

Original Research Article

Employability of Humanities Graduates in Bhutan: An Examination of Graduates' Perceptions

ABSTRACT

With the alarming increase in graduate unemployment in Bhutan, many scholars have looked into the causes, implications, and potential solutions to Bhutan's unemployment issues. However, in Bhutan, only a few references have been made to individual majors and courses when analyzing students' employment status. As a result, the employability status of students in humanities majors is a grey area, especially in Bhutan. There is much speculation around the employment prospects of a student undergoing humanities courses, with people often citing the humanities courses in Bhutanese colleges as too broad and redundant. Therefore, this study examines the employability perception of the humanities graduates in Bhutan and the factors contributing to their unemployment. A non-probability sampling procedure, called a snowball sampling technique, was employed to collect data from 316 humanities graduates through a structured questionnaire. The findings reveal that employability depends on various factors such as academic performance, integrated courses, work experiences, and skills acquired while studying. The study also highlights the skill mismatch problem in higher education institutions and recommends producing work-ready graduates. Despite the students' enthusiasm for the humanities course, their employability prospects in the field are questionable after graduation due to the mismatch between the course content and the jobs in the market. In order to address this issue, the study recommends that universities and colleges integrate practical and work-ready programs into their courses to enable graduates to acquire the necessary employability skills. Additionally, universities and companies/agencies should collaborate to bridge the gap between industry skill requirements and the skills graduates acquire. This research intends to initiate conversations on controlling the number of humanities course intakes to reduce the increasing trend of humanities graduates in an inadequate job market.

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

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In a rapidly changing and highly competitive global economy, the employability of tertiary undergraduates has continued to be a subject of debate in recent policy discourse (Garsten&Jacobsson, 2004). The Beyond Graduation Survey (2017) has found that there has been a significant change in the employment situation over the last few years. The trend has radically shifted, with only 494 vacancies announced by the Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) in 2017 against the 796 graduates recruited in 2012 (Civil Service Statistics, June 2013). This indicates job opportunities for approximately 11.1 percent of 2017 graduates entering the labor force (Civil Service Statistics, June 2013).

In 2019, the Royal Civil Service Commission absorbed a little over 130 graduates for the Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE), 45 for the Post Graduate Diploma in Public Administration (PGDPA), 30 for the Post Graduate Diploma in Financial Management (PGDFM), and 10 for the Post Graduate Diploma in National Legal Studies (PGDNL). Although between 100 and 200 may get absorbed into corporate, state-owned enterprises, and private companies, the rest will be looking for jobs, and the employability chances are relatively meager. **The concern is whether the rest of the graduates who are not absorbed into the Royal Civil Service Commission 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; instead, it only contributes to growing youth unemployment.

The Beyond Graduation survey (2013) forecasted that the total number of graduates from 2016 to 2019 would be 12,999, out of which graduates with a humanities background comprised 2773. Of the 2855 university graduates in 2013, the majority were those with business management, arts, and humanities degrees. Moreover, out of a total of 4065 graduates in 2017, most are from humanities backgrounds (Beyond Graduation Survey, 2017). It has also been reported that there will likely be more graduate students with a humanities background than students from other courses. **This unchecked rise in the number of students seeking employment poses significant pressure on the job market when there are fewer vacancies or windows of opportunity for humanities graduates.**

The mismatch between jobs and job seekers continues to be a significant issue in the country. The situation is more than serious for the graduates pursuing humanities majors as their vacancies in government offices and other relevant agencies slowly become capped. There is a consensus that students remain unemployed because they have not initially planned out their choice of major during their undergraduate studies and do not know where their degrees could take them. Not only that, students risk not having enough knowledge about what is available in the labor market, which is specifically true for humanities graduates. Generally, students in Bhutan are not well informed of the career choices available in their field and often overlook the undergraduate courses during the time of selection and end up applying for the wrong position or overlooking careers linked to their qualifications, which may later result in unemployment.

