



**GRADUATION IS JUST THE BEGINNING: UNLEASHING THE POTENTIAL OF  
PAKISTANI BUSINESS GRADUATES**

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**Abstract**

*The Pakistani job market is a battleground for graduates, especially those in business. While academic qualifications remain a prerequisite, employability skills are increasingly the key that unlocks career doors. This study delves into the skill gaps hindering Pakistani business graduates and proposes a path to bridge the divide, empowering them to navigate the competitive landscape and contribute meaningfully to the nation's economic growth. Using an online survey on LinkedIn, the researchers targeted business graduates actively seeking employment. The data revealed key weaknesses in their employability skill set, pinpointing areas where Pakistani graduates often fall short: Inability to collaborate effectively and contribute constructively within teams. Ineffective verbal and written communication, hindering clear idea presentation and persuasive arguments. Difficulties building rapport, fostering positive relationships, and navigating personal interactions with professionalism. Inability to adapt quickly to new information, environments, and challenges. Uncomfortable and ineffective in negotiating terms and achieving desired outcomes. Poor time management, planning, and task prioritization leading to inefficiency and missed deadlines.*

*By recognizing these shortcomings, the researcher proposes several measures to bridge the gap between academic qualifications and employer expectations. Tailor-made workshops and online courses designed to hone the identified skills. These programs would equip graduates with practical tools and techniques to excel in teamwork, communication, interpersonal interactions. Case competitions, simulations, and job fairs offer platforms for graduates to put their skills into practice in real-world scenarios. These events also provide valuable networking opportunities, connecting graduates with potential employers and building industry connections. Building strong partnerships between universities and companies aligns business education with market demands. This allows for curriculum updates that reflect current industry needs and*



*prepare graduates for the jobs they'll actually encounter. Moving beyond traditional textbook learning, business education needs to prioritize experiential learning. Project-based learning, internships, and real-world case studies ensure graduates develop not just theoretical knowledge, but also practical skills and adaptability.*

*By addressing these crucial skill gaps, we can empower Pakistani business graduates to navigate the competitive job market with confidence and land their desired positions. They would become valuable assets to their organizations, contributing to increased productivity and success. Drive the nation's economic growth by actively participating in the workforce with the skills and expertise needed to thrive. This study not only shines a light on the challenges faced by Pakistani business graduates, but also offers a comprehensive roadmap for addressing them. By implementing these solutions, we can pave the way for a brighter future for both graduates and the Pakistani economy.*

**Keywords:** Pakistani job market, competition, business graduate skill gaps, communication skill, interpersonal skills, learning agility, skill development programs, academia-industry collaboration, economic growth.

## **Introduction**

Strong employability skills are crucial for job seekers to ensure the smooth and successful operation of any organization. However, the current job market in Bangladesh presents significant challenges due to its competitive nature and limited opportunities. Unfortunately, many business graduates lack the necessary skills to secure immediate employment upon graduation. This often stems from deficiencies in vital areas such as communication, English language proficiency, information technology savvy, interpersonal skills, leadership, problem-solving, adaptability, and risk-taking. As Branine (2008) and (Australia, 2019) noted, business graduates seek not only in-depth knowledge in their chosen field but also the critical skills that enhance their employability. Therefore, it is imperative for business graduates to actively develop their employability skills, defined as the fundamental skills required to secure, retain, and excel in jobs across all industries (Singh, 2008).

The importance of employability skills extends far beyond simply securing a job. These valuable attributes contribute to personal and organizational progress, equipping individuals with the tools to navigate a dynamic world and achieve success. As many researchers (Akter, 2020; Hossain, 2017) emphasizes a focus on graduates' capabilities to adapt and leverage their personal and academic skills fosters tangible educational outcomes, ultimately leading to greater employability. This mindset encourages continuous learning and personal development; ensuring individuals remain relevant and competitive throughout their careers. Mason et al. (2009) highlight the enthusiasm of outgoing students who seek to contribute to the workforce through their talents, abilities, attitudes, and understanding. This proactive approach fuels personal growth and satisfaction, as individuals actively seek opportunities to learn and contribute value.

As Ahmad et al. (2010) point out, proficiency in both soft and hard skills is crucial for student success. Soft skills like communication, teamwork, and problem-solving complement hard skills like technical expertise and industry knowledge, creating well-rounded individuals who can effectively navigate the complexities of professional life. Ultimately, mastering these skills translates to superior job performance and career success. As Knight and Yorke (2000) assert, skilled individuals benefit not



only themselves but also the workforce, society, and the country as a whole. Their contributions drive innovation, productivity, and overall economic growth of the country (Cole & Hallett, 2019).

