

## Original Research Article

# Perception of Humanities' Graduates on their Employability in Bhutan

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### ABSTRACT

Many scholars have conducted research on graduate unemployment in Bhutan as a result of the worrisome rise in unemployment among graduates, however there is a scarcity of practical research on unemployed humanities graduates. There is also a lot of speculation and mysticism around the employment prospect of a person with a humanities degree, with some people arguing that the humanities field is too broad. The study aimed at exploring the factors that contribute to the unemployment of humanities' graduates and perception on their employability in Bhutan. The data was collected through the administration of structured survey questionnaires to 316 humanities graduates. The result of this study revealed that employability depends on different factors such as the academic performance, integrated course, graduate's work experiences and skill obtained while studying. Therefore, this paper recommends that the university's course should incorporate practical and work-readiness programmes that will allow graduates to gain employability skills. Moreover, to narrow the gap between the skill needs of industry and the skills received, university and company/organization should work in collaboration.

**Keywords:** Employability, humanities, perception, employers, undergraduates' curriculum

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

In the context of a rapidly changing and highly competitive global economy, employability of tertiary undergraduates continues to be a subject for debate in recent policy discourse (Garsten & Jacobsson, 2004). As per Beyond Graduation survey (2017) it has found that over the year, there has been significant change in the employment situation. The trend has drastically changed over the years with only 494 vacancies announced by Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) in 2017 against 796 graduates recruited in 2012 (Civil Service Statistics June, 2013). This constitutes employment opportunities to about 11.1 percent of the graduates entering the labor market in 2017, the trends is expected to continue as forecasted by looking at the previous trends of employment.

In fact the Royal Civil Service Commission will absorb a little over 130 graduates for PGDE, 45 for PGDPA and 30 and 10 for the post graduate diploma in financial management and in national law respectively. Between 100 to 200 may get absorbed into the corporate, state-owned enterprise and private companies. The rest will end up looking for jobs. The concern is whether the rest of the graduates who are not absorbed by the RCSC possess the required skills demanded by the private sector and other corporate agencies. According to Rinchen (2008) Bhutan's current education system does not meet the needs of job seekers and employers; rather it is only contributing to the growing youth unemployment.

Beyond Graduation survey (2013) has forecasted that the total number of graduates from 2016 to 2019 will be 12, 999 and out of which graduates with humanities background comprised 2773. From the 2855 universities graduates in 2013, the majority of graduates were those with business management, arts and humanities degrees. Moreover, from the total of 4065 in 2017 the majority graduates are from humanities background (BGS, 2017). It has also indicated that, from many courses, it is expected to have a higher number of graduates from humanities background.

The mismatch between jobs and job seekers continues to be an issue in the country. The situation is more serious with graduates from the fields of Humanities. It is believed that they are unemployed because they do not know where their degrees can take them. Humanities graduates do not know what is available for them in the labor market. Generally, people view humanities graduates in Bhutan are not informed of the career choice available in their field and they end up applying for the wrong position or overlooking careers linked to their qualification, which may result in unemployment.

The graduates from the humanities are more affected by the unemployment compared to the graduates from the other field (Mouchipku, 2019). The common view that humanities graduates are not employable, coupled with concerns about their lack of practical skills and the design of the curriculum. An understanding of the issue related to the employability of

humanities graduates in Bhutan will provide both higher education and graduates an opportunity to be aware of skills and attitudes required in the job market.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

It is believed by many that Humanities studies are less relevant in today's highly competitive economy. However, defenders of the humanities argue that humanities studies focus on preparing graduates to be conscious citizens and to think critically about social phenomena (Smuts, 2010). As per National Statistical Bureau (2019) the youth unemployment rate stands up 11.7 percent and highest unemployment rate is among persons with Bachelor Degree (12.7%) (LFS, 2018). The Graduates who pursued science, technology, engineering, and mathematics degrees have a higher degree of satisfaction with their courses, 17.5% of arts and humanities have indicated lower levels of satisfaction with their course (BGS, 2017).

The situation of mismatch between jobs and job seekers trends is common with graduates from humanities background. This is making students question: do humanities graduates lack high-demand skills such as practical and technical skills? What skills does a humanities degree equip them with? What employability provision is provided to humanities students to give them the best possible chance at succeeding? This is the striking question most of the humanities graduates asked themselves. Thus, due to the alarming rise in unemployment among graduates in Bhutan, research has been carried on graduate unemployment by many researchers, but there is a dearth of practical research being done on unemployed humanities' graduates. This keeps a wide field of opportunity to explore humanities' graduates' perception on their employability in Bhutan.

## **1.3 Objective**

1. To identify why humanities graduates in Bhutan are struggling to enter the job market.
2. To understand the perception of Humanities' graduates on their employability based on skills, undergraduates' curriculum and employer' expectation.

## **1.4 Research Question:**

This research try to answer the following question:

1. What are the factors that affect humanities graduates to enter the labor market?
2. What are the perceptions of humanities graduates on their employability in Bhutan?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In order to explore better the phenomenon of employability of humanities' graduates in Bhutan, it is important to contextualize how the phenomenon is experienced and understood by different scholars. This chapter presents information on what other scholars have written on the employability and humanities graduates prior to this study.

### **2.1 Concepts on the employability**

The review of literature on employability of university graduates reveals that the concept has different interpretations based on stakeholder perceptions on employability. Some of the

researchers' refer to employability as the individual's capability to obtain the desired job and maintain that job in a changing context (Yorke & Knight, 2006).

