Exploration on Job Mismatch with Job Placement: Employers Perspective in Sultanate of Oman

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Abstract
This study delves into the intricacies of job mismatch and its correlation with job placement, focusing on the employers' perspective in the Sultanate of Oman. The research aims to identify factors contributing to the discordance between job seekers' skills and employer requirements, shedding light on the implications for both the workforce and the economy. Through a comprehensive analysis of employer feedback, the study explores issues such as inadequate educational preparedness, skills misalignment, and the evolving demands of the job market. The research methodology involves surveys, interviews, and data analysis to gather insights from a diverse range of employers across sectors. Preliminary findings suggest that mismatches often arise from a gap between the skills job seekers acquire through education and training and the skills demanded by employers. Additionally, emerging trends in technology and industry dynamics further compound these challenges. Cultural and social factors influencing career choices are also considered in the analysis. Understanding employers' perspectives is crucial for formulating effective policies and interventions to address job mismatch issues. The study contributes to the discourse on human capital development, proposing recommendations for educational institutions, vocational training programs, and policymakers to enhance alignment between workforce skills and employer expectations. By bridging this gap, the Sultanate of Oman can optimize its labour market, fostering economic growth and providing meaningful employment opportunities for its citizens. The findings aim to inform strategic initiatives that promote a more harmonious relationship between job placement and the evolving demands of the Omani job market.
Keywords: Job Mismatch, Skill, Employer Expectations, Labour Market

Introduction
The Sultanate of Oman, nestled on the southeastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula, has undergone profound economic and social transformations in recent decades. Traditionally reliant on oil and gas, the Omani government has strategically diversified the economy, investing in sectors such as tourism, logistics, and technology. This diversification has, in turn, altered the landscape of the labour market, posing challenges and opportunities for both employers and job seekers. One of the emerging challenges in this evolving scenario is the

issue of job mismatch, wherein the skills possessed by the workforce do not align with the demands of employers (Hossain et al., 2018a). This background section delves into the historical, economic, and educational contexts to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to job mismatch from the employers' perspective in the Sultanate of Oman.

Historical Context
Oman's history is steeped in a rich tapestry of trade, culture, and maritime influence. The modern Sultanate emerged under the leadership of Sultan Qaboos bin Said in the 1970s, following a period of isolation. Sultan Qaboos envisioned a modern and prosperous Oman, setting the stage for economic development and social progress. The nation's transformation involved investments in infrastructure, education, and healthcare, leading to improved living standards and increased life expectancy. However, these changes also necessitated a revaluation of the labour market dynamics to accommodate the evolving needs of the economy.

Economic Landscape
The backbone of Oman's economy has long been its oil and gas sector. The abundant hydrocarbon resources propelled the nation into economic prosperity, enabling significant investments in infrastructure and public services. However, the vulnerability of oil-dependent economies to global price fluctuations became evident, prompting Oman to diversify its economic base. The government's Vision 2040 and subsequent strategies aimed to reduce reliance on oil and gas by promoting non-oil sectors such as tourism, fisheries, and manufacturing.
As the economy diversified, the demand for a skilled and adaptable workforce increased. New industries required a different set of skills, and this transition exposed a gap between the skills imparted by the educational system and those demanded by the emerging job market. Consequently, job mismatch emerged as a pertinent challenge, affecting both employers struggling to find suitably skilled employees and job seekers grappling with the evolving requirements of the job market.

Educational Landscape
The Omani government, recognizing the importance of education in building a capable workforce, embarked on comprehensive educational reforms. The establishment of schools, colleges, and universities aimed to equip Omani youth with the skills necessary for a rapidly evolving job market. However, the alignment between educational outcomes and industry needs has been a persistent challenge. The education system traditionally emphasized academic qualifications, often overlooking the practical skills demanded by the job market (Hossain et al., 2023). Moreover, the rapid pace of technological advancements has rendered certain skills obsolete while creating a demand for new and specialized capabilities. Consequently, graduates may find themselves ill-prepared for the requirements of the job market, contributing to the overarching issue of job mismatch.

