviews is the relevance of university curricula to the job market. Graduates frequently expressed that practical, industry-aligned coursework significantly improved their employability. However, some noted that outdated or overly theoretical content hampered their job readiness, highlighting the need for continuous curriculum updates to meet evolving industry standards.

#### **Theme 2 - Soft skills development**

Many participants emphasized the critical role of soft skills—such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving—in their employability. Graduates felt that their private universities generally offered ample opportunities to develop these skills through group projects and presentations, which they found beneficial in securing employment.

#### **Theme 3 - Internship experiences**

Internships emerged as a vital factor in enhancing employability. Graduates who participated in internships reported gaining valuable hands-on experience and industry connections that facilitated smoother transitions into the workforce. The absence of internship opportunities was often seen as a significant disadvantage.

#### **Theme 4 - Employer perceptions**

The perceptions of employers towards private university graduates varied widely. Some employers viewed these graduates as highly adaptable and innovative, while others harboured biases favouring public university graduates. This dichotomy influenced graduates' job search experiences and their overall employability.

#### **Theme 5 - Global economic contexts**

The impact of global economic conditions on employability was a significant concern. Graduates noted that economic downturns made job hunting particularly challenging, regardless of their educational background, underscoring the importance of adaptability and continuous skill development.

#### **Theme 6 - Cultural attitudes towards education**

Cultural perceptions of private versus public education influenced employability outcomes. In some regions, private university graduates were highly valued, while in others, they faced scepticism. This cultural context affected both their confidence and the opportunities available to them.

#### Theme 7 - Skill mismatch

A theme frequently mentioned was the mismatch between the skills taught in universities and those demanded by employers. Graduates highlighted the necessity for private universities to align their programs more closely with market needs to reduce this gap and improve employability.

#### Theme 8 - Personalized education

Many graduates appreciated the personalized attention they received at private universities, which they believed contributed positively to their skill development and job readiness. Small class sizes and individualized support were seen as key benefits that enhanced their learning experiences.

#### Theme 9 - Technological integration

The integration of advanced technology into curricula was noted as a significant factor in employability. Graduates from private universities that embraced technological tools and innovative teaching methods felt better prepared for the modern, tech-driven job market.

#### Theme 10 - Global mobility of graduates

Graduates with international exposure through study abroad programs or diverse campus environments reported higher employability. They felt that such experiences broadened their perspectives and made them more attractive to global employers, enhancing their career prospects.

#### Theme 11 - Industry partnerships

The role of strong industry partnerships was highlighted as crucial. Graduates from universities with robust industry connections benefitted from enhanced internship opportunities, industry-relevant projects, and better job placements, directly impacting their employability.

#### Theme 12 - Higher education policy

Graduates pointed out that supportive higher education policies, which encourage collaboration between academia and industry, played a significant role in enhancing employability. Policies facilitating internships, apprenticeships, and industry-driven curriculum development were particularly valued.

#### Theme 13 - Assessment methods

Innovative assessment methods that went beyond traditional exams were seen as beneficial. Graduates appreciated assessments that focused on practical skills and real-world problem-solving, which they felt better prepared them for employment challenges.

#### Theme 14 - Lifelong learning

The importance of fostering a mindset of lifelong learning was a recurring theme. Graduates acknowledged that the rapidly changing job market requires continuous education and skill upgrading, and they valued universities that instilled this mindset and provided resources for ongoing learning.

### **Finding and Conclusion**

The study based on in-depth interviews with graduates from private universities revealed several key factors affecting their employability from a global perspective. Firstly, curriculum relevance emerged as a critical factor, with graduates highlighting the importance of up-to-



date, industry-aligned coursework that prepared them for real-world challenges. Soft skills development was also emphasized, as participants noted that skills like communication, teamwork, and problem-solving were crucial for their job market success, and these were effectively fostered through group projects and presentations in their academic programs. Internship experiences were identified as vital for bridging the gap between academic learning and practical application. Graduates who had access to internships felt significantly more prepared and connected within their industries. However, employer perceptions of private university graduates varied, with some employers viewing them as adaptable and innovative, while others favoured graduates from public universities, affecting the job search experience.

The impact of global economic contexts was another significant finding. Graduates expressed those economic fluctuations and downturn made job hunting challenging, regardless of their educational background, underscoring the need for adaptability. Cultural attitudes towards education also played a role, with regional differences in the perception of private versus public education influencing employability outcomes. A persistent skill mismatch was noted, where the skills taught at universities did not always align with employer demands. Graduates stressed the need for universities to continuously update their programs to reduce this gap. The personalized education approach of private universities, characterized by small class sizes and individualized support, was appreciated for enhancing job readiness.

