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## Rethinking the PhD: Aligning Higher Education with Market Needs and Practical Skills

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the growing trend among GCC students, particularly master's degree holders, in pursuing doctoral studies as a means of enhancing career opportunities and achieving social mobility, especially in government sectors. It critically assesses the relevance of a doctorate in today's job market, where competencies, experience, and skills are increasingly prioritized over academic qualifications. The research is based on data collected from prominent recruitment platforms, such as Bayt.com and GulfTalent, to provide actionable insights for academia, industry, and policymakers. It explores how labor market demands and shifting workforce requirements influence the motivation to pursue doctoral degrees and highlights the need to align academic programs with market needs. A theoretical framework examines industry requirements, Oman's economic development, government initiatives, and the role of academic institutions in shaping demand for doctorate holders. Using a qualitative methodology, including a literature review, data from recruitment platforms, and interviews, the study offers an in-depth analysis of labor market trends in the GCC. The findings aim to inform stakeholders by providing evidence-based recommendations for revising training programs, improving educational curricula, and guiding policy decisions related to employment and workforce development in the region. By addressing the evolving relationship between academic qualifications and labor market needs, this research contributes to bridging the gap between education and employability in the GCC.

**Keywords:** Business Sector Needs; Strategic Review; Motive for Postgraduate Studies; Doctorate Degrees; Higher Education

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#### ARTICLE INFO

Received: 30 November 2024 | Revised: 3 January 2025 | Accepted: 6 January 2025 | Published Online: 22 January 2025  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i2.7942>

#### CITATION

Awashreh, R., Ghunaimi, H.A., 2025. Rethinking the PhD: Aligning Higher Education with Market Needs and Practical Skills. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*. 7(2): 254–264. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i2.7942>

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## 1. Introduction

In today's fiercely competitive professional landscape, one clear trend has emerged: a growing number of graduates, professionals, and recent MBA holders are pursuing doctoral degrees. This trend seems truer for graduate students at a master's level who actively aim to seek admission into a doctoral program. The lure of doctoral studies, however, extends far beyond traditional academia. This all is not about new skills and knowledge acquisitions; rather, it is much better than that in terms of career growth opportunities. One does not look forward to the skill acquisition process only, but also gain in terms of prestige and place oneself at influential positions at the government circles in this doctorate desiring effort. Most of those holding master's degrees have a desire to be general managers, advisors, or advisory board members in respective countries, and even federal councilors. A kind of opinion is attached to the earning of a Ph.D. with advanced posts at the national or political level. Inside, one knows that after all, the doctoral certificate, no matter how honorable it may be, is going to be looked upon as no better than a piece of paper boxed in a hard cover.

Most of work positions need a university degree, while at the top positions ask for master's degree level. According to the World Economic Forum, most of the jobs in contemporary employment landscapes want applicants to have at least university degrees, with rising requirements towards higher levels like mastering degrees<sup>[1]</sup>. This trend mirrors an increased complexity and specialization of industries and employer demand for advanced knowledge and skills to manage these changing professional environments<sup>[2]</sup>. In most professions, a university degree is considered one of the core basic requirements that enable the candidate to have a related theoretical understanding and practical competencies in building expertise in a certain profession<sup>[3]</sup>. Moreover, as industries innovate, the need for specialized knowledge increases, and employers take in more people with master's degrees to prove higher levels of expertise or competencies acquired in their chosen fields<sup>[4]</sup>. At the master's degree level, one not only gains specialized knowledge but also develops critical thinking, research, and analytical skills that are highly sought by employers in today's competitive job market. According to Zulkharnaeva et al., mostly, employers would view master's degree holders as empowered people in the sense that they will be able to do complex tasks, make

informed decisions and be able to drive growth and innovation for the organization<sup>[5]</sup>. Many graduate degree programs incorporate this practical experience in the form of internships, research projects, and industry collaborations, which eventually help graduate students gain firsthand experience and enhance their employability<sup>[6]</sup>. Having a master's degree is, therefore, increasingly becoming the differentiator among employment seekers, unlocking wider opportunities in careers and upward mobility across industries and sectors.