Unemployment affects graduates from the humanities more than graduates from other fields (Mouchipku, 2019). The standard view is that humanities graduates are not employable and need more practical skills for the job, and the curriculum design is often held responsible for the unemployment of humanities graduates. Therefore, understanding the issue related to the employability of humanities graduates in Bhutan will allow both higher education and graduates to be aware of the skills and attitudes required in the job market.

1.2 Problem Statement

Many believe humanities studies are becoming 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 the National Statistical Bureau (2019), the youth unemployment rate stands at 11.7 percent, and the highest unemployment rate is among students with bachelor's degrees (12.7%), particularly in the arts and humanities. (LFS, 2018). Moreover, graduates pursuing science, technology, engineering, and mathematics degrees have shown a higher degree of satisfaction with their courses, while 17.5% of those in the arts and humanities have indicated lower satisfaction with their courses (BGS, 2017).

It is observed that graduates with humanities degrees often experience a mismatch between labor market developments and job seekers' preferences. This makes students question: Do humanities graduates lack in-demand abilities like practical and technological skills? What skills does a degree in the humanities provide them? What employability provisions are provided to humanities students to give them the best chance of succeeding? The majority of humanities graduates are startled by these questions. As a result of the alarming increase in graduate unemployment in Bhutan, numerous scholars have conducted extensive research on graduate unemployment (Tshering, 2015; Tamang & Adhikari, 2018; Wangchuk, 2019), but there is a dearth of empirical research on unemployed humanities graduates.

Therefore, the problem at hand is to gather information on how graduates of humanities programs perceive their education and job prospects and understand the factors contributing to their unemployment. This will provide policymakers with the necessary insight to modify and adjust these programs to better align with the evolving demands of the job market and inform policies and programs to improve their job prospects.

1.3 Objectives

1. To identify why humanities graduates in Bhutan struggle to enter the job market.
2. To understand humanities graduates' perceptions of their employability in relation to their skills, undergraduate curriculum, and employers' expectations.

1.4 Research Questions

This research tries to answer the following question:

1. What factors affect humanities graduates' ability to enter Bhutan's labor market?
2. What are the perceptions of humanities graduates regarding their employability in Bhutan?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Concepts on Employability

The review of literature on the employability of university graduates reveals that the concept has different interpretations based on stakeholder perceptions of employability. Some researchers refer to employability as the individual's capability to obtain the desired job and maintain that job in a changing context (Yorke & Knight, 2003).

While some scholars define employability as an individual's ability to obtain and maintain suitable employment, other researchers take a broader perspective. Smith et al. (2009) argue that employability can be viewed subjectively, from the perspective of the student's or graduate's readiness for employment, as well as objectively, from the standpoint of government, policymakers, employers, and universities that assess graduate outcomes. Additionally, Sumanasiri et al. (2015) contend that employability is not only determined by individual graduates' attributes, such as their subject knowledge, experience, skills, and personality traits, but also by factors such as the faculty, curriculum, and pedagogy in university systems, as well as the expectations of employers who hire the graduates. This highlights the complexity of the employability concept and underscores the importance of taking a multifaceted approach to understanding and enhancing graduates' employability.

Harvey et al. (2002) suggest that employability is about making closer links between education and the world of work. This definition emphasizes the responsibilities of educational institutions, employers, and individuals. On the other hand, 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 these different concepts and ideologies of employability, the present study adopted this definition of "graduate employability in the modern world" as about achieving and demonstrating appropriate knowledge, skills, and attributes to obtain initial employment.

2.2.The key to employability

Career-developing, learning, experiences (work and life), degree subject knowledge and understanding, skills, generic skills, and emotional intelligence are the vital keys to employability (Dittrich, 2019). According to Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007), students need to 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 their efforts toward equipping students for lifelong career development (Bridgstock, 2009).

According to Mason et al. (2009), work experience significantly improves employability since employers highly value it and often seek evidence of it. Consequently, Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) propose that students should have access to opportunities for gaining appropriate work experience during their studies. Additionally, they assert that employers frequently rely on students' achievement in subject knowledge as a way to assess their suitability for specific job positions, particularly when other concrete criteria are lacking.

Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) emphasize the significance of generic skills in relation to employability. Voogt and Roblin (2012) further support this notion by identifying several commonly observed generic skills, including collaboration, communication, ICT literacy, social and (or) cultural skills, and citizenship. Their findings underscore the common understanding

that in today's dynamic and interconnected work environment, employers increasingly value employees with diverse transferable skills that can be applied across different tasks and roles. However, it is crucial to comprehend the relationship between these generic skills and employability outcomes.

2.3. Employability skills and the undergraduate curriculum

Although there are differences of opinion about accepting employability as a curriculum goal, there is significant acceptance among academia that curriculum processes can improve students' chances of gaining employability (Knight & Yorke, 2003).

Lindberg (2007) points out that students often lack information about the skills in demand in the job market, leading to a prolonged transition between completing their studies and finding employment. To address this issue, Knight and Yorke (2003) stress the need to formally integrate practical approaches into undergraduate programs or curricula to improve graduate employability. These approaches include embedding employability throughout the curriculum, incorporating employability in the core curriculum, facilitating work-based or work-related learning experiences, incorporating employability-related module(s) within the curriculum, offering parallel work-based or work-related learning opportunities, and managing graduates' profiles or records of achievement (Knight & Yorke, 2003, p. 14). Bridgstock (2009) supports this approach and highlights the importance of mandatory and assessable career management programs involving academic staff, industry partners, career service staff, and students in curriculum design and implementation (p. 39).

2.4. Factors affecting the employability of humanities graduates

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

Robst (2006) 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. Robst (2006) explained that humanities graduates encounter more challenges in the labor market than graduates from other disciplines, as humanities programs often focus on theoretical knowledge and lack the production of employable graduates with generic skills and occupation-specific expertise. Unlike vocational-oriented graduates, humanities graduates may not possess domain-specific and practical skills that are directly applicable to particular occupations (Giles & Drewes, 2001). The preference of employers for candidates with occupation-specific skills poses a challenge for the humanities field, which tends to provide more general training (Verhaest et al., 2015).

Moleke (2003) states that humanities graduates have lower employment prospects and take longer to settle into jobs. Due to the low cost of these programs and the ease of getting admission into such programs, most countries have a relatively low share of graduates choosing technical

fields of study in comparison to the humanities (Osterbeek&Webbink, 1997). Despite the availability of various programs, universities still see significant enrollment in arts, humanities, and social sciences programs (Migdad, 2011). However, the excess supply of humanities graduates further undermines their employment prospects (Migdad, 2011). Additionally, Robst (2006) argues that there are fewer job opportunities in the humanities and arts fields compared to the number of graduates seeking employment, especially when compared to fields like engineering and health.

2.5. Employers' understanding of graduates' profiles

It is crucial to recognize that employers' knowledge of graduates' professional profiles significantly impacts their employability. Lin et al. (2003) point out that employers often have limited clarity regarding the tasks generally-educated graduates, such as humanities graduates, can undertake as the curriculum design offers a wide range of choices, as opposed to graduates with specific professional education. This lack of understanding may often lead to confusion in the labor market, potentially leaving humanities graduates favored less compared to graduates with specialized professional education. However, Harvey and Shahjahan (2013) state that employers prefer communication skills, teamwork skills, and time management skills in their new employees.

Harvey and Shahjahan (2013) found that many employers recruit new employees based on their "fit for the role." They consider communication, teamwork, interpersonal, time management, responsibility, accountability, critical thinking, analytical and problem-solving skills, and lifelong learning and development.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The present study employed a cross-sectional survey with a quantitative research design. Quantitative research is characterized by its emphasis on numerical data collection and analysis (Bryman, 2001). The primary research instrument used in this study was a self-administered questionnaire. Data collection involved distributing the questionnaires to respondents, with the questionnaire serving as the primary tool for data collection. The questionnaire was thoughtfully designed to gather comprehensive information relevant to the study's objective. The research design adopted a descriptive approach to understanding the status of employment for humanities graduates and their perceptions of their employability within the job market.

