



RESEARCH PAPER

Decent Work and Governance in Pakistan: Implications of SDG 8 for Graduate Employability

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the relationship between Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8) and graduate employability, especially focusing on the role of the government to provide and develop employment opportunities, and labor market challenges faced by university graduates. The main objective of this article is to explore how the government system works effectively, the educational quality, and the policies that are designed to improve employment opportunities for graduates. Focusing on increasing problems like graduate unemployment, skill mismatch, and the limited contribution of educational institutions to achieving Sustainable Economic growth in increasing employment. The research uses analytical and qualitative methodology by studying multiple relevant articles, previous research articles based on SDG 8 and graduate employability, and international organizational reports. Secondary data sources were also used to examine the current situation of employment, governance framework, and the role of universities in preparing graduates for labor market demands. The studies reveal that inadequate policy plans, a lack of collaboration between educational institutions and industries, and insufficient skill development programs are playing a negative role in graduate employability, especially in Pakistan. Moreover, the study indicates that an effective governance system, skill development trainings, digital skills, and market-based educational reforms can highly increase employment chances or results, and support the achievements of Sustainable Development Goal 8 objectives. The conclusion of this article is that sustainable economic development and decent work opportunities needs to collaborative work between universities, industries, public and private institutions. Policy makers should make strong and effective policies for employment, enhance digital and soft skills training, promote small and new businesses, and improve institutional cooperation to establish career growth for graduates and prolonged sustainable development.

KEYWORDS SDG 8, Graduate Employability, Youth Unemployment, Decent Work, Mismatch Skills, Pakistan Labor Market, Economic Growth, Higher Education, Labor Market, Employment

Introduction

In the past decade by the change of the world and population growth the concept of development has been changed, the narrow socio-economic turned into the broader one competition between the globalization and economic become the major concern for all mostly the developing countries like Pakistan (Muzaffar & Choudhary, 2017). Where the large number of young youth graduated and looking for the opportunities, mismatch of jobs and required skills The United Nation started the concept of SDGs in 2015 to solve and address the socio-economic problems. One of these SDGs (Goal 8) focuses on economic development, sustainability, provide productive and better jobs to all. The concept of Decent Work provides effective, secure, suitable, and available jobs and fair salaries (Aslam & Muzaffar, 2025).

With the fast-growing population, Pakistan faces a lot of challenges, such as an increasing rate of poverty due to unemployment. Most educated people face these kinds of problems a lot nowadays, with graduating degrees, a lack of jobs, limited policies, a weak(bad) institutional system, a poor infrastructural system, and a mismatch of graduate skills, making it difficult. The governance must be maintained in balance between graduate skills and market demand, and provide opportunities for unemployed graduates for the betterment of the development of the country as well as the good future of the literate people. Employment is also the source of wages (money), economic growth, dignity, and improvement of employees' skills. In this situation, the government needs to coordinate the educational policies and market demands, which creates decent, better, profitable job opportunities for all.

In this context, the government plays an important role in the employment framework, with effective and better policies, institutions with a lot of opportunities for work, and creates an environment where educated people can get productive and good wages for jobs and improve their skills. This article must examine the interrelationship between Decent work, Governance system, and Graduate Employability in the state of Pakistan, with the focus and implementation of SDG 8 (Malik, et al., 2023; Aslam & Muzaffar, 2025a; Aslam & Muzaffar, 2025b). In this case study, it aims to investigate the challenges faced by unemployed graduates and the opportunities to achieve the goals, and the role of the government to focuses to provide job opportunities for unemployed graduates.

Literature Review

Economic growth and decent work opportunities are serious challenges in Pakistan's labor market, especially for graduate employability. Graduate unemployment has emerged as a notable issue. Showing that the studies are excessively advanced compared to the entire unemployment level. Ahsan and Khan (2023) feature that graduate unemployment is higher than the national average, pointing to structural inefficiencies in the economy. Likewise, Fasih (2025) ties SDGs openly with employability outcomes, which underline the need for policy alignment between education and the labor market.

