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Bridging the Graduate Transition: The Role of Perceived Employability, Career Decision-Making, and Job Search Behavior among University Students

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Abstract

This study aimed to 1) assess the perceived employability of university students, focusing on their skills and abilities awareness, job market knowledge, and perceived university support, 2) examine the career decision-making capabilities of university students, including their career clarity, goal-setting behavior, decision-making confidence, and use of resources, and 3) analyze the job search behavior of university students, particularly their proactive search activities, networking efforts, and utilization of career services and events. The study focused on how university students perceive employability, career decision-making, and job search behavior by using a descriptive survey research design. The study was cross-sectional and quantitative in nature. Three questionnaires were developed on employability, career decision making as well as job search behavior which were used to collect data from a sample of 300 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in the public-sector universities of Punjab, Pakistan. Descriptive findings revealed that the general levels of perceived employability were moderately high among the students and this was especially true when it came to university support, academic preparation, and knowledge of employer expectations. Career decision-making capability was also seen among students of high performance particularly in being confident in making informed decisions, career planning and dealing with career uncertainties. On the same note, the engagement levels of students regarding job search activities were moderate to high in terms of networking, using online job portals, participating in career events and utilizing university career services. In general, the descriptive results indicated that the students were quite an active group in terms of career-related planning and job seeking, though they required some work on long-term career goal setting, personal skills confidence, and regular job search record keeping.

Keywords: Employability, Career Decision-Making, Job Search Behavior, University Students

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Introduction

The university to labor market transition is more difficult in the 21 st century, where it is not only the academic qualification that is required but also it is influenced by globalization, technical progress, and changing workplace requirements. Employability, which refers to the ability to acquire, keep and grow a profession, is now a focus on hard and soft skills, as well as technical abilities and communication, adaptability, teamwork, problem-solving, leadership, and self-management (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020). Employability is a focus issue for students, parents, policymakers, and employers as universities are now under pressure to deliver ready-work graduates. Even with career counseling, internships, and skills programs, not all students are able to make the transition to the career, and this is partially due to the notion of employability, or the assumption that they can get a good job (Rothwell et al., 2008). Such perceptions affect attitudes forming career-related perceptions, motivation, goal setting, as well as decision-making and job search (Pitan, 2017).

The problem is urgent in the developing countries such as Pakistan where the unemployment rates and underemployment among graduates are still very high (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023). A considerable number of graduates do not work within their specialties, experience vocational stagnation, lack self-confidence in job search, and little knowledge of the needs of the labor market. The current paper intends to analyze employability as perceived by students and how it correlates with the process of career decision making in terms of evaluating interests, abilities, and opportunities (Gati & Asher, 2001) and job search behavior in terms of resume writing, networking, and attending interviews (Kanfer et al., 2001). It also considers demographic characteristics (gender, academic discipline, work experience) with a view to investigating their effects on perceptions and behaviors. The study informs the evidence-based approaches to be used by teachers, counselors, administrators, and policymakers to equip students at the university with career readiness and ease the process of transferring to the workforce by focusing on the Punjab-based public-sector universities.

Review of the Literature

Globalization, technological advancements, and economic uncertainty make the process of the university-workforce transition more and more difficult because of increasing competition and the need to show greater employability (Donald et al.,

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2018). The students should have formal qualifications and critical soft skills like communication skills, flexibility, critical thinking, and adaptability. The perceived employability that is influenced by academic qualifications, experience, self-efficacy, motivation, and confidence are important factors in influencing the capability of students to secure employment (Vanhercke et al., 2014).

The more perceived employability, the higher the likelihood of students being involved in career decision-making, a process that entails self-reflection, opportunity evaluation, and long-term goal setting, which means that interests and skills of students are matched with the realities of the labor market (Lent et al., 1994). On the same note, job search behavior, resume writing, networking, and application are more likely to be systematic and persistent in students who possess high perception of employability and decision-making ability (Kanfer et al., 2001).

These constructs are quite applicable in Pakistan, as unemployment among young people has been on the increase, they have a lack of career guidance and disjuncture between educational preparation and labor market demands (Ali and Javed, 2024). The gap in the knowledge existing in literature is the fact that there is no established information on how the attitude of students prevails towards employability, career decision-making, and job search behaviour.

The study aimed at investigating the perceptions of undergraduate and graduate students at public sector universities of Punjab, Pakistan regarding employability, career decision making, and job search behavior by university students.