However, some researchers view employability as more than just individual ability to obtain and maintain suitable employment. Smith et al. (2009) analysis suggested that employability can be seen from the subjective perspective of the student's or graduate's preparedness for employment; it can also be considered from the objective perspective of government, policy makers, employers and universities which assess graduate outcomes. Moreover, Sumanasiri et al. (2015) argued that employability depends not only on the attributes of the individual graduates such as subject knowledge, experience, skills, and personality traits, but also on the faculty, curriculum, and pedagogy in university systems, and also on the employers who hire the graduates and their expectations.

Employability is about making closer links between education and the world of work (Harvey et al., 2002). This definition points out the responsibilities of educational institutions, employers and individuals. Yorke (2006) draws a line between an individual's capability to obtain a graduate job and practically acquiring a graduate job in the labor market. From the different researchers and the literature, the current project adopted this definition of 'graduate employability' in the recent world as about achieving and demonstrating appropriate knowledge, skills and attributes to obtain initial employment.

## **2.2 The Key to Employability**

The career developing learning, experiences (work and life), degree subject knowledge and understanding and skills, generic skills and emotional intelligence are the vital key to employability (Dittrich, 2019). According to Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) claimed that students should be equipped with skills that will help them articulate their acquired knowledge and skills to prospective employers. The lack of focus on career development or career management skills affects graduate employability negatively (Bridgstock, 2009). Thus, it is essential for universities to direct toward equipping students for lifelong career development (Bridgstock, 2009).

Mason et al. (2009) states that work experience positively enhances the employability as it is valued by the employers as they often look for evidence of this. Therefore, Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) suggest that students should have access to opportunities for gaining appropriate work experience during their studies. Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) mentioned that with no other concrete means to judge graduates, employers often use students' achievement in subject knowledge as a means to gauge their suitability for a particular job.

The generic skills are an important element of employability (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007). Voogt and Roblin (2012) the most common generic skills found to appear frequently include collaboration, communication, ICT literacy, social and/or cultural, skills, and citizenship.

Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) mentioned that after students have accessed opportunities for those four key elements of employability, through the process of reflection and evaluation, they will be able to build self-efficacy, self-confidence as well as self-esteem.

### **2.3 Employability skills and the undergraduate curriculum**

According to Knight and Yorke (2003) while there are differences of opinion in accepting employability as a curriculum goal, there is significant acceptance among academia that curriculum processes can improve the chances of students' gain in terms of employability.

According to Lindberg (2007) students often lack information about what skills are in demand in the job market which results in prolonged transition between completion of study and employment. Knight and Yorke (2003) emphasized the need to formally integrate the following practical approaches into undergraduate programs or curricula to enhance graduate employability: employability through the whole curriculum, employability in the core curriculum, work-based or work-related learning, employability-related module(s) within the curriculum, work-based or work-related learning in parallel with the curriculum, managing graduates' profiles or records of achievement (Yorke & Knight, 2006, p.14). Such an approach is also supported by Bridgstock (2009) who insisted on mandatory and assessable career management programs involving academic staff, industry partners, careers service staff and students in curriculum design and implementation (p.39).

### **2.4 Factors affecting the employability of humanities graduates**

Kalamatianou and Kougioumoutzaki (2012) states that employment prospects have become more uncertain due to the expansion of higher education, coupled with the changing needs of the economy. However, according to Fenesi and Sana (2015) studies on graduate labor market outcomes show that the job situation of graduates in the humanities is unfavorable compared to that of other disciplines.

Robst (2007) explained that humanities graduates experience more difficulties in the labor market than graduates from other disciplines do. Moreover, humanities programs are less likely to produce employable graduates in related fields that provide generic skills and focus on theoretical knowledge. Giles and Drewes (2001) that they do not provide domain-specific and practical skills that can be applied to particular occupations unlike vocational-oriented graduates, humanities field face problem as more of general training were received and on other hand those with occupation-specific skills are more preferred by employers (Verhaest et al. 2015).

Moleke (2003) claimed that humanities graduates have lower employment prospects and take longer to settle in jobs. In line with that, most countries have relatively low share of graduates choosing technical fields of study in comparison to humanities (Oosterbeek & Webbink, 1997). Due to the low costs of these programs and the ease to get admission into such programs, Migdad (2011) asserted that despite the existence of different programs in universities, enrolment remains concentrated on Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences programs in the University of Palestine. Moreover, the excess supply of graduates in the humanities greatly

undermines the employment prospects for such graduates (Migdad 2011). Nonetheless, Robst (2007) argued that the number of jobs in the humanities and arts fields is lower than the number of graduates (job seekers) compared to those in fields like engineering and health.

## **2.5 Employers' understanding of graduates' profile**

It should be noted that employers' understanding of graduates' professional profiles is an important aspect of employability. Lin et al. (2003) point out that employers do not have a clear understanding of what tasks generally-educated graduates such as Humanities graduates can perform as the curricula design offers a wide range of choices, as opposed to graduates with specific professional education. This may often lead to confusion in the labor market and leave humanities graduates favored less compared to professional graduates. However, Harvey and Shahjahan, (2013) states employers prefer communication skills, teamwork skills and time management skills in their new employee.