Problems for the research came when rezoning led to a number of master's degree holders declaring their interest in pursuing doctorate programs. This study started with a preliminary investigation through discussions on why students would want to enroll in a doctorate program. Responses relating to this were many, but all generally focused on personal interests and desire for more learning. Notably, the students preferred particular universities and countries offering doctoral programs, more often preferring the distance learning formats that restrict the interaction between the professors and the learners either in a class or online<sup>[7]</sup>. In such programs, the kind of education dispensed focuses on assignments, projects, and theses, which the doctorate seekers termed as assignments, dispensing with the conventional methods of learning such as exams, attendance, or presentation. The researchers argue that the market does not demand people with doctorate qualifications, whether online, classroom-based, or hybrid. The world is day after day waking up to the realization that what human capital needs is relevant capabilities and skills. This perspective calls for a rethink in the way educational pathways and qualifications are assessed in order to meet the demands of the market and actually contribute to the development of the workforce.

## 2. Literature Review

The labour market in Oman, like many other countries, is shaped by dynamic changes in the economy, technology, and society<sup>[8, 9]</sup>. Key sectors driving the demand for skilled labour in the country include technology, engineering, health-care, education, finance, and tourism. In particular, there is a growing need for professionals in fields such as civil, electrical, and computer engineering, as well as medicine, including doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and lab technicians<sup>[10-12]</sup>. Moreover, the expansion of educational infrastructure has

led to an increased demand for educators, while shifts in the economy have intensified the need for finance, economics, and business professionals<sup>[13]</sup>. Additionally, the tourism and hospitality industry requires workers across various roles, such as hotel staff, restaurant personnel, and tour guides<sup>[14]</sup>. Beyond technical skills, general competencies such as communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and lifelong learning are highly valued by employers. As a result, university programs often reflect both market demands and student aspirations, with fields like engineering, IT, medicine, business, tourism, and teaching consistently in high demand. However, specialized expertise at the doctoral level is particularly sought in areas such as research and development, where innovation is vital<sup>[15]</sup>. Moreover, universities across the Gulf region, including those in Oman, require faculty members with advanced degrees to advance academic research and teaching<sup>[16]</sup>.

Despite these demands in the labour market, Oman's government has made significant investments in education, including higher education, to improve the quality and expand opportunities available to its citizens<sup>[17, 18]</sup>. However, despite these efforts, there remains a noticeable mismatch between the skills acquired by graduates and the needs of the labour market, leading to challenges in finding suitable employment for some graduates<sup>[17]</sup>. Additionally, financial constraints restrict the ability of some educational institutions to enhance their infrastructure and improve quality. While Oman's higher education system continues to grow, there are still ongoing challenges, including limited access to specific educational programs and a lack of alignment between academic offerings and market needs (Sultan Qaboos University, 2015). In some fields, there is an oversupply of graduates, which results in limited employment opportunities, particularly in sectors with low demand<sup>[19, 20]</sup>. Nevertheless, both the government and educational institutions are committed to improving the alignment of education with labour market requirements and fostering the development of a skilled workforce.

In response to these challenges, master's programs serve as a crucial bridge between undergraduate and doctoral education, particularly in systems such as those in the UK, Australia, and the USA, where students can directly pursue a PhD after completing their bachelor's degree. These programs offer advanced learning opportunities, enabling

students to gain expertise in a particular subject area while preparing them for doctoral-level research<sup>[21]</sup>. Consequently, master's programs serve as a transition from foundational undergraduate studies to the advanced skills necessary for doctoral work, equipping students with the specialized knowledge required to engage in high-level research and academic pursuits.