Investing in employability skills unlocks a treasure box of benefits far beyond landing a job. These skills empower personal growth, fuel organizational success, and contribute to a thriving society. Let's dive deeper into why employability skills are crucial for graduates in today's dynamic world. As Zaharim et al. (2009) highlight, graduates must be adaptable and flexible within organizations to acquire current knowledge and respond effectively to changing environments. This ability to learn and adapt empowers them to make necessary adjustments, ensuring their ongoing relevance and value. Employability skills, therefore, define a situation where fresh graduates can prove their worth to organizations by actively acquiring relevant skills, knowledge, and a positive attitude. In today's competitive landscape, reputable organizations prioritize hiring individuals who can demonstrably exhibit these skills (Rizwan et al., 2021). Organizations routinely emphasize specific skills in their graduates, such as analytical ability, problem-solving prowess, critical thinking, strategic thinking, and quantitative analysis. Proficiency in technology and modern research methods further elevates a graduate's profile, boosting their confidence and effectiveness. By honing their employability skills, graduates embark on a path of personal and professional fulfillment (Asif & Shaheen, 2022; Cole & Hallett, 2019; Rizwan et al., 2021). They become valuable assets to organizations, driving innovation and productivity. Ultimately, they contribute to a vibrant society where skilled individuals work together to build a brighter future. So, graduates, embrace the call to develop these vital skills and unleash your potential to make a meaningful impact.

### **Literature Review**

Measuring and defining employability presents a significant challenge, as highlighted by scholars like Gedye and Beaumont (2018), Römgens et al. (2020), and Tymon (2013). This complexity arises from its ever-evolving nature, adapting alongside changes in work patterns and workforce models. In fact, Le Blanc et al. (2017) observe a fascinating shift in perspective. Once a vague and uncertain concept, employability has now become a driving force in current labor market policies. Its crucial role is undeniable, serving as a key criterion for shaping labor market strategies and policies. For graduates, honing their employability skills unlocks a path to impactful contributions to society and the economy (Asif, 2022; Fleuren et al., 2020). Their proficiency in these skills not only translates to secure and promising careers with competitive salaries, but also elevates their social standing in many regions.

While prioritizing employability development empowers graduates to navigate the dynamic job market and contribute meaningfully, a significant disparity exists in their labor market outcomes. Factors like lack of work experience, lower academic performance, unsuitable specialization, technical skill gaps, unclear career goals, and even negative personality traits can hinder their success. To bridge this gap, it's crucial to understand the specific skills employers seek - the so-called "employability skills." These encompass foundational academic knowledge, personal and teamwork skills, effective communication, critical thinking and analysis, problem-solving abilities, initiative and self-motivation, the ability to work under pressure and deadlines, organizational skills, adaptability, numeracy, and an appreciation for diversity and difference. Additionally, negotiation skills are often highly valued. Mastering these skills is not just about securing a job, but about performing well and thriving in your



chosen field. They equip you with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to "own" your employment, navigate challenges, and contribute meaningfully to your organization and the wider community.

The importance of employability skills transcends academic achievements and technical prowess. As Higgs et al. (2019) rightly point out, skills like oral and written communication, teamwork, and interpersonal abilities form the bedrock of success in both academic and professional settings. Defining these skills, however, isn't a one-dimensional endeavor. Dearing and Garrick (1997) saw them as the key that unlocks job opportunities aligned with a graduate's qualifications. (Buck & Barrick, 1987; Overtoom, 2000) broaden the scope, emphasizing non-technical attributes that make an employee an asset. (Zaharim et al., 2009) offer a holistic perspective, defining employability skills as a unique combination of abilities, knowledge, and personal qualities that equip individuals to achieve organizational goals. The supply of skilled and employable graduates is not just an economic advantage, but a national and social imperative. (Dearing & Garrick, 1997) warns of the far-reaching consequences of failing to equip young people with these vital skills. Therefore, the onus lies on educational institutions and society as a whole to cultivate these essential qualities in graduates. Dearing and Garrick (1997) provides a valuable checklist: strong oral communication, language proficiency, quantitative analysis, problem-solving, creative and innovative thinking, adaptability, learning agility, decision-making, dependability, optimism, teamwork, punctuality, self-confidence, and self-efficacy.

