

**Skill-Based and Market-Oriented Curriculum in Higher Education:
An Empirical Study of Pakistani Universities**

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Abstract

Skill-based and market-oriented higher education curriculum might support social and economic growth in Pakistan. Curriculum design continues to be essential to national development since education is essential for promoting social harmony, cultural awareness, economic production, and personal development. The aim of this study is to examine the role of a skill-based and market-oriented higher education curriculum in promoting social and economic development in Pakistan by analyzing students' perceptions regarding curriculum dimensions, social outcomes, and sector-wise differences between public and private universities. The study focuses on important curriculum elements such as technical skill development, religious and life skills, agricultural education, physical education, social transformation, and health awareness. Data were gathered from 600 students enrolled in public and private colleges using a quantitative study design. Students' opinions on how the curriculum contributes to social and economic growth in public and private schools did not significantly differ, according to statistical research. The results show that in order to satisfy the demands of the labor market and society today, curricular reforms that prioritize experiential learning, practical competences, and the integration of skill-based and market-aligned topics are necessary. According to the study's findings, Pakistan needs a contemporary, adaptable, and competency-focused higher education curriculum to increase graduate employability, promote sustainable social development, and produce law-abiding, productive citizens. It suggests boosting funding for higher education, updating the curriculum frequently, adding technical and practical courses, and using cutting-edge teaching methods that meet international standards.

Keywords: Higher education, curriculum development, educational reform, skill-based education, market-oriented curriculum

Introduction

Education's dynamic goals include integrating people into society, educating them about society's values, standards, beliefs, and morals, and preparing them for employment in the market for their betterment. Education serves as a tool for fostering interpersonal relationships and maintaining social harmony and stability. Curriculum impact on social development has been tested and results have been extracted from the respondents. Education as a whole is considered the primary criterion to assess the development of society. It enables society to rationalize decision-making and provide opportunities for social and economic development.

Education's primary purpose is to sustain individual and social development; there are both concrete and moral dimensions to this process. (Aslam, et al. 2022). Social development denotes a general improvement of economic, social, and cultural dimensions of the society, social development means a social change in society as well as individuals, although social development as a concept is all-inclusive economic development, however, it has differed from this sense that it is emphasized the development of society to all levels of cultural, social, political, cultural and economic aspects (Gore, 1973). Higher education serves as a cornerstone of societal progress and economic prosperity in the 21st century. As global labor markets evolve rapidly due to technological advancements and shifting economic demands, universities are expected not only to transmit knowledge but also to cultivate practical skills, critical thinking, and adaptability among students. An effective higher education curriculum is therefore pivotal in aligning academic outcomes with the complex needs of contemporary societies, fostering not only individual competence but also collective social development. Recent research emphasizes that higher education curricula should be dynamic, integrating both theoretical knowledge and market-oriented competencies to bridge the persistent gap between academic preparation and employability in developing economies such as Pakistan. (Alwi and Karim 2024).

In Pakistan, the role of higher education in nurturing a skilled, socially responsible, and employable workforce has become increasingly critical in the face of unemployment challenges and structural mismatches between university graduates and labor market requirements. Empirical evidence suggests a significant disconnect between the skills imparted through higher education programmes and the competencies demanded by industry, particularly in terms of communication, digital literacy, critical thinking, and practical expertise (Riaz et al, 2025).. This misalignment has contributed to a growing employability gap and has raised questions regarding the relevance and responsiveness of existing curricula to contemporary social and economic realities (Alwi and Karim 2024).

Scholars have argued that curricula must evolve beyond traditional discipline-centric content to incorporate experiential learning approaches, competency-based frameworks, and market-aligned skill development. Internationally, competency-based education models have been highlighted for their potential to enhance employability, foster

sustainable higher education ecosystems, and strengthen university–industry collaboration (Maya Ortiz, et al. 2025) Within the Pakistani context, recent studies point to emerging trends in curriculum reform efforts, noting a growing interest in skills-based learning and technological integration, albeit accompanied by implementation challenges such as limited resources and inadequately trained faculty (Aslam et al.2023).