However, Harvey, and Shahjahan (2013) found that many employers recruit new employees based on 'fit for the role', the skills they considered are communication skills, team work or interpersonal skills, time management skills, responsibility and accountability critical thinking, analytical and problem-solving skills, and lifelong learning and development.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter presents methods that were adopted for the study. It includes the research design, data collection methods and data analysis section.

### **3.1 Research Design**

The present study has utilized quantitative methodology. Bryman (2001) states that quantitative research approach is the research that places emphasis on numbers and figures in the collection and analysis of data. It has employed the use of questionnaires as the research instrument. The data collection was based on the questionnaire distributed to the respondent and this served as the primary instrument. The questionnaires were designed in order to accumulate enough information pertaining to the objective of the study. The research was exploratory and descriptive to better understand the issue being studied.

#### **3.1.1 Sample method and sample size:**

The respondent for this study was selected in accordance with a non-probability sampling procedure. This sampling technique was used because it enables the researcher to select the most appropriate based on his own judgement. Researchers employed a snowball sampling technique. Mack et al. (2005) states that with snowballing technique, participants with whom contact has already been made use their social networks to refer the researcher to other people who could potentially participate in or contribute to the study. The study population was 2773 Humanities' graduates of 2017 to 2019. Snowball sampling technique was used to draw the sample and sample size for the study was calculated using Qualtrics sample size calculator

([www.qualtrics.com](http://www.qualtrics.com)). The sample size for the study was 338. However, after administering a questionnaire survey, 316 responded to the survey which accounts for 93.5% response rate.

### **3.2 Data Collection Methods**

The primary data are collected through the questionnaire. The questionnaires were distributed among the Humanities' graduates through sharing the links in email, WhatsApp, Messenger and WeChat.

#### **3.2.1 Research Instrument**

The survey method was followed to collect the data on the perception of humanities graduates on their employability in Bhutan. The questionnaire was divided into three parts. Part one asks about the demographic features such as gender, years of graduates, qualification, field of studies employment status and further study. Part two consisted of two multiple questions and five scale Likert scale to identify factors that contribute to the unemployment of humanities graduates or reasons why humanities graduates are struggling to enter the job market. Part three of the questionnaires also consisted of a two multiples questions and Likert scale to examine how humanities graduates perceive their employability based on skills they are equipped by humanities course and expectation of employers.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

The data gathered from the respondent were analyzed for the purpose of answering the research question. The questionnaires were analyzed using the descriptive statics in order to collect the frequency count and percentages. It also included finding mean and standard deviation. They were presented in the form of tables, demographics variables of the respondent were also collected to support data to understand the overall analysis. A reliability test was conducted to test the internal consistency among the items of questionnaire subscales. The data analysis utilized was the Microsoft Excel 2010 and Statistical Package Social science (SPSS).

### **3.4 Ethical Consideration (Human Participation Protection)**

Ethical issues cannot be ignored, as they relate directly to the integrity of a piece of research and of the disciplines that are involved (Bryman, 2012). Ethical considerations in this research included: confidentiality, anonymity and remuneration to ensure integrity, quality and transparency.

### **3.5 Reliability Analysis**

Reliability analysis was carried out to test the internal consistency among the item of each subscale. The generally accepted rule is Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.6 to 0.7 indicates acceptable level of reliability, and 0.8 or greater indicates a very good level (Eisinga et al., 2013).

The table 1 shows reliability analysis on factor that contribute to the unemployment among the humanities graduates subscale consisted of seven items ( $\alpha = .898$ ), the importance of

various skills in the employability consisted of six items ( $\alpha = .964$ ), the skills that graduates got from the humanities course consisted of six items ( $\alpha = .921$ ), importance of developing skills/attributes for humanities graduates to obtain employment subscale consisted of seven items ( $\alpha = .947$ ), aspects that recruiting agencies look to recruit the employees subscale consisted of five items ( $\alpha = .842$ ).

**Table 1.** Cronbach's alpha values for variables

| Variables  | Number of items | Cronbach's alpha |
|--|-----------------|------------------|
| Factor that contribute to the unemployment among Humanities graduates                    | 7               | .898             |
| Graduates perception on the importance of various skills in the employability            | 6               | .964             |
| Skills that graduates got from the humanities course                                     | 6               | .921             |
| Importance of developing skills/attributes for humanities graduates to obtain employment | 7               | .947             |
| Aspects that recruiting agencies look to recruit the employees.                          | 5               | .842             |

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

This chapter comprises results and discussion. The data were gathered based upon the objective of the study. The questionnaires were analyzed using the descriptive statistics in order to collect the frequency count and percentages. It also includes finding mean and standard deviation. They were presented in the form of tables and graphs. This section ends by discussing results and providing implications of the study.

#### 4.1. Profiles' of Respondent

The table 2 shows respondent profiles. The more respondents in this survey group were females who represented 50.3% of the sample and 49.7% of the respondents were males. The majority of the respondents which comprised 96.8% have a qualification of bachelor degree, 2.8% have honors and 0.3% with the master degree. As for the field of studies, the majority (27.5%) of respondents were from history background and least (1.6%) from the psychology background. Moreover, 27.5% of 2019 graduates, 33.9% of 2018 graduates and 38.6% of 2019 have participated in answering the questionnaire. The most of the respondents are unemployed currently as it comprises 82. % and 18% were the employed humanities graduates. The study shows 84.2% of graduates did not pursue further study and 15.5% have pursued the further study.