Lack of Alignment between Education and Employment in Pakistan

A major issue discovered in the study of this literature is the incompatibility between education and market demands. Riaz et al (2024) spotted that an important Ratio of graduates lack the technical and soft skill mandatory by employers. which obstruct their employability. Similarly, Ahmed et al (2023) and Muzaffar, et al., (2023) point out that imperfections in educational quality and educational plan contribute to this mismatch, which gives results that graduates are not qualified and industry-ready. Farooq et al (2025) illustrate that the fast growth of higher education is still not accompanied by proportional underemployment. Ahsan and Khan (2023) claim that detach among academic training and industry needs is one of the reasons for graduate unemployment in Pakistan.

Skill Deficiencies and Industry Exposure

Another key element influencing graduate employment is the lack of practical skills and industry exposure. This study emphasizes the value of practical experiences and industry cooperation in strengthening employability. The literature also emphasizes the importance of employability skills covering communication, problem-solving, and adaptability. Fasih (2025) Muzaffar, et al., (2024) argues that educational quality, skill development, and industry cooperation are highly correlated with employability outcomes. Likewise, Islam and Ali (2023) show that involvement in skill development programs greatly enhances employment prospects for graduates in Pakistan. Arif and Mir (2023) explain employability skills as essential capabilities that increase graduates' skills and abilities to secure and maintain jobs. In accordance with this, Asghar et al. (2025) detect

deficiencies in digital literacy and technological competencies, which are increasingly significant in the modern labor market. Ahmed et al (2023) identify the lack of communication, analytical reasoning, and technical skills as the greatest obstacle to employment.

Role of Governance in Skill Development Program and Policy Framework

Governance had played a vital part in structuring labor market consequences and addressing graduate employability challenges. An efficient governance system, including a policy framework and organizational co-ordination are necessary for ensuring coherence education system with labor market demands. Skill development programs are found to significantly enhance employment results. Hague (2023) and Batool, et al, (2023) propose that government-led employability plans and policy amendments are important to address unemployment complications among graduates. Ahsan and Khan (2023) emphasize the need for enhancing academic-industry partnerships to increase job possibilities. Islam and Ali (2023) explain that taking part in a skill development program positively influences employability among graduates. Ali et al (2024) dispute that sustainable skill development policies aligned with SDG 8 can improve workforce preparation and economic competition. Fasih (2025) indicates that coordinated reforms, including policymakers, education institutions, and industry stakeholders, are needed to reduce unemployment. In the same way, Farooq et al. (2026) highlight the necessity for policy reforms to make better workforce absorption capacity.

The role of Technical and Vocational Education and Training in enhancing Employability

TVET has played a vital role and is known as a major solution to graduate unemployment. Increase employability by empowering learners with practical, industry-relevant, and in-demand skills, facilitating faster change into the manpower as compared to the traditional education system. Ali et al (2017) conclude that TVET significantly enhances employability, concentrating on practical skills. Furthermore, Ali et al (2024) highlight that restructuring the vocational education and training system is required for connecting skill gaps and achieving SDG 8 targets. Rasheed et al. (2026) argue that TVET institutions in Pakistan play a crucial role in providing graduates with market-relevant skills, thus improving employment outcomes.

Psychological and behavioral factors impacting employability

The literature also covers the study of how psychological and behavioral factors affect employability. Because employability does not just depend on skills, it also focuses on mindset, behavior, attitude towards work, communication, and personality. Bakri and Khoso (2017) highlight the role of psychological capital in creating employability preparedness. Motivated and confident students play their role more effectively in interviews, and they handle the situation easily. Siddique et al. (2022) highlight behavioral capabilities in workplace success. Workplace advancement and achievements do not depend only on knowledge, but also on the ability, attitude of an employer, discipline, and teamwork. Ishaq and Asghar (2024) identify self-perception as an important factor in job readiness. Underline that if a person is not psychologically ready for the job, they should not enter the workplace. Malokani et al (2023) moreover relate motivation and leadership skills to the employability outcomes. The leader or employee must know how to manage teamwork, communicate, and build resilience.