In this context, undergraduate and graduate education play complementary and distinct roles in the academic trajectory. Undergraduate programs aim to provide a broad knowledge base, fostering critical thinking, communication skills, and general knowledge in a given field<sup>[22]</sup>. These programs are designed to expose students to a range of topics, cultivating intellectual curiosity and transferable skills such as problem-solving and teamwork. In contrast, graduate programs focus on specialization, providing students with an in-depth understanding of a specific field. These programs involve intensive coursework and independent research, preparing students for advanced scholarship, research, and academic leadership<sup>[8]</sup>. Postgraduate education builds upon the broad foundation established during undergraduate studies, offering depth and specialized training aligned with both career goals and scholarly ambitions.

Finally, in GCC countries, including Oman, students pursue doctoral programs for a variety of personal and socio-economic reasons. The primary motivation for many is career advancement. A study conducted in Saudi Arabia by Alasmari and Alotaibi found that career progression is a significant driver, with participants viewing the attainment of a doctorate as a means to enhance their credentials and secure better jobs, higher salaries, and positions at universities, research centres, or within the industry<sup>[23]</sup>. Additionally, a strong motivation for pursuing doctoral education in the region is the desire for intellectual inquiry and knowledge creation. Al-Furaih et al. found that many doctoral students in these countries are driven by a passion for research, with aspirations to address gaps in existing knowledge and make meaningful contributions to their fields. This reflects intrinsic motivation, which is shaped by the cultural value placed on intellectual achievement and academic success in Arabic and GCC societies<sup>[24]</sup>.

In light of these motivations, a theoretical framework that takes into account a range of factors influencing the demand for Doctorate holders in Oman must be thoroughly

understood. Among these factors is the industry requirement within the GCC region<sup>[25]</sup>. Specific industries or sectors, such as academia, research institutions, healthcare, engineering, and technology, often require Doctorate holders for research, development, and leadership roles, as observed by the International Labor Organization<sup>[4]</sup>. These sectors are key stakeholders in determining the demand for doctorate-level competence in the country. Furthermore, another critical factor influencing demand is the trajectory of economic development in Oman. As the country seeks to diversify its economy and reduce its overdependence on petroleum and gas, there is an increasing need for advanced research and innovation. This economic shift, therefore, necessitates the expertise of Doctorate holders to drive progress in these key sectors.

Furthermore, Doctorate holders have the opportunity to apply their knowledge in emerging fields such as renewable energy, environmental science, and technology, among others. This expertise has a transformative effect on the dynamics of labour market demand, as it responds to the evolving needs of the economy. According to Gielen et al, government policy is also a crucial determinant of demand for Doctorate holders. In this regard, policies that support research, innovation, and education contribute significantly to altering the outlook of demand. By creating an enabling environment for the exploitation of competencies associated with Doctorate holders, such policies further promote economic growth, sustainable development, and technological advancements, thus driving the need for more Doctorate holders in various fields. In contrast, higher education institutions play a dual role in Oman, both consuming and producing Doctorate holders<sup>[26]</sup>. Universities and research centres indeed “consume” Doctorate holders by employing them as faculty members, researchers, and administrators, thereby enhancing the value of the higher education landscape and contributing to the creation of knowledge<sup>[27]</sup>. This demand from academic institutions is unlikely to diminish, as the need for skilled professionals remains crucial to advancing research and educational agendas in Oman. The continuous development of higher education and research institutions ensures that the demand for Doctorate holders remains strong, particularly in light of the country’s ongoing pursuit of innovation and progress.

### 3. Research Methods and Procedures

The study adopts a descriptive analytical method and uses both qualitative and quantitative data to analyse the labour market. It combines a literature review, data from recruitment websites, and qualitative interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of labour market dynamics<sup>[28]</sup>. The research begins with a detailed literature review to identify key concepts and variables relevant to the study<sup>[29]</sup>. Following this, data is collected from electronic recruitment sites, where job postings, requirements, and market trends are analysed to gain insights into the current labour market. Additionally, qualitative interviews with industry experts offer further depth, shedding light on labour market needs and challenges<sup>[30]</sup>.

The participants for the interviews are selected based on their experience and research network, with individuals volunteering to contribute data. These participants are chosen for their expertise from a diverse range of sources, including employees, recruitment companies, and field experts. They are identified through purposeful sampling from an accessible group (ensuring they are well-positioned to provide informed perspectives on the labour market).