Investing in employability skills is not just about securing a job; it's about empowering individuals to navigate the complexities of the modern workplace, contribute meaningfully to organizations, and ultimately, build fulfilling careers that benefit themselves, their communities, and their nation. Similarly, Cranmer (2006) indicated employability skills mean work readiness. Work readiness is a state of individual who possesses the knowledge, skills and aptitude that can help him/her to make dynamic assistances to achieve organizational goals and objectives. Overtoom (2000) have also specified that companies want entry-level employees who are responsible and reliable, technologically proficient, communicative and have the wish to absorb and progress the capability to perform in team, and hold a right approach.

In today's rapidly changing economy, possessing relevant skills is no longer a luxury, but a necessity for graduates seeking meaningful employment. The Asian Development Bank (2014) highlights the importance of "foundation training" and proficiencies, encompassing basic skills, thinking abilities, and personal competencies across resource management, interpersonal relationships, information literacy, systems understanding, and technology usage. Zainuddin et al. (2019) further emphasize the need for continuous learning and skill acquisition, as knowledge and job requirements evolve quickly. Pollard and Hillage (2001) identify three key factors for graduate employability: securing an initial job, retaining that job, and successfully transitioning to new roles. This highlights the importance of building a well-rounded skill set beyond just academic expertise. As Fallows and Steven (2000) note, employers and industry reports increasingly pressure universities to equip graduates with "basic and convertible skills" applicable across diverse roles. To meet these demands, educational institutions must forge closer ties with the corporate sector. Building a working relationship with businesses allows universities to understand specific hiring needs and tailor their curriculum accordingly. Zainuddin et al. (2019), Pollard and Hillage (2001), Fleuren et al. (2020), Cranmer (2006), and Fallows and Steven (2000) all share this view, urging universities to move



beyond subject-specific knowledge and prioritize the development of transferable skills that empower graduates to navigate the ever-changing job market and confidently meet employer expectations.

In today's fiercely competitive business landscape, success hinges on hiring the right people. Dutt et al. (2016) emphasizes this, stating that companies need employees with the abilities that deliver a strong return on investment. This is where universities and employers can join forces to bridge the skills gap and prepare graduates for the real world. Universities can actively contribute by revising curriculum and updating course content to reflect current industry needs and integrate employability skills development. Establishing partnerships with corporations for guest lectures, workshops, internships, and mock interviews. Organizing industry-university counseling sessions to help students understand career paths and employer expectations. Employers, in return, can play a valuable role by offering additional training programs to newly hired graduates to address specific skill gaps. Employers can also host events on campus, participating in industry-university forums, and providing feedback on curricula.

As Gallagher (2015) propose, corporate involvement can go even further. Integrating industry professionals into course design and delivery can significantly enhance the practical relevance of education. Ensuring courses align with professional standards and legal requirements adds further value. Graduates themselves can take ownership of their skill development by creating personal improvement portfolios (Asghar et al., 2021; Gallagher, 2015; Rizwan et al., 2021; Römgens et al., 2020; Zainuddin et al., 2019). This allows them to track their progress in acquiring relevant skills and showcase their strengths to potential employers. The unfortunate reality is that currently, many graduates struggle to secure and retain jobs due to a lack of the skills employers seek. Institutions of higher education acknowledge this and are actively seeking solutions. The core issue lies in the disconnect between academic qualifications and employers' expectations.

By actively collaborating, universities and employers can address this critical gap. Working together to equip graduates with the relevant skills and practical experience will lead to a more prepared workforce, benefitting both businesses and individuals in the long run.

### **Research Objectives**

This study's primary goal is to pinpoint the major issues with business graduates' employability abilities, which are demanded by employers. The research also aims to:

- Illustrate the predicted career areas for business graduates in Pakistan.
- Offer pertinent recommendations to help them overcome the gaps in their employability abilities.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

In the context of Pakistan, the entire purpose of this study was to analyse the research questions and determine the outcome suggested by the research aim. Both quantitative and qualitative data were used to arrive at the research's conclusion.

#### **Sampling and Data Collection**

To get to the sample and calculate the sample size from the population, the researchers employed the non-probability sampling approach. Further to non-probability sampling method,



convenient sampling method was adopted. The students in the sample region were those who belong to Rawalpindi and Islamabad and had completed their business education undergraduate and graduate degrees from several Pakistani institutions, and were actively looking for job in various organizations through LinkedIn.