Methodology

The study aimed at conducting a research study based on the perceptions of university students on employability, career decision-making and job search behavior. In this section, research design, population and sampling design, instrumentation, validity and reliability, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures are discussed.

- **Research Design**

This research was a quantitative study that used a descriptive survey-based research. A descriptive design fits the purpose of providing a clear description of the features, behaviours, or perceptions of a population at a certain moment (Creswell &

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Creswell, 2018). This was considered to be the most effective method of addressing the objectives of the study that was to investigate the levels of perceived employability, prevalence of career decision-making, and job search behavior (JSB) among undergraduates and graduates.

❖ Population and Sampling

The target population of the current research was male and female students enrolled in the universities located in public sector of the Punjab Province in Pakistan. The accessible population included the undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in the University of Sargodha, Sargodha. To utilize a representative sample, undergraduate and graduate students were selected from the University of Sargodha, Sargodha, using a multiphase sampling method. During the first phase, four faculties were randomly chosen from the University of Sargodha, Sargodha, including Social Sciences, Sciences, Arts and Humanities, and Computing and Information Technology. In the second phase, 320 undergraduate and graduate students were selected using the proportionate stratified random sampling.

❖ Instrumentation

A structured questionnaire was the research instrument utilized in this research. The questionnaire was designed based on the already tested research instruments and a detailed investigation of the available literature. The questionnaire included three scales i.e., the Employability Scale (E), Career Decision-Making Scale (CDM), and Job Search Behavior (JSB). In terms of the number of items to be represented in the instrument, 12 were assigned to each construct. The ratings were based on a 5-point Likert scale Strongly Disagree (1) and Strongly Agree (5). The demographic section included the background information required including gender, department, grade level, semester, faculty, residence, and the current GPA/CGPA. Each questionnaire will be detailed as follows:

❖ Validity and Reliability

The entire process of professional validation was applied to make sure that research instruments have duly captured the three important constructs of Employability (E), Career Decision-Making (CDM), and Job Search Behavior (JSB) among the selected sample of undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Sargodha, Sargodha. Seven academic experts with educational background in assessment, instructional design, and educational psychology reviewed the questionnaire. Their contribution with regard to criticizing the language and content of the items, as well

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as clarity, was required in enhancing the same since there was need to make sure that all the constructs were well and sufficiently represented.

The scales were first tested by the professionals in educational research and measurement and by the specialists of the University of Sargodha, Institute of Education. They were evaluated on the basis of their content validity, wording, cultural and adherence to study objectives. Based on their feedback, some of them were modified to be more readable and conceptually accurate, which enhances the general validity of the instrument. The sample population in the pilot study was selected through the convenience sampling technique after the review was done by the experts among 50 undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Sargodha. However, they failed to provide such people with the final data collection.

After reviewing, the pilot test was done to ensure the reliability and internal consistency of the questionnaire. The reliability of the instrument was high according to the results of pilot study. The Cronbach alpha value of the overall instrument was found to be 0.813. Likewise, the three scales also performed well, including the Employability Scale (E), the Career Decision-Making Scale (CDM), and the Job Search Behavior Scale (JSB) whose coefficients values were found to be 0.896, 0.796, and 0.739, respectively. These coefficients demonstrated that the tool was stable and sound in the major research where the sample of students is larger and will be more valid since the coefficients will surpass the standard cutoff of 0.70 (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994).

- **Data Collection and Data Analysis**

After finalizing the research instrument, data were collected via Google Forms and face-to-face mode. The questionnaire was administered to the selected sample while research associates also helped the researchers with the collection of the data. A web link was also distributed to the participants via WhatsApp groups and emails to ensure that more people can be reached.

Subsequently, data screening was conducted by removing 20 responses that were either incomplete or invalid, and, lastly, 300 responses were recorded in the statistical analysis. Quantitative analysis of the data was performed using the IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26). The constructs of interest were Employability (E), Career Decision-Making Scale (CDM), and Job Search Behavior (JSB) where the perceptions of the undergraduate and the graduate students were investigated in a

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thorough way with the help of the descriptive statistics, including frequency, mean, standard deviations, percentage, and rankings. In addition, the demographic variables of the participants were also incorporated.

