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**Social Capital and Employability in Palestine Challenges Facing  
Higher Education Case study of Palestine Polytechnic University  
(PPU) Hebron, Palestine**

رأس المال الاجتماعي والتوظيف في فلسطين، تحديات تواجه التعليم العالي "دراسة حالة  
لجامعة بولتكناك فلسطين"

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**Abstract**

This study explores the factors contributing to the unemployment for the graduates of the Palestinian Universities (Palestine Polytechnic University (PPU) as a case study). Semi-structured interviews with employed and unemployed graduates and with university representatives as well as focus groups with the last year study students have revealed a range of views about the employability of the graduates and the university course which sought to prepare them for the labor market. The analysis of the interview data revealed that traditional human capital accumulation is insufficient to deliver jobs; the human risk capital is high. Risk factors for PPU students include course admission, curriculum content and delivery and language fluency. A significant contribution of the research is the recognition that the framework of educational practices, associated with what has been termed social capital, provides an alternative and more constructive means for the analysis of the data. The findings of the research suggest the need for a university in a country such as Palestine to expand its educational responsibility by taking on a social capital curriculum whose principal feature is the establishment of

communicative links between local communities, the university and workplaces.

**Keywords:** Employability; Human capital, Social Capital.

### ملخص

تبحث هذه الورقة في العوامل المؤثرة على مستوى البطالة بين خريجي الجامعات الفلسطينية (جامعة البولتكنك فلسطين كدراسة حالة). أُجريت مقابلات شخصية مع خريجين عاملين وغير عاملين إضافة إلى ممثلين عن الجامعة من أصحاب القرار كأداة لجمع البيانات، إضافة إلى إنشاء مجموعات نقاش وتركيز مع طلاب الجامعة في السنة الدراسية الأخيرة لهم، عبر وعين تقييمهم الشخصي للأسباب وعلاقة ذلك بالجامعة والمناهج وأساليب التدريس. توصل تحليل البيانات في المقابلة أن الأثر التقليدي لرأس المال البشري غير كافٍ للحصول على وظيفة، وكما أشار البحث، إن عوامل الخطر في هذه النظرية تكمن في أنها مرتبطة بطريقة إعطاء المساقات ومحتوى المناهج وبعض التحديات الخاصة في ممارسة اللغة الإنجليزية. يوصي البحث بعد تحليل البيانات في أن إطار الممارسة التعليمية مقترنا بما يسمى رأس المال الاجتماعي قد يعطي حلاً بديلاً. سلطت نتائج البحث الضوء على حاجة الجامعات في فلسطين لزيادة مسؤولياتها التعليمية بإدخال مفاهيم وأساسيات رأس المال الاجتماعي في المناهج الدراسية من أجل الحفاظ على العلاقة التعاونية بين الجامعة والعمل والمجتمع.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** رأس المال البشري، رأس المال الاجتماعي، التوظيف والتشغيل.

### Introduction

This study explores paths by which Palestine's higher education establishments can build stronger community connections to satisfy the country's socioeconomic development and safeguard the quality of its educational level. As one of the country's most important educational resources, Palestine Polytechnic University (PPU) adds to the nation's human capital of skills and knowledge; it may also contribute to the country's social capital of informed networks and community growth through engagement with representatives of its civil society. To explore the university's contribution to capital accumulation for the country, Palestine Polytechnic University (PPU) was selected for this study on the grounds of its employment rates. Briefly, this paper progresses from an

exploration of contributing factors leading to an inability to translate all the graduates into the workplace.

### ***Research Statement***

This study contributes to the body of knowledge supporting both human capital and social capital theory. The study uses the considerable literature on these theories to build a thesis through the research. The results support strategies applicable to universities within the Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt). Thus, this research is an attempt to apply a social theory to a specific educational question.

Human capital theory states that a country's investment in education has positive returns in both its community and economic development (Schuller, 2001), whereas social capital theory's strength lies in the thesis that such investment applied to social networks both accumulates human capital for a country and also aids in sustained social and economic nation-building as a civil society (Woolcock, 2000).

Developing economies face a shared challenge in that their higher education systems, as national change agents, are not meeting the nations' labor market needs or community expectations. There is a lack of policy coordination at the juxtaposition of a quality graduate supply, community and labor market standards.

In a rapidly evolving knowledge development environment, PPU, as one of the Palestinian major determinant of professional capital, faces a challenge in its ability to define the country's future labor market needs, in addition to deliver appropriate job placements for its graduates.