This study surveyed 500 business graduates actively searching for employment in Pakistan to gauge their employability skills. A carefully crafted questionnaire covering key skill areas yielded 460 usable responses for analysis. Employing a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," the data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and a percentage-based ranking method. To further dissect the results and provide interpretations, the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software was utilized.

### Limitations of the Study

This research acknowledges several limitations. The sample size and composition were somewhat limited, potentially affecting generalizability. Additionally, some respondents were unable to complete the questionnaires, leading to potential sampling bias. Finally, data collection was restricted to the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi, limiting the representativeness of the findings for a broader population.

### Results and analysis

This research gathered final data from 460 university students across various disciplines using a structured survey questionnaire. Each respondent was personally administered the questionnaire, resulting in a satisfactory 90% response rate. The collected data was then analyzed using simple statistics, with the results tabulated and reported in percentages.

### Demographics

Table 1 paints a picture of the 460 individuals who participated in your study, revealing their backgrounds in terms of gender, age, and marital status. Let's delve into the details:

**Table 1**

*Demographics*

	Class	Frequency	Percentage frequency
<b>Gender</b>	Male	265	57.61
	Female	195	42.39
<b>Age</b>	20-25	127	27.61
	25-30	247	53.69
	30-35	86	18.70
<b>Marital Status</b>	Single	378	82.17
	Married	82	17.83
<b>Total respondents = 460</b>			

The landscape leans slightly towards males, making up 57.61% of the participants. Females



represent 42.39% of the group, offering a diverse cross-section of perspectives.

The majority, 53.69%, fall within the 25-30 age range, indicating a youthful and dynamic sample. 27.61% are slightly younger, between 20 and 25, while 18.70% are 30-35 years old. This range suggests a focus on young adults but still incorporates some experiences from individuals across the early career landscape. According to the marital mosaic, the vast majority, 82.17%, report being single, highlighting a focus on unmarried individuals in your study. 17.83% are married, offering a smaller yet valuable perspective from partnered individuals.

In essence, Table 1 reveals a participant pool predominantly composed of male, young adults who are still navigating the early stages of their professional and personal lives. This understanding of your sample's demographics can enhance your data analysis and offer rich context when interpreting your research findings.

**Table 2**

*Respondents' willing fields*

Willing Fields of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Academic/ teaching jobs	39	8.5
Banking Jobs	46	10
Government Jobs	135	29.35
Multi-national companies Jobs (MNCs)	103	22.39
Private Jobs	45	9.78
Telecom sector jobs	38	8.26
Others	54	11.74
Total	460	100%

Table 2 unveils the career aspirations of the 460 participants in your study, showcasing their preferred fields for future employment. Government jobs stand out as the most coveted destination, attracting a sizeable 29.35% of respondents. This suggests a preference for stability, security, and potential service to the community. Multi-national companies (MNCs) follow closely with 22.39% yearning for their global exposure and professional opportunities.

Private jobs in general garner interest from 9.78%, indicating a desire for the dynamism and flexibility the private sector often offers. Banking jobs entice 10% with their financial opportunities and career growth potential. The telecom sector holds sway for 8.26%, showcasing the allure of a rapidly evolving and technologically driven field. Academic/teaching jobs resonate with 8.5%, suggesting a passion for education and knowledge dissemination. 11.74% choose the umbrella category of "Others", hinting at diverse and perhaps unconventional career paths waiting to be explored.

Table 2 paints a vibrant picture of the participants' career aspirations. It reveals a mix of stability-seeking individuals drawn to the public sector, ambitious professionals aiming for MNCs and private



enterprises, and those with specific industry interests like banking and telecom. Notably, a passion for education and a spirit of exploration also find their place amongst these aspirations.

**Table 3**

*Weaknesses of Business Graduates*

Skill Type	Weakness of Business Graduates	Frequency	Percentage
Soft Skills	Poor communication and interpersonal skills	184	40.00%
	Less attitude of working under pressure and deadlines	69	14.98%
	Valuing diversity and difference	35	7.61%
	Absent of team working skills	42	9.13%
Problem-solving and adaptability	Lack of problem solving skills	68	14.78%
	Less ability to learn and adapt to the environment	92	19.98%
Essential skills	Using your initiative and being self-motivated	56	12.17%
	Lack of organizing skills	81	17.61%
	Inadequate Numeracy	192	41.74%

**Total respondents 460**

Table 3 sheds light on the perceived weaknesses of 460 business graduates, revealing areas where they might need further development to thrive in their professional careers. Let's delve into the key takeaways;

***Soft Skills Shortfalls***

**Communication and interpersonal skills:** This tops the list, with 40% of graduates identified as lacking in clear and effective communication skills, as well as the ability to build and maintain positive relationships.