Results and Findings

The results and the findings of the study were as follows:

❖ Demographic

The research data consisted of the 300 undergraduate and graduate students of different faculties of the University of Sargodha located in Sargodha, Pakistan. It was found that females (50.3%) outnumbered males (49.7%) which showed that a small percentage of female respondents had higher education than their counterparts. Nevertheless, most of the respondents (53.7%) were in the urban population as per their residential background as compared to (46.3%) in the rural population and representing a balance between the two settings. In terms of academic level, most of the participants, 189 students (63.0%) had undergraduate courses which included BS, 111 students (37.0%) were in graduate level courses like M.Phil., MS, or Ph.D. Most of the respondents (28.0%) belonged to the social sciences faculty followed by the next category (20.0%), which were in the arts and humanities faculty and (27.7%) in the computer and information technology faculty. According to the semester distribution, (19.7%) of the students were in fourth semester, (14.0%), in their third semester, (25.3%), in their eighth semester, (2.0%), in their fifth semester, (20.0%), in their seventh semester and (13.0%), in their second semester. This diverse sample brought out a clear study of Employability (E), Career Decision-Making (CDM), and Job Search Behavior (JSB) of learners in a diverse group of varied demographics that provided sufficient representation of students in their terms of their gender, field of study, and level of study.

❖ Frequency Analysis of Employability

The following is the frequency analysis of students' responses regarding employability:

Table 1.1. Frequency Analysis of Students' Responses about Employability

Sr#	Statements	Disagreement Zone		Total Disagreement	N	Agreement Zone		Total Agreement	Result
		SDA	DA			A	SA		
Employability (E)									
Skills & Abilities Awareness (SAA)									
1	I feel I have skills that are important in today's job market.	51 (17.0%)	39 (13.0%)	90 (30.0%)	11 (3.7%)	193 (64.3%)	6 (2.0%)	210 (70.0%)	Agreement
2	I am confident I can adapt to different work environments.	59 (19.7%)	15 (5.0%)	74 (24.7%)	18 (6.0%)	158 (52.7%)	50 (16.7%)	226 (75.4%)	Agreement
3	I can effectively communicate my strengths to potential employers.	58 (19.3%)	18 (6.0%)	76 (25.3%)	13 (4.3%)	177 (59.0%)	34 (11.3%)	224 (74.6%)	Agreement
4	I can apply my academic knowledge to solve real-world problems.	41 (13.7%)	20 (6.7%)	61 (20.4%)	16 (5.3%)	179 (59.7%)	44 (14.7%)	239 (79.7%)	Agreement
Job Market Knowledge (JMK)									
5	I am aware of current trends and demands in the job market.	68 (22.7%)	17 (5.7%)	85 (28.4%)	27 (9.0%)	170 (56.7%)	18 (6.0%)	215 (71.7%)	Agreement
6	I regularly explore future career opportunities related to my studies	39 (13.0%)	13 (4.3%)	52 (17.3%)	19 (6.3%)	191 (63.7%)	38 (12.7%)	248 (82.7%)	Agreement
7	I understand what employers generally expect from graduates.	40 (13.3%)	8 (2.7%)	48 (16.0%)	24 (8.0%)	182 (60.7%)	46 (15.3%)	252 (84.0%)	Agreement
8	I stay updated on industry standards and professional requirements	37 (12.3%)	18 (6.0%)	55 (18.3%)	12 (4.0%)	193 (64.3%)	40 (13.3%)	245 (81.6%)	Agreement
University Support & Preparation (JSP)									
9	I believe my academic program provides relevant preparation for employment.	38 (12.7%)	15 (5.0%)	53 (17.7%)	8 (2.7%)	202 (67.3%)	37 (12.3%)	247 (82.3%)	Agreement

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10	I believe my university courses match the demands of the current job market.	45 (15.0%)	15 (20.0%)	60 (15.8%)	24 (8.0%)	184 (61.3%)	32 (10.7%)	240 (80.0%)	Agreement
11	I believe the university provides resources that help improve student employability.	44 (14.7%)	9 (3.0%)	53 (17.7%)	18 (6.0%)	182 (60.7%)	47 (15.7%)	247 (82.4%)	Agreement
12	I believe my university's reputation enhances my chances of getting a good job after graduation.	24 (8.0%)	8 (2.7%)	32 (10.7%)	24 (8.0%)	210 (70.0%)	78 (11.3%)	312 (89.3%)	Agreement

