

THE COMPATIBILITY OF BUSINESS CURRICULUM AT PALESTINIAN UNIVERSITIES WITH THE ACTUAL DEMANDS OF THE LOCAL MARKET AS PERCEIVED BY BUSINESS GRADUATES

Usamah Shahwan

Abstract:

The research came in response to the growing concern among both academicians and practitioners in recent years regarding the relevance of the business curriculum taught in Palestinian universities to the actual demands and skills needed in the local market. This discrepancy negatively impacts employment opportunities for business graduates as well as their job performance. The researcher sought to find out whether the core business courses which the business majors in Palestinian universities are required to take, provide the students with the necessary skills to work successfully in the Palestinian local market. For this purpose, a study was designed, based on both a qualitative and quantitative analysis. Responses were collected from a number of Palestinian business managers using, in-depth interviews, and from a sample of business graduates from five Palestinian universities who have worked in Palestinian private enterprises during the last ten years. Content analysis of the material found in some major textbooks taught in core business courses was carried out to determine the content validity of the curriculum. For the quantitative part of the study a structured questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 125 employees in various for-profit enterprises. A variety of statistical tests were employed to analyze the results of the quantitative part of the research. Findings suggest both business managers and graduates perceive a mismatch between the business curriculum and the job demands of the Palestinian local market.

Keywords: *mismatch, curriculum, market demands, skills, textbooks, training*

1. Introduction

In light of innumerable changes in technology, economy, politics and lifestyle in recent years there is a growing need all over the world to emphasize the match between workers' qualifications and job requirements. This need has been voiced by many analysts in both the United States and Europe. A mismatch of skills and job openings has been considered as a possible contributor to unemployment in America as was the case in England during the eighties of the last century (Whitehouse, 2010). The match has also been considered as a major challenge for member states in the European Union which should pay more attention to the "interplay between the educational systems and the labor market"(Anderson, 2010).

The global economic crisis and the increasing constraints facing the Palestinian economy, make it imperative for local universities and other educational institutions to produce graduates whose competencies match the requirements of the job market. This will not only mean an efficient use of human resources but it will also enhance the performance and competitiveness of the Palestinian enterprises that face a world characterized by an intensive regional and global competition in all spheres

The establishment of business departments in Palestinian universities during the mid-seventies and early eighties of the last century was practically a response to the rising demand for business majors due to the increasing number of business enterprises whose number continued to rise despite the destructive impact of the two uprisings on the Palestinian economy. However, the design of the business curriculum in all the local universities has not been formulated on the basis of a strategic plan incorporating the various variables in the Palestinian environment and the volatile labor market demands, but was rather a copied version of the curricula applied in foreign universities which operate in somewhat different environments. Courses taught in the faculties of

business administration at Palestinian universities have been borrowed en masse from either American business schools (Bethlehem, Bir-Zeit, Arab American University) or from Arab universities especially Egypt and Jordan (An-Najah, Al-Kuds, Hebron etc). It is important to take into account that the business curricula in Western industrialized countries have been designed to address issues pertinent to a service, high tech and information based economy.

In spite of the relative improvement in the economy of the West Bank during the last few years, the rate of unemployment is still high especially among university graduates. Business enterprises operating in the Palestinian territories employ a significant number of graduates from business faculties of the local universities. However, there is a perception shared by many observers here that following graduation and employment, many business graduates feel a deep sense of alienation on the job and start to question the relevancy of what they have studied in college to the demands of their jobs. Appointees express disappointment at the lack of compatibility between what they learn at college and the job requirements they are asked to perform. This reflects a waste of resources that have to be addressed. Students majoring in the field of business administration need to know better how the market system works within.

Over the years, the researcher, who is a business professor, was approached by former students from different local universities asking that something be done to modify existing curriculum and tailor it to the actual needs of the Palestinian economy. Furthermore, informal probing carried out by the researcher indicates that this particular issue has never been researched in Palestine despite its crucial importance.

