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***BRIDGING THE SKILLS GAP: ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCE
MANAGEMENT IN ALIGNING UNIVERSITY EDUCATION WITH
INDUSTRY REQUIREMENTS IN PAKISTAN***



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Abstract

Pakistan's growing Information Technology sector requires graduates who can combine technical knowledge with practical, communicative, cognitive, and professional capabilities. However, many graduates enter employment with limited workplace exposure and experience difficulty applying academic knowledge to real organizational demands. This study explored the key skills gaps among recent university graduates entering Pakistan's IT sector and examined how integrated Strategic Human Resource Management practices address those gaps and strengthen workplace readiness. Strategic Human Resource Management Theory served as the sole theoretical foundation. An interpretivist philosophy and exploratory qualitative design were adopted. Data were collected through 19 semi-structured interviews with seven HR professionals, seven early-career graduates, and five academic stakeholders selected through purposive sampling. The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis. Four themes emerged: the shifting location of the skills gap; the polarization of HR intervention capacity; university-industry collaboration as ceremonial rather than substantive; and the performance management disconnect. The findings indicated that technical gaps were present but were generally considered easier to address than deficiencies in professional communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, client interaction, independent judgment, adaptability, and workplace behavior. Larger and more mature organizations used structured recruitment, onboarding, training, mentoring, and performance-development systems, whereas smaller organizations often depended on reactive hiring and informal learning. Integrated HR practices were most effective when supported by senior management, line managers, adequate resources, and meaningful university-industry collaboration. The study concludes that HRM can serve as a conditional strategic bridge between university preparation and workplace capability. It recommends project-based learning, structured internships, competency-based recruitment, formal onboarding, continuous mentoring, developmental feedback, and sustained collaboration between universities and IT organizations.

Keywords: skills gap, Strategic Human Resource Management, graduate employability, workplace readiness, IT sector, thematic analysis, Pakistan

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