Table 1.1 shows that the frequency analysis of student responses related to employability, based on three sub-dimensions: Skills and Abilities Awareness (SAA), Job Market Knowledge (JMK), and University Support and Preparation (USP). The results show that there is a high degree of congruency among the students on all the items, which shows that the students have a positive overall perception of their employability. Seventy percent to almost eighty percent of students in the SAA field said they believe they have significant job relevant skills, they have the ability to fit into different work situations, they are able to sell their strengths, and they are able to transfer the learning in academic realm into practical issues in the real world. This indicates a high level of self-efficacy and belief in transferable skills by the respondents. In the JMK dimension, over 70 per cent of the students were aware of the job market trends, employer expectations and career possibilities and the highest level of agreement (84 per cent) was found on that of understanding employer expectations. On the same note, more than 80 percent of them had concurred that they keep up with industry standards. Students who participated in USP category strongly agreed (more than 80%), that their academic programs, university resources and institutional reputation contributed positively to their employability. The statement that their job opportunities are improved when they attend university gave the highest level of agreement (89.3). In general, the table shows a high perceived employability among students with especially high confidence in their readiness to enter the job market and match university courses with requirements of employment.

❖ Frequency Analysis of Career Decision-Making (CDM)

The following is the frequency analysis of students' responses regarding their career decision-making:

Table 1.2. Frequency Analysis of Students' Responses about Career Decision-Making

Sr#	Statements	Disagreement Zone		Total Disagreement	N	Agreement Zone		Total Agreement	Result
		SDA	DA			A	SA		
Career Decision-Making (CDM)									
Career Clarity & Goal Setting (CCGS)									
13	I have a clear idea of the career I want to pursue.	14 (4.7%)	13 (4.3%)	27 (9.0%)	23 (7.7%)	212 (70.7%)	38 (12.7%)	273 (91.1%)	Agreement
14	I have set specific career goals for the next five years.	62 (20.7%)	16 (5.3%)	78 (26.0%)	9 (3.0%)	167 (55.7%)	46 (15.3%)	222 (74.0%)	Agreement
15	I know the steps I need to take to achieve my career goals.	9 (3.0%)	11 (3.7%)	20 (6.7%)	16 (5.3%)	191 (63.7%)	73 (24.3%)	280 (93.3%)	Agreement
16	I have developed a career plan that I am actively following.	4 (1.3%)	12 (4.0%)	16 (5.3%)	22 (7.3%)	180 (60.0%)	82 (27.3%)	284 (94.6%)	Agreement
Decision-Making Confidence (DMC)									
17	I am confident in making informed decisions when it comes to career planning.	3 (1.0%)	11 (3.7%)	14 (4.7%)	16 (5.3%)	188 (62.7%)	82 (27.3%)	286 (95.3%)	Agreement
18	I understand how my personal interests and strengths connect with my future career.	10 (3.3%)	12 (4.0%)	22 (7.3%)	17 (5.7%)	179 (59.7%)	82 (27.3%)	278 (92.7%)	Agreement

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19	I feel capable of assessing risks when making career choices.	4 (1.3%)	10 (3.3%)	14 (4.6%)	17 (5.7%)	185 (61.7%)	84 (28.0%)	286 (95.4%)	Agreement
20	I can handle career-related uncertainties without feeling overwhelmed.	8 (2.7%)	13 (4.3%)	21 (7.0%)	21 (7.0%)	164 (54.7%)	94 (31.3%)	279 (93.0%)	Agreement
Resource Utilization & Consultation (RUC)									
21	I actively seek information about different career options.	19 (6.3%)	23 (7.7%)	42 (14.0%)	21 (7.0%)	159 (53.0%)	78 (26.0%)	258 (86.0%)	Agreement
22	I feel confident using university resources, like counseling or career services, for career planning.	7 (2.3%)	17 (5.7%)	24 (8.0%)	28 (9.3%)	157 (52.3%)	91 (30.3%)	276 (91.9%)	Agreement
23	I consult with mentors, teachers, or professionals when making career decisions.	15 (5.0%)	12 (4.0%)	27 (9.0%)	20 (6.7%)	166 (55.3%)	87 (29.0%)	273 (91.0%)	Agreement
24	I reflect on feedback I receive to improve my career decisions.	17 (5.7%)	16 (5.3%)	33 (11.0%)	24 (8.0%)	163 (54.3%)	80 (26.7%)	267 (89.0%)	Agreement