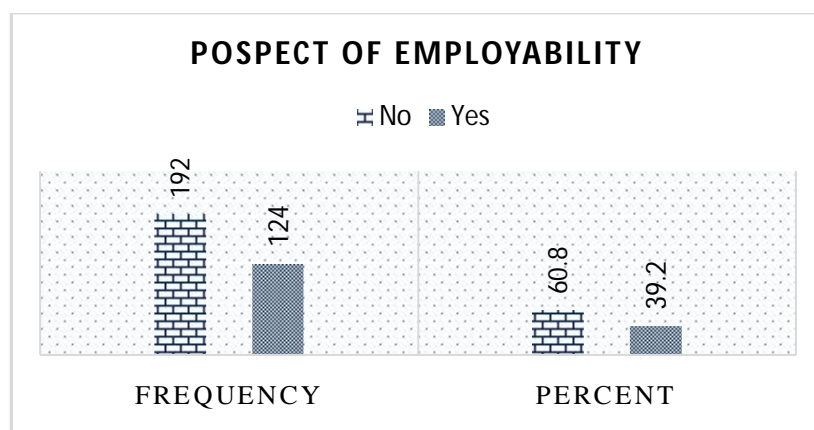
**Table 2.** *Respondent Profiles*

| Variables         | Category          | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------|-------------------|-----------|---------|
| Gender            | Female            | 159       | 50.3    |
|                   | Male              | 157       | 49.7    |
|                   | Total             | 316       | 100.0   |
| Qualification     | Bachelor degree   | 306       | 96.8    |
|                   | Honors            | 9         | 2.8     |
|                   | Master            | 1         | 0.3     |
| Field of Studies  | History           | 87        | 27.5    |
|                   | Literature        | 83        | 26.3    |
|                   | Sociology         | 45        | 14.2    |
|                   | Cultural Studies  | 38        | 12.0    |
|                   | Anthropology      | 32        | 10.1    |
|                   | Linguistics       | 16        | 5.1     |
|                   | Philosophy        | 10        | 3.2     |
|                   | Psychology        | 5         | 1.6     |
|                   | Year of Graduates | 2019      | 122     |
| 2018              |                   | 107       | 33.9    |
| 2017              |                   | 87        | 27.5    |
| Further study     | No                | 266       | 84.2    |
|                   | Yes               | 50        | 15.8    |
| Employment Status | No                | 259       | 82.0    |
|                   | Yes               | 57        | 18.0    |
|                   | Total             | 316       | 100.0   |

## 4.2 Factors affecting the employability of Humanities graduates

### 4.2.1 Did graduates think about the prospect of employability in humanities courses in future?

The figure 1 portrays whether they think about the prospect of employment before they choose to pursue the humanities course. The 124 (39.2%) of total respondents claimed that they have thought about the prospect of employment. However, the majority of respondents 192 (60.8%) stated that they have not thought about the employment prospect of the courses.

**Figure 1.** Respondent's awareness on prospect of employment before choosing the course

#### 4.2.2. Reason for pursuing the humanities course

The table 3 presents the reasons among the respondents for pursuing the humanities course. The majority of respondents 41.1% claim that they choose humanities courses based on their interest. Whereas 20.9% of graduates pursued humanities courses thinking that it has higher scope in future and 12% choose it is easy to get admission in the programme. In addition 9.2% due to family influences, 8.2% choose because of easy to complete the course, 6% due to low cost of programme/easy to afford(self-finance) and 2.5% because of peer influences. Therefore, the students choose humanities courses based on their interest.

**Table 3.** Reason for choosing the course

| Variables                       | Category  | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------------------------|---|-----------|---------|
| Reasons for choosing the course | Based on my interest                                | 130       | 41.1    |
|                                 | Higher career scope                                 | 66        | 20.9    |
|                                 | Easy to get admission in the programme              | 38        | 12.0    |
|                                 | Family influence                                    | 29        | 9.2     |
|                                 | Easy to complete the course                         | 26        | 8.2     |
|                                 | Low cost of programme/easy to afford (self-finance) | 19        | 6.0     |
|                                 | Peer influence                                      | 8         | 2.5     |
|                                 | Total   | 316       | 100.0   |

### 4.2.3. Factors that contribute to the unemployment among the humanities graduates.

Each item was rated from Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree. Table 4 shows the factors that contribute to the unemployment of humanities graduates in the job market. As tabulated in table 4, it was found that humanities graduates are struggling to enter into the job market mainly because there are high humanities graduates but inadequate job opportunities, especially in the private sector ( $M=3.78, SD=1.159$ ). The least contributing factor for the unemployment of humanities graduates is the mindset that the humanities courses are easy and do not take the course seriously ( $M=3.27, SD=1.252$ ).

