

MBA Programs in Lahore Pakistan: A Study through the Eyes of Graduates and Employers

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DECLARATION

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.



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Signature

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ABSTRACT

This study critically reviews MBA programs offered by public and private universities in Lahore, Pakistan, through the eyes of MBA graduates and employers with the aim of assessing student satisfaction and possible gaps between student expertise and knowledge on the one hand, and employer expectations on the other. This is the first serious evaluative study of current MBA programs in Pakistan.

Rapid recent change in the economic and social environment of Pakistan coupled with major expansion in MBA courses point to weaknesses and limitations in current MBA programs. What is required is an in-depth evaluation of MBA programs and their outputs, concentrating particularly on documenting: 1) employer expectations from the business schools and their views towards MBA programs, 2) the knowledge acquired by MBA students and their particular skills to meet employer demands, 3) possible gaps between employer expectations from MBA programs and the actual skills and knowledge developed by business schools, 4) views of employers and business graduates towards MBA programs in order to help identify any possible gaps, and 5) strategies for reform of business school curricula and teaching methods.

Outcomes of such studies may provide information and recommendations to enable faculty and university leaders to develop MBA programs that are better tailored and more successfully business-oriented in order to meet more effectively employer expectations and at the same time cater for the career development needs of business graduates. This particular study sought to link theory about learning and training with practice and assessed the relevance, appropriateness, versatility and usefulness of MBA degree programs from the perspective of graduates. On the employer's side, it focused on preparedness, potential readiness, creativity and minimal ability to work alone and in-group situations.

Changes in the business and industrial environment of Pakistan in particular has provided universities and business schools with major challenges to enhance the qualifications and skills of their faculty and undertake major curricula reform. With increased competition to

attract students, some universities and business schools recognize the need for major internal changes and for closer and more effective associations with major firms. Growing competition in management education has urged business schools to reassess their mechanisms for delivering management education, the effectiveness of their collaboration with industry, the importance of curriculum renewal processes, the use of modern technology in delivering management education programs, and the role of accreditation bodies. The study assumes that success of management education depends on creating a desirable balance between graduate expertise and abilities nurtured in the universities, and the ultimate requirements of corporate employers. The closeness of this match will determine success in the accomplishment of organization goals and objectives, which result in the progress and prosperity of the business community. The study seeks to identify the gaps between student expertise and employer requirements, and suggest ways to minimize these gaps as identified by both business graduates and business managers.

In Pakistan, cooperative relationships between industry and education are not yet well established. Few business firms are involved in designing MBA programs and curricula offerings, while faculty responsible for preparing course outlines often are not in close and regular contact with the real business environment. Through empirical investigation, the thesis tries to address this issue through questions such as the following: What are the ongoing changes/trends in the particular industry being studied and how have changes affected employer expectations? What are the demands and expectations of employers from the business schools? What sorts of capacities are expected from business graduates to assist them to compete effectively in the changing global business environment?

The methodology is based on semi-structured interviews with MBA graduates and employers in the textile industry. Thirty-six MBA graduates and fifteen employers/senior managers were selected for interview using stratified random sampling techniques. Semi-constructed questionnaires were developed to guide the interview process and ensure involvement of the various dimensions of the research. The views of respondents were recorded along with their comments on issues, particularly their emphasis on specific issues both negatively and positively, using a soft version of a questionnaire available in Laptop. Related interview records and notes were also taken.

The instrument developed for the interviews with MBA graduates concentrated on four main variables: (1) reasons behind the choice of business schools, (2) perceptions of the MBA graduates about the relevance of their degree program to the job requirements in terms of knowledge and skills, (3) satisfaction of MBA graduates with their degree program, and (4) contribution of the MBA program in the personal and professional development of the graduates. In the instrument for employers, five variables were included: (1) knowledge about the work performance of MBA graduates in their firm, (2) general perceptions of employers about MBAs, (3) changes in the quality and competence of recent MBAs in comparison to MBAs of the past as observed by employers, (4) differences between MBA graduates from public universities and those from private sector universities, and (5) perceived deficiencies in current MBA programs.

The study has produced findings relevant to the further development and enhancement of business education in Pakistan, providing insights into corporate requirements for business graduates entering employment in industry and guides to possible likely future trends in business life. Significantly, MBA graduates favored curricula and teaching methods that provide greater flexibility in course delivery and content, and greater relevance to workplace needs, while employers were highly critical of most current MBA programs. At state universities, students were concerned about crowded classrooms and large student cohorts. Student choice of courses was influenced not only by the reputation of the institution and its course but by a range of other factors, including geographic location of the university, availability of hostel accommodation, recommendations from graduates and preferences of family. From the interviews with employers, it was observed that most firms wish MBA graduates to possess qualities that are consistent with those discussed in the scholarly literature concerning what MBA graduates need to know. Work ethics, a sense of dedication to their work and a high level of motivation in order to ensure that tasks are completed efficiently and effectively were seen to be of critical importance. Employers described their requirements in rank order in terms of: communication skills, knowledge of current trends, and leadership abilities accordingly. Generally, they believed that students from private-sector-universities possess greater confidence and more enterprising aptitudes, whereas graduates from state universities tend to have stronger professional knowledge.

ABBREVIATIONS

AIU	American International University
APTMA	All Pakistan Textile Mills Association
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BSc	Bachelor of Science
DLitt	Doctorate of Literature
HRM	Human Resource Management
HRD	Human Resource Development
IBA	Institute of Business Administration
LBS	London Business School
LLD	Doctor of Laws
LUMS	Lahore University of Management Sciences
MA	Master of Arts
MSc	Master of Science
MPhil	Master of Philosophy
MBA	Masters of Business Administration
PCBA	Punjab College of Business Administration
TT&AA	Teach, Test and Award Alliance
TQM	Total Quality Management