Importance of the research

The research sheds light on a problem that is rarely addressed by development experts in the developing countries i.e the mismatch between local universities' curricula and community

needs. This makes the majority of college graduates in these countries especially in business and management fields ill prepared to meet market demands, thus minimizing their chances to find suitable employment. Local economy in Palestine is dependent to a large degree on a network of small businesses in which about 91 percent are micro-businesses employing 1-2 individuals. Business courses taught in the local universities are tailored to fit the Western Industrialized economic model of large and medium-size enterprises and corporate management. This gap has negative implications for the prospects of economic development in the country. Research results may sensitize policy makers in the higher education sector to the importance of addressing the issue more seriously.

Research problem

The mismatch between business curriculum in Palestinian universities and local market demands has serious implications for employment opportunities for business graduates. Most of the courses taught are borrowed from foreign universities and have been designed to respond to the requirements of advanced industrial and service economies of welfare states. The skills these courses are intended to impart do not always fit the needs of the small business enterprises operating in the local markets. This lack of compatibility negatively impacts organizational performance and reduce operational efficiency. The discrepancy also undermines recruitment practices in the private sector, making the objective of job-ability fit difficult to realize. This places the management of many Palestinian enterprises at a weak competitive position with rival foreign firms in the region. Furthermore, a substantial number of business graduates prefer to emigrate in order to seek better work opportunities in foreign markets further stripping the Palestinian society of a resource that is vital in building a viable state.

Theoretical framework

The issue of compatibility between academic programs and market requirements evokes an old classical debate between the idealists and the pragmatists regarding whether knowledge is sought for its own intrinsic value or for its utilitarian benefits. In other words, should the business curriculum, for example be designed to respond exclusively to the particular needs of the economy or to satisfy the human thirst for knowledge? The controversy spills over to the status and role of the business school. Should the curriculum emphasize academic rigor or relevancy? The answer to this question has a very important implication in the formulation of academic and educational strategy in a country.

The world today is impacted by changes in the economic and political scene characterized by more depletion of natural resources and recurrent economic crises. The new reality calls for a reassessment of the relationship between academic training and the requirements of a volatile global market. Business schools have been tremendously affected by changes in the economy which made funding from central government more and more difficult. The result was a shift towards more relevance in order to secure more funds from the private sector. Zell (2001) articulated the new trend pointing out that business schools became “market-

driven” and started to perceive students as customers. In his judgment, the executive programs started by business faculties to provide much needed funding have downgraded the academic content of the curriculum to make the training programs easier and more attractive to participants. The transformation of the role of the student from learner to customer has had significant implications in terms of the classroom environment, relationship between teacher and student and more importantly in relation to the academic curriculum.

Jurse and Tomnic (2008) stressed the importance of taking seriously the requirements of the labor market when designing business curriculum, particularly during the early process of academic program development, to provide graduates with the necessary skills which help them perform better on their jobs. Calls for redesigning higher education curricula in order to align it with today’s local and global market demands have been voiced in a number of developing countries and major policy changes in the area of educational reform have been carried out in Latin America during recent years. In Chile “educational reform has figured prominently in the social policy agenda” Valverde (2004). Brewer, Harrigea and Mendonca (2006) proposed a “continuous improvement process framework in developing a comprehensive curriculum model’ in which each stakeholder is involved in defining curriculum objectives.

Many developing countries including Palestine face the challenge of aligning university curriculum with job openings as a strategy to minimize unemployment among college and university graduates plaguing these countries. In a keynote speech at the Biennial conference of the International council of Universities of St. Thomas Aquinas, January 26, 2011 President Aquino of the Philippines noted “the mismatch between job openings and courses offered in the universities and hinted at taking certain measures to strengthen ties between employers and higher institutions”(Official Gazette of the Philippines, 2011)

Job performance, however, is not exclusively dependent on the course contents to which a business graduate has been exposed to in his/her years of study. Competency is a product of various factors including cognitive, technical and interpersonal skills besides the proper match between personality and the type of job. But a significant number of these skills especially the technical and interpersonal ones can be learned through a variety of business and management courses. Content validity which describes the relevancy of the program contents to the actual skills needed in the market is of crucial importance in the future success of the job applicant.