Table 1.2 gives an in-depth examination of the reactions of the students as defined by the Career Decision-Making (CDM) that can be subdivided into three sub-dimensions, namely: Career Clarity and Goal Setting (CCGS), Decision-Making Confidence (DMC), and Resource Utilization and Consultation (RUC). The data shows a high degree of agreement to the majority of the items, which shows the strong orientation of students to career planning. The majorities in the CCGS dimension were also high, with more than 91 percent of the students stating that they know their career path and are aware of the path to follow towards their objectives. It is important to note that 94.6% said that they were actively pursuing a career plan, but slightly fewer students (74) said that they have specific five-year career objectives, which implies that long-term planning could be improved. Within the DMC area, there were extremely high levels of agreement, with more than 92 percent of students indicating a sense of confidence in making informed career choices, knowing the relationship between their interests and future career and in dealing with doubts and risks when it comes to career choices. The greatest

agreement (95.4) was identified in regard to the skills of students to evaluate risks in career decision-making with a high level of self-efficacy and emotional preparedness. In the case of the RUC dimension, students possessed positive tendencies as well. Most (more than 86) actively tried to find information, relied on the resources of the university and consulted mentors or professionals at the time of making career choices. It is important to note that 91.9% of the students were confident in utilizing institutional sources of information like counseling and career services. Additionally, 89% said that they reflect on feedback in order to improve their career planning, which is reflective thinking and lifelong learning. Overall, the analysis reveals that students possess a high level of career clarity, confidence in decision-making, and effective utilization of resources, all of which suggest a proactive and well-supported approach toward career development.

- **Frequency Analysis of Job Search Behavior (JSB)**

The following is the frequency analysis of students' responses regarding their job search behavior:

Table 1.3. Frequency Analysis of Students' Responses about Job Search Behavior (JSB)

Sr#	Statements	Disagreement Zone		Total Disagreement	N	Agreement Zone		Total Agreement	Result
		SDA	DA			A	SA		
Job Search Behavior (JSB)									
Proactive Search Activities (PSA)									
25	I regularly check for job or internship opportunities in my area of interest.	10 (3.3%)	21 (7.0%)	31 (10.3%)	20 (6.7%)	206 (68.7%)	43 (14.3%)	269 (89.7%)	Agreement
26	I keep my CV or resume updated.	19 (6.3%)	21 (7.0%)	40 (13.3%)	25 (8.3%)	154 (51.3%)	81 (27.0%)	260 (86.6%)	Agreement
27	I maintain a list of potential employers or organizations that interest me.	19 (6.3%)	23 (7.7%)	40 (14.0%)	24 (8.0%)	162 (54.0%)	72 (24.0%)	258 (86.0%)	Agreement

28	I use online platforms like LinkedIn or Rozee to explore job or internship openings.	11 (3.7%)	15 (5.0%)	26 (8.7%)	31 (10.3%)	149 (49.7%)	94 (31.3%)	274 (91.3%)	Agreement
Networking & Follow-Up (NFU)									
29	I follow up after job or internship interviews or applications.	13 (4.3%)	20 (6.7%)	33 (11.0%)	35 (11.7%)	142 (47.3%)	90 (30.0%)	267 (89.3%)	Agreement
30	I reach out to professionals or alumni for career advice and job leads.	9 (3.0%)	16 (5.3%)	25 (8.3%)	25 (8.3%)	160 (53.3%)	90 (30.0%)	275 (91.9%)	Agreement
31	I participate in student or professional organizations related to my career interests.	17 (5.7%)	36 (12.0%)	53 (17.7%)	18 (6.0%)	144 (48.0%)	85 (28.3%)	247 (82.3%)	Agreement
32	I engage with professional networks or social media groups in my area.	6 (2.0%)	14 (4.7%)	20 (6.7%)	21 (7.0%)	165 (55.0%)	94 (31.3%)	280 (93.3%)	Agreement
Use of Career Services & Events (UOCSE)									
33	I attend career fairs, workshops, or networking events to expand my job search opportunities.	7 (2.3%)	21 (7.0%)	28 (9.3%)	16 (5.3%)	174 (58.0%)	82 (27.3%)	272 (90.6%)	Agreement
34	I seek help from university career services to improve job search strategies.	5 (1.7%)	29 (9.7%)	34 (11.4%)	26 (8.7%)	160 (53.3%)	80 (26.7%)	266 (88.7%)	Agreement
35	I use mock interviews or resume reviews offered by career services.	13 (4.3%)	20 (6.7%)	33 (11.0%)	25 (8.7%)	169 (56.3%)	72 (24.0%)	266 (89.0%)	Agreement
36	I participate in career development programs or seminars organized by the university.	9 (3.0%)	16 (5.3%)	25 (8.3%)	24 (8.0%)	192 (64.0%)	59 (19.7%)	275 (91.7%)	Agreement

