

Employment Possibilities for An-Najah National University's Graduates

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Abstract

This study addressed the issue of employment possibilities for students graduating from An-Najah National University. The study concluded that there is a large number of graduates which led to a gap between supply and demand in the local market. There are several reasons behind this including the fact that most graduates lack many skills such as work skills, teamwork skills, computer and internet skills, English skills and others.

Also, the fact the type of education that students receive focuses less on the practical side and makes the students unable to stay up-to-date with the latest developments in their field of study. This can be attributed to the prevalent traditional academic teaching.

Work force development in Palestine faces several obstacles especially in preparing skilled workers which would lead to develop the competitiveness in the Palestinian market. Statistics show that unemployment rates are growing inside the Palestinian work market especially among young people. Reasons behind the high unemployment rates are attributed to a number of factors including: The limited and small size of the market, its inability to cope with the growing population, the fact that the Palestinian society is considerably young, the absence of a database for the characteristics of supply and demand which would, if made available, help graduates choose their majors carefully, the fact that higher education graduates in Palestine lack adequate competency, skills and practical knowledge, in addition to the fact that most majors that are offered by Palestinian universities are considered classical, meaning that the more update and modern specializations that are mostly demanded by the market are not available to students.

Introduction:

The Palestinian graduates' suffering continues as they seek to find a job that would secure their life, but whenever they do this they run into a difficult reality where the work market is limited. While the numbers of students who graduate every year are increasing, the rates of unemployment, market weakness, lack of investment and the global financial crisis are also escalating. After graduation students begin to look for job through contacting their friends to inquire about how to start, for example to whom they should send their CVs? What are their chances of getting a job?etc.

Recently, several studies have addressed the issue of job opportunities for graduates. A 2004 study, for example, addressed the extent to which graduates of the Palestinian higher education meet the requirements of the Palestinian job market.

The study depended on the data issued by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics about the different Palestinian universities and showed that unemployment among graduates reached 25%. The study classified the unemployed into two groups: First, the unemployed who were laid off from their job which they joined after graduation; Second, the unemployed who did not have the chance to get a job at all.

Several reasons stand behind the lay off of employees such as the fact that many graduates lack the necessary skills and potentials for achieving excellence and success in their job which they seek to acquire during the transitional stage from the day of their graduation to the day they qualify for a job position.

The study's problem:

This study addresses the issue of the employment possibilities for An-Najah National University's graduates which is considered a very significant issue both for the University and the students. Getting a job after graduation is the primary reason that drives students to join the university since getting a job that matches their specialization is the way through which they can contribute actively in building their society. The University is concerned with providing the Palestinian society with qualified employees and experts in various fields; to achieve this, the University works hard to train and prepare its students to be able to engage in the work field in the future.

The study's questions and topics:

1. Do graduates get job easily after graduation, and how long they have to wait to get one?
2. Are there any courses or training programs that aim to develop the graduates' skills so that they become ready for work?
3. How does the University reinforce creativity and employment potentials for current students and graduates?

First topic:

Do graduates get job easily after graduation, and how long they have to wait to get one?

The results of a study conducted by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics to survey the conditions of higher education and vocational training graduates in 2006 have shown that unemployment rate among individuals who hold a Bachelor Degree or higher (%22.1) with a (17.9%) in the West Bank and (27.9%) in Gaza Strip.

The study's results also showed that between the years 1987-2005 graduates have searched for jobs immediately after graduation with (51.2% males) and (50.4% females) and only 31.6% were able to find a job. The study also showed that the number of graduates in late 2005 reached almost 296,000 with 182,000 in the West Bank and 114,000 in Gaza. Moreover,

approximately 60% of graduates who obtained a job said that personal relationships are the key factor to get a job. Also, 53.9% of them said the competition in interviews is the defining factor for getting a job, while 50.8% of them said it is scientific and professional excellence. Some said the reasons why they were unable to find a job was because of the limited personal relationships they have.

Concerning An-Najah graduates, An-Najah University has been trying to develop the quality of education through activating its different centers including the Community Service Center, the Continuing Education Center and the Alumni Association in order to provide the students and graduates with training that would enable them to join the work market successfully later on. The percentage of employees who graduated from An-Najah University was 18% in 2008, and 20% under-training. (Hannon and Bitar 2008).

According to Mr. Rafe' Daraghmeh, Director of An-Najah Alumni Association, said the period that graduates wait after graduation until they get a job differs according to their different specializations; engineers and accountants for example find jobs much faster than others from other study fields such as Psychology.

Second topic:

Are there any courses or training programs that aim to develop the graduates' skills so that they become ready for work?