Probably, the most serious weakness in the curriculum is pedagogical. There is generally an overemphasis on memorizing material and shunning innovative and “unorthodox” ideas. It is a chronic problem in the Arab educational system that engulfs both schools’ and universities’ approach to knowledge. Innovativeness has been a major factor behind the fame and success of business enterprises especially high-tech firms in the industrialized countries

2.2 Literature review

Almost all the research dealing with the academic curriculum in Palestine, and carried out by experts commissioned by the Palestinian Ministry of Education, including those of the business administration programs, focused on evaluating the feasibility of these programs and their relative academic standards vis-à-vis similar programs in a sample of international and regional universities. An independent desk study, entitled “Professional business leadership development program: needs assessment study of the local MBA programs” which was sponsored by the Welfare Association in Ramallah (January 2010), assessed the quality of the MBA programs offered in four Palestinian universities and the performance of the MBA graduates in the local market. It also sought to gauge the degree of satisfaction felt by employers towards employees carrying MBA degrees from Palestinian universities and working in their firms. The study recommended that the MBA programs in the universities under investigation should be restructured to respond to the needs of the local, regional and international markets. The study, however, was restricted to the MBA programs. The undergraduate business programs and their relevance to the market requirements were not included. A field research was conducted in Jordan for Al-Manar project at the National Center for Human Resource Development in Amman (2006) with the aim of identifying employable skills that determine the successful entrance of Jordanian university graduates in the labor market. The study revealed-among other things, that “leadership skills have the most significant correlation with graduates’ employment sector”. The researchers also found that there were significant differences in perception between employees working in the private sector and their counterparts employed in the public sector. For example, teamwork skills were rated as more useful for those working in the public sector. However, the study did not adequately address the relationship between the academic curriculum, particularly in the business faculties and labor demands.

The findings of a study which aimed at investigating the gap between required managerial skills and recruitment and selection practices adopted by large Palestinian enterprises indicated that recruitment and selection techniques applied by these organizations did not correspond to the skills required for the advertised jobs (jaabari 2010). The study, however, failed to link the sought- after skills to the nature of courses taught in the business curricula of the Palestinian universities. The match between business curriculum and market demands received much greater attention in the United States and some other countries. A number of studies were published in leading business journals during the past twenty years. Among these were Walker’s and Black’s (2000) entitled, “Reengineering the undergraduate business core curriculum: aligning business schools with business for improved performance” The authors proposed a process-centered model of undergraduate business education in line with the trend for process-managed organizations. In their view, the approach “provides a vehicle for the development of interdisciplinary faculty, encourages attention to the need for change, and provide a basis for aligning faculty and institutional rewards system”.

Another study by Finkle and Deeds (2001) under the title” Trends in the market for entrepreneurship Faculty 1989-1998” focused on the growing popularity of entrepreneurship programs in the schools of business and management during 1989-98 in the United States and the dramatic increase of entrepreneurship positions by 253 percent. The researchers noted that there was more recognition of the importance of the field in the economy.

An important research in this area was done by Divina Edralin (2010) of De Lassalle University in Manila, Philippines under the title “The Outlook of the Business Administration Courses and its Graduates in Philippines Amidst Global Challenges”. Her findings carried a very optimistic outlook for the future of business administration in the Philippines in light of the increasing market demands, labor supply of business graduates and other macro-economic factors. However, the researcher stressed the need for securing relevancy and quality of the business administration courses to make it more compatible with the existing market demands.

A revealing message from Yasuyuki Nambu, the CEO of the Japanese PASONA GROUP to the shareholders of the company, a leader in Japanese employment and staffing (February 2011) highlights the consequences of the mismatch issue. Nambu writes:

There are of course many reasons why an individual is unable to find work. The most common involves a mismatch between the type and nature of work and the aspirations of the job seeker. When considering the difficulties that university students face when seeking employment, I believe there are three core areas of mismatch. The first relates to an information mismatch. The second is an education or training mismatch. The business environment has experienced volatile change. Compared with traditional skills and abilities the third mismatch revolves around individual awareness and by association commitment

Other researchers addressed a new dimension in the issue of re-designing business programs. Their concern was focused on the spiraling cases of corruption and unethical practices in today’s markets. In an article dealing with this problem, Maetz and Sharp (2004) suggested that the core business curriculum include courses on ethics and that the courses become an integral part of business academic program in business schools. Actually, this call for the inclusion of ethical training as part of the business curriculum goes back to the late eighties (Hosmer, 1988).