The Emergence of Job Mismatch
Job mismatch, a global phenomenon, manifests when the skills possessed by job seekers do not align with the skills demanded by employers. This mismatch is particularly pronounced in economies undergoing transitions, such as Oman. Employers, eager to meet the demands of

a diversified economy, seek individuals with specific skill sets that may not be adequately addressed by the education system. As a result, the labour market witnesses a discordance between job seekers and employers, leading to inefficiencies, underemployment, and diminished productivity.

The literature on job mismatch provides insights into the complexities of this phenomenon. Arulampalam et al (2004) highlight the significance of educational quality in reducing job mismatch, emphasizing the need for education to be relevant to the demands of the job market. Allen and De Weert (2007) stress the importance of fostering a strong link between education and employment to ensure graduates are equipped with the skills demanded by employers.

In the Omani context, Al-Balushi and Al-Badi (2013) shed light on the challenges within the education system, including issues related to curriculum relevance and the alignment of educational outcomes with industry needs. Al-Yahyai and Al-Lamki (2017) contribute by examining the broader mismatch between the skills acquired through education and the requirements of the labor market. While these studies provide valuable insights, there is a noticeable gap in the literature concerning the specific perspectives of employers on job mismatch in Oman.

Employers' Perspective on Job Mismatch

Understanding job mismatch from the employers' perspective is crucial, as they play a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics of the labor market. Employers are not only affected by the skills of the workforce but also influence the skills demanded through their job requirements and expectations (Javed et al., 2020). Exploring the employers' viewpoint provides nuanced insights into the challenges faced during the recruitment process, the skills prioritized by different industries, and the implications of job mismatch on organizational performance.

In Oman, employers contend with unique challenges arising from the rapid diversification of the economy. Different sectors, such as tourism, healthcare, and technology, have distinct skill requirements, and employers in these sectors may face challenges finding appropriately skilled workers. The employers' perspective is critical for devising strategies that align educational outcomes with industry needs, ensuring a more seamless transition for job seekers into the workforce.

Problem statement

In the midst of Oman's economic diversification, transitioning from a reliance on oil and gas to a more diversified economy, the challenge of job mismatch has surfaced as a critical impediment to the nation's sustainable development. Ministry of Manpower, Sultanate of Oman. (2021). Job mismatch, defined by a misalignment between the skills possessed by job seekers and those sought by employers, has become a pervasive issue, disrupting the efficient functioning of the labour market (Al-Ghassani & Al-Salti, 2021).

While extant literature acknowledges the existence of job mismatch in Oman, there is a paucity of research specifically addressing this issue from the employers' perspective. The employers, as key stakeholders in the labour market, play a pivotal role in shaping job requirements and influencing the skills demanded. Understanding the challenges faced by employers in various sectors, their expectations, and the implications of job mismatch on organizational productivity is essential for crafting targeted solutions (World Bank, 2021).

Limitations

A potential limitation of the exploration on job mismatch with job placement from the employers' perspective in the Sultanate of Oman is the challenge in obtaining a representative sample of employers across diverse sectors. Variability in industry characteristics and organizational sizes may impact the generalizability of findings. Additionally, the study's reliance on self-reported data from employers might introduce response bias. Despite these limitations, the research aims to provide valuable insights into the specific challenges faced by employers, contributing to the understanding of job mismatch dynamics in Oman's evolving labour market.

Literature Review

The Sultanate of Oman's economic diversification has ushered in transformative changes, reshaping its labour market dynamics. The evolving job landscape has led to the emergence of job mismatch, a complex issue where the skills possessed by the workforce do not align with the skills sought by employers. This literature review seeks to delve into the existing body of knowledge on job mismatch and job placement, with a specific focus on the employers' perspective in the Sultanate of Oman.

Global Perspectives on Job Mismatch

Job mismatch is a global phenomenon that has garnered attention due to its profound implications on economic efficiency and individual well-being (Saleh et al., 2023). In their seminal work, Arulampalam et al (2004) emphasize the importance of education in reducing job mismatch, highlighting the need for alignment between educational outcomes and industry demands. Allen and De Weert (2007) extend this perspective, arguing that a strong connection between education and employment is essential for minimizing skill mismatches. The relevance of these global insights to the Omani context is underscored by the nation's commitment to educational reforms. However, despite these efforts, job mismatch remains a challenge, necessitating a nuanced exploration of the employers' viewpoint.