The principal aim of this study is therefore to determine factors impacting the employability of PPU's graduates, focusing on four research questions:

**Q1:** What are the factors that impede the employment of PPU graduates?

**Q2:** What are the skills required for PPU graduates to gain employment?

**Q3:** What are the employability skill development activities that need to be improved in the university?

**Q4:** To what extent can PPU enhance student employability and prepare the graduates for workplace?

***Aim and Objectives of the Study***

The aim of this study is to apply to the subject matter individual and connective dimensions from human and social capital theory, and extract replicable strategies for a developing economy's higher education system. The intended outcome of this study is to achieve a critical appraisal of Palestinian higher education, supporting a risk-based capital model, and thus to reach a valuable contribution to knowledge.

A further objective of this research is to determine and examine the PPU course structures and curriculum, and the faculty's relationships and coordination with Palestinian employers and other stakeholders.

The outcomes from the interviews are filtered and analyzed according to the following prompts:

- To examine whether PPU through its program invested sufficient resources in both its human and social capital structures.
- To determine the extent to which the PPU programs meet the perceived career needs of its graduates.
- To decide whether PPU's curriculum and achievement standards are based on the demands of the labor market.
- To consider whether specific findings relating to the PPU program may be applicable to other undergraduate programs and courses within other Palestinian universities.
- To identify the characteristics of sample partnership structures applicable to the PPU, its graduates and students.

The final objectives relate to the discussion of the principles of social and human capital theory and the interpretation of the research outcomes within these frameworks.

## Literature Reviews

Employability derives from complex learning, and it is a complex concept (Yorke, 2006). Since it is widely assumed that employability includes many skills denote graduates' work readiness, gather these skills "employ-ability", with the emphasis placed more on "ability" and less on "employ"(Harvey, 2005). On the one hand, it relates to the attributes with which university graduates seek to enter the workforce. On the other hand, the term also pays attention to the nature of the employment environment for those graduates (Yorke, 2006).

While this research is located within the discourses of education, its conceptual scope demands the inclusion of the basic theoretical framework for the research: that of human capital, social capital and their interrelationships. This study summarizes and evaluates the research on human and social capital and discusses how they present means of understanding employability in a way which will enable the researcher to move beyond the restricted possibilities in existing higher education and employability research in Palestine and similar countries. In their practical applications, both forms of capital embody the connections between university courses, the employability of graduates in the labor market and the community connectivity that form the environment for these processes.

### *Human Capital, Social Capital Theories*

First, Human capital is defined, by The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD (1998) as "*the knowledge, skills, competences and other attributes embodied in individuals that are relevant to economic activity.*" Duration of schooling and levels of qualification are the standard measures. Human Capital can be developed through formal training and education aimed at updating and renewing one's capabilities in order to do well in society (Dakhli & Clercq, 2014). A recent report analyzes the Human capital world trends (capabilities) for 2014, and shows their main characteristics as being the most urgently needed: leadership, retention and commitment, training, and attainment

of and access to talent ( Global Human Capital Trends 20U: Engaging the 21st-century workforce., 2014)

The origins of human capital as a concept can be clearly traced to the work of Theodore Schultz and Gary Becker in the 1960s. In his proposition to treat education and training as an investment, Schultz's thesis shed light on skilling and training of people, which yields economic growth and social prosperity to nations. His student, Becker, built on Schultz's work and analyzed investment in education and training to identify empirical evidence regarding returns and growth from this investment to individuals, society and the nation at large. Becker also states that the higher the level of education and training provided to individuals, the more skills they acquire and as a result the stronger their relative positions are in the labor market (Schuller 2001, OECD, 1998).

*“It's not what you know, it's who you know.”* This common aphorism sums up much of the conventional wisdom regarding social capital ( Woolcock, 2000). The concept of social capital is arguably one of the most successful "exports" from sociology to other social sciences and to public discourse during the last two decades (Portes, 2000). For the majority of writers, social capital is defined in terms of *networks, norms* and *trust*, and the way these allow agents and institutions to be *more effective in achieving common objectives* (Schuller, 2001). The basic idea of “social capital” is that one's family, friends, and associates constitute an important asset, one that can be called upon in a crisis, enjoyed for its own sake, and/or leveraged for material gain. What is true for individuals, moreover, also holds for groups. Those communities endowed with a diverse stock of social networks and civic associations will be in a stronger position to confront poverty and vulnerability, resolve disputes, and/or take advantage of new opportunities.