**Table 4.** Factor contribute to the unemployment among humanities graduates

| Variables  | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--|------|----------------|
| There are high humanities graduates but inadequate job opportunities, especially in private sector                 | 3.78 | 1.159          |
| Lack of scope to gain practical work experiences in humanities course  | 3.61 | 1.134          |
| Lack of specific career direction in the humanities degree   | 3.59 | 1.158          |
| Little relevance of courses with the real world of employment  | 3.57 | 1.129          |
| Graduates' own undervalued perception about their Humanities degree  | 3.37 | 1.129          |
| Employers do not value/understand the value of humanities  | 3.28 | 1.15           |
| The humanities graduates has the mindset that the humanities courses are easy and do not take the course seriously | 3.27 | 1.252          |

*Note.* 1=strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree

### 4.3 Humanities graduates' perception on their employability, based on skills, undergraduates' curriculum and expectation of recruiting agencies

#### 4.3.1 Graduates perception on the importance of various skills in the employability

The respondents have answered a five Likert-scale to measure how different skills are important when applying for a job in a company/organization. The table 5 portrays that communication skills ( $M=4.48, SD=1.025$ ) as a very important skills, followed by Personal skills ( $M=4.47, SD=0.98$ ), interpersonal skills ( $M=4.36, SD=0.987$ ), Thinking skills ( $M=4.35,$

$SD=0.995$ ), Learning skills ( $M=4.31$ ,  $SD= 1.013$ ) and least with Intercultural skills ( $M=4.18$ ,  $SD=0.997$ ). Therefore, communication skills are the most important skills when graduates apply for a job.

**Table 5.** *Importance of various employability skills*

| Variables   | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|------|----------------|
| Communication skills (ability to listen, express and present ideas, ability to persuade, to negotiate etc.) | 4.48 | 1.025          |
| Personal skills (self-confidence, Positive attitude, strong work ethics etc.)                               | 4.47 | 0.97           |
| Thinking skills (critical, analytical, strategic thinking etc.)   | 4.53 | 0.995          |
| Interpersonal skills (ability to work in a team, ability to manage conflicts, networking etc.)              | 4.36 | 0.987          |
| Learning skills (ability to learn independently; curiosity and drive for continuous learning etc.)          | 4.31 | 1.013          |
| Intercultural skills (command of more than one language, work in culturally diverse teams etc.)             | 4.18 | 0.997          |

*Note.* 1=not at all important, 2=low important, 3=neutral, 4=important and 5=very important

#### 4.3.2 Skills that graduates got from the humanities course

Table 6 presents the findings on the various skills graduates think that their humanities courses equipped them with. Respondent answered that interpersonal skills ( $M=3.86$ ,  $SD=0.881$ ) is a very high skill their course developed them, followed by thinking skills ( $M=3.82$ ,  $SD=0.947$ ), communication skills ( $M=3.80$ ,  $SD=0.898$ ), learning skills ( $M=3.79$ ,  $SD=0.931$ ) personal skills ( $M=3.73$ ,  $SD=0.923$ ) intercultural skills ( $M=3.72$ ,  $SD=0.955$ ) is the least skills that humanities courses has equipped them with it.

**Table 6.** *Skills that graduates got from the humanities course*

| Variables  | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--|------|----------------|
| Interpersonal skills (ability to work in a team, ability to manage conflicts, networking etc.) | 3.86 | 0.881          |

|   |      |       |
|---|------|-------|
| Thinking skills (critical, analytical, strategic thinking etc.)   | 3.82 | 0.947 |
| Communication skills (ability to listen, express and present ideas, ability to persuade, to negotiate etc.) | 3.80 | 0.898 |
| Learning skills (ability to learn independently; curiosity and drive for continuous learning etc.)          | 3.79 | 0.931 |
| Personal skills (self-confidence, Positive attitude, strong work ethics etc.)                               | 3.73 | 0.923 |
| Intercultural skills (command of more than one language, work in culturally diverse teams etc.)             | 3.72 | 0.955 |

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*Note.* 1=very low, 2=low, 3=neutral, 4=high, and 5=very high

#### 4.3.3 Most contributing factor in developing skills/attributes

To obtain the employment among the humanities graduates, the subscale consisted of seven items, on table 6, majority of respondent feel very important to include curriculum related to the job market ( $M=4.15$ ,  $SD=1.04$ ) and ( $M=4.06$ ,  $SD=0.964$ ) respondent responded to the integrating humanities subject with technical subjects as a least important.

**Table 7.** *Most contributing factor in developing employability skills-graduates view*

| Variables   | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|------|----------------|
| Include curriculum related to the job market              | 4.15 | 1.04           |
| Include practical tasks and assignment                    | 4.07 | 0.988          |
| Provide ongoing collaboration with the labor market actor | 4.07 | 1.001          |
| Include work integrated learning                          | 4.06 | 1.043          |
| Skills and Knowledge imparted in University               | 4.01 | 1.033          |
| Further study   | 4.01 | 0.998          |
| Integrating humanities subject with technical subjects    | 4.06 | 0.964          |

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*Note.* 1=not at all important, 2=low important, 3=neutral, 4=important and 5=very important.

#### 4.3.4 Academic performance of graduates and about their integrated course

The table 8 shows the academic performance and the about their integrated course. The (53.5%) of respondents has good degree marks that is between 70.1% and 79.9%, (39.9%) has fair academic performance between 60.1% and 69.9, (3.5%) has very good degree marks 80% and above and (3.2%) has poor degree marks that is between 50.1% and 59.9%. Therefore, the majority of respondents have good academic performance/degree marks. The polar question was also asked as did their programme involve any work integrated course or not, majority of respondent answered “No” (59.5%) and less “Yes “with (40.5 %.)