Oman's Educational Landscape

The educational system in Oman has undergone significant reforms to equip the workforce with the skills required for a diversified economy. Al-Balushi and Al-Badi (2013) provide a comprehensive examination of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programs in Oman. They highlight challenges related to curriculum relevance and the alignment of educational outcomes with industry needs. This underscores a potential source of job mismatch, as educational programs may not be adequately preparing graduates for the evolving demands of the job market. The study by Al-Yahyai and Al-Lamki (2017) extends this perspective by examining the broader mismatch between the skills acquired through education and the requirements of the labor market. These studies collectively suggest that despite educational reforms, there is a persistent gap between the skills developed in educational institutions and those demanded by employers, necessitating an exploration of job mismatch from the employers' lens.

Employers' Perspectives on Job Mismatch

While existing literature acknowledges the challenges posed by job mismatch, there is a notable gap concerning the specific perspectives of employers in Oman. Employers, as key stakeholders in the labour market, play a crucial role in shaping job requirements and

influencing the skills demanded by various industries (Al Qalhati et al., 2020a; Al Qalhati et al., 2020b).

Research by Kiker et al (1997) emphasizes the role of vocational training programs in reducing skill mismatches. This perspective is particularly relevant to the Omani context, where aligning vocational training with industry needs is essential. However, the literature lacks an in-depth exploration of how employers perceive the effectiveness of these programs and the challenges they face in finding adequately skilled employees.

Industry-Specific Challenges

The diversification of Oman's economy has led to the emergence of distinct challenges in different industries. For instance, the tourism sector may require skills related to hospitality and customer service, while the technology sector may demand proficiency in emerging technologies. Understanding the specific challenges faced by employers in different industries is crucial for developing targeted interventions. The study by Al-Asfoor et al (2020) provides insights into the challenges faced by the information technology sector in Oman. The findings underscore the importance of aligning educational programs with the rapidly evolving technology landscape. However, this study represents just one sector, indicating the need for a more comprehensive exploration encompassing various industries.

Impact of Job Mismatch on Organizational Performance

Beyond the challenges in finding suitably skilled employees, job mismatch has broader implications for organizational performance. Studies by Mahyuni et al (2018) suggest that job mismatch can lead to increased turnover, reduced productivity, and decreased job satisfaction. Understanding the organizational implications of job mismatch is essential for employers and policymakers alike.

The existing literature provides valuable insights into the global challenges of job mismatch and the broader educational landscape in Oman. However, a notable gap exists in understanding job mismatch from the specific perspective of employers in Oman. The challenges posed by industry-specific skill requirements and the impact of job mismatch on organizational performance remain areas requiring further exploration. This study aims to address these gaps, providing a nuanced understanding of job mismatch in Oman from the employers' viewpoint, thereby contributing to the development of targeted strategies to enhance job placement and align the workforce with the evolving demands of the Sultanate's labour market.

Research Objective

To explore the specific challenges faced by employers in the Sultanate of Oman in terms of job mismatch, focusing on the discrepancy between the skills sought by employers and those possessed by the workforce, across diverse industries and organizational sizes.

Research Question

How to explore the specific challenges faced by employers in the Sultanate of Oman in terms of job mismatch, focusing on the discrepancy between the skills sought by employers and those possessed by the workforce, across diverse industries and organizational sizes?

Research Methodology

Data Collection

Semi-Structured Interviews: In-depth, semi-structured interviews were used collecting the primary data. These interviews were conducted with employers of various regions and across sectors to capture a diversified viewpoint.

Sampling: Purposive sampling was used to select a diverse group of participants with varying industrial experiences, representing different geographical areas and sectors. A sample size of 19 participants was envisaged to achieve data saturation.

Data Sources: In addition to in-depth interviews, documents such as business reports, publications, and news articles were analysed to complement the interview data and provide context.

Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis: The collected data was analysed through thematic analysis. This involves identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the qualitative data. The data were coded, categorized, and interpreted to draw meaningful conclusions.

Ethical Considerations

Informed Consent: Participants were provided with clear information about the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks. Informed consent was obtained before data collection.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: All data collected are kept confidential and anonymous, and any identifying information will be removed or pseudonyms used to protect participants' identities.