**Working under pressure and deadlines:** 15% seem to struggle with managing stress and meeting deadlines in fast-paced environments.

**Teamwork:** 9% exhibit weaknesses in collaborating effectively and contributing to team goals.

**Valuing diversity:** 8% might need to work on embracing and appreciating different perspectives and backgrounds within the workplace.

***Problem-Solving and Adaptability Gaps***

**Problem-solving:** 15% face challenges in analyzing situations, developing solutions, and making sound decisions.

**Adaptability:** 20% might struggle to adjust to changing environments, acquire new skills, and learn from challenges.

***Essential Skills Missing***

**Self-motivation and initiative:** 12% seem to require further development in taking ownership of





tasks, being proactive, and driving their own development.

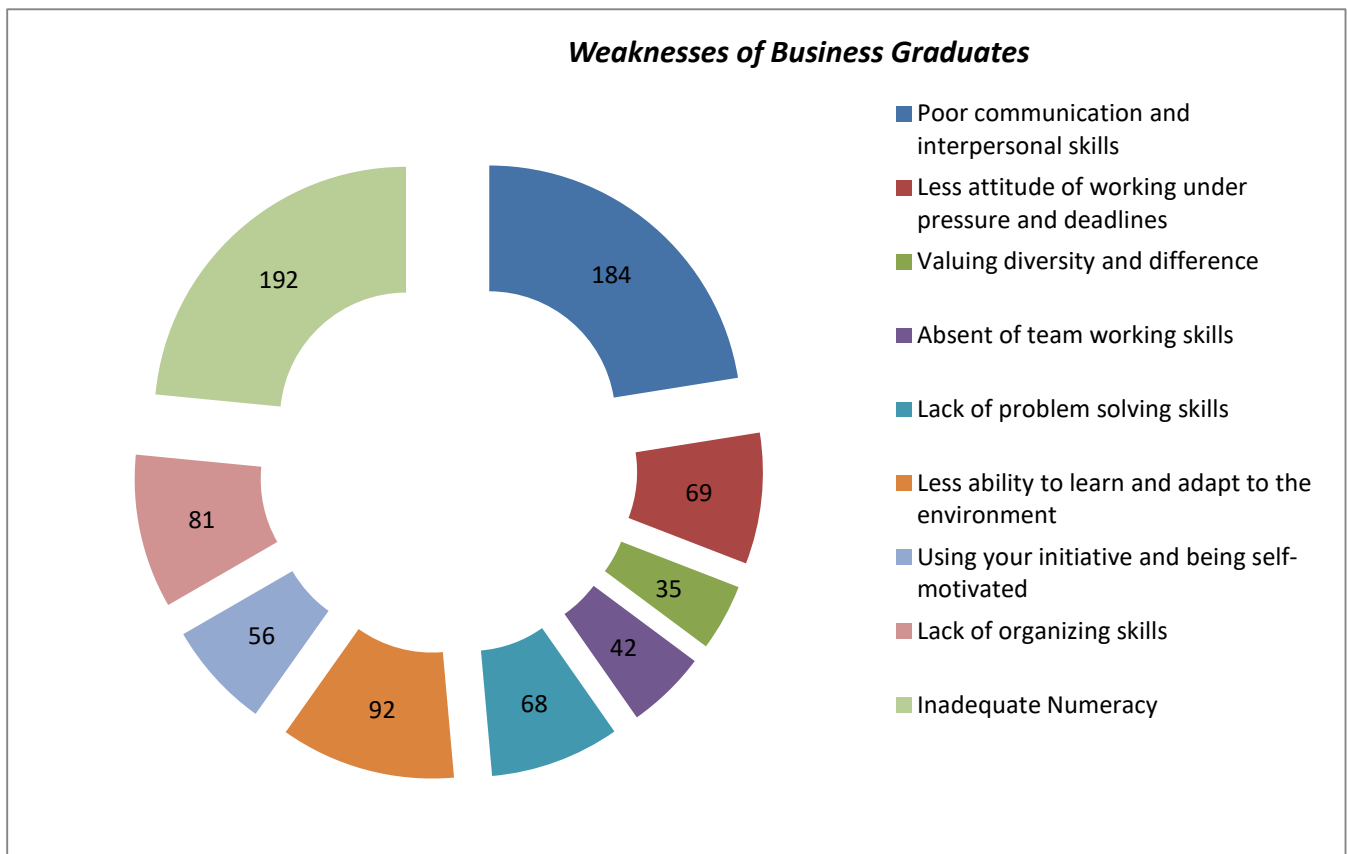
Organization: 18% could benefit from improved time management, planning, and prioritizing skills.