There is, potentially, a strong complementarity between human capital and social capital (OECD, 2001). Human capital alone appears insufficient explanation for a country's economic success in the modern world. Social capital adds a valuable conceptual dimension to theories of economic development (Schuller, 2001). For example, Schuller goes on to argue that while human capital is defined in terms of the gaining of

qualifications by individuals, social capital identifies the manner by which those individuals participate in networks; an important characteristic is that they are information relationships (2001). Also Fukuyama (1995) notes that “*virtually all economic activity... is carried out not by individuals but by organizations that require a high degree of social co-operation*”.

Human capital in the socially and economically developed countries is regarded as the source from which decisions relating to service, quality, effectiveness, efficiency, and productivity are generated. For instance, the OECD states that Investments in human capital generate significant private and social benefits and human capital is increasingly central to the competitive edge of firms and nations. These findings provide strong support for the view that wisely-targeted investment in human capital formation represents a sensible public policy choice (OECD, 2001).

Woolcock (2000) argues that social and human capital play equal roles in a nation’s growth and economic development. In fact, he believes that the structural applications of a nation’s social capital and human capital interact to determine school continuation for children. He stresses that human capital must be accompanied by social capital to create wellbeing across the generations. Human and social capital are complements, however, in that literate and informed citizens are better able to organize, evaluate conflicting information, and express their views in constructive ways. Schools, which are an integral part of community life, nurture high parental involvement and actively expand the horizons of students, are more likely to help students achieve higher test scores (Woolcock, 2000).

To summarize, during the last two decades, developed countries have been investing in education and training to continue their social and economic development and to encourage lifelong learning for workers. A key indicator for economic and social growth is a nation’s development and maintenance of high quality educational and training institutions that can deliver work-based learning and skills development for its labor force (Yorke, 2006). Human capital theorists assert that education,



knowledge and skill formation for a knowledge economy are the basis for growth and community satisfaction in developed countries (Schuller, 2001). Social capital theorists, on the other hand, point to the information sharing potential of certain kinds of social relationships in the enhancement of individuals' participation in community life, education and ultimately in their own economic successes and in that of the nation (Nayaran 1999, Woolcock 2000).

### ***Higher Education in Palestine***

Educational development in Palestine is a *unique, rich, and challenging* experience; *unique* because it is one of the very few places in the world, if not the only one, where a Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) is being built from scratch, *rich* because of the eagerness and motivation of the Palestinians to learn, *challenging* as Palestine is not yet an independent country and is witnessing conflict on a daily basis. Education is a pivotal pillar of empowerment and for decades has served as major factor in ensuring Palestinian society's capacity to face and overcome crises, both individually and collectively. Palestine's overall schooling rates were the highest in the Middle East and North Africa. Despite the fact that Palestine occupies a somewhat lower economic position among medium-income states, its educational performance is nevertheless advanced among countries of the same category (UNDP 2004) (Al Subu' 2009).

Many researchers consider that the Palestinian educational system, in spite of its successful expansion to accommodate upward population trends, has not yet fully achieved its most basic task: i.e. preparing upcoming generations to meet the demands of the future. They believe the Palestinian educational system must adapt in order to expand each student's ability to learn over a lifetime to make the development of the student the central focus of the education process, rather than rote learning. At the same time, others believe that educational institutions are seeking innovation, development and capacity-building among those who have made education their career, in addition to organizing the institutional framework of education in order to meet tomorrow's challenges. (UNDP, 2004)

However, the quantitative indicators that show high educational performance do not paint a complete picture of Palestinian educational reality, unless quality of education indicators is taken into account. Such qualitative indicators (which has a clear effect on building social capital) include curricula excellence indicators, the relationship between educational institutions and society, the quality of vocational and professional training received by teachers, the quality of educational methods and capacities, and levels of creativity and rational thought achieved by the education process. (UNDP, 2004) (Nakhleh, 2005)

### ***Quality of Higher education***

Despite improving educational participation, the quality of the education system has been criticized, particularly in the sense that it does not adequately prepare graduates for the future job market. A report commissioned by UNESCO notes that the Palestinian educational system does not do enough to promote active learning, with the *Tawjihi* (final examinations for high school pupils) being a classic example of testing by rote learning. (UNDP, 2009)

Many studies, based on the examination of some quality inputs, such as student/teacher ratio, have concluded that the quality of HE in the West Bank and Gaza Strip has declined. Actually, the quality seems to be declining in most universities, and that university administrators are aware of this decline. The student/teacher ratio is increasing, the percentage of part-time teachers is increasing, and faculty are moonlighting or taking overloads. Although the situation is improving, only about half of the faculty holds doctorate degrees. The books/student and journal/teacher ratios are decreasing. (Hashweh, Berryman 2003) (Nakhleh 2005)

### ***Relevance to the needs of labor market***

How relevant is the Palestinian Higher Education System? In other words, how well does the higher education system support economic growth and enhanced individual welfare? Is the higher education system in the West Bank and Gaza Strip producing graduates that are relevant to

the needs of the labor market and to the local economy, quantitatively and qualitatively?