Data Security: Data are securely stored and accessible only to the researcher.

Data Analysis Plan

Data Collection Overview

The study involved semi-structured interviews with 19 employers from diverse geographic regions and sector as well. In addition to interviews, relevant documents such as business reports and publications were analysed.

Data Coding and Categorization

Initial Coding: Upon collecting interview data, initial open coding was conducted to break down the text into meaningful segments. Each segment was assigned a code, capturing key concepts, themes, and ideas.

Thematic Analysis: The coded data was analysed by thematic analysis. Similar codes were grouped into themes and sub-themes. Themes were identified through a combination of inductive and deductive approaches, allowing for both data-driven and theory-driven insights.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is a robust method for exploring and interpreting qualitative data, providing a rich understanding of complex phenomena. In the context of the exploration of job mismatch with job placement from the employers' perspective in the Sultanate of Oman, thematic analysis offers a lens to uncover patterns, recurring themes, and nuances within the data. This analysis seeks to illuminate key themes emerging from interviews with employers,

shedding light on the challenges faced and strategies employed in navigating job mismatch issues.

Theme 1: Skills Mismatch in Emerging Industries

A recurrent theme that emerged from the data is the challenge employers face in finding employees with skills aligned with the requirements of emerging industries. Oman's economic diversification has led to the growth of sectors such as technology, tourism, and healthcare. Employers in these industries expressed a common struggle in finding candidates with up-to-date and industry-specific skills. For example, in the technology sector, employers emphasized the need for expertise in areas like data analytics, artificial intelligence, and cybersecurity. This theme underscores the evolving nature of the job market in Oman and the importance of aligning educational programs with the skill demands of these emerging industries.

Theme 2: Variability in Educational Preparedness

The variability in educational preparedness among job seekers emerged as another salient theme. Employers reported disparities in the quality and relevance of education, contributing to job mismatch. Some employers noted that graduates often lacked practical skills or had outdated knowledge. This suggests a need for greater collaboration between educational institutions and industries to ensure curricula are tailored to meet the dynamic needs of the job market. Additionally, employers expressed a desire for more internship programs and practical training opportunities to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and workplace requirements.

Theme 3: Industry-Specific Skill Prioritization

The data revealed that different industries prioritize distinct sets of skills based on their specific needs. For instance, employers in the healthcare sector emphasized the importance of soft skills such as empathy and effective communication, in addition to technical competencies. In contrast, technology-oriented industries prioritized technical proficiency and adaptability to rapid technological changes. This theme underscores the necessity for a nuanced understanding of industry-specific skill requirements to address job mismatch effectively. Policymakers and educators can use these insights to tailor training programs that cater to the diverse needs of different sectors (Hossain et al., 2018b).

Theme 4: Recruitment Challenges and Innovations

Employers consistently highlighted challenges in the recruitment process, citing the time and resources spent in finding suitable candidates. Many expressed the need for more efficient and innovative recruitment strategies to streamline the process. Some employers are exploring novel approaches, such as collaborating with educational institutions for custom training programs or leveraging digital platforms for talent acquisition. This theme highlights the dynamic nature of recruitment in the face of job mismatch challenges and suggests the potential for technology-driven solutions to enhance the efficiency of the hiring process.

Theme 5: Gender Disparities in Certain Sectors

A noteworthy theme that emerged pertains to gender disparities in specific sectors. Employers in industries traditionally dominated by one gender reported challenges in attracting diverse talent (Hossain et al., 2018c). For example, the technology sector often

faces a gender imbalance, with fewer female applicants. This theme underscores the need for targeted initiatives to encourage diversity and inclusivity in certain industries, including revisiting societal norms and perceptions that may influence career choices.

Thematic analysis of employers' perspectives on job mismatch and job placement in the Sultanate of Oman reveals multifaceted challenges and dynamic strategies. The identified themes emphasize the critical role of educational institutions in aligning curricula with industry needs, the importance of recognizing industry-specific skill priorities, and the need for innovative recruitment practices. Additionally, the gender disparities highlighted suggest the importance of promoting diversity and inclusivity in the workforce.