Research questions

1. Is the business curriculum in the Palestinian universities perceived to be relevant to the market requirements in the country?
2. Does the type of academic education provided for the students majoring in business administration including finance and accounting equip the students with the necessary analytic skills to understand the market, and perform successfully on managerial positions in business enterprises?
3. Is there a significant cause-effect relationship between

the kind of management and business education which the business majors receive in their schools and their failure to find suitable jobs in the market?

- Are there differences in perception among respondents related to gender, years of experience, type of job and area of business specialization: accounting, finance and marketing

Research Design and Methodology

The research comprised two stages: qualitative and quantitative. The first stage was exploratory. It aimed at gaining deeper insight into the problem. At this preliminary stage, the researcher carried out a critical review of the available secondary data including published and unpublished materials, statistics and official documents relating to the issue. Methods of collecting data included informal conversations with university professors and structured interviews with local CEOs who shared the same concern voiced by the researcher. A small focus group of Bethlehem University graduates working in different business enterprises in the West Bank was conducted with the purpose of exploring the different dimensions of the problem. In addition, the researcher carried out some content analysis of a number of textbooks which are required readings in most business schools in Palestine to see how much relevant the texts to the actual conditions in the country. These books were in the area of consumer behavior, human resources entrepreneurship and marketing.

The quantitative (conclusive) stage followed a descriptive design and employed the empirical tool of collecting field data. For this purpose a structured questionnaire was designed. The questionnaire was divided into four parts including both demographic and basic information. The target group consisted of employees in private for profit organizations and also those who are self-employed. To be included in the sample, respondents must be graduates from business faculties at local Palestinian universities after the year 2000. Employees currently working in non-profit NGOs or government must have worked for at least six months in a private-for-profit Palestinian enterprise, in order to be eligible

Sampling

In view of the absence of a credible data base covering the number, specializations and characteristics of business graduates and their distribution in the Palestinian market, it was extremely difficult to use random sampling techniques. A snowball sampling technique was adopted by the researcher to both locate and interview respondents. According to this technique, an initial group of respondents was randomly selected and were asked to identify others who belonged to the target population of interest. The process effectively resulted in reaching 131 individuals working in the West Bank. Gaza was excluded for security reasons. After reviewing the filled out questionnaires, six questionnaires were dropped for illegibility, inconsistency or incompleteness.