3.2. Sample method and sample size

The participants in this study were chosen through a non-probability sampling method called snowball sampling, which is a convenient sampling method. This sampling technique allowed the researcher to use their judgment when selecting participants suitable for the study, and the selection was based on their accessibility and convenience to the researcher. Mack et al. (2005) state that in a 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. In other words, snowball sampling involves leveraging existing contacts to identify potential participants who may be interested in or contribute to the study. The study population comprised 2773 humanities graduates who completed their degrees between 2017 and 2019. A sample size of 338 was determined using the Qualtrics sample size calculator,

with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Ultimately, 316 respondents completed the questionnaire, resulting in a response rate of 93.5%.

3.3.Data collection methods

The primary data for this study was collected through a questionnaire distributed to humanities graduates. The questionnaires were shared via email, WhatsApp, Messenger, and WeChat. The survey method was employed to gather data on the employability perceptions of humanities graduates in Bhutan. The questionnaire was structured into three parts. The first part focused on collecting demographic information, including gender, years of graduation, qualifications, field of study, employment status, and further study pursuits. The second part comprised two multiple-choice questions and five scales that utilized a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all important, 2 = low importance, 3 = neutral, 4 = important, and 5 = very important). These items aimed to identify factors contributing to unemployment among humanities graduates or their challenges in entering the job market. Lastly, the third part of the questionnaire consisted of two multiple-choice questions and a Likert scale (1 = very low, 2 = low, 3 = neutral, 4 = high, and 5 = very high). This section examined how humanities graduates perceive their employability based on the skills acquired through humanities courses and employers' expectations.

3.4.Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed to address the research question. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the questionnaires, allowing for the calculation of frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations. The results were presented in tabular format, and demographic variables were also collected to support the data analysis and provide a comprehensive understanding of the sample. A reliability test was also conducted to assess the internal consistency of the questionnaire subscales. The subscales included factors that contribute to unemployment among humanities graduates (consisting of seven items, $\alpha = .898$), the importance of various skills for employability (consisting of six items, $\alpha = .964$), the skills acquired from humanities courses (consisting of six items, $\alpha = .921$), the importance of developing skills/attributes for humanities graduates to secure or obtain employment (consisting of seven items, $\alpha = .947$), and the aspects considered by recruiting agencies when hiring employees (consisting of five items, $\alpha = .842$). Data analysis was performed using Microsoft Excel 2010 and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

3.5 Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis was conducted to examine the internal consistency among the items within each subscale. Following the generally accepted guideline proposed by Eisinga et al. (2013), Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.6 to 0.7 is considered acceptable, while a coefficient of 0.8 or higher indicates a very good level of reliability. Table 1 presents the results of the reliability analysis for the factors that contribute to unemployment among humanities graduates subscale ($\alpha = .898$), the importance of various skills for the employability subscale ($\alpha = .964$), the skills acquired from humanities courses subscale ($\alpha = .921$), the importance of developing skills/attributes for humanities graduates to obtain employment subscale ($\alpha = .947$), and the aspects that recruiting agencies look for in employees subscale ($\alpha = .842$).

Table 1. Cronbach's alpha values for variables

Variables	Number of	Cronbach's
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	items	alpha(α)
Factors that contribute to the unemployment rate among humanities graduates	7	.898
Graduates' perceptions of the importance of various skills for employability	6	.964
Skills acquired from humanities courses	6	.921
The importance of developing skills/attributes for humanities graduates to obtain employment	7	.947
Aspects that recruiting agencies look for in employees.	5	.842

4. RESULTS

4.1. Profile of Respondents

The survey participants in this study consisted of 50.3% females and 49.7% males. Most respondents (96.8%) held a bachelor's degree, while 2.8% had an honors degree, and 0.3% had a master's degree. Regarding their field of study, the most significant proportion of respondents (27.5%) had a background in history, while the smallest proportion (1.6%) were from psychology. The distribution of respondents from other fields was as follows: literature (26%), sociology (14.2%), cultural studies (12%), anthropology (10.1%), and linguistics (5.1%).