These themes provide a foundation for developing targeted interventions to address job mismatch effectively. Policymakers can use these insights to refine educational policies, foster industry-academic collaborations, and implement strategies to encourage diversity in the workforce. By understanding the intricacies of job mismatch from the employers' perspective, this exploration contributes to the ongoing dialogue on optimizing the match between workforce skills and employer requirements in the dynamic landscape of the Sultanate of Oman.

Findings and Conclusion

The findings from the exploration on job mismatch and job placement in the Sultanate of Oman, focusing on the employers' perspective, reveal a nuanced landscape characterized by diverse challenges and innovative strategies. Through in-depth interviews with employers across various industries, several key findings have emerged, shedding light on the intricacies of job mismatch and the efforts made to address this issue.

Firstly, Challenges in Skills Alignment

A predominant finding is the challenge employers face in aligning the skills of job seekers with the specific requirements of their industries. Oman's economic diversification has given rise to emerging sectors such as technology, healthcare, and tourism, each with distinct skill demands. Employers across these industries consistently reported difficulties in finding candidates with up-to-date, industry-specific skills. The mismatch between the skills offered by job seekers and those sought by employers poses a significant hurdle in the recruitment process.

In the technology sector, for instance, employers expressed the need for expertise in areas like data analytics, artificial intelligence, and cybersecurity. This emphasizes the rapidly evolving nature of certain industries and the struggle to find candidates equipped with the latest technical proficiencies. Employers in healthcare stressed the importance of soft skills such as empathy and communication alongside technical competencies, reflecting the diverse skill sets required in different sectors.

Secondly, Variability in Educational Preparedness

The findings underscore the variability in educational preparedness among job seekers, contributing to job mismatch. Employers identified disparities in the quality and relevance of education, with some graduates lacking practical skills or possessing outdated knowledge. This points to a critical need for a more dynamic and industry-aligned educational system. The employers expressed a desire for stronger collaboration between educational institutions and industries to ensure that curricula are tailored to meet the practical needs of the job market. Additionally, there was a consensus among employers for increased internship programs and

practical training opportunities to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and workplace requirements.

Thirdly, Industry-Specific Skill Prioritization

A notable finding is the industry-specific prioritization of skills. Different sectors emphasize distinct sets of skills based on their unique requirements. The healthcare industry places high value on interpersonal and communication skills, recognizing the importance of effective patient care. In contrast, technology-oriented industries prioritize technical proficiency and adaptability to rapid technological changes. This finding underscores the necessity for a nuanced understanding of industry-specific skill requirements to effectively address job mismatch. Policymakers and educators can leverage this insight to tailor training programs that cater to the diverse needs of different sectors.

Fourthly, Recruitment Challenges and Innovations

Recruitment challenges emerged as a recurrent theme in the findings, with employers expressing the need for more efficient and innovative recruitment strategies. Many employers noted the substantial time and resources spent in finding suitable candidates, particularly in the face of job mismatch issues. Some employers are exploring novel approaches to streamline the recruitment process. Collaborations with educational institutions for custom training programs and the utilization of digital platforms for talent acquisition were identified as potential innovative solutions. This finding highlights the dynamic nature of recruitment in response to job mismatch challenges, suggesting that technology-driven solutions could enhance the efficiency of the hiring process.

Finally, Gender Disparities in Certain Sectors

An important finding relates to gender disparities in specific sectors. Employers in industries traditionally dominated by one gender reported challenges in attracting diverse talent. For example, the technology sector often faces a gender imbalance, with fewer female applicants. This highlights broader societal and cultural influences on career choices and underscores the need for targeted initiatives to encourage diversity and inclusivity in the workforce. Addressing gender disparities is not only a matter of social equity but also a strategic imperative for industries seeking to tap into a diverse talent pool.

The findings from the exploration on job mismatch and job placement in the Sultanate of Oman, from the employers' perspective, provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in the current labour market. The dynamic nature of Oman's economy, marked by economic diversification, has created a complex job landscape with evolving skill requirements.

The challenges identified, including skills misalignment, educational disparities, industry-specific skill priorities, recruitment hurdles, and gender disparities, offer critical insights for policymakers, educators, and businesses. The findings suggest a need for targeted interventions, including curriculum enhancements, industry-academic collaborations, and innovative recruitment strategies. Additionally, addressing gender disparities requires a holistic approach involving societal and cultural changes to encourage a more inclusive workforce.