Statement of Problem

Despite these scholarly developments, there remains a need for more systematic inquiry into how students perceive the contribution of current curricula to their social and economic outcomes. Understanding student perspectives is essential, as learners are direct beneficiaries of curricular design and critical stakeholders in societal transformation. This research aims to identify key areas by comparing perceptions across public and private universities, for curriculum reforms that support both societal well-being and market-oriented competencies, offering evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and educational planners committed to bridging the gap between higher education and societal needs. Despite rapid expansion of higher education in Pakistan, its contribution to socioeconomic development remains uneven and insufficiently understood due to limited context-specific, institution-level research. Persistent inequalities in access and quality, concerns about curriculum relevance and program effectiveness, and inadequate learning environments continue to constrain outcomes. Existing studies largely rely on macro-level analyses and rarely examine multiple higher education components together, highlighting the need for integrated, institution-level research to better understand how higher education can effectively support national development.

Research objectives

- To investigate students’ perceptions regarding the contribution of higher education curriculum to social and economic development in Pakistan
- To analyze key curriculum dimensions including technical skills, agricultural education, physical education, religious and life skills, and social transformation.
- To examine the perceived impact of higher education curriculum on students’ social and economic outcomes such as health awareness, future career prospects, and social mobility.
- To compare perceptions of students from public and private universities regarding curriculum effectiveness and developmental outcomes.

Research Questions

- How do students perceive the role of higher education curriculum in promoting social and economic development in Pakistan?

- How do different curriculum dimensions (technical skills, physical education, agricultural education, religious and life skills, and social transformation) influence students' social and economic outcomes?
- Is there a significant difference between public and private university students' perceptions regarding the effectiveness and developmental contribution of higher education curriculum?

Significance of the Study

This study is because it examines how skill-based and market-oriented higher education curricula in Pakistan contribute to both social and economic development. By exploring students' perceptions across public and private universities, the research highlights gaps between existing curricula and the practical competencies demanded by the labor market. The findings provide evidence for policymakers, educators, and curriculum developers to design contemporary, competency-focused programs that enhance graduate employability, promote sustainable social progress, and prepare socially responsible citizens. Ultimately, this study emphasizes the critical role of higher education in aligning academic outcomes with societal and economic needs in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Pakistan has achieved great progress in growing the quality of its institutions in recent decades, but it still has a long way to go in terms to provide the human resources for the growth of the contemporary knowledge-based economy prom by promoting its higher education system (Rehman, 2021).

The definition of development as 'development' is entirely explained by developmental theory. For example, the term "development" does not necessarily refer to any particular aspect of social, political, or economic improvement. Instead, this is an amalgam of words for various approaches used to improve the socio-economic and environmental conditions of society from its current state (Pearson, 2000). In the context of Bangladesh, Mahmoud (2016) equated development with economic growth and is measured only in terms of annual improvements in per capita income or gross national product, regardless of its distribution or the extent to which people participate in actual growth. The process of social and economic progress in society is frequently referred to as socioeconomic development. The indicators used to evaluate it include GDP, life expectancy, literacy, and employment levels. Personal integrity, liberty, personal safety, and the absence of a threat of physical harm, as well as the level of civil society activity, are all considered. This could relate to a society's transition in terms of social and economic factors as defined by AEDA (2021). Yabiku and Schlabach (2009) indicated one of the most evident indicators of social progress was the growth of formal education, which corresponded with the emergence of nation-states and modern economies. Education's expansion resulted in a complex web of institutions scattered along diverse courses in the life course from initial childhood schooling through school phases to the last periods of higher education, as well as the delivery of lifetime learning opportunities as deliberated by Flaherty and Lidy (2018).

Alain (2015) discussed that education is also connected to improved civic involvement since it allows individuals to make more educated judgments about who to vote for, what policies to support, and what issues to campaign for also allows them to express their worries and viewpoints. People frequently utilize education to construct their "social identities," shaping their perceptions of themselves and their interactions with others. Increased well-being, health, social trust, and political participation are all linked to a good, affirming social identity.