The collected data is subsequently analysed to identify key trends, skills gaps, and labour market needs, which then inform recommendations for training programs, curricula, and public policies. To begin this process, the research examines job postings from two major online portals, Bayt.com and Gulf Talent, both of which are widely used in the GCC for job advertisements. These sites offer a comprehensive view of the regional job market, linking to other job boards, company sites, and recruitment agencies. Bayt.com serves various industries, while Gulf Talent focuses specifically on the skill and qualification needs within the GCC market. Both sites were chosen for their reliability and relevance to the region’s labour dynamics, offering valuable insights into job trends and employer demands.

In addition to the online data, the study also interviews a range of stakeholders, including students, teachers, HR personnel, employers, and government representatives, to ensure a balanced and comprehensive perspective. This multifaceted approach helps address two key research questions:

1. Does the market prioritize specific skills over doctoral degrees, except in universities and research centres?

2. Are PhD applicants motivated more by prestige or personal reasons than by fulfilling market demands or acquiring knowledge and skills?

By combining these methods, the study aims to provide a well-rounded analysis of the labour market and the demand for doctoral qualifications in Oman and the GCC region.

## 4. Results

The analysis section is based on both qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative data came from advertise jobs in various website such as Bayt Com and Gulf Talent, in addition to Ministry of Labor in Oman.

### 4.1. Degrees Market Requirement

The market does not necessarily require individuals with doctorate degrees; neither the government nor the private sector have a significant demand for PhD holders. Many

people pursue a PhD for various reasons. Some believe that a PhD will enhance their job prospects, while others are influenced by societal factors. What the market, however, values most is individuals with experience and competence in performing the job (Interview with Al-Rashidi, 2024). In response to the first question—whether the market prioritizes employees with specific capabilities and skills over those with a Doctorate degree, except for positions within universities and research centres, the answer has been revealed. It was found that a PhD is not required in most of the job market, except for roles within universities and research centres. This finding is supported by data obtained from two major recruitment portals, Bayt.com and Gulf Talent, which provide coverage across all GCC countries, as shown in **Table 1**. These platforms indicate that the demand for PhD holders is primarily confined to academic and research roles, further reinforcing the notion that practical experience and skills are more valued in most industries.

**Table 1.** Advertised post on Bayt and Gulf Talent on GCC.

	Oman	UAE	Qatar	Kuwait	KSA	Bahrain
Bayt Month April, Dates:	No of All Adv post	No of All Adv post	No of All Adv post	No of All Adv post	No of All Adv post	No of All Adv post
<b>Jobs at Bayt.com</b>						
Directors, GM, CEO, Exe.						
Director	5	15	1	2	7	0
BA	2	9	0	0	1	0
MA	3	5	1	2	6	0
<b>PHD</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Consultant, Expert	8	266	46	13	355	3
BA	5	261	44	12	353	3
MA	3	4	2	1	2	0
<b>PHD</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Researcher	0	35	2	1	11	1
BA	0	18	0	0	6	0
MA	0	13	0	0	5	1
PHD	0	4	2	1	0	0
<b>Gulf Talent</b>						
Directors, GM, CEO, Exe.						
Director	0	32	17	5	13	1
BA	0	18	15	4	8	1
MA	0	14	2	1	5	0
PHD	0	0	0	0	0	0
Consultant, Expert	0	34	7	0	11	1
BA	0	28	5	0	9	1
MA	0	5	2	0	2	0
PHD	0	1	0	0	0	0
Researcher	0	1	0	0	0	0
BA	0	1	0	0	0	0
MA	0	0	0	0	0	0
PHD	0	0	0	0	0	0

The data presented above was collected from two renowned recruitment portals during the month of April 2024. The findings indicate that possessing a PhD is not a prerequisite for the positions advertised. The researcher conducted an analysis of job postings and descriptions. As indicated in the table, there is only one job in the category of directors/general managers/executive directors. This particular job combines technical development with research in that the holder of the job must have managerial skills, research skills, and technical skills. Instead of just PhD pursuits, highly esteemed government positions serving the public and the community should also be the target for current holders of master's degrees. Stronger development in the current bachelor's and master's programs of study in higher education would prove to be a good enhancement in the skill-building of students for these positions. (Interview with Khademizadeh, 2024).