Demographic pressure and increasing unemployment

The world's population is increasing massively, especially in developing countries like Pakistan; this rapid increase in population also affects the labor market. People are

mostly not aware of their profession and do not have any skills or knowledge. According to UNDP (2022), Pakistan has the largest youth population, which might be turned into both beneficial and challenging. The World Bank (2023) highlights that insufficient job creation may lead to youth unemployment. Ahsan and Khan (2023) note that an increasing number of young graduates entering the labor market boosts competition for limited jobs. Farooq et al (2025) argue that this imbalance leads to unemployment as skilled graduates seek opportunities abroad.

Entrepreneurship and Other Employment Paths

Entrepreneurship has progressively been recognized as a workable solution for decreasing unemployment for graduates. Especially for developing countries like Pakistan, where employment opportunities are limited. The literature proposes that promoting an entrepreneurial mindset among graduates can decrease dependency on employment sectors. According to Nabi et al (2017), a study of entrepreneurship specifically enhances graduates' intentions to start their own businesses, thus contributing to job creation. The World Bank (2020) emphasizes that entrepreneurship not only creates independence to choose their profession and self-employment but also drives broader economic growth by creating further jobs. Ahmed et al (2023) argue that merging entrepreneurship into higher education is essential and can close the gap between education and employment by supplying graduates with practical skills.

SDGs 8 framework and policy consequences

SDGs 8 framework provides complete policy guidelines for promoting decent work, sustainable development, and economic growth, specifically in developing countries facing high graduate unemployment. The literature highlights that achieving SDG8 needs to coordinative governance. According to the International Labor Organization (2022), active labor market policies include skill development programs and employment encouragement. Fasih (2025) argues that weak governance structures and incomplete policy implementation slow the progress toward SDG 8 objectives. Alimehmeti et al (2024) put forward that integrating SDG principles into education and economic policies can increase employability and promote sustainable development. And as a result, achieving SDG8 demands a comprehensive approach that combines education reforms, governance improvements, and labor market intervention.

Theoretical framework

Graduate Employability within the methodology and framework of Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG8), which highlights decent work and economic growth, can be efficiently recognized by a combination of multiple theoretical perspectives and ideas. Especially the Employability Skill Theory, and workforce enablement enhances a person's productivity and enlarges their value in the labor market. The study of this theory highlights the role of higher education institutions in providing graduates with relevant knowledge and skills for the profession they want to choose in their future, and capabilities that meet labor market demands. Yet in underdeveloped states like Pakistan, the presence of a constant mismatch between academic qualifications and the labor market requirements. limits the efficiency of human labor development and contributes to graduate unemployment (2020). Praising this perspective theory highly, the Employability Skills Theory highlights the value of transferable skills like conveying a message through communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and adapting to different things to understand the nature of a work situation, which are highly required by workers in a dynamic global economy. David York (2006) explains employability as a part of achievements, including skills, understanding, and personal qualities that enhance graduates' possibility of increasing employment and success in their chosen profession. Andrew and Higson (2008). Empirical studies propose that students holding degrees relevant to their profession have