**Table 8.** *Academic performance and about their integrated course*

| Variables         | Category                | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------|-------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Degree Marks      | Between 70.1% and 79.9% | 169       | 53.5    |
|                   | Between 60.1% and 69.9  | 126       | 39.9    |
|                   | 80% and above           | 11        | 3.5     |
|                   | Between 50.1% and 59.9% | 10        | 3.2     |
| Integrated course | No                      | 188       | 59.5    |
|                   | Yes                     | 128       | 40.5    |
|                   | Total                   | 316       | 100.0   |

#### 4.3.5 Aspects that recruiting agencies look to recruit the employees.

The table 9 shows the respondents views on to what extent those factors are taken into account by the recruiting agencies. On the average majority of respondent has answered that ( $M=4.34$ ,  $SD=0.952$ ) academic performance, and least respondent has answered to the co-curriculum activities ( $M=3.72$ ,  $SD=1.045$ ).

**Table 9.** *Aspects that recruiting agencies looks to recruit the employees*

| Variables                     | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|-------------------------------|------|----------------|
| Academic performance          | 4.34 | 0.952          |
| Field related work experience | 4.10 | 1.034          |

|                                     |      |       |
|-------------------------------------|------|-------|
| Field related internship experience | 3.94 | 0.967 |
| Peer network                        | 3.79 | 0.947 |
| Co-curriculum activities            | 3.72 | 1.045 |

*Note.* 1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=always.

#### 4.3.6 Recommendations to enhanced the employability of humanities graduates

The respondents were asked to provide recommendations to enhance the employability. Therefore, top recommendations (33.3%) is to make humanities students aware about how to sell their skills and how to apply to the workplace and fourth (11.1%) with the most support on career related information.

**Table 10.** Recommendation to enhance employability

|  | Items   | Frequency | Percent |
|--|---|-----------|---------|
| Recommendation to enhanced the employability | Make humanities students aware about how to sell their skills and how their skills apply to the workplace | 105       | 33.2    |
|  | Emphasis on internship/work placement/practical work experience   | 95        | 30.1    |
|  | Provide clear guidelines at the beginning about the link between course and career path                   | 81        | 25.6    |
|  | More support on career related information  | 35        | 11.1    |
|  | Total   | 316       | 100.0   |

#### Discussion

The current study investigates the factors that contribute to unemployment of humanities graduates and the humanities graduates' perception on their employability based on skills, undergraduates curriculum and employers' expectation. The following key areas are identified: Factors that contribute to the unemployment of humanities graduates and the most contributing factors to obtain employment. Perception on their own skills gained from the humanities course and their perception on the expectation of employers.

The first major finding was on the factors that contribute to unemployment. The analyses revealed there is a high number of humanities graduates but inadequate job opportunities, especially in the private sectors is a main factor that affects the employability of humanities graduates. The finding is parallel to study by Migdad (2011) where the excess supply of graduates in the humanities greatly undermines the employment prospects for such graduates. Students choose to pursue the humanities course based on their assumption of better employment opportunities and based on their interest in the field of study/degree program, without taking the

prospect of employability seriously. Analogous to this finding, Giles and Torben (2001) also presented that lack of scope to gain practical work experiences, lack of specific career direction and little relevance of the course with the real world of employment leads to the unemployment of humanities graduates. However, it seems that there are also other factors determining the unemployment of humanities graduates as it indicates in the finding of this study.

The study also investigated their perception on the most contributing factors for developing skills/attributes in order to obtain employment. The skills and knowledge imparted in university is vital to develop the skills. The respective institution should encourage students to acquire the basic skills that employers value the most. The breadth of choice and diversity of offerings equip humanities graduates with generic skills that are applicable to any job. In the process for the employability, it is vital to provide ongoing collaboration with the labor market actor. Including the curriculum related to the job market, including practical tasks and assignment, including work integrated learning, and encouraging further study are the main contributing factor to the employment/employability of humanities graduates. However, it seems that there is a strong influence of integrated work and past experiences on the status of employment. Whether or not these two factors enables humanities graduates to obtain employment related to their long-term career goal is a matter of further investigation.

The second major finding was concerned with perception of their own skills and how importance is those skills while applying for the job. The studies show that communication skills are an important skill while they are looking for a job. Followed by the personal skills and thinking skills which job recruiting agencies is looking for. This result is in compliance with the studies carried out by Harvey& Shahjahan, (2013) as the communication skills is the one that employer's value the most. Surprisingly, findings of this study revealed humanities courses are not equipped with communication skills, rather interpersonal skills and thinking skills are the one they got from humanities courses. Thus, such mismatch was also pointed out in the study of Lindberg (2007) where students often lack information about what skills are in demand in the job market and skills they have (mismatch of skill).

The study looked into the graduates' perception on the expectation of employers. The result shows academic performance and field related work experiences are factors which are always matter by the recruiting agencies. It is relevant to the study done by the Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) and Williams and Cranmer (2009) which states that work experience positively enhances the employability as it is valued by the employers as they often look for evidence of this. Therefore, field related experience significantly shortens the time gap between graduating from the humanities degree and the first job obtained. This is also evident from the employers' responses stating they prefer a graduate with previous relevant work experience.

From the graduates' perception on their skills gained from the university's curriculum and expectation, findings indicate that the concern issue needs to be addressed. As the employability is a concept, it should not be regarded as an individual matter. To address the issue working in collaboration between university institutions and recruiting agencies/company/organization is important. In fact institutions are the supplier of human capital for the company/organization, so

it is important to work in collaboration rather than separately. If not the gap between the skill needs of industry and the skills received by graduates may continue to grow.