Numeracy: This stands out as a major concern, with 42% identified as having inadequate numerical skills, potentially hindering their ability to analyze data, perform calculations, and make informed decisions.

In essence, Table 3 paints a picture of business graduates who excel in some areas but might require additional training and support to hone their soft skills, problem-solving abilities, adaptability, and key essential skills like self-motivation, organization, and numeracy. By addressing these weaknesses, they can equip themselves for success in a dynamic and demanding business environment.

**Figure 1**

*Weaknesses of Business Graduates*



**Suggestions for Improvement**

The whispers of the job market are clear: even with a business degree, certain skills are crucial for graduates to navigate the competitive landscape. Based on both research and voices from the field, a map emerges, guiding graduates towards sharpening their tools and carving a path to thriving careers.

1. The business world is not a solo act. Graduates can hone their corporate leadership, delve into



real-world case studies, and even embark on executive training programs. Mastering the art of collaboration, from guiding teams to effectively navigating group dynamics, becomes a passport to success. But individual expertise also blooms in this fertile ground. Deepening knowledge in a specific field, becoming a specialist, ensures a valuable niche in the professional ecosystem. And let's not forget the global language of business: English proficiency polishes the communication edge, allowing graduates to connect and excel in an interconnected world.

2. Clear communication is the bridge between ideas and action. Graduates can refine their communication and interpersonal skills, ensuring their voice is heard and understood by colleagues, clients, and stakeholders. But professionalism is not just about eloquence; it's about demonstrating a qualified professional attitude, a commitment to ethical conduct and continuous learning. These threads, woven together, create a tapestry of trust and respect, vital for navigating the professional tapestry.
3. The academic world and the world of work are not always on the same page. Graduates can bridge this gap by cultivating a spirit of continuous learning and adaptability. Embracing new knowledge, readily acquiring fresh skills, and stepping out of their comfort zones allows them to adapt to the ever-shifting landscape of the business world. Seeking specialized training in specific fields adds another layer of expertise, making them sought-after assets in the marketplace.
4. From performance evaluations to securing resources, the ability to negotiate effectively is a secret weapon in any professional's arsenal. Whether advocating for their own needs or representing their team, graduates can sharpen their negotiation skills to ensure mutually beneficial outcomes and pave the way for a satisfying career journey.
5. Chaos might be the engine of creativity, but in the business world, organization is the key to productivity. Graduates can become skillful and productive employees by leveraging effective administrative support, embracing clear leadership, and advocating for a de-politicized learning environment. When resources are allocated efficiently and meritocracy reigns, everyone thrives.
6. This roadmap, illuminated by research and experience, offers business graduates a path towards success. By honing their teamwork skills, cultivating professionalism, embracing adaptability, mastering negotiation, and prioritizing organization, they can unlock their full potential and find their place in the dynamic world of business. Remember, the journey is just as important as the destination, so enjoy the process of growth and embrace the ever-evolving landscape of your chosen field.

## **Conclusion**

The greatest way to prepare managers and executives for the future is through employability skills, since business graduates play a crucial role in today's professional education. Globally, there is a huge increase in business graduates, which has led to improvements in the field's quality and applicability in our nation. In this sense, the employability skills of the twenty-first century, such as communication, teamwork, problem solving, initiative and entrepreneurship, planning and organising, self-management, learning, and technology, should be retained by our business graduates. Aside from business graduates, other relevant skills include corporate knowledge, improved communication skills,



current case-based learning, executive training; in-depth knowledge, field of specialisation, and fluency in the English language; sufficient business research; connections between academia and industry; training and professional development, etc.

Additionally, graduates should be adjusted with an appropriate reward and appraisal system. Business graduates can also be improved by creating a strong connection between academia and business, getting resource person training, allocating a sufficient budget for research, and making sure that there is an efficient system in place for teachers' evaluation and compensation, among other things. Last but not least, to reduce the employability skills issues facing our nation's business graduates, a comprehensive and cooperative effort including both the government and private owners is required.

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### **Conflicts of Interest**

In order to publish it, the authors have declared no conflicts of interest.

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