Table 1.3 provides a frequency further analysis of Job Search Behavior (JSB) among students in three essential areas, Proactive Search Activities (PSA), Networking and Follow-Up (NFU) and Use of Career Services and Events (UOCSE). Statistics depict that students are very much engaged in the behaviors that are related to job search. On the PSA dimension, more than 86 percent of the students indicated that they check job opportunities on a regular basis, update their CVs, and have a list of prospective employers. Interestingly, 91.3 percent of the students reported to be using online services such as LinkedIn or Rozee.pk, which means that the job market is well-digitized. Students in NFU domain exhibited active networking. An example is that 91.9% said that they contacted professionals or alumni to get job leads and that 89.3% contacted them after interviews or applications. Even though a relatively small percentage (82.3) of respondents joined professional organizations, most participants (93.3) were members of professional social media groups or online networks and preferred digital networking platforms. Students were also very active under the UOCSE dimension. Approximately 90 percent or higher of students participated in career fairs and career development events, utilizing assistance of career services, and mock interviewing and resume reviews that the university provided. The highest level of agreement (91.7) was recorded in the involvement in career development seminars, which shows that students were highly using institutional support in enhancing employability. Generally, the table indicates that students actively engage in job search behaviors and those include proactive searching, good networking, and the frequent use of university-offered career services. These results indicate that there should be a balanced and strategic approach toward career readiness among the respondents.

- **Descriptive Statistics of Employability (E)**

The following are the descriptive statistics of Employability (E):

Table 1.4. Descriptive Statistics of Employability (E)

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Ranking	Interpretation
I believe my university's reputation enhances my chances of getting a good job after graduation.	300	3.74	0.978	1st	Moderately High
I understand what employers generally expect from graduates.	300	3.62	1.183	2nd	Moderately High
I believe my academic program provides relevant preparation for employment.	300	3.62	1.161	3rd	Moderately High

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I stay updated on industry standards and professional requirements.	300	3.60	1.171	4th	Moderately High
I believe the university provides resources that help improve student employability.	300	3.60	1.224	5th	Moderately High
I regularly explore future career opportunities related to my studies.	300	3.59	1.169	6th	Moderately High
I can apply my academic knowledge to solve real-world problems.	300	3.55	1.224	7th	Moderately High
I believe my university courses match the demands of the current job market.	300	3.48	1.211	8th	Moderately High
I am confident I can adapt to different work environments.	300	3.42	1.365	9th	Moderately High
I can effectively communicate my strengths to potential employers.	300	3.37	1.321	10th	Moderately High
I feel I have skills that are important in today's job market.	300	3.21	1.222	11th	Moderately High
I am aware of current trends and demands in the job market.	300	3.18	1.321	12th	Moderately High

According to the descriptive statistics in the above table, the overall result of employability among the university students is moderately high, which is determined by the mean scores of 3.18 3.74. The most rated one, "I believe my university reputation will increase my likelihood of securing a good job after graduation" (M = 3.74, SD = 0.978) indicates that students have a lot of confidence in the role played by the institution in securing a good job upon graduation. Other questions that showed the relatively high mean values include "I know what employers expect from graduates and I think my academic program has well prepared me to work" (both M = 3.62) reflecting on the confidence of the students in the academic preparation and knowledge of the employer expectations. Conversely, items that are rated lower, such as "I feel I have the skills that are important in the job market today" (M = 3.21) and "I am aware of current trends and demands in the job market" (M = 3.18) point to the relative lack of self-confidence in the individual skills and knowledge of the job market. Nevertheless, the general trend shows that there is a positive perception of employability, institutional support and academic preparation are seen more positively than personal career preparedness. It means that extra work should be done, including employability workshops and market-oriented skills development programs, to close the gap between the institutional support and personal readiness.