According to Hakobyan and McLaren (2016) the traditional phrase "literacy leads to development" is significantly different from the new idea that the workshop was attempting to promote, which is that literacy is a social practice with social significance. Hanif and Arshed (2016) took this approach to literacy requires not just a comprehensive examination of the literate competencies required in each society, but also a careful examination of education as a separate commodity by approaching literacy, it is also possible to link education a component of the universe's evolution.

Feenstra and Weinstein (2017) studied and defined the characteristics of universities, which is a key element in the potential for preparing young people who would help to shape an international vision and a social ethic for harmony and social development, and literacy to people's social practices. Pakhomova (2021) expressed in terms of "standard deviations," making communication with policymakers outside education professionals challenging. High levels of learning, on the other hand, were linked to more years of schooling, greater wages, and better well-being. This research used two techniques to illustrate the success of learning interventions with equivalent grades on one hand and improved living wage net value on the other hand. This study used cost-effectiveness data and included a battery of robustness tests. Findings showed that many treatments enhanced learning by 6 to 9 years of regular training. The median structured education intervention increased learning by 0.9 years from her 0.6 years in regular school Lambrechts (2013) discussed that poverty reduces the likelihood of educational achievement and outcomes in a circularly reinforcing manner; the reduced educational opportunity and outcomes prolong a poor existence. As a result, poverty and inequality remain inherent drawbacks. Gunawardena et al. (2020) described that education also fosters social mobility by helping those who were poor or underprivileged to better their social and economic status. Increased educational attainment in one generation led to increased schooling, work productivity, and income in the following generation, resulting in intergenerational economic and social advantages Individuals' cognitive and soft skills improved because of the education. Zhogova, et al. (2020) discover how the ongoing processes of digitalization affected the formation and growth of human capital. The study's objective was to investigate how digitalized factors affect the human capital in Russian Federation regions. The statistics were obtained from the Russian Federation's State statistics service. The authors gathered data to calculate the index of the conditions for the formation and development of human capital (CFDHC) for 82 regions and 34 factors that characterized the development of digitalization in Russia between the years 2014 to 2018. The authors used ordinary least squares (OLS) estimation to create a multivariate regression to describe the connection between the index and digitalization factors. Models with random and fixed effects were developed

taking into account the distinct effects of the Russian Federation's regions. The findings confirmed the hypothesis to create and cultivate human capital in regions, efforts should be made to build the digital infrastructure, reduce digital inequality, support higher education through research institutions and develop electronic services for the public and municipal services.

Sharipov (2020) looked into the idea of internationalizing the idea of higher education. This is a common practice in all higher educational institutions around the world. He talked about the idea of higher education and the globalization of higher education. He also talked about the idea in the context of contemporary campuses in higher education. The term means as many activities and fields that fall under that umbrella.

Mamurov et al. (2020) based on this analysis, demonstrated that health means human values, harmonization of physical and mental health; systems of attitudes, and motivations for human behavior in social environments. Normal functioning and physical activity; stable psycho-emotional spheres of a person in life existence, the physical and mental capacity of a person resistance to various factors of life, the archaeological factors that lead to the creation of a healthy lifestyle for subjects in the course of higher education are demonstrated, creating a model for the formation of a healthy lifestyle for students. Part of the concept is a program of physical education extracurricular activities. There was a statistically significant increase in the following measurements: physical activity, theoretical preparation, motivation, value formulation for physical health, and healthy lifestyles. The study found that motivational factors included knowledge and an effective basis for reasoning, prediction, and establishment of a healthy lifestyle value model, modernizing the physical education process in colleges has shown that a change in method is needed (Imas et al. 2018).