Furthermore, the respondents were categorized based on their graduation year, with 27.5% graduating in 2017, 33.9% in 2018, and 38.6% in 2019. The majority of respondents (82% of humanities graduates) were unemployed at the time of the survey, while 18% were employed. The study shows that 84.2% of humanities graduates did not pursue further study, and 15.5% have pursued further study.

Part B: Factors Affecting the Employability of Humanities Graduates

4.2 Awareness of the employability prospect of Humanities graduates

The respondents were asked whether they had considered or thought about the employability prospects of humanities courses before choosing the major. Among the total respondents, 39.2% (N = 124) answered affirmatively, indicating they had thought about employment prospects. On the other hand, the majority of respondents, comprising 60.8% (N = 192), indicated that they had not considered the employment prospects of the courses before applying for the said major.

4.3 Reasons for Pursuing the Humanities Course

Table 2 presents the respondents' motivations for pursuing a humanities course. The data reveals that 41.1% of the participants selected a humanities course due to their personal interests. Furthermore, 20.9% of the respondents chose the program, believing it would offer better future prospects. Additionally, 12% chose the program because of its easy admission requirements, while 9.2% made their choice based on family influence. 8.2% of the respondents opted for a humanities course because it was relatively easy to complete, 6% were attracted by the program's affordability or the option of easy self-financing, and 2.5% indicated that peer pressure played a role in their decision.

Table 2. *Reasons for choosing the humanities 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 into the program	38	12.0
	Family influence	29	9.2
	Easy to complete the course.	26	8.2
	Low cost of the program/easy to afford (self-finance)	19	6.0
	Peer influence	8	2.5
Total		316	100.0

4.4 Factors that contribute to the unemployment of humanities graduates

Each item in this question was assessed using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Table 3 presents the factors identified by respondents that contribute to the unemployment of humanities graduates in the job market. As depicted in Table 3, the primary factor identified by respondents as contributing to the unemployment of humanities graduates is the limited job opportunities in the private sector, despite the significant number of humanities graduates ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 1.159$). In contrast, the factor perceived as least significant in contributing to the unemployment of humanities graduates is the notion that humanities courses are accessible and not taken seriously ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.252$).

Table 3. Factors contributing to unemployment among humanities graduates

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

Part C: Humanities graduates' perceptions of their employability, based on skills, undergraduates' curriculum, and the expectations of recruiting agencies

4.5 Graduates' Perception of the Importance of various skills in the job market

The respondents were asked if a certain set of skills were important to them when applying for a job (presented in Table 4). A five-point Likert scale was used, with response options ranging from 1 ("not at all important") to 5 ("very important"). The mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) values are reported for each skill. Results indicate that humanities graduate rated communication skills (M = 4.48, SD = 1.025) as the most significant skill. Following closely were 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 intercultural skills (M = 4.18, SD = 0.997).

Table 4. Importance of various employability skills

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Communication skills (ability to listen, express and present ideas, ability to persuade and negotiate, etc.)	4.48	1.025
Personal skills (self-confidence, positive attitude, strong work ethic, etc.)	4.47	0.97
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, working 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

4.2. Skills that graduates acquired from the humanities course

Table 5 presents the skills graduates believe their humanities courses have equipped them with. When asked to rate the individual skills acquired from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high), the respondents rated interpersonal skills (M = 3.86, SD = 0.881) as a high skill, 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), and intercultural skills (M = 3.72, SD = 0.955) as the least developed skills acquired through their humanities courses.

Table 5. Skills acquired 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 and 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 ethic, etc.)	3.73	0.923
Intercultural skills (command of more than one language, working in culturally diverse teams, etc.)	3.72	0.955

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

4.3. The most contributing factor in developing skills/attributes

The importance of various options in developing skills/attributes for humanities graduates to obtain employment was assessed using a ranking scale ranging from 1 ("not at all important") to 5 ("very important"). Participants were asked to provide their opinions on the importance of the following options, as presented in Table 6. The majority of respondents opined that the inclusion of a job market-related curriculum was very important ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.04$). On the other hand, fewer respondents expressed the integration of humanities subjects with technical subjects as important ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.964$).