❖ Descriptive Statistics of Career Decision-Making (CDM)

The following are the descriptive statistics of Career Decision-Making (CDM):

Table 1.5. Descriptive Statistics of Career Decision-Making (CDM)

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Ranking	Interpretation
I am confident in making informed decisions when it comes to career planning.	300	4.12	0.743	1st	High
I feel capable of assessing risks when making career choices.	300	4.12	0.760	2nd	High
I have developed a career plan that I am actively following.	300	4.08	0.789	3rd	High
I can handle career-related uncertainties without feeling overwhelmed.	300	4.08	0.891	4th	High
I understand how my personal interests and strengths connect with my future career.	300	4.04	0.890	5th	High
I know the steps I need to take to achieve my career goals.	300	4.03	0.846	6th	High
I feel confident using university resources, like counseling or career services, for career planning.	300	4.03	0.914	7th	High
I consult with mentors, teachers, or professionals when making career decisions.	300	3.99	0.985	8th	Moderately High
I reflect on feedback I receive to improve my career decisions.	300	3.91	1.032	9th	Moderately High
I actively seek information about different career options.	300	3.85	1.090	10th	Moderately High
I have a clear idea of the career I want to pursue.	300	3.82	0.876	11th	Moderately High
I have set specific career goals for the next five years.	300	3.40	1.378	12th	Moderately High

The descriptive statistics of career decision-making (CDM) skills of the university students are given in the above table, and the study has shown that the levels of decision-making readiness are mainly high or moderate. The most rated ones were "I am confident in making informed decisions regarding career planning" and "I feel capable of evaluating risks in career choice" with average of 4.12 which means that the students are confident that they can take risky yet wise career decisions. In the same spirit, the answers to the statements like "I have developed a career plan which

I am actively following" (M = 4.08), "I can handle career-related uncertainties without feeling overwhelmed" (M = 4.08) indicate that students are quite confident in the ability to follow their career plans and make decisions adequately and flexibly. Nevertheless, the low-ranking combinations, such as "I have a clear idea of the career I want to follow" (M = 3.82) and "I have set specific career goals within the next five years" (M = 3.40), suggest that, although students are sure about how the decision-making processes should be managed, some still do not have long-term clarity and goal setting. This identifies one of the institutional intervention opportunities, which include offering customized career guidance and long-term goal development seminars to assist in strategic career planning.

- **Descriptive Statistics of Job Search Behavior (JSB)**

The following are the descriptive statistics of Job Search Behavior (JSB):

Table 1.6. Descriptive Statistics of Job Search Behavior (JSB)

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Ranking	Interpretation
I engage with professional networks or social media groups in my area.	300	4.09	0.863	1st	High
I reach out to professionals or alumni for career advice and job leads.	300	4.02	0.932	2nd	High
I attend career fairs, workshops, or networking events to expand my job search opportunities.	300	4.01	0.905	3rd	High
I use online platforms like LinkedIn or Rozee to explore job or internship openings.	300	4.00	0.975	4th	Moderately High
I seek help from university career services to improve job search strategies.	300	3.94	0.943	5th	Moderately High
I participate in career development programs or seminars organized by the university.	300	3.92	0.870	6th	Moderately High
I follow up after job or internship interviews or applications.	300	3.92	1.035	7th	Moderately High
I use mock interviews or resume reviews offered by career services.	300	3.89	0.987	8th	Moderately High
I keep my CV or resume updated.	300	3.86	1.089	9th	Moderately High
I regularly check for job or internship opportunities in my area of interest.	300	3.84	0.875	10th	Moderately High

I maintain a list of potential employers or organizations that interest me.	300	3.82	1.080	11th	Moderately High
I participate in career development programs or seminars organized by the university.	300	3.92	0.870	12th	Moderately High

The above table provides the descriptive statistics of the involvement of university students in Job Search Behavior (JSB). The results indicate that the general job search engagement is moderate high to high (3.82 to 4.09), and the mean scores between 3.82 and 4.09 indicate this fact. The behavior with the best score was "I engage with professional networks or social media groups in my area" (M = 4.09, SD = 0.863), which means that students are actively utilizing the digital networking areas to investigate career opportunities. At close the next two are the "I reach out to the professionals or the alumni to seek career advice and job leads" M = 4.02) and the "I attend career fairs, career workshops or networking events" (M = 4.01) which are showing a proactive career development approach. All other items including, "I use LinkedIn or Rozee to explore the job opportunities" (M = 4.00), "I follow-up after applying to the job" (M = 3.92) and "I seek career services" (M = 3.94) are all in the moderately high range meaning that the students are practicing job search in a structured and supportive manner. However, it is interesting that the mean score of slightly lower values was found under such areas as: "I maintain a list of potential employers" (M = 3.82) and "I keep my CV or resume updated" (M = 3.86), which allows concluding that there are still certain areas that some students need to be consistent or proactive. Overall, the results indicate that even though the level of job-seeking behavior overall among university students is moderate, it still has the potential to improve in regard to regular documentation, follow-up, and planning. Strengthening career guidance programs, providing mock interviews, and increasing active utilization of institutional career services may be included in the case of universities to increase the readiness of students to the job market further.