Relevance is the extent to which educational objectives correspond to the overall objectives, needs and priorities of the West Bank and Gaza Strip concerning the economic growth and enhanced welfare of the area. It is not easy to assess whether there are potential future gaps between the number of college and university graduates that the West Bank and Gaza produce each year, and the number of graduates that will be required to meet the needs of a growing economy due to the absence of a variety of statistics and econometric projections.

Labor outcomes in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as in all other countries in the world, are the result of many competing forces affecting labor supply and demand, although Palestinian statistics show that more education increases the likelihood of finding employment, the rates of return (RORs) to college and university graduates are either negative or close to zero. Demand for higher education graduates in the Palestinian Occupied Territories and Israel is low. Three basic issues were identified that affected the relevance of the Palestinian HE system. These include an inappropriate production in certain fields of study, irregular and un-institutionalized relationships between HE institutions and the local labor market, and insufficient data and studies on both the supply and demand for HE graduates and on their inter-linkages (Hashweh, Berryman, 2003).

Moreover, looking at the social capital aspect, despite the existence of relationships between HE institutions and the labor market on the one hand, and between HE institutions and their graduates on the other hand, these relationships are not regular or adequately institutionalized. Collecting, modeling, and analyzing labor market data and linking these to the supply of human resources in the West Bank and Gaza on the macro and on the institutional levels, allows for a better understanding of the quantitative and qualitative gaps between the supply of and demand for Palestinian HE graduates; consequently is possible to formulate interventions to bridge that gap (Nicolai, 2006).

Palestinian universities play a major role in the academic preparation of tens of thousands of Palestinian students for civic and professional life. Although the significance of this role is clearly recognized, education at the university level in Palestine now faces number of challenges. Palestinian universities must use their influence in the areas of economic, cultural and scientific research to facilitate and speed the processes of empowerment and development. Universities and their academic teams are required to become a major catalyst for the creation of a qualified professional workforce, both adaptive and innovative, which will propel the national economy forward and stabilize Palestinian institutional infrastructure.

Palestinian education at the university level is demanded to keep up with scientific and technological trends throughout the world. Universities must become financially self-sustaining, and shall maintain close ties to the Palestinian private sector to ensure that programs of study reflect the needs of society. They assume a more proactive role in the dissemination of progressive thought and cultural openness, while promoting respect for Palestinian traditional values and the national character. If universities succeed in meeting these challenges, social advancement and qualitative gains in empowerment will be assured (UNDP, 2004).

### **Research Methodology**

The research methodology of this study relies on qualitative method. In selecting research techniques to maximize outcomes from the insertion of original work in dimensions of capital theory consideration was given to the most appropriate type of methodology. Semi-structured interviewing and focus groups were deemed to achieve superior results. Semi-structured face to- face interviewing and focus groups are valued tool in examining participants' perceptions. As expounded within the literature, open-ended and semi-structured questions were formulated with supporting questions as probes. Based on specific pre-determined themes and categories related to this study's objectives, the questions were structured to explore participants' perceptions of their experiences. A guide was then developed to focus the interviewees' responses on

issues critical to this study’s aim and objectives: the PPU curriculum, community expectations and job specifications. This approach was selected to provide deeper and wider insights into the causes of the PPU graduates’ unemployment.

Data for this research was obtained from participants, placed in five categories. Key targeted participants in this study are: PPU academics; employed PPU graduates in the government sector; employed PPU graduates in the private sector; fourth year PPU students; and unemployed PPU graduates,

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis in this research seeks to describe accurately a research framework that meets conditions through human capital theory and social capital theory dimensions. Five questions were derived with the intention of opening up the extent to which human capital and social capital can explain the evident disconnection between the goals of the PPU program and the employment outcomes of its graduates. These questions were used during semi-structured interviews and the same for the focus groups to elicit information from participants: Themes and sub-themes were therefore grouped from the responses rather than from the question structure itself.