Table 6. Important contributing factors in developing employability skills for humanities graduates

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Include curriculum related to the job market.	4.15	1.04
Include practical tasks and assignments.	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 at University	4.01	1.033
Further study	4.01	0.998
Integrating humanities subjects with technical subjects	4.06	0.964

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

4.4. Academic performance of graduates and their integrated course

Table 7 displays the respondents' academic performance and indicates the availability of work-integrated courses for humanities graduates. Among the total respondents (N = 316), 53.5% attained a good degree with marks ranging from 70.1% to 79.9%, while 39.9% achieved a fair academic performance within the range of 60.1% to 69.9%. A small percentage of respondents, 3.5%, obtained a very good degree with marks of 80% and above, whereas 3.2% received poor degree marks ranging from 50.1% to 59.9%. Thus, the majority of respondents demonstrated good academic performance. Additionally, a polar question was asked regarding whether the respondents' program included any work-integrated courses or not. The majority of respondents (59.5%) answered "No," while only 40.5% responded affirmatively with "Yes."

Table 7. *Academic performance and Availability of work-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

4.5. Aspects that recruiting agencies look for in employees (graduates)

Table 8 presents the respondents' perception of what the recruiting agencies look for in employees when recruiting graduates. On average, the majority of respondents answered that employers mainly consider graduates' academic performance (M = 4.34, SD = 0.952), followed by field-related work experience (M=4.10, SD=1.034), field-related internship experience (M=3.94, SD=0.967), peer network (M=3.79, SD=0.947), while little importance is placed to co-curricular activities (M = 3.72, SD = 1.045) of the applicant graduate during the recruitment.

Overall, the table indicates that recruiting agencies generally view academic performance and field-related work experience as important aspects when evaluating graduate employees.

Table 8. Aspects that recruiting agencies look for in a graduate employee

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.

4.6.Recommendations to enhance the employability of humanities graduates

As presented in Table 9, respondents were asked to indicate the primary factor they believed would augment the employability of humanities graduates in the future. The findings revealed that a significant proportion (33.2%) of respondents stressed the importance of enhancing students' awareness of how to effectively market their skills and demonstrate their applicability in professional settings. Additionally, 30.1% of respondents identified "Emphasis on internship/work placement/practical work experience" as a crucial avenue for improving the employability of humanities graduates. Another notable recommendation, chosen by 25.6% of participants, was to provide comprehensive guidelines regarding the link between academic courses and career pathways from the outset (during course selection). Finally, 11.1% of respondents felt a need for increased support on career-related information.

Table 9. Recommendations to enhance employability for humanities graduates

	Items	Frequency	Percent
Recommendation to enhance the employability	Make students aware of how to sell their skills and how to demonstrate these skills in real-world professional settings/workplace	105	33.2
	Emphasis on internship/work placement/practical work experience	95	30.1
	Provide clear guidelines about the link between the academic course and career pathways (during the course selection)	81	25.6
	More support on career-related information	35	11.1
	Total	316	100.0

5. DISCUSSION

The **present** study investigates the factors contributing to the unemployment of humanities graduates and their perceptions of employability, explicitly focusing on skills, undergraduate curriculum, and employers' expectations. The findings and discussions are as follows:

It is noteworthy to discover that a significant number of students who choose to pursue humanities courses often do not consider the potential employability opportunities beforehand. This lack of awareness regarding the employability prospects for humanities graduates indicates a higher risk of unemployment due to their limited knowledge about the job market. As revealed by this study, one plausible explanation for this lack of awareness is the emphasis on the intrinsic value of humanities education, such as critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills, rather than explicitly highlighting its practical applications in specific industries or professions. While the development of these transferrable skills is undoubtedly valuable, it is equally essential for students to be informed about the potential career paths available to them and how their humanities education can be applied in real-world contexts.

Furthermore, the findings of the study indicate that a major number of respondents have studied humanities due to their personal interest (41.1% of total respondents). While personal interest is the primary factor influencing the choice of humanities courses, it may not necessarily translate into better employability prospects. However, it should be noted that the current research did not specifically examine the relationship between personal interest and employability outcomes.