Figure 1- Distribution based on gender

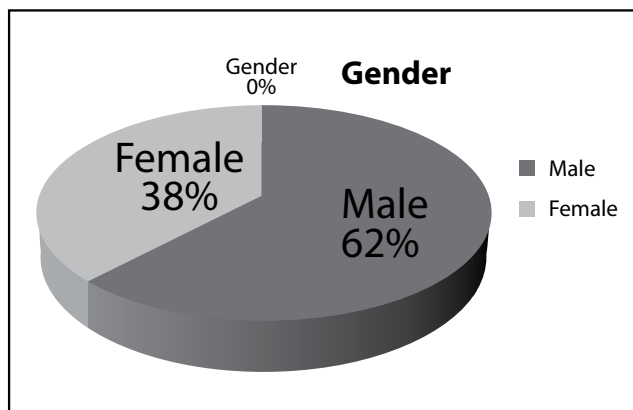


Figure 2 Distribution based on area of specialization

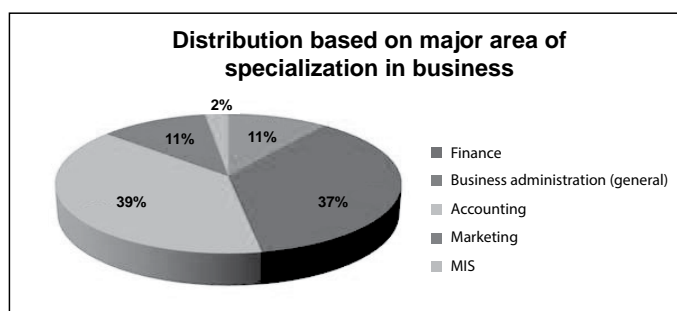


Figure 3

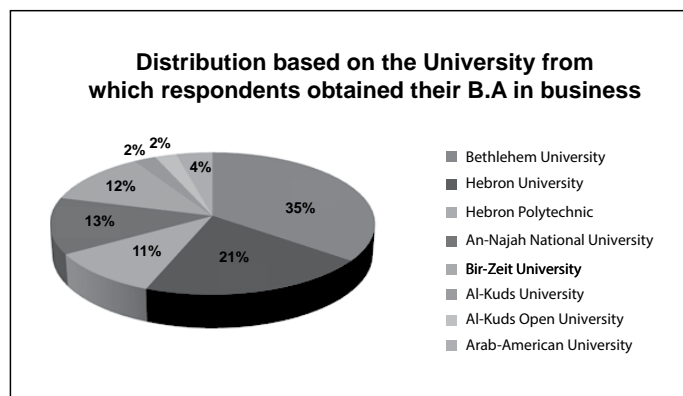
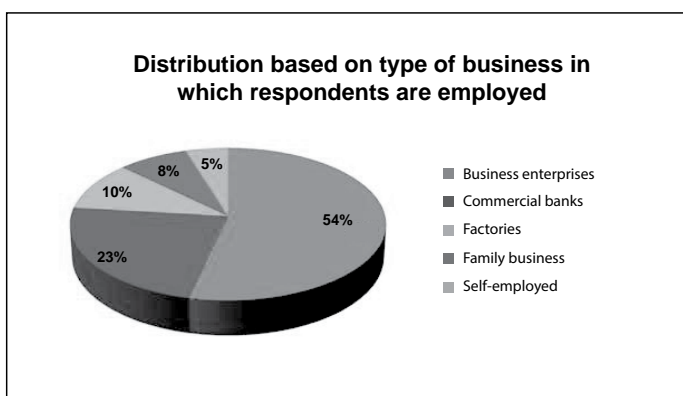


Figure 4



Research findings

Qualitative results

A. Focus group

Discussions held with members of a focus group comprising business graduates working in the private sector confirmed the initial assumption of the researcher, i.e. that a job-ability misfit exists, but in their assessment the extent of the gap between the curriculum taught at business schools and the labor demands is influenced by the type of job. For example, the gap is not significant in accounting, where, according to their opinions, the curriculum provides an acceptable background for performing the basic tasks of the job. However, members of the group offered the following suggestions:

1. Other useful courses that must be added to the curriculum includes office management, proposal writing and project management
2. There should be a stronger linkage between business and IT. Students should be exposed to computerized programs and software necessary in the field of finance.
3. More psychology courses should be added especially in the area of consumer and organizational behavior
4. In light of what they perceived as discrimination against women laborers in the market, university female students should be given some training aimed at empowering them and giving them more self confidence to be able to perform more successfully in the local market.

B. Interviews with business managers

The interview part of the exploratory stage aimed at identifying both the actual demands of the Palestinian labor market and performance of business graduates on the jobs. There were five interviewees holding managerial positions in five private organizations. One is the chief of operations at the Arab Bank-Bethlehem branch. Three were factory managers, one of whom is the HR director of the factory and the fifth is a manager of an insurance company branch in the Hebron area. The five organizations employed a number of business graduates in different jobs.

Although the perspectives of the interviewees were not identical, there was an agreement among the five interviewees that a significant mismatch existed between what the graduates had learned in business schools and actual job requirements. However, almost all of them were not deeply troubled by the mismatch since, in their view, the situation could be remedied through training and coaching. But most interviewees expressed the view that the lack of compatibility, to a certain extent, negatively impacts, performance on the job. There were differences among interviewees regarding the courses that graduates should have taken before joining the labor market. The differences stemmed from the nature of the work in which the business enterprise was involved. For example, the bank manager stressed the importance of commercial legal training and bank management: the two courses are assigned peripheral status in the business curriculum. Three company managers, on the other hand, regarded interpersonal and communication skills as being critical for achieving success on the job. English language proficiency figured prominently in the list of requirements which business graduates need in order to compete successfully in the local market. More practical training was also demanded by one interviewee.

To summarize, the courses that need to be either added or emphasized in the curriculum are behavioral courses and English language in addition to providing more time for practical training which in the view of the majority are not given adequate time in the business schools. All interviewees, however, stressed the need for building bridges between the private sector and business schools in the local universities.