Discussion

The findings indicated that the results were consistent with the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent, Brown, and Hackett, 1994), according to which, self-efficacy and decision-making are linked to individual characteristics, including employability. The earlier research (Koen, Klehe, and Van Vianen, 2012; Berntson, Sverke, and Marklund, 2006) also reported the employment ability as associated

with the confidence of the students to make informed career choices. The statistics showed that students had higher perceived employability, better career decision-making ability, and good job search behaviour. Based on the USEM employability model by Yorke and Knight (2007), the models of employability revolve around understanding, skills, efficacy beliefs, and metacognition. Students with the view that they are competent and flexible were more inclined to do career planning and self-assessment. Moreover, there was a significant correlation between employability and job search behavior was significant. However, this relationship weakened as the direct relationship between employability and job search behavior was mediated by career decision-making (Savickas, 2013). Likewise, another study conducted by Zikic and Saks (2009) revealed that career decision-making totally mediated the relationship between employability and job search behavior implying that career clarity is an intervening variable between perceived employability and job-seeking behavior. It was also demonstrated that decision-making self-efficacy is related to the association between employability and job search behavior.

Conclusions

This research paper has investigated the levels of employability, career decision-making, and job seeking behavior among university students. The data proved that students with increased perceptions of employability showed more attention to career goals, confidence in decision making and more attention to proactive job search behaviors. The findings were in line with the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent, Brown, and Hackett, 1994) that proposes that self-efficacy and outcome expectations determine the career goals and behaviors of individuals. Perceived employability in this study was a concept of career related self-efficacy which indicates confidence in ability, skills and knowledge of students seeking meaningful employment. The results indicated that such perceptions related to career decision-making and job-seeking behavior. The findings were also in accordance with Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991). Employability perceptions in the research were linked with attitudinal beliefs and control beliefs that determined the intentions of the students to make informed career choices. The role of career decision-making as witnessed in the data was a significant factor along with employability beliefs and job search behaviors.

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Recommendations

The following were the recommendations of the study:

1. The results reveal that employability training may be integrated into academic curriculum by using activities like practical skills, teamwork, problem solving, and computer literacy (Andrews and Higson, 2008).
2. There is an indication that enhancing career guidance facilities could assist students to investigate career choices and enable them to be confident with career-related decision making (Nauta, 2007).
3. The paper reveals that regular workshops on self-assessment, competency evaluation based on market relevance and work-readiness could help to increase the employability of students.
4. The findings reveal that the perceived employability of the students can be in line with what the labor market wants by partnering with industry professionals (Bridgstock, 2009).
5. The evidence indicates that career self-efficacy, decision-making styles, and goal-setting training are likely to enhance the career development of the students.

Suggestions for Future Research

The following are the suggestions for future research:

1. The research was restricted to universities in Punjab that are in the public sector and may not be useful in the application to the private sector and other universities in other provinces.
2. The cross-sectional design data was used in the collection of data and self-reported measures were used in this study. These limitations could be resolved in future studies by incorporating larger samples, longitudinal designs, and other variables concerning career development.
3. Other research directions may also investigate various institutional settings, fields, and cultural settings to investigate their impact on perceptions of employability and career achievements.
4. Longitudinal research designs are also proposed to analyze the variations in the employability and career-related behaviors of students during the duration of their academic programs, which can have a more convincing causal impact.

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5. It is suggested that cross-cultural and cross-industrial research should be conducted to determine the relevance of the mediation model across other labor markets, education systems, and socioeconomic backgrounds.
6. To investigate student's in-depth decision-making and motivation towards employability and job search behavior, qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, focus groups or narrative case study are recommended.
7. Further research may investigate policy level and institutional interventions that focus on employability training and mentorship and career counseling services to determine their effectiveness in helping to narrow the gap between academic preparation and labor market needs.

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