According to Nguyen et al. (2017) moral behavior is wider than ethical behavior that it goes beyond the rigorous norms of codes of conduct. Moral practice is essential in the teaching of higher education. These materials assist in better understanding the characteristics of moral education in higher education. This prompted the investigation of a whole new area of research in higher education to enhance human development. Because of the converging moral modes connected to higher education purposes (which was unexpected), a rising literature on non-neoliberal higher education was discovered to guide theoretical growth in the pre-program.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design to investigate the contribution of higher education curricula to social development in Pakistan. A structured survey instrument was used to collect data from students across multiple universities, enabling the examination of perceptions regarding curriculum dimensions and their social outcomes. Quantitative methods were chosen to provide a systematic and measurable assessment of students' opinions, ensuring generalizability of findings across both public and private university sector.

Population and Sample

The target population for this study comprised undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in public and private universities in Pakistan. A total of 600 students participated in the survey, representing diverse academic disciplines, socio-economic backgrounds, and institutional contexts. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation from both public (n = 300) and private (n = 300) universities. This sampling approach allowed for a meaningful sector-wise comparison of students' perceptions regarding curriculum relevance, skill development, and social outcomes.

Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire was developed to capture students' perceptions of higher education curricula. The instrument consisted of two major sections: Curriculum Dimensions, including farming courses, physical education, religious and life lessons, technical skill development, and social transformation initiatives. Social and Economic Outcomes, covering health awareness, future career prospects, housing insights, and overall social mobility. Items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The questionnaire was pretested with a pilot group of 50 students to ensure clarity, relevance, and reliability of items. Content validity was ensured by consulting subject-matter experts in curriculum development, higher education, and social development. The pilot study helped refine ambiguous items and improve construct validity. Reliability analysis confirmed the questionnaire's internal consistency, with all subscales demonstrating Cronbach's alpha values above 0.80.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through self-administered surveys distributed both online and in-person. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, and their participation was voluntary. Ethical considerations, including confidentiality and anonymity, were strictly maintained throughout the data collection process.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS Version 26. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, were calculated to summarize students' perceptions regarding curriculum dimensions and social outcomes. To examine differences between public and private universities, independent samples t-tests were conducted. A p-value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant. Additionally, sector-wise comparisons provided insight into institutional variations in curriculum effectiveness and contribution to social and economic development.

Results

Table: Perceptions of cumulative students towards curriculum and social development.

Sr No	Dimensions	SDA	DA UN	A	SA	Mean
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1 Farming courses	23 (4.1)	73 (13.0)	60 (10.7)	234 (41.6)	163 (29.0)	4.15
2 Physical courses	74 (14.1)	95 (16.5)	137 (14.1)	123 (27.8)	130 (30.2)	4.32
3 Bring transformation	12 (2.12)	7 (1.21)	21 (3.7)	240 (42.7)	276 (59.1)	4.70
4 Religious and life lesson	85 (15.1)	123 (21.9)	93 (16.5)	143 (25.4)	116 (20.6)	4.30
Social Development						
5 Future of students	229 (40.7)		48 (8.5)	16 (2.81)	20 (3.62)	3.71
6 Health	44 (7.81)	25 (4.4)	63 (11.2)	210 (37)	212 (37.7)	3.65
7 Better housing	225 (40.0)	176 (31.3)	55 (9.8)	54 (9.6)	50 (8.9)	3.34

The dimension, “farming courses” the statement, in Table 1 is demand for the addition of farming courses in the curriculum, the data in Table 4.7 that in term of 13.0 % disagree, 4.1 % strongly disagreed, and in the meanwhile, 41.6% agreed and 29.0 % strongly agreed. Only 10.8 % were uncertain about that statement. The majority believed that they were satisfied with the statement that it demands the addition of farming courses in the curriculum also supported by the mean score is 4.20. there were 17.1% students were disagreed and only 70.6% were disagreed. Only 10.8% were with no opinions.

A statement from the above data in Table 1 as the dimension physical courses indicated that there were 27.8 % of students agreed and 30.2 % strongly agreed whereas 14.1 % disagreed and 16.5% strongly disagreed. Only 14.1 % were uncertain about that statement. The majority thought that they were satisfied with the up gradation of physical courses like sports and exercise subjects can result in a reduction of rising health issues among youth especially when it comes to diseases like Covid and other health concerns. The mean score is 4.1 supported this claim.