To enhance the employability of humanities graduates, study suggests to make humanities students aware about how to sell their skills and how their skills apply to the workplace. Moreover, study shows emphasizing on internship/work placement/practical work experiences and providing clear guidelines at the beginning about the link between course and career path will enhance the employability. However, employability is driven by the demand in the job market which operates in cycles, when there is strong demand for graduates from specific disciplines while graduates from other disciplines face challenges in obtaining employment. Therefore, employability of humanities graduates depends on where the humanities graduates are in the 'employment cycle'.

### **Implication**

The study aimed at understanding the factors affecting employability of humanities graduates, and finding the study will help humanities' graduates, higher institutions and policy makers to get insight on the issue. Graduating students who are getting ready to enter the job market will come to know what skills are needed/desired by organizations(expectation of employers) and assess themselves better so that they can prepare well. Insights gained from the research may also help universities to understand the magnitude of the problem of skill mismatch and take remedial steps in producing work-readiness graduates, which will help to obtain initial employment and adapt to change. Findings of the study also stimulate discussions amongst the planners and the policy making bodies on controlling the number of intake to pursue humanities courses to reduce the increasing trends of humanities graduates in the inadequate job market. It will inform policymakers on aspects to consider in ensuring that graduates from the humanities are more employable.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

This study was carried out to investigate factors that contribute among unemployment and their perception on employability. The factors that contribute among humanities graduates include high humanities graduates but inadequate job opportunities, lack of work experience, lack of career direction and little relevance of courses with the real world of employment. The finding of this study revealed that employability depends on different factors that were elaborated upon in this research, such as the academic performance, integrated course, graduate's work experiences and skill obtained while studying. Therefore, these factors are why responses suggested that the university's course should incorporate practical and work-readiness programmes that will allow graduates to gain employability skills. Moreover, due to the fact that institutions are the supplier of human capital for the company/organization, to narrow the gap between the skill needs of industry and the skills received, working in collaboration between university institutions and company/organization is important.

### **Limitation**

The study is limited to one disciplinary context due to time constraints. The study was from the perception of 316 humanities graduates and not from the humanities academics and employers, the result was based on the one lens. Moreover, since there is a dearth of paper and articles on the employability of humanities graduates in Bhutanese context, the researcher attempted to make the concept relevant to context in question from the consulted literature of different countries. Thus, at this stage, it is only hoped that this small study triggers further inquiry into this field.

### **Recommendation for Future Research**

Since this study was a pure quantitative study, by just employing the use of a questionnaires as the medium of data collection, it is suggested that future research could employ other data collection instruments like interviews and focused group discussion so as to collect a more in-depth information regarding the factors that affects the employability of humanities graduates in regards to the skills they have and the skills demand by the labor market.

Moreover, there are several potential directions for the future research in this area. Future research could focus on the perspective of employers on what skills are really demanding by them and humanities' academics on what skills are they really providing to the humanities undergraduates.

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### Acronyms

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| BGS   | Beyond Graduation Survey                       |
| LFS   | Labor Force Survey                             |
| ICT   | Information and Communication Technology       |
| RCSC  | Royal Civil Service Commission                 |
| PGDPA | Post Graduate Diploma in Public Administration |
| PGDE  | Post Graduate Diploma in Education             |

### APPENDICES

#### **Appendix A: Questionnaires on “The Perception of Humanities’ Graduates on their Employability in Bhutan”.**

*Dear participant(s),*

*My name is Dorji Wangdi, a trainee of Royal Institute of Management currently pursuing Post Graduate Diploma in Public Administration. This research is conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of my course. Due to the alarming rise in unemployment among graduate in Bhutan, I am doing research on “The Perception of Humanities’ Graduates on their employability in Bhutan”. Research has been carried on graduate unemployment, but there is limited literature on unemployed humanities’ graduates and this research will focus on the perceptions of the humanities’ graduates. The survey is conducted in the framework of the universities graduates in humanities subjects and the collected data will be analyzed to identify why humanities graduates in Bhutan are struggling to enter the labor market.*

*The responses are anonymous and the questionnaire will take a maximum of 6 minutes to complete. I would like to thank you in advance for your cooperation.*

*Best regards,*

**Part 1: Demographic Background**

1. What is your gender?
  - Male
  - Female
2. Which year did you graduate with your humanity degree? (Please select one)
  - 2017
  - 2018
  - 2019
3. Present degree of studies (or highest acquired degree)
  - Bachelor degree
  - Honors
  - Master degree
4. Field of studies
  - History
  - Philosophy
  - Sociology
  - Linguistics
  - Literature
  - Anthropology
  - Psychology
  - Cultural studies
5. Are you currently employed?
  - Yes
  - No
6. Since graduating with your humanities degree from this university, have you pursued any further study?
  - Yes
  - No

**Part 2: Factors that contribute to the unemployment among humanities graduates**

7. Did you think about the prospects of employability before you choose to pursue humanity course?
  - Yes
  - No

8. Why did you choose to pursue the humanities course? Please tick the one most appropriate answer
- High career scope
  - Low cost of programme/easy to afford (self-finance)
  - Family influence
  - Peer influence
  - Easy to complete the course
  - Based on my interest
  - Easy to get admission in the programme
9. To what degree do you agree or disagree with the following statement about the factor that contribute to the unemployment of humanities graduates of Bhutan. The scale of 1 to 5 where 1=strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree.