By leveraging these findings, stakeholders in Oman can work collaboratively to bridge the gap between the skills of the workforce and the demands of employers. This exploration not only contributes to the ongoing dialogue on job mismatch but also serves as a foundation for

evidence-based strategies that aim to enhance job placement and optimize the utilization of human capital in the Sultanate.

Recommendations

The findings from the exploration on job mismatch and job placement in the Sultanate of Oman, focusing on the employers' perspective, highlight several challenges and opportunities. Building on these insights, the following recommendations are put forth to address job mismatch effectively and foster a more aligned and efficient labour market.

Firstly, Enhance Industry-Academic Collaboration

To bridge the gap between educational outcomes and industry needs, there is a pressing need for strengthened collaboration between educational institutions and industries. Establishing advisory boards comprising industry experts can facilitate the development of curricula that are more responsive to the evolving demands of the job market. Regular dialogue between educators and employers can ensure that educational programs incorporate the latest industry trends and equip graduates with the skills required for immediate employability.

Secondly, Promote Practical Training Opportunities

Introducing and expanding practical training opportunities, such as internships, apprenticeships, and industry placements, is crucial. This hands-on experience can supplement theoretical knowledge with practical skills, making graduates more job-ready. Collaborative initiatives between educational institutions and businesses can facilitate the integration of practical training into academic programs. Employers can play an active role in providing real-world exposure to students, ensuring they graduate with a skill set aligned with industry requirements.

Thirdly, Tailor Educational Programs to Industry Needs

Policymakers and educational institutions should conduct regular assessments of industry needs and dynamically adjust educational programs. This involves a continuous feedback loop where employers provide input on the skills they require, allowing educational institutions to adapt their curricula accordingly. Flexibility and responsiveness in educational offerings are vital to ensuring that graduates are equipped with the skills that are currently in demand in the job market.

Fourthly, Implement Industry-Specific Certification Programs

Introducing industry-specific certification programs can be instrumental in validating the skills of job seekers. These certifications, developed in collaboration with industry experts, can serve as a standardized benchmark for employers. Encouraging and recognizing such certifications can enhance the credibility of job applicants and simplify the hiring process for employers by providing a clear indication of the candidates' industry-relevant skills.

Fifthly, Foster Innovation in Recruitment Practices

Employers should explore and embrace innovative recruitment practices to streamline the hiring process and identify the right talent efficiently. Leveraging digital platforms, artificial intelligence in candidate screening, and data analytics for talent acquisition can enhance the speed and accuracy of recruitment. Additionally, investing in employer branding and

showcasing a commitment to employee development can attract a more diverse pool of candidates.

Sixthly, Address Gender Disparities Through Inclusive Policies
To address gender disparities in certain sectors, concerted efforts are required to challenge societal norms and promote inclusivity. Implementing policies that encourage diversity, providing mentorship programs for underrepresented groups, and fostering a workplace culture that values diversity can contribute to breaking down gender barriers. Collaborative initiatives between government bodies, businesses, and civil society organizations can drive these changes and create a more inclusive work environment.

Finally, Continuous Monitoring and Adaptation
The dynamic nature of the job market necessitates continuous monitoring and adaptation of strategies. Regular reviews of the effectiveness of implemented initiatives, feedback from employers, and adjustments to policies based on evolving industry needs are essential. This iterative approach ensures that recommendations remain relevant and responsive to the ever-changing landscape of the Sultanate's economy.

These recommendations, grounded in the insights gained from the exploration on job mismatch and job placement in Oman, aim to guide stakeholders in creating a more harmonious and efficient labour market. By fostering collaboration, promoting practical training, tailoring education, implementing certification programs, innovating in recruitment practices, addressing gender disparities, and maintaining a dynamic approach, Oman can navigate the complexities of job mismatch effectively.

Implementation of these recommendations requires a collective effort from educational institutions, employers, policymakers, and the broader community. Through concerted and strategic actions, Oman can not only mitigate the challenges posed by job mismatch but also position itself as a dynamic and adaptive economy with a workforce ready for the demands of the future.

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