As the dimension “bring transformation” in terms of the statement, the Pakistani curriculum should bring transformation in the traditional conception of the social status of society, from the above data in Table 4.7 shows that there were 42.7% of students agreed and 59.1% strongly agreed on the other hand only 1.21% disagreed and 2.12 % strongly disagreed. Only 3.7% of students were uncertain about that statement. The majority thought that they were satisfied that the Pakistani curriculum should bring transformation in the traditional conception of the social status of society. The mean score is 4.25 supports this claim.

The dimension religious and life lesson in terms of the statement from the above data in that we need to design a better curriculum to equip the mindset of youth with better religious and life lessons, there were 25.4 % of students were agreed 20.6% strongly agreed whereas 15.1% disagreed and 21.9 % of students were dis agreed Only 16.5% were uncertain about that statement. The majority believed that they were satisfied that we need to design a better curriculum to equip the mindset of youth with better religious and life lessons so that they may decide their life goals and ambition wisely, mean score is 4.20 which shows that the majority of the students agreed with that statement.

As the dimension from the data in Table 1 in terms of the statement curriculum decides the future of students in the later stage of their life in Pakistan that there were 3.6 % of students agreed and 2.81% of students strongly agreed and 42.5 % disagreed and 40.7 % strongly disagreed. Only 8.5 % were uncertain about that statement. The majority believed that they were not satisfied with the curriculum that decides the future of students in the later stage of their life in Pakistan. The mean score is 3.71 supported this claim.

Table 1 indicated that in the dimension, “health problem” regarding the statement there were 4.4 % of students agreed and 7.8 % strongly agreed whereas 37.7 % of respondents disagreed and 37.4 % strongly disagreed and only 11.2% remained uncertain. The majority believed that they were not satisfied with the statement that our educational curriculum is a basic reason for the increasing ratio of health problems among youth. The mean score is 3.65 also supported this claim. 12.2% students were disagreed and only 75.1% were disagreed. Only 11.2% were with no opinion

Regarding the dimension of better housing, the statement from the above data in Table shows that there were 8.9 % of students agreed 9.6 % strongly agreed whereas 31.3 % disagreed and 40.0 % strongly disagreed. Only 9.8% were uncertain about that statement. The majority believed that they were not satisfied that educational institutes have designed better technical course curricula for higher degree programs for better housing insights among youth for the future. The mean score of 3.65 supported this claim. 18.5% students were agreed and only 71.3.

Table 2: Sector-wise comparison of the curriculum, social and economic development.

Public	SD Public	Private	SD Private	df	Mean Difference	SD	P- value	Sig
0.69	0.76	1.80	1.32	559	1.11	1.51	0.00	0.000

Table 4.10 shows the overall sector-wise comparison of curriculum and social and economic development that is public sector university students are inclined to disagree with the statements, the mean score is 0.69, and SD =0.76 of public university students whereas the mean score of private university students on curriculum, and social and economic development is 2.26 and (SD= 1.80) with df = 559. The mean difference is 1.11, with a P-value of 0.00. It means that there is no significant difference (0.00) between the perception of private and public university students toward curriculum and social and economic development.

Findings

Curriculum and economic development have been tested and results have been taken out from the respondents the findings reveal that the majority of students were not satisfied that curriculum decides the future of students in the later stage of their life in Pakistan Majority believed that they were not satisfied with that our educational curriculum a basic reason of increasing ratio of health problems among youth. The majority thought that they were satisfied with the rise of corporate culture and urbanization has severely impacted the rural areas and demands the addition of farming courses in the curriculum.