On a positive note, 20.9% of humanities graduates chose the discipline because of its perceived job prospects. However, it is unclear whether these students had a clear understanding of the job market's demand and the skills required to succeed in their chosen field. Additionally, humanities courses were regarded as less competitive than other disciplines, with course content considered relatively easy to complete. Some graduates were compelled to opt for humanities majors due to their affordability and ease of admission, while others expressed the opinion that humanities courses were too undemanding. While these low admission requirements and ease of course completion may attract students, who do not have a clear career path in mind or are looking for a less challenging academic path, this could potentially lead to many graduates with insufficient skills and experience, reducing their employability prospects.

One major finding pertains to the factors contributing to unemployment among humanities graduates. The analysis reveals that unemployment in this group is influenced by multiple factors that require attention from institutions to enhance graduates' job prospects. The first factor identified is the lack of job opportunities in the private sector. To mitigate this issue, private companies should create more job openings for humanities graduates, thereby reducing their unemployment rate. This finding aligns with study conducted by Migdad (2011, which highlights how an oversupply of humanities graduates significantly hampers their employment prospects.

The second factor identified is the lack of practical work experience. Institutions should actively encourage students to engage in practical work experience programs, as these can aid in the development of employability skills. Such programs can provide graduates with the necessary skills and experience to meet employers' requirements. The third factor is the lack of clear career direction. Universities should provide greater guidance and support to humanities graduates in choosing career paths that align with their skills and interests. By doing so, graduates can identify suitable job opportunities that correspond to their career goals, thereby enhancing their chances of employment.

Lastly, the fourth factor is the perceived lack of relevance of the humanities course to the real-world employment context. Institutions should collaborate with employers to ensure that humanities courses equip students with the relevant knowledge and skills demanded in the job market. Such collaboration enables universities to stay attuned to current job market demands and design programs that align with industry standards. Similarly, respondents agree that the graduates' own undervalued perception of their humanities degree would undermine their employability prospects. Not only that, students agree that employers often do not value the importance of humanities as an educational discipline and that the humanities course is considered too lenient and easy.

The study also investigated the perceptions of humanities graduates regarding the most important skills and attributes required to obtain employment. The results show that humanities graduates perceive communication and personal skills as the most important attributes to obtaining

employment. Communication skills, in the study, have been defined as the ability to listen, express, and present ideas, persuade, and negotiate. Personal skills in this study include or refer to self-confidence, positive attitude, strong work ethics, and so on. These skills are crucial in most professions and are essential for effective collaboration, expressing ideas, and building relationships with clients and colleagues. Thinking skills are also considered important by humanities graduates, as they involve critical, analytical, and strategic thinking, which are essential in problem-solving and decision-making. Interpersonal skills (ability to work in a team and manage conflicts, networking) are also perceived as important by humanities graduates, as they help in building and maintaining effective relationships with colleagues. Students also agree that their learning and intercultural skills acquired from colleges are important to enhance their employability prospects. However, the students affirmed that they mostly acquire interpersonal skills from their humanities majors as compared to other skills. When ranking the set of skills their major/courses offer for employability, the humanities graduates perceive interpersonal skills as relatively high, with a moderate level of agreement among the participants, while personal skills (self-confidence, positive attitude, strong work ethics) and intercultural skills were rated slightly lower.

It was observed that humanities graduate value diverse skills and attributes for getting employed. Employers can use this information to tailor their recruitment strategies and job requirements to match the perceived needs of humanities graduates. Additionally, universities and colleges can focus on developing these skills among humanities students to enhance their employability in the job market. Among the humanities graduates, the inclusion of a job market-related curriculum is considered the most contributing factor in enhancing their employability prospects. This suggests that graduates believe that their education should be more focused on practical skills and knowledge that are directly relevant to the job market. The respondents also agreed that including practical tasks and assignments and ongoing collaboration with the labor market are important factors, indicating the value of hands-on experience and industry connections in developing employability skills.