fewer or no skills, thereby decreasing their employability in a more competitive industry. The capability approach introduced by Amartya Sen(1999) gives a wide and more inclusive framework by explaining individuals' real freedom and opportunities to achieve desired outcomes, such as valuable and effective employment. This approach explains that employability is not only controlled by skills or people’s qualifications but also has a strong effect of external factors like multiple industries, institutions, social economical structure, its condition, and the institutional support system. Within the framework of SDG8, the motive is particularly related to underlining the need for creating better and more effective policies, good education quality that everybody can access easily, and a supportive labor market environment that facilitates all graduates to get jobs. In countries like Pakistan, where the structural system is damaged, gender and religious inequalities, limited job opportunities, and limited graduate abilities to change effectively into the workforce (UNDP 2021). Therefore, in this theoretical framework, merging these interpretations and viewpoints gives a comprehensive understanding of graduate employability by relating education, skill development, and more inclusive socio-economic conditions with the objective of Sustainable Economic Growth and decent work for all graduates.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study aims to examine the relationship between Sustainable Development Goals (SDG8) and Graduate Employability, by recognizing major determinants that influence employment outcomes. This conceptual framework had include education related inputs (independent variables), employability (dependent variables), and external factors (moderators). (Becker 1993) explains Human Capital Theory that technical knowledge and a higher level of education increase skill development. Employability Skills Theory (Yorke, 2006), featuring the role of skill development, such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, in ensuring employment. The Capability Approach (Sen 1999) highlights that access to career openings and a cooperative environment are important for achieving purposeful work. In the conceptual framework, these variables are addressed as independent factors influencing Graduate Employability, which works as a dependent variable. The framework brings-in moderator like institutional support, labor market conditions, and economic prospect can make a strong or weak relation between education and employability.

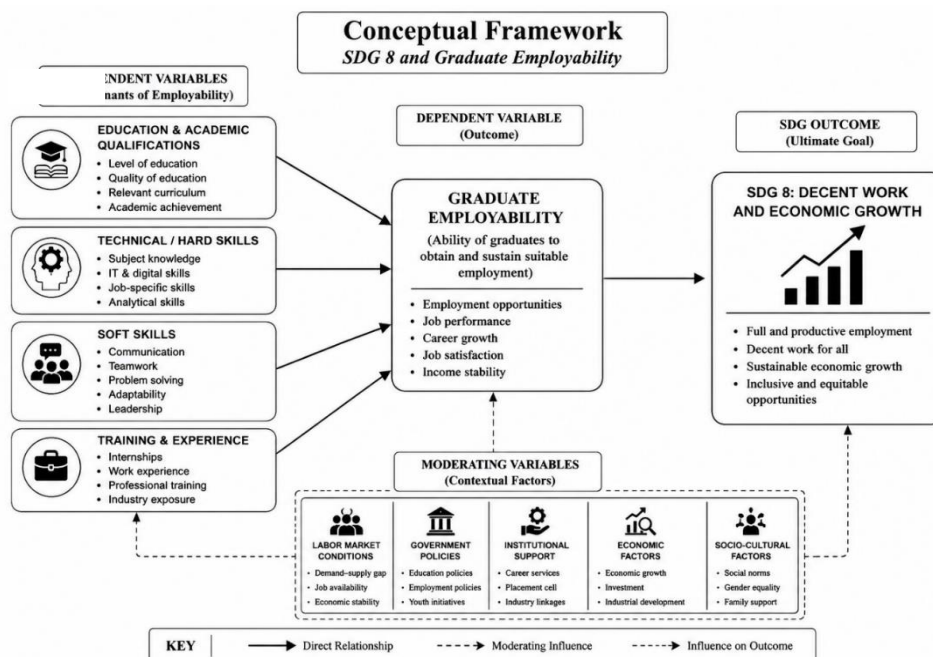


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Material and Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to analyze the connection between the Sustainable Development Goals and Graduate Employability in Pakistan. In this research, different kinds of primary and secondary sources used including different peer-reviewed general articles, periodical articles, newspaper articles, official reports, policy documents, books, and publications from international organizations such as the United Nations, International Labor Organization, and World Bank. Relevant published literature between 2015 and 2025 was examined to ensure the inclusion of recent developments related to graduate unemployment, employability skills, labor market demands, and SDG8 objectives.