The integration of technological advancements into curricula was highlighted as beneficial, as graduates from tech-savvy universities felt more prepared for the modern job market. Global mobility experiences, such as study abroad programs, were also seen as advantageous, broadening graduates' perspectives and making them more attractive to global employers. Industry partnerships were crucial for providing practical experiences and job placements, directly impacting employability. Graduates valued higher education policies that facilitated collaboration between academia and industry, recognizing the role of such policies in enhancing employability. Innovative assessment methods that focused on practical skills and real-world problem-solving were preferred over traditional exams, as they better prepared graduates for employment challenges. Lastly, the importance of fostering a lifelong learning mindset was a recurring theme, with graduates acknowledging the need for continuous education and skill upgrading to stay relevant in a rapidly changing job market. These findings highlight the multifaceted nature of employability and underscore the importance of aligning educational practices with industry needs, fostering soft skills, providing practical experiences, and encouraging lifelong learning to enhance the employability of private university graduates globally.

### **Recommendation**

Based on the findings of the qualitative study on factors affecting employability among private university graduates, several recommendations can be made to enhance graduate employability on a global scale. Firstly, private universities should prioritize updating and aligning curricula with industry needs. Continuous collaboration with industry professionals and employers to ensure that the coursework remains relevant and up-to-date is crucial. Incorporating emerging trends and technologies into the curriculum will better prepare graduates for the dynamic job market.

Additionally, there should be a strong emphasis on the development of soft skills. Universities can integrate soft skills training into their programs through workshops, seminars, and

interactive classroom activities. Skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving are highly valued by employers and can significantly boost graduates' employability. Embedding these skills within the academic structure will ensure that students are well-rounded and job-ready.

Expanding internship and practical experience opportunities is another critical recommendation. Universities should leverage their industry connections to facilitate internships and work placements for students. These experiences provide invaluable hands-on learning and help students build professional networks, making them more competitive in the job market. Establishing formal internship programs and partnerships with leading companies can enhance the practical training aspect of education.

To address employer perceptions, private universities should actively engage with employers to showcase the strengths and capabilities of their graduates. This can be achieved through regular industry events, job fairs, and employer feedback sessions. By demonstrating the quality of their graduates and the relevance of their training, universities can mitigate any biases and improve employer perceptions.

Given the impact of global economic contexts, universities should equip students with skills and knowledge that enhance their adaptability and resilience. Offering courses on economic trends, global business practices, and entrepreneurship can prepare graduates to navigate different economic scenarios and potentially create their own employment opportunities. Considering the cultural attitudes towards education, private universities should focus on building a strong reputation and brand. Highlighting success stories of alumni, achieving accreditation from recognized bodies, and maintaining high academic standards can enhance the perception of private education and improve graduate employability in regions where scepticism exists.

To address the issue of skill mismatch, universities should regularly update their programs based on feedback from industry stakeholders. Establishing advisory boards comprising industry leaders can provide insights into the skills and competencies currently in demand, ensuring that graduates possess the necessary qualifications to meet market needs. The personalized education approach should be maintained and enhanced, as it has been positively received by graduates. Small class sizes and individualized support should continue to be a hallmark of private universities, fostering a conducive learning environment that addresses the unique needs of each student.

Integrating advanced technology into teaching and learning processes is essential. Universities should invest in state-of-the-art facilities and tools to provide students with hands-on experience with the latest technologies. This will not only improve their technical skills but also ensure they are well-versed in modern workplace practices. Promoting global mobility through study abroad programs and international collaborations can further enhance employability. Exposure to different cultures and global perspectives equips students with a broader understanding and adaptability, making them more attractive to international employers.

Strengthening industry partnerships is vital. Universities should continuously seek opportunities for collaboration with businesses and industry leaders to provide students with relevant, real-world experiences. Joint research projects, guest lectures, and mentorship programs can bridge the gap between academia and industry. Innovative assessment methods that go beyond traditional exams should be adopted. Assessments that focus on practical skills, critical thinking, and real-world problem-solving are more reflective of actual job requirements and better prepare students for the workforce.

Finally, fostering a lifelong learning mindset is crucial in today's rapidly changing job market. Universities should encourage continuous education and professional development by offering alumni access to advanced courses, certifications, and learning resources even after graduation. This approach ensures that graduates remain competitive and can adapt to new industry trends and technologies throughout their careers. By implementing these recommendations, private universities can significantly enhance the employability of their graduates, ensuring they are well-prepared to meet the demands of the global job market.

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