The University's concern with its graduates should be among its foremost priorities since graduates are considered as ambassadors for the University representing it wherever they are. Being successful in the work field and equipped with the needed skills and potentials reflect positively on the University. In response to the large number of graduates every year who seek employment at the local, regional and international institutions An-Najah University has established a number of centers to contact the local society and contribute to the provision of jobs to its graduates. Among these centers are the following:

An-Najah Alumni Association:

An-Najah Alumni Association was established to follow up on graduates, train them and help them join the job market through contacting the different institutions, ministries, education and higher education offices and others to allow graduates find suitable jobs and at the same time reduce unemployment rates in the country. The Alumni Association at An-Najah University consists of a number of sections including the Training and Guidance Section which aims to train graduates and guide them to know the needed administrative and professional skills. This section also works on offering different training courses in a variety of fields to shape the personality of the graduate. According to a 2008 study around 184 graduates were successfully employed since the establishment of the Association, 99 of whom were employed by institutions outside Palestine such as the United Arab Emirates and the Saudi Arabia, in addition to 85 inside Palestine.

Among the courses offered by An-Najah Alumni Association are the following:

Be Ready to Work course which aims to train the graduate on how to write the CV, prepare graduates to undergo job interviews, training on correspondences in Arabic and English, archiving files as soft and hard copies, time management, introduction to job law, the importance of dress and communication, how to maintain good relationships with managers and colleagues, the importance of English in the workplace and other topics.

Your Computer at Work course:

This course seeks to introduce the students to the basic concepts concerning computer skills, programs and software that students need at the workplace such as Microsoft Office, the internet, the email, graphic design software, Photoshop, Al-Shamel, Access and others.

Third topic:

Providing students with actual indications about the career future for the various academic specializations, reinforcing the partnership between the University and the different governmental and public institutions, and teaching the students on how to write their CVs in addition to the effective job seeking methods are considered among the most important issue that universities must consider in order to produce highly qualified graduates who meet the requirements of the local job market.

It is worth mentioning that the steps toward preparing the students for the post-graduation stage must begin from the early stages of the students' university study through providing them with consultancy and courses. This will help graduates contact the local institutions and companies and increases their awareness regarding the orientations of the job market and the most wanted specializations.

By knowing exactly what the job market needs, graduates will be able to select the job position they see fit their qualifications and interest. To this end, the Training and Guidance Section works on guiding fresh students towards choosing the most suitable study field through special brochures.

There are a number of things a student must consider before he / she chooses a certain major including: His / her personal interest, family guidance, high school average, his / her family's financial situation, how much a certain major is needed in the work field and the job possibilities that a given specialization allows. The Section also guides students on how to contact employee-seeking companies, how to write CVs and how to be prepared for job interviews. The University not only provides training for students, but it also offers special courses that would help them in the post-graduation job-seeking stage such as English in the Workplace course for engineering and economics students.

Results:

- 1- Unemployment among graduates is attributed to a number of factors some of which are related to the characteristics of the Palestinian higher education, while others are related to the characteristics of the local job market.

The reasons related to the Palestinian job market are the distortions caused by the Israeli occupation policies over the last three decades.

- 2- The process by which students choose their university major is not based on a clear goal or long-term objective but rather on the idea of just getting a university degree regardless of any future considerations.
- 3- The inability of graduates to work or the inability to remain in his / her position due to a number of factors including his / her weakness in English (writing and speaking), weakness in computer skills, internet and other job-related skills.
- 4- The use of unfair ways such as cronyism, nepotism and personal relationships in hiring graduates.
- 5- Graduates lack adequate and enough practical experiences and skills due to the limited number of practical training opportunities during their university study and post-graduation stage.

Recommendations:

- 1- Guide the graduates and students who are expected to graduate in the job-seeking process and to work on employing them as possible.
- 2- Work on providing the institutions and bodies that interested in employing the University's graduates with the graduates' information, as well as the information of those who are expected to graduate.
- 3- To work on devising a mechanism to follow up on the employment of the University's graduates at the institutions that requested the graduates' data.
- 4- Employers must consider objective standards when selecting candidates for the available positions.
- 5- The University must take into consideration the training of students during their study and familiarize them with the institutions that can employ them for a training period. This would enable the students to gain experience before they graduate so that they become ready to join the workplace. By training students, the University can get feedback that is essential in developing the curricula and extra-curricula programs.
- 6- Offer consultancy and guidance programs in the school stage so that students can choose the field of study that can qualify them immediately to the work field as soon

as they graduate. This is combined with the follow up and guidance that students receive during their university study and the communication that the University maintains with the economical, social and cultural institutions to provide job opportunities for the graduates.