## 4.2. Public Service over PhD Pursuit

In a century when intellectual pursuits overshadowed the glamour of public service, it is time for a rewriting of these curves of career paths. Attention to reverent positions in government might provide a more effective way to grow and give back than merely pursuing the PhD. This shift not only epitomizes the service to the community but also brings out the potential for improving the existing programs at the universities in order to better meet the needs of the public sector. Throughout history, the PhD has been associated with academic prestige. In today's fast-moving world, the definition of prestige itself is getting changed. Governmental public service positions offer the best opportunities for people to make out a tangible difference in society; more so, those that are non-professional in nature but very honorary in their designation. Be it in the shaping of public policy or some other social change, leading some other transformative initiative, these roles wield immense influence and impact. (Interview with Khademizadeh, 2024).

While there is a level of validity in the pursuit of PhDs, there is room for bettering; universities can go ahead and stretch beyond the academic rigor to incorporate practical skills and experiences that would help students appreciate and link theory to the practice in public service. This can be achieved by integration of internships, externships, and service-learning opportunities into the curriculum. Think of those successful individuals who pursue the path of public

service and not just to earn a PhD. In so doing, these powerful politicians in the highest echelons of government, in synergy with visionary social leaders, have used their knowledge and passion to effect great change in society. Research has also shown that demand for highly educated professionals in the public sector has increased, hence providing proper ground for career advancement and for satisfying a job. (Interview with Kouaib, 2024). While pursuing a PhD remains something commendable, it should not blind the public from the value of public service and its ability to transform people and society. But if we want prestigious government positions and develop university programs to build a pipeline of accomplished professionals in the public sector, then we have to approach a new, purpose-driven leadership—and we can achieve so much more together. (Interview with Abdulrahim, 2024).

## 4.3. Redefining Success beyond Academic

While a PhD is often considered the pinnacle of academic success, it is important to reconsider whether the pursuit of this degree alone defines true success. Success should be about finding fulfillment and making a meaningful impact, both with or without an academic title. It can be achieved through various paths, including public service, entrepreneurship, social innovation, and community leadership (Interview with Adam, 2024). Rather than focusing solely on obtaining a PhD, students should be encouraged to explore career paths aligned with their passions, values, and aspirations (Interview with Mohamed, 2024). This could involve gaining practical experience through internships, volunteer work, or entrepreneurship, or pursuing graduate education in fields like public policy, social work, environmental conservation, or global health. Moreover, students need to understand that fulfillment and success are not confined to academia. Many opportunities exist outside the academic world where individuals can make a significant difference. Success can take many forms, from public service to social entrepreneurship, activism, or creative endeavors (Interview with Kouaib, 2024). As teachers and mentors, it is our responsibility to guide students in defining success on their own terms and help them discover paths that align with their values and ambitions.

By fostering an environment that encourages exploration and purpose-driven ambition, we can inspire the next

generation of leaders who are motivated to make a positive impact in the world—regardless of the titles they hold. While pursuing a PhD may be an admirable goal, true success should be measured by purpose and the ability to fulfill one’s potential for the greater good (Interview with Al-Mushkini, 2024). In this way, we can help redefine success beyond academic achievements and empower students to contribute meaningfully to society in diverse ways.

#### **4.4. Curriculum Reform in Higher Education**

Higher education is essential for societal progress, but its landscape must evolve to meet the changing needs of students, employers, and society. This essay advocates for urgent reforms in higher education curricula, supported by evidence and examples. A key reform is aligning academic programs with labor market demands. As noted in a 2018 World Economic Forum report, there is a growing gap between the skills students acquire and the needs of employers<sup>[1]</sup>. Graduates must be prepared to adapt to new industries and technological innovations by acquiring interdisciplinary competencies, digital literacy, and flexibility. Many institutions have responded to this challenge by incorporating internships and work experiences to improve employability (Interview with Abdulaziz, 2024).