A careful assessment of the responses of both the focus groups and company managers reveals that the two groups agree on the following points:

1. There is a mismatch between the business curriculum adopted in local Palestinian universities and market demands
2. There is a need to provide more courses in organizational and consumer behavior necessary for acquiring interpersonal and communications skills
3. Stronger relations should be built between the private sector and business schools in local Palestinian universities.

C. Content analysis of textbook material

A critical analysis of textbook material found in core courses in management, human resources, entrepreneurship, marketing, advertising, selling, strategic management, organizational and consumer behavior taught at the undergraduate level in business schools in Palestinian universities reveals that the contents are heavily contextual. They address issues and concerns that are more relevant to post-industrial and service economies with a solid corporate culture and flourishing small business sector. The textbooks target readers who are supposedly market-driven consumers and whose buying behavior is influenced by capitalist values. Notwithstanding the impact of increasing globalization on consumer behavior in developing countries, local cultural values and attitudes are still strong. The area in which the sharp contrast in value orientation appears is in the field of consumer behavior. Michael Solomon's textbook "Consumer Behavior (2009)," a required text in both Bethlehem and Bir-Zeit universities projects lifestyles and patterns of consumption that are almost exclusively Western. Lifestyle is not defined by tradition or class as in the case of many developing societies but rather by the products and services a person buys. In chapter six, under the title: "Personality and Lifestyle" one finds the following sentence (page 255) "lifestyle defines a pattern of consumption that reflects a person's choices on how to spend her time and money". In the same page the author defines a person's social status as follows " In a modern consumer society, however, people are freer to select the set of products, services, and activities that define themselves and, in turn, create a social identity they communicate to others". Courses offered on entrepreneurship in business schools are potentially the most useful in the curriculum in view of the fact that the fragile economy of the Palestinian Territories is entirely dependent on small and medium enterprises. However, the literature as exists in textbooks on the topic, mirror the socio-economic conditions that prevail in Western industrialized countries especially the United States. Here again the contents in textbooks are highly contextual. The classic personality of the entrepreneur as an individualistic, achievement-oriented character (Lambing & Kuehl 2003) is rarely found in the Palestinian context. Nor does the material

on entrepreneurship address the numerous constraints encountered by the Palestinian entrepreneur and small business owner. The major challenge of the Palestinian entrepreneur is not opportunity recognition but rather the scarcity of start-up funds and lack of government support. The kind of public-private partnership essential for the development of a viable small business sector unfortunately does not exist in the Palestinian territories. Furthermore, the definition of small and medium enterprises in terms of the number of employees and the size of capital is different in the United States. Almost 92 percent of enterprises operating in Palestine are micro-businesses employing one or two workers each. Most of these enterprises are family owned. The problems that such very small businesses encounter are not sufficiently addressed in textbooks on entrepreneurship that form an integral part of the business curriculum in Palestinian universities.

The other field in which content validity is missing is the human resources management which is a required core course in all business administration departments in Palestine. In addition to the fact that few business organizations have functional human resources units, the contents of the HRM textbooks incorporate concepts, theories and practices that reflect the experiences of large corporations in the areas of recruitment, selection, training, employee performance and development. The concepts of job enlargement and job enrichment, competency-based job analysis as well as the issues of single parents recruitment and substance abuse in the workplace (Dessler (2011) are not relevant issues in the Palestinian context. This classic textbook contains material on very advanced and sophisticated recruitment and selection techniques including personality tests, management assessment centers and vestibule training which reflect the state of the art of human resources management. However, at the practical level, they offer little value for the undergraduate student in terms of their applicability in Palestinian business organizations. There is also a significant discrepancy between labor laws covering the private sector in Palestine and the labor laws in the United States and European countries. There are differences in matters of employment, compensation, equal opportunities, discipline, labor relations and others. In reality, with few exceptions, human resources management in the Palestinian private sector is still in the “archival” stage of development which is similar to the status of personnel administration in the United States during the forties and fifties in the last century. Major functions of the human resources department are incorporated into the role of the chief executive officer of the firm.

Quantitative analysis
Validity of the Study Tool

The structured questionnaire was validated through review by a group of referees and expert arbitrators, who provided some comments on the tool. These comments were incorporated into the final version of the questionnaire. On the other hand, the validity was also measured statistically by factorial analysis, in order to examine the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. Findings indicate that all the study items combined measured the perception among business graduates working in the Palestinian for-profit sector regarding compatibility between business curriculum

and market demands in light of the theoretical framework which the tool of study is based upon.