**Q1:** Describe PPU graduates employability in Palestine’s public and/or private sectors?

**Q2:** What are the Skills and knowledge required of PPU graduates to gain employment?

**Q3:** What kind of Issues - regarding transition from university to the workplace-graduates will face?

**Q4:** Are graduates supported by the university through offers of further training?

**Q5:** Are graduates prepared for Palestine’s workplaces?

Data analysis was determined inductively through multiple readings of interview transcripts and multiple interpretations of data leading to

findings connected to the research objectives. This process contributed to the development of classifications from the raw data which led to the key themes. Through multiple interpretations of the raw data, themes appear from the analysis. Relationships and links on a causal basis were also identified between the responses from different categories of participants.

The themes through the data analysis are classified as the following:

1. Characteristics of PPU Course
2. PPU Graduates' Characteristics
3. Graduates' employment prospects
4. University \ Industry Cooperation

### ***Characteristics of PPU Course***

This section inquires into the extent to which the relationship between graduates in obtaining employment relates directly to the nature of the PPU program. It seeks to identify how specific course features are explicable within a human capital framework in which the program enables students to acquire the knowledge and skills that make them employable in the labor market in Palestine. In that inquiry, however, the analysis considers the social capital significance of the PPU practices.

The four principal parts of this section comprise analyses of study participants' views of the purpose and functioning of the PPU curriculum programs; the lecturers; student experiences within the program together with PPU's support for its graduates through work based learning.

### ***University Curriculum***

Questions to interviewees on the curriculum brought strong responses. For example, the graduates' categories, working for both public and private sectors, challenged the curriculum and expressed the desire for input into future course planning by PPU.

### ***Theory and Practical Training***

The PPU program's balance between theory and practice was of importance to interviewees and the discussion was asserted upon the

divergent goals of the participant categories. Although the curriculum displayed a mix of theory and practice, and that all graduates now experience practical training from their third year, and the practical credit hours is a strategy in the university in all colleges starting with the College of Engineering and ending with the Applied Professions, the majority of participants found that theoretical input overwhelmed the practical aspects of the curriculum. Most of them called for requirement of more practical skills than theoretical knowledge and one of faculty staff asked for a *revolution* to change major aspects in the curriculum features.

### ***Curriculum Subjects***

The curriculum subjects available to students were debated avidly throughout the interviews. All participants confirmed that the curriculum is up-to-date and scientific and that all the graduates from PPU are academically strong. It became obvious through the interviews that the students and graduates were very aware of the demanding requirements of the contemporary job market. Many of them voiced their concern that the university qualifications were not enough to guarantee employability for any graduate. However, Most of them believe that in addition to a strong focus on their academic majors, they also need to work hard to improve their English language skills, and soft-skills to enhance their employability after graduation. They suggest that such skills as teamwork, presentation skills, communication skills, and problem solving skills, are necessary for success in future workplace.

### ***Lecturers and teaching methods***

Higher education should set the basic methods for self-directed learning and adapt to current demands, as well as strengthen and modernize adult education. Faculty members, as deliverers of these aims, are considered a college's most important resource. Their research qualifications, vocational and professional experience affect program delivery and success.

Although modern teaching methods such as interactive teaching and learning appear to be effective in helping students develop

communication and problem solving skills, team work, and practical skills, the majority of lecturers in the university still retain traditional teaching methods. The teacher remains a strong authority in class, and the teaching still follows the top-down model.

In general, students expressed their preference for the modern type of teaching; they also mention some difficulties related to this new teaching method. The biggest challenge revealed in some interviews is that in order to change their learning styles to adapt to more independent study, they must struggle to change themselves. Specifically, there is some confusion about where to seek advice when they have difficulties as books and other learning materials are very limited. This is unlike the West where independent learning is supported by a well-stocked library, access to subscription databases and other academic sources.

### ***PPU Graduates' Characteristics***

This section reports on the outcomes of the PPU program grounded in human capital theory. Whilst the PPU course inputs are acknowledged in 4.1 as changing and variable, study participants in this section consider the results in terms of graduates' competencies and work readiness; in particular, language fluency, information use and communication technology, and the transition from university to the workplace. The analysis establishes the extent to which the PPU program is considered by participants as relevant to the labor market to which its graduates are directed.

### ***Graduate skills' standards***

Currently, faculty members in many universities are under pressure to adapt their educational style to deliver quality outcomes to meet the expectations of employers, and broadly, contribute to a learning society (Dunne, 1999).