Results and Discussion

Graduate Employability and Skill Mis-match

The conclusion of this study suggests that skill mismatch is one of the most important factors affecting graduate employability in countries like Pakistan. Despite the number of graduates from universities having increased each year, many labor markets continue to report dissatisfaction about graduates' lack of skills, practical capability, and career preparedness. The labor market highly demands from graduate employers those with the ability to perform tasks effectively, communication skills, and problem-solving skills. On the other hand, the higher education institutions often emphasize academic learning rather than practical application. As a result, graduates face challenges in securing suitable job opportunities, leading to unemployment. According to Andrew and Higson (2008), employers placed greater importance on transferable skills, teamwork, communication, and management skills than on academic qualifications alone. Nabi (2003) defines that many graduates experience different challenges because the educational programs are not aligned with labor market demands. Therefore, educational institutions need to improve the academic syllabus and program, and incorporate employers' training to make better employability outcomes and promote Sustainable Development Goal 8, relevant to Decent Work and Economic Growth.

Function of Higher Education Institutions in the Life of Graduate Employability

Higher Education Institutions play a big part in the life of graduates' employability by developing students' academic, technical, and professional abilities. The literature reveals that educational institutions offer opportunities to do an internship, career counseling service, workshops, and collaboration with industries to participate more effectively in employment opportunities for graduates. Gary Becker (1993) explains human capital theory that investing in academic and training increases productivity and economic condition. The literature finds that the educational institutions still depend on the traditional education system, which limits the students, making them bound and not able to explore their creativity and the real-world professional environments. In addition, the insufficient connection between the industries and academic institutions can reduce the number of graduates' willingness for the labor market. The findings put forward an idea that educational reforms, digital learning opportunities, and partnerships in industries are really important to support Graduate Employability and contribute toward achieving SDG 8. Just like that, educational institutions must implement a new, advanced, and influential educational system that aligns with the developing demands and requirements of the modern workplace

Significances of Interpersonal Skills and Technical Expertise

The study reveals that both soft skills and hard skills are important determining factors of Graduate Employability in the modern Labor market. Employers increasingly look

for graduates who have communication skills, the ability to work with a team actively, leadership qualities, resilience, digital skills, and academic knowledge. The fast changes in global economies and technological development have increased the demand for a highly skilled labor force proficient in responding to changing workplace demands. According to David Yorke (2006), employability is affected by the combination of achievements, personal qualities, and transferable skills, that let graduates to get and maintain Employability. The search study points out that many graduates in Pakistan have a lack of confidence, a lack of communication abilities, and technical expertise, which critically affect their employment opportunities. Andrews and Higson (2008) likewise point out that soft skills are the most important qualities considered by Employers during the enlistment process. The observation highlights that technical and vocational training programs greatly enhance Graduate Employability by improving their technical skills and work and career preparedness. Therefore, educational institutions should merge interpersonal skills with technical training into academic programs to meet job market prospects and support Sustainable employment growth.

Influence of Sustainable Development Goal 8 on Employment Opportunities

The observation of this study emphasizes that Sustainable Development Goal 8 plays a crucial role in promoting and increasing employment opportunities, economic productivity, and decent work for young graduates who seek to get jobs. The SDG8 focuses on comprehensive economic growth, profitable labor, and equal access to decent work opportunities, especially for graduated youth and the deprived population. The study demonstrated that linked to SDG8, including vocational educational training, business start-up programs, and youth employment policies, beneficially impact on graduate employability and workforce involvement. As stated in the International Labor Organization (2020) young population employment remains a major worldwide issue, especially in developing economies, where labor market efforts are being made to address the increasing number of graduates. In Pakistan, limited industrial growth and inadequate employment creation continue to hinder the achievement of SDG8 objectives. Economic instability and technological changes have raised competition in the labor market, which makes employability quality really important since ever before. The study suggests that the stronger enforcement of SDG8 policies can improve employment opportunities and reduce graduate unemployment. Therefore, coordination between the Government, Universities, and the private sectors is necessary to promote Sustainable Economic Growth and Decent Employment for Graduates.