Reliability of the Study Tool

To test the reliability of the questionnaire, it was tested by calculating the internal consistency of the questionnaire items using the Cronbach Alpha Formula. Findings indicated that the questionnaire with its different dimensions was reliable (0.63).

Following data collection, data was reviewed in preparation for processing it into the computer; Lickert scale was used i.e. verbal answers were transformed into numbers with the following categories: strongly agree 5, agree 4, neutral 3, disagree 2, strongly disagree 1. In order to carry out the required statistical procedures for the data percentages, means, standard deviations and graphics were used. In addition, the following statistical tests were employed. t. test, One way analysis of variance, Cronbach Alpha, Factor Analysis, and figures, using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS).

The findings from the representative sample of employees tend to substantiate the views of both focus group members and business managers interviewed. Regarding the first hypothesis, sample members perceive a mismatch between the curriculum and market demands. However, their perception of the mismatch is more moderate than that of the interviewees as shown in the table below

Table (I) Perception among respondents regarding compatibility between business curriculum and market demands

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Perception	125	2.92	0.29

With respect to the second hypothesis which assumes that the specialized education provided by the business departments does not adequately provide the graduate with the necessary skills required in the market. The answer to two critical questions in this regard confirm the hypothesis. In response to the question of whether serious technical deficiencies with negative practical implications for performance, exist in the business curriculum, the answer was affirmative with a mean of (4.16) and a standard deviation of (0.689). Additionally, there appears to be a strong perception among sample members that the curriculum used in local business faculties reflect job demands in the markets of Western Industrialized countries more than those of developing countries; (mean 3.86) and a standard deviation of (0.992)

The third hypothesis stating that there are no significant differences in perception among respondents regarding compatibility between business curriculum and market demands related to gender, university, type of job and area of specialization was confirmed,

Quantitative analysis of results reveals other interesting findings. There is nearly a consensus among respondents that stronger relations should be built between private business and faculties of business administration in Palestine: mean (4.21) and standard deviation (0.699). There is also a strong support for inviting business leaders to participate in designing the curriculum with the academic staff of the business faculties (mean 4.14) and standard deviation (0.790).

Discussion and Conclusions

1. The findings indicate a near consensus among business graduates working in Palestinian for-profit enterprises (irrespective of their specific areas of specialization) that there is a mismatch between the curriculum adopted in the business faculties in Palestinian universities and the specific demands of the local job market. This perception has been substantiated by the responses of a sample of business owners and managers who were interviewed for this purpose.
2. The majority of respondents believe that they were not adequately trained in their business faculties to perform satisfactorily in the labor market
3. There were no significant differences in the perception of sample members regarding lack of compatibility between the business curriculum and job demands related to gender, area of specialization, type of job or the university they graduated from
4. There is a problem of content-validity in the core courses taught in the business faculties. The textbook material in a number of courses are contextual reflecting the needs, demands and priorities of the markets in Western industrialized societies especially the United States
5. There is a need for more synchronization between the business curriculum in the Palestinian universities and the local job market
6. There is a pressing need for more training and practical experience for students majoring in the field of business administration in all Palestinian universities.

Research Limitations and suggestions for further research

The research has certain limitations that should be understood within the political and economic context of the Palestinian Territories which are under Israeli occupation. To conduct a comprehensive field study under the present circumstances has never been an easy task. Furthermore, the absence of a solid data base on the number and characteristics of university graduates has made the choice of a random sample extremely difficult. Therefore, the researcher had to resort to convenience sampling in the form of a snow ball technique. Additionally, in light of the security issue and roadblocks, the researcher was able to reach only a limited number of business managers for interviews and comments. These managers were concentrated in two areas, Bethlehem and Hebron. Nevertheless, the researcher believes that the results of the study can be a good start for further research on this important issue. Furthermore, a comprehensive review of the business curriculum in Palestinian universities should be conducted by the academic staff and experts with the aim of identifying deficiencies and irrelevancies regarding the material taught to business majors in all areas of specialization. This should be coupled with a field study of the Palestinian labor market

must be launched to determine the needs of the market in terms of the skills required to perform satisfactorily in the workplace. Promoting more cooperation between academia and the local business sector in Palestine in the form of exchange of opinion and advice regarding the needs of the local market. Joint projects between the two sectors should be encouraged.