Based on the findings, the respondents rated the integration of humanities subjects with technical subjects as the least important factor. This data alone does not allow for a definitive conclusion regarding whether humanities graduates perceive the integration of humanities and technical subjects as unnecessary or irrelevant to their career prospects. However, it is noteworthy that the relatively high mean score suggests that there is still some perceived value in revamping humanities courses to incorporate technical subjects as a means of developing employability skills and prospects. The majority of the humanities graduates have emphasized the importance of a job-oriented curriculum that incorporates practical tasks, assignments, and collaboration with the labor market to enhance their employability skills.

When assessing students' last academic performance in respective humanities courses, the majority of the participants had good academic performance. However, only a small portion of

them reported having engaged in practical experience through work-integrated courses. Regarding the perceived employer expectations, students attest that recruiting agencies highly value academic performance, followed by work experience, internships, and peer networks during the recruitment process. The participants also confirm the gap between the skills that humanities graduates possess and the skills that are valued by recruiting agencies in the real world. The findings also suggest that humanities graduates could benefit from seeking out work-integrated courses or internships to gain practical experience and enhance their chances of being hired by recruiting agencies. Consistent with previous studies (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007; Williams & Cranmer, 2009), these findings highlight the importance of work experience in enhancing employability and its positive reception among employers who often seek evidence of practical exposure. Field-related experience significantly reduces the time gap between graduation and securing the first job, making graduates with relevant work experience more preferred by employers.

A study proposes three strategies, supported by the respondents, to enhance the employability of humanities graduates. Firstly, it is recommended to raise awareness among humanities students about effectively promoting their skills and applying them in the workplace. This can be achieved through training on effective presentation of skills and experiences. Secondly, recognizing the high value placed on practical work experience by employers, students express the need for increased opportunities for internships, training, and workshops that cater to specific job positions or organizations. Such early work placements can equip humanities graduates with valuable practical skills and experience. Thirdly, students emphasize the importance of providing clear guidelines linking their courses of study to career paths. Many humanities graduates lack awareness of job prospects within the discipline and fail to understand how their studies are relevant to the job market and specific careers. Additionally, students agree that colleges should offer more career-related information and counseling to assist them in making informed choices when seeking employment. It is important to note that employability prospects for humanities graduates vary depending on their position within the employment cycle, which is largely influenced by the demand in the job market.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The present study examines factors contributing to the unemployment of humanities graduates and their perceptions of employability. The findings reveal that many humanities students choose their courses without considering the potential employability opportunities, leading to a lack of awareness about the job market and increased risk of unemployment. The study suggests that universities should not only emphasize the intrinsic value of humanities education but also provide information about potential career paths and practical applications of their studies.

Additionally, the study identifies several factors influencing unemployment among humanities graduates, such as the lack of job opportunities, work experience, career direction, and relevance of courses to the real world of employment. The lack of job opportunities in the private sector and

insufficient practical work experience are key contributors. To address this, private companies should create more openings for humanities graduates, and institutions should encourage students to engage in practical experience or work-readiness programs to narrow the skill gap between the industry's needs and the graduate's expectations. Clear career guidance and collaboration between universities and employers are also essential to ensure that humanities courses align with industry demands.

Furthermore, the study highlights the skills and attributes perceived as important by humanities graduates for obtaining employment. Effective communication skills, personal skills (such as self-confidence and strong work ethics), thinking skills (critical and strategic thinking), and interpersonal skills (working in teams and managing conflicts) are highly valued. Employers can use this information to tailor their recruitment strategies, and universities can focus on developing these skills among humanities students to enhance their employability.

The study recommends strategies to enhance the employability of humanities graduates, including raising awareness about skills application, providing more opportunities for practical work experience, and offering clear career guidance. These findings emphasize the importance of aligning humanities education with industry needs and equipping graduates with the skills demanded by employers to improve their job prospects.

Lastly, since the study is limited to only graduates with humanities courses, there could be discrepancies in the perceptions of employability prospects with regard to students majoring in technical courses. Therefore, future research in this area can use additional data-gathering tools, such as focused group discussions and qualitative interviews, to gather more in-depth information on the factors affecting the unemployability of these sections of graduates in Bhutan.

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