### ***Language Skills as a Bridging Social Capital Factor***

In this study, all interviewees selected the graduates' levels of English fluency and literacy as being an important factor to their employment. Although English is not an official language in Palestine,



the benefits attending the English language have assumed increasing importance in recent years.

The majority of graduates employed in both business sectors found they were inadequately prepared in English, having undertaken only two general English language courses, and this lack of proficiency affected not only their recruitment potential but also their ability to communicate effectively once employed. Similarly, Academics and students categories viewed PPU graduates as lacking in English language skills but they add a good hope to decrease this problem due to the new step that the university have done in adding another compulsory course titled (Effective Use of English) which includes many useful goals related to improve English language and soft skills too.

### ***ICT Skills as Human and Social Capital Factors***

From a human capital perspective, economists agree that information and communications technology (ICT or IT) and computer skills facilitate graduates' employability and career prospects, in which these skills are complementary in the generation of earnings (Tahboob, 2010). PPU presents a good opportunity for economic growth since it is the major "Poly technological" University in Palestine. From a social perspective, computer and ICT skills assist the growth of social capital and create more cohesive societies.

### ***Job-seeking Skills to Grow Social Capital***

Social capital is a valuable resource when finding employment and better job opportunities (OECDa, 2001). The earlier writers found that weak ties across different social groupings provide better chances of employment than strong ties concentrated within local groups. In fact, they stressed the need to have accurate and sufficient occupational information to achieve desired employment outcomes.

The greater majority of the graduates' participants expressed their opinion that PPU graduates did not possess a high level of job-hunting skills (except for graduates and students from the College of Administrative sciences and Informatics). Actually, they lacked

competence in writing résumés, the ability to market themselves to employers, or to present themselves convincingly in competitive interviews. Unemployed graduates found their job-seeking skills inadequate to the task. An unemployed graduate observed:

*"I believe there are certain techniques and skills in the area of job hunting which we as graduates lack."*

unemployed graduate adds:

*"The Students' Affairs Department at PPU should provide some workshops related to job interviews and job hunting."*

While the majority of the University policymakers (academics) confirms the ability of the students these years to seek assistance from the Students' Affairs Department, which is organizing a very good number of workshops and projects to enhance the soft skills He/She reported that students proactively attended events, approached employers and learned CV and interviewing techniques through the career days that the University organizes yearly with many organizations and companies. The majority of last year students (through the focus groups) agreed that efforts the PPU is investing during the last years have contributed in improving the soft skills attained by students. However, many of them criticized the Career Days as they didn't reach to their expectations.

Preparing graduates to apply for and successfully gain positions in the industry of their choice may appear to be little more than the realization of human capital principles. In terms of gaining employment, trust within the weak ties of social capital is related to the capability of an applicant able to communicate professional competence. The role of the university in social capital growth, that is, to serve its society by engaging other groups and cultures and to promote acquisition of skills and knowledge for graduates to compete in an open market, was apparently acceptable to the University, and should be considered.

As a summary of graduate characteristics, the correlations between these components and their variables cannot be assessed, but inferences can be drawn. Social capital development is associated with transparent

competition. The unemployed graduates cannot compete, are therefore disillusioned and unwilling to try to find work against what they believe are insurmountable odds. Social capital growth does not occur and there is no contribution to the nation's civil society. The graduates require job placement to acquire lifelong learning.

### ***Graduates' employment prospects***

This section examines employment prospects in the PPU programs, noting graduates' sector preferences as a contributing factor; and influences on the job market of a social capital nature, including the Nepotism. The majority of respondent categories expressed opinions on job availability in both sectors of Palestine's industry. With minor exceptions and degrees of emphasis relating to respondent categories, all participants agreed that graduates were not being employed at the expected rate, preferring the private sector for employment and facing the prospect of few jobs in the public sector industry.

### ***Private Sector Preference***

The near-universal preference for private sector employment by academics, students and graduates stems from the technological sciences and the business oriented subjects that the university offers and suits the private market. Except for the Applied Sciences Programs which are facing a problem in their ID due to lack of clarity to the philosophy of the program till now.

The formal private sector plays an integral role in hiring the PPU graduates. Private employers can gain a greater voice in skill formation through intermediate steps such as requiring a wider range of skills at the time of hiring. whereas in the public sector, graduates will not develop their skills with the same rate "beside that the majority of the specializations will not take the priority in the public sector.