The majority believed that they were not satisfied with that educational institutes has designed better technical course curriculum for higher degree programs for better housing insights among youth for the future Majority thought that they were satisfied that we need to design better curriculum to equip the mindset of youth with better religious and life lessons so that they may decide their life goals and ambitions wisely. The majority believed that they were satisfied with that gradation of physical courses like Sports and exercise subjects can result in a reduction of rising health issues among youth especially when it comes to diseases like Covid and other health concerns Majority thought that they were not satisfied with that Pakistani curriculum can bring transformation in the traditional conception of the social status of the society. The majority thought that they were satisfied that we need to update our curriculum to bring prosperity to the lives of Youth.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that respondents strongly supported the development of a quality-oriented and market-responsive curriculum aligned with contemporary educational and labor market demands. These results are consistent with international and national research, including reports by the World Bank (2020–2021), Haque and Nayab (2021), Umar and Hassan (2019), NSSO, and Topper (2020), which emphasize the importance of modern curricula designed to equip graduates with practical competencies for active participation in society and community development. Global research highlights the need for model curricula that integrate updated content, practical knowledge, and skill-based learning to prepare graduates for national and international employment opportunities. Similarly, Hague (2021) stressed the importance of revising outdated syllabi and incorporating future-oriented learning materials that reflect societal changes and promote sustainable social development.

Previous studies have also demonstrated that increased national investment in education contributes to curriculum improvement and economic growth. For example, Sri Lanka's higher education reforms and increased GDP spending between 2010 and 2019, along with the integration of e-learning initiatives (Colombo, 2020; UNESCO, 2020), highlight the positive relationship between educational investment and curriculum modernization. Within the Pakistani context, Rehman's (2021) longitudinal analysis of public and private universities revealed significant progress in improving higher education quality to develop human capital suitable for a modern knowledge-based economy. However, despite these advancements, Pakistan's Human Development Index ranking remains relatively low, with limited government expenditure on

education (UNDP, HDR 2020; Burki, 2021), indicating the need for greater policy attention and financial commitment to higher education reforms.

Recommendations

In order to support contemporary, skill-based, and market-oriented curriculum that are in line with the needs of the domestic and international workforce, it is advised that the government boost funding for higher education. Universities should incorporate technical and practical courses, encourage experiential learning through project-based learning and internships, and implement creative teaching methods that improve students' employability and critical thinking abilities. To keep the curriculum current and high-quality, educators, industry professionals, and stakeholders must regularly examine it. Institutions should also improve their technical, agricultural, and physical education programs in order to meet the socioeconomic needs of the community and guarantee the overall development of their students. Graduates will be even more prepared for global competitiveness and sustainable social development if higher education programs are in line with international norms.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this research it is concluded that education is a powerful instrument for the development of any country. This research 's major parts focused on the point that higher education is the key element of the success of any nation, In the education system our degree programs' level of education and curriculum of higher education, will contribute effectively to social and economic development in Pakistan. This research indicated that the higher education system contributes to development through its mission and it has responded to contemporary 21st-century challenges by enhancement of several courses like financial intelligence, financial learning, and introduction of technical courses for youth with better job opportunities in the market, physical courses are essential tools for social and economic development. Further, the curriculum with modern-day required subjects could result in better opportunities for graduates in the job market degree programs or state educational level (is playing important role in the prospect of students). Higher Education with no employment perspective is one of the main causes of depression and mental fatigue for young graduates in Pakistan. Education in Pakistan is not providing insight to the students about better house planning. Education is playing a vital role in maintaining a healthy lifestyle in Pakistan. The curriculum does not decide the future of students in the later stage of their life in Pakistani. Our educational institutes need to introduce technical courses for youth with better job opportunities in the market.

We need to update our curriculum to bring prosperity to the lives of Youth. Need to continually stern as the statement from the above data in Table 4.7 indicated that there were 3.3% of students disagreed and 91.8% agreed. Only 3.7% were uncertain about the statement that they were satisfied that we need to update our curriculum to bring prosperity in the lives of youth Majority thought that they were satisfied with that we need to update our curriculum to bring prosperity in the lives of youth Mean score is 4.385. It shows that the majority of the students agreed with this statement.

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