Public Policies and Institutional Framework

Public or government policies and the institutional framework are a very critical system that influences graduate employability and job market integration. The results demonstrate that efficient employment policies, vocational training ambitions, and educational reforms can specifically improve employment results for graduates. Government plays a crucial role in creating multiple opportunities for students by investing in business programs, the education system, and a labor market growth plan. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that policy implementation gaps and a limited institutional cooperation often reduce the effectiveness of employment strategies in Pakistan. According to the World Bank (2020), the underdeveloped economies need a stronger policy framework to coordinate the higher education system with the labor market. Moreover, a lack of funding to promote educational institutions, skill development programs, and limited career guidance services negatively affects graduates' entry into employment. The study indicates that cooperation between public institutions, universities, and the labor market can increase workforce readiness and the new employment generation. Therefore, policymakers should give more attention to making a strong institutional support system, encourage innovation, and provide easy access to job opportunities in line with SDG8

objectives. Such actions can contribute to sustainable economic development and reduce graduate unemployment.

Social and Economic Factors: Challenges in Pakistan

The study finds that socio-economic challenges had a major influence on graduate employability and easy access to decent work opportunities in Pakistan. Factors like poverty, gender inequality, territorial imbalance, and limited access to a better education create boundaries that limit graduate employment prospects. Graduates from rural areas face challenges due to a financially unstable background, and often face more difficulties in obtaining professional skills, accessing technology, and struggling to secure suitable employment opportunities. The Capability Approach proposed by Amartya Sen (1999), argues that employability does not only depend on education and skills, but also relies on individual access to jobs and supportive socio-economic conditions for youth. The study reveals that female graduates in particular workplaces tackle multiple problems like discrimination and limited participation in the labor market, which affects economic growth as well. Furthermore, a weak university-industry gap and a lack of labor market information reduce employment opportunities for many young graduates. The study also found that unstable economic conditions and an increasing rate of unemployment have led to stiff competition within the labor market. Therefore, addressing socio-economic inequalities and improving the institutional system is important for increasing employability and achieving the wider goals of SDG 8 related to sustainable economic development.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the interrelation between graduate employability and SDG 8 faces particular challenges faced by graduates in Pakistan. Graduate employability is influenced by numerous factors, including education, technical abilities, soft skills, labor market conditions, and demands. Higher educational institutions have been expanding in recent years, but graduates still face challenges of unemployment, and employers increasingly demand practical knowledge, communication skills, and problem-solving abilities, which are poorly developed in traditional educational institutions. SDG8 provides a significant plan to promote decent work, economic growth, and sustainable employment opportunities for youth. Still faces challenges in achieving these goals due to limited resources, lack of industrial growth, weak collaboration between industries and educational institutions, and socio-economic problems. Limited access to job opportunities still faces graduate employability in Pakistan. Cooperation between universities, policymakers, industries, and other stakeholders is important to bridge the gap between graduate employability and labor market demands, to support economic development in SDG 8. Therefore, aligning higher education and labor market needs is important for reducing unemployment and achieving the broader objectives of decent work and sustainable development in Pakistan.

Recommendations

The study suggests that higher education institutions need to reframe the curriculum according to job market demands, and practical learning, experiential learning, and industry-based training into educational programs. Universities should prioritize developing soft skills, like communication, leadership qualities, teamwork, and critical thinking, with technical knowledge.

The government should build strong vocational education initiatives to prepare graduates for increasing employment sectors and the digital economy. Strong collaboration between academic institutions and industries should be motivated to work to ensure that labor must get into those jobs that are relevant to their graduation. Career counseling and job services should be made better in academic institutions to guide

and train the students about employment opportunities and job planning. Lawmakers should design and introduce inclusive policies that promote start-ups, innovation, and policies that create a large scale of jobs for graduates. The government should give special attention to social and economic inequality, especially gender inequality, and regional inequality, and remove barriers and provide easy access to employment opportunities. Investment in information technology and professional development programs should be elevated to prepare graduates for changing world labor market trends and technical progress.

Future Direction

Future research should apply a quantitative approach to provide a broader opinion and evidence on the unemployed graduates and the labor market. A further comparative approach should help to identify the difference between the public and private sectors, rural-urban unemployment differences, and government policies aimed at reducing graduate unemployment

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