A re-designed curriculum model

The suggested model represents a two-pronged approach comprising two categories of programs. The first category includes core or 'rock bottom' courses which constitute the major principles of the discipline that are taught in other international business schools around the world. The second category includes specific courses that are tailored to the needs of the local and regional market. Identifying these specific needs should depend on a comprehensive survey conducted by the universities in cooperation with representatives from the private for-profit sector. The emerging trends in the global market should also be taken into consideration when designing the specific courses to prepare graduates face the challenges of a highly competitive global markets. The new model should be characterized by a greater emphasis on entrepreneurial economics and the incorporation of information technology into the syllabus.

References

- Kenton B. Walker and Ervin L Black (2000), "Re-engineering the undergraduate business core curriculum: aligning business schools with business for improved performance, *Business Process Management Journal*, Vol 6, issue:3, pp 194-213
- Todd A Finkle and David Deeds (2001), "Trends in the market for entrepreneurship faculty, 1989-1998, *Journal of Business Venturing*, Vol 16, Issue 6, November 2001, PP 613-630
- La-Rue Tone Hosmer (1988), "Adding ethics to the business curriculum", *Business Horizons*, Vol 31, Issue 4, July August 1988, PP 9-15
- Mark Whitehouse (2010), "Job-openings are not what they used to be", *Outlook*, Oct 11, 2010
- De-one Zell, (2001), "The market-driven business school: has the pendulum swung too far?, *Journal of management Inquiry*", December 2001, Vol.10, No 4, PP 324-338
- Mazaya (2010), "professional business leadership development program needs assessment study of the local MBA programs" Welfare Association, Ramallah, Palestine, January 2010
- Soren Kaj Anderson (2010), "Responses to growing unemployment and mismatch between skills and job openings in EU member states", *Employment Relations Research Center (FAOS)*, Department of Sociology, University of Copenhagen.
- Official Gazette of the Philippines, www.gov.ph/2011/.../the-presidents-day-wednesday-january-26-2011

Yasuyuki Nambu, A message from GROUP CEO to our shareholders (February 2011)
www.pasonagroup.co.jp/english/ir/ir_message_e.html

Mark Baetz and David J Sharp (2004) "Integrating ethics content into the core business curriculum: Do core Teaching material do the job, Journal of Business Ethics Vol 51, No 1, PP 53-62

Peggy A. Lambing and Charles R. Kuehl (2003), Entrepreneurship, Prentice hall, New Jersey, Third edition

Michael R. Solomon (2009), Consumer Behavior, Buying, Having and Being, Pearson, Prentice Hall

Gary Dessler (2011), Human Resource Management, Pearson, Prentice Hall, Twelfth edition, Eighth edition

Mohammad Jaabari (2011), "Discrepancy between required managerial skills and recruitment policies in Palestine", working paper delivered at the Second Palestinian Conference on Human Resources" 23-23 May, 2011, Al-ahliyah University College, Bethlehem, Palestine.
Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) 2010, Press release on the results of the labor force survey (October-December, 2010

Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), 2011, Press release on the relationship between academic specializations and labor market, July 10, 2011

Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), 2007, Census of economic enterprises. Nader Mryyan, H. Omari and Robert Palmer (2006), "From School to Career" Jordanian Graduates, Al-Manar, Amman- Jordan

Jurše, M., & Tominc, P. (2008). Professional competences of graduates as a labour market mechanism For aligning business school curriculum reform with the Bologna Declaration principles. Management: Journal of Contemporary Management Issues, 13(1), 17-36

Valverde, G. A. (2004). Curriculum convergence in Chile: The global and local context of reforms in curriculum policy. Comparative Education Review, 48(2), 174-201

Brewer, Jeffrey, Alka Harriger, and John Mendonca. "Beyond the model: Building an effective and dynamic IT curriculum." Journal of Information Technology Education 5 (2006): 441-458

Dr. Usamah Shahwan
Bethlehem University
Palestine
usamas@bethlehem.edu