As examples of such risk, a graduate employed in the private sector declared that he gained low skilled work for twelve months in working at the public sector (teaching at a local school). An unemployed graduate took the matter further:

*"As for the government sector, there are limited job opportunities, job vacancies are scarce, and the political problems between the Palestinian parties make it worse, and there are plenty of unemployed graduates. I've been unemployed for three years now."*

Competition and nepotism (Wasta) are the major problems that face every graduate looking for a governmental opportunity. Despite private sectors potential role in increasing the employability of PPU graduates, some graduates particularly those graduating from the College of Applied Sciences, still prefer to work in the public sector because of their adherence to labor laws that regulate their hiring, compensation, and firing practices.

### ***Job Market Issues***

Even though most students work hard for the transition from university to workplace, they do not appear confident about succeeding in the job market. They blame the lack of confidence on the employment process carried out in most enterprises in a way that it is unclear, not transparent, and too many applications for only one position advertised. That is why many of them, though still try hard to master needed skills, they are still not confident about themselves, and believe in luck in job seeking process. Apart from those who study engineering, most students in other disciplines worry about their future jobs. In fact, many of them are not confident to pursue a career after graduation, but maintain high stamina to pursue academic opportunities or a Masters degree in their discipline. Others said that they try not to think about seeking a job after graduation, so they can concentrate on their studies at the university. "Let it be" is what many students say about their future plans.

Overall there seemed to be some interesting differences in the levels of confidence at workplace amongst graduates. Most graduates seemed confident about their capability at work. However, they also shared the nervousness of students at the time before and after graduation. They said that after graduation they always looked for something relevant in their study disciplines, but finally found job opportunities that they never thought they would assume. They said that it always took them a while to

figure out that there are many opportunities for them to find a job which, at the surface, sound irrelevant to their study, but then, their qualification is enough to fulfill the job demands. They need sufficient time and experience to understand the job market, to expand their network, and seize the good opportunity for themselves.

### ***Nepotism (Wasta)***

The unemployment issue facing graduates in Palestine was not only an outcome of the structural conditions of the PPU and its relations with employers. Through nepotism, the employability of graduates possesses a cultural dimension too.

Nepotism, or "Wasta" (in Arabic) occurs throughout the Arabic-speaking countries. "Wasta" may be viewed as an example of strong intercultural or clan ties that in developing countries have a negative impact on social capital formation. "Wasta" angers unsuccessful candidates who have outstanding credentials, and creates dependencies among those who are less capable, yet obtain power and position due to their acquaintances rather potentials. Competition for positions and resources increases the importance of wasta. In wider society, critics condemn "Wasta" as illegal and/or inefficient. Paradoxically, these critics continue to seek and provide "Wasta" benefits. A public sector employee made this point emphatically: *"Wasta is increasing rapidly because there are fewer employment opportunities and the undergraduate numbers are increasing and this means those who are the best\* will survive and get a job and those who are weak in any specialization will get a job only through Wasta."*

Employed graduates were greatly concerned about this issue, citing many incidents of applicants being aware of who was going to be chosen for a job prior to anyone attending interviews.

### ***Industry\ University Cooperation build strong Social Capital***

This section explores views on improving communications between the university and the market, and the means to improve graduates' human capital and reduce risk.

Universities in general devote considerable resources to foster communications with their stakeholders for survival and growth. The aim of university industry cooperation is to produce future managers, business leaders, engineer, professions, who are active to play their due role in the nation's building process. In order to increase the employability of graduates, the PPU tried to utilize numerous strategies such as: establishment of the specialized centre in 2007 for the cooperation between the industry and the university. In addition, the university is currently examining the idea of increasing the workplace training hours which leads to better employability, as well as provide training of future and current industry workforce (students) through undergraduates and entrepreneurship programs (still an idea) and create business incubators for graduates. However, this type of partnership is in dire need for a clear vision and realistic action plans.

The research analysis found that a lack of communication between the university and the public and private sectors was a major obstacle confronting graduates' employability. Deficiencies were perceived in two areas that participants identified to affect the PPU employment process; an absence of employers' involvement in the curriculum design, and little coordination between the Students' Affairs Department as PPU's representatives, and government as represented by the Ministries and Municipalities to create jobs for graduates by implementing effective policy strategies.

The major missing link in PPU is between the academic research and economic development. It is a notable difference between the role of higher education and vocational education that the former institutions lead the industries because they work for future. They innovate, invent and develop new products, processes and systems with the help of new ideas and knowledge advancement. While vocational education supplies the existing system with workers and qualified professionals. In PPU, unfortunately neither there is clear or strategic studies to the labor market nor valuable evaluations for the academic programs. graduates Thus, PPU lack needed data of its undergraduates' absorption rate within the workforce.