| Option   |  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Employers do not value/understand the value of humanities  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Lack of scope to gain practical work experiences in humanities course  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Lack of specific career direction in the humanities degree   |  |  |  |  |  |
| There are many humanities graduates but inadequate job opportunities, especially in private sector                 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Graduates' own undervalued perception about their Humanities degree  |  |  |  |  |  |
| The humanities graduates has the mindset that the humanities courses are easy and do not take the course seriously |  |  |  |  |  |
| Little relevance of courses with the real world of employment  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Part B: Perception of Humanities Graduates on their employability based on skills, University's courses and expectation of employers.**

10. As per your experience, how important is the following skills while applying for a job in the company/organization. Please rate the importance of the following skills when you are looking for a job. Where, 1=not at all important, 2=low important, 3=neutral, 4=important and 5=very important

| Options   | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        | 5                        |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Communication skills (ability to listen, express and present ideas, ability to persuade, to negotiate etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Personal skills (self-confidence, positive attitude, strong work ethics etc.)                               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Interpersonal skills (ability to work in a team, ability to manage conflicts, networking etc.)              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Intercultural skills (command of more than one language, work in culturally diverse teams etc.)             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Learning skills (ability to learn independently; curiosity and drive for continuous learning etc.)          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Thinking skills (critical, analytical, strategic thinking etc.)   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

11. Please rate the following skills, how much your humanities course equip you with?  
Where, 1=very low, 2=low, 3=neutral,4=high, and 5=very high.

| Options   | 1                        | 2                        | 3                                   | 4                        | 5                        |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Communication skills (ability to listen, express and present ideas, ability to persuade, to negotiate etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Personal skills (self-confidence, positive attitude, strong work ethics etc.)                               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Intercultural skills (command of more than one language, work in culturally diverse teams etc.)             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Learning skills (ability to learn independently; curiosity and drive for continuous learning etc.)          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Thinking skills (critical, analytical, strategic thinking etc.)   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

12. According to your opinion, how important do you think the following options are in developing skills/attributes for humanities graduates to obtain employment? Please rank the option listed below: Where 1=not at all important, 2=low important, 3=neutral, 4=important and 5=very important.

| Option | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--------|---|---|---|---|---|
|        |   |   |   |   |   |

|  |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Skills and knowledge imparted in the university  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Include practical tasks and assignments in the courses   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Include curriculum that are directly related to job market                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Provide ongoing collaboration with the labor market actors                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Further study  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Integrating humanities subjects with the technical subjects                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Include work<br>Integrated learning( example: graduating with workplace placement/ internship) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

13. What is your academic performance as student (Degree Marks?)

- Between 50.1% and 59.9 %( poor)
- Between 60.1% and 69.9(fair)
- Between 70.1% and 79.9 %( good)
- 80% and above (very good)

14. Did your programme involve any work integrated course/s (for example, workplace placement, intern, project management?)

- No
- Yes

15. According to your opinion, when looking for a job in your field, to what extent the following aspects are taken into account by recruiting agencies? Where, 1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=always.

| Option  | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        | 5                        |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Field related work experience                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Academic performance                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Field related internship experience (locally/ abroad) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Peer Network  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Co-curriculum activities(certificates)                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

16. Tick the top one answers that you think will enhance the employability of the humanities graduates in future?

- Emphasis on internship/work placement/practical work experience
- Provide clear guidelines at the beginning about the link between course and career path
- Make humanities students aware about how to sell their skills and how their skills apply to the workplace
- More support on career related information

**Appendix B: Letter of Introduction**

UNDER PEER REVIEW



ལྷོ། རྒྱལ་གཞུང་འཛིན་སྐྱོང་སློབ་ཁྲིམས།  
**ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT**  
 (Incorporated under the Royal Charter of the Royal Institute of Management, 1990)



RIM/DRC/PGDPA/ 5659

08 October 2020

**LETTER OF INTRODUCTION**

.....*Dorji Wangdi*..... (12001000501)..... is a postgraduate trainee at the Royal Institute of Management (RIM) selected through the Royal Civil Service Examinations (RCSE) undergoing the Diploma in Post Graduate Diploma in Public Administration (PGDPA) Programme.

As part of the academic fulfillment to complete PGDPA programme, he/she has to complete a capstone project. He/She has chosen to conduct research on *the perception of humanities graduate on their employability*..... which requires him/her to interact with the targeted sample/population that he/she wants to use for her research work. Hence, Royal Institute of Management (RIM) would like to request the concerned sector/agency to help him/her by approving and rendering necessary support in data collection. The data collection would entail meeting the target sample/population and conduct surveys through one-on-one interviews, or focus group interviews, and your support in terms of mobilizing the respondents would immensely benefit the students. The Royal Institute of Management, as per its Research Ethics Guideline, ensures that the data collected shall be used for academic purposes only.

In addition, we would like to bring to your notice that by supporting the students complete their research, you and your organization will be a part of a larger plan that RIM has worked very hard for in the last 1 year. As part of the Royal Institute of Management's strategy towards enhancing research on Bhutan and to build a research knowledge base in the field of management, it is launching a national-level open-access peer-reviewed journal in the field of Management by the end of the current year to publish the student's research through a peer-review process. The journal will be free and will only publish papers on Bhutan. As envisaged, the Royal Institute of Management is confident that the journal (with its collection of papers on Bhutan in the field of Management) would prove to be useful in the near future to make evidence-based policy decisions, and your contribution will be invaluable in achieving it.

In the spirit of serving the Tsa-Wa-Sum in new and better ways.

(Sonam Pelden Thaye)  
 Director

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