As a summary, this research examines the causes of the dislocation between the supply of skilled graduates and the demand for skilled professionals. It establishes that, although the context for Palestinian professionals is clear, the job specifications and the qualities required of graduates to fill those positions are not clear. The study explores the views of the students and graduates of their tertiary education experiences in order to establish firmly the issues that they and the other study participants believe to contribute to high unemployment rates amongst graduates.

### **Conclusion**

Within a capital theory framework, this study considers the antecedents for unemployed graduates at Palestine Polytechnic University PPU.

The issue of graduate employability is one of the great concerns to Higher Education institutions in Palestine in general, and for the PPU in particular. Faced with the contracting and competitive job market, PPU is under pressure to ensure employability of its graduates. One of the challenges in supplying the market with qualified graduates is to identify the tools to ensure they have the relevant knowledge, skills and attributes required by industry. In addition to the well engagement and coordination between the university and these industries, The findings derived from interviews revealed that despite highly valued and systematic efforts the university is providing to its graduates, the gap between university and the undergraduate labor market is significant. Even though students are keen to learn, there are many factors that hinder students' efforts to respond to the needs of labor market. For example, the traditional learning style resulting from a top-down model of education, the theory oriented curriculum, the traditional teaching methods, assessment design and the acceptable but not challenging relation between the university and the public and private sectors.

In this research, human capital acquisition relates to the PPU course content and procedures: curriculum, teaching styles and standards, career advice, and work experience. The next step for unemployed graduates

was forestalled by human capital risk factors that were accumulating throughout the PPU course; mainly of university origin, but the lack of initiative of students and graduates also contributed to this outcome of non-employability. This in turn may be mitigated by the university's engagement with society, particularly the business sector and the government, by lobbying for acceleration in the growth of industry. However, there were course content barriers still in place that denied the acquisition of appropriate human capital.

Social capital, on the other hand, relates to relationships the university encourages its staff and students to build internally and externally. Internally, the members of the university use the characteristics of family, friends, neighbors and acquaintances to construct networks for trust and reciprocity. Trust proved to be a victim in this study, with the dense familial ties of Wasta interfering at graduation, where any available jobs were taken with other criterias besides ability. Nevertheless, social capital risk was also present externally through the inability of unemployed and under-skilled graduates to accumulate sufficient status to influence the networks of weak ties and thus locate job opportunities; and the external risk to the University of losing status in supplying unemployable graduates.

The conclusions reached by this research determine that PPU failed to meet perfectly the expectations of graduates, employers and university executive's policymakers. There was a greater investment by the university in physical capital than in human or social capital and this focus was fundamental to graduates' employment difficulties.

Before discussing the recommendations to bridge the gap, it should be noted that there are various issues that need to be addressed in order to enhance students' employability. It has been suggested that enhancing employability requires a holistic approach, integrating knowledge, work experience, and technical and interactive skills development that would reflect on how these can meet the needs of flexible organization. At PPU the enhancement should be *via* the following means:



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1. Shifting from the Traditional to a Credit-based curriculum which is directed towards the outcomes needed by industries and businesses
2. Providing education according to the specific needs of labor market
3. Increasing university support for graduates in their search for work
4. Creating links between employers and alumni
5. Integrating development of work-related skills in the curriculum
6. Establishing programs to enhance teaching and learning skills of lecturers

In this research, we have been concerned with some of the ways of how to increase the employability of the graduates at PPU, Hebron. It is clear from our findings that higher education must be well placed to respond. University disciplines are demanded to maintain their core identity and values of traditional disciplines, but they must be complemented by continuing innovation within the curriculum. PPU prides itself on being interested and tuned in to the real world and its problems. As a result, its curriculum has to be changed for a better understanding of the workplace, the employer and the students' employability. Alongside with the shift in the curriculum, PPU has to renovate its teaching methodology, building support units to help its students to be successful in both academia and professional life. In a fast changing world, even if the university is doing well, more can and must be done. Universities should enhance employability of their students by constantly raising the quality of education and by developing a strategic institution-wide approach to employability to maximize the effectiveness of their links with employers.

This research has the means within its observations and recommendations to add to future research arguments regarding capital theory. Furthermore, because of human capital's contributions to civil society through an educated population, identified risk elements may be used to reinvigorate research interest in both human and social capital theory. This research, considering capital risk, utilizes a bridging factor to open discussions on dimensions of social capital that may lead to more

robust applications of theory to define and ultimately benefit human Endeavour.

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