Moreover, with the complexity of today’s world, critical thinking and creative problem-solving are essential. Yet, traditional education often emphasizes memorization over these skills. To better prepare students for the modern workplace, programs should focus on analytical thinking, creativity, and innovation, along with interdisciplinary courses and project-based learning (interview with Salman, 2024). In addition, as technology rapidly evolves, higher education must integrate emerging technologies like AI and VR to remain relevant. These technologies can transform teaching, learning, and research, offering students the opportunity to engage with cutting-edge tools and concepts. Furthermore, employers increasingly seek soft skills such as communication and adaptability, which traditional education often overlooks. Without opportunities to develop these skills, students will not be fully prepared for success in the workforce (Interview with Atef, 2024). Thus, integrating soft skills development into academic programs is crucial to ensuring that graduates are well-rounded and capable of navigating the challenges of modern careers.

In short, higher education programs require significant reform to ensure their relevance in today’s dynamic job market. Emphasizing critical thinking, emerging technologies, and soft skills will better equip students for the workforce. Evidence-based reforms and innovative teaching practices will foster societal progress by producing graduates who are not only knowledgeable but also adaptable, innovative, and equipped with the practical skills required by employers. The quality and relevance of education, especially in private universities, must improve to ensure students have the tools necessary to succeed in their careers (Interview with: Atef, Salman, Adam, Al-Ghunaimi, Al-Maskari, Al-Saadi, Abdulrahim, 2024).

#### **4.5. Professional Certification**

In today’s competitive job market, traditional academic achievements like master’s or Ph.D. degrees are increasingly being overshadowed by the growing emphasis on standardized certifications. Employers now prioritize certifications, such as TOEFL or IELTS for language proficiency, over university degrees, believing that these tests offer a more reliable measure of skill than academic transcripts. This shift stems from concerns over grade inflation and the perception that university grades do not always reflect a candidate’s potential. Consequently, the assessment of abilities and skills has shifted significantly in modern business environments. Employers now value practical skills that align with organizational goals, driven by the dynamic market, technological advancements, and evolving job requirements. Skills in effective communication, problem-solving, teamwork, adaptability, and innovation are now preferred over qualifications alone. Interviews with Al-Maskari, Al-Saadi, and Abdulrahim (2024) confirm that competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, and the ability to work collaboratively are key factors in hiring decisions.

Furthermore, this focus on competencies is closely linked to improved organizational performance. Employees who possess the right skills and practical abilities contribute to innovation and success within organizations. By prioritizing these competencies during hiring, companies ensure better alignment between individual performance and business objectives, leading to long-term success and sustainability (Interviews with Al-Maskari; Al-Saadi; Abdulrahim, 2024). Therefore, the emphasis on practical skills is not just about

fulfilling immediate hiring needs but also about fostering innovation and maintaining organizational competitiveness.

The declining interest in traditional university degrees can also be attributed to the gap between theoretical knowledge taught at universities and the practical skills demanded by the job market. Many universities continue to focus primarily on theory that may not always be applicable in modern workplaces. To address this issue, a more holistic approach to talent assessment is necessary—one that considers both academic achievements and practical experience, as highlighted by an interview with Mubarak (2024). This approach would ensure that individuals are equipped with both the theoretical foundations and the practical skills needed to thrive in today's labour market.

In summary, this research explored the relevance of pursuing a PhD in today's job market and examined the motivations behind individuals seeking doctoral degrees. Through qualitative and quantitative analysis, the study revealed that the job market, except for academia and research roles, places greater emphasis on specific skills and practical experience than on doctoral qualifications. Specifically, data from platforms like Bayt.com and Gulf Talent (2024) confirmed that most positions do not require a PhD, with only a limited number of executive roles demanding a combination of technical expertise, research proficiency, and managerial capabilities.

Building on this, the findings challenge the perception that a PhD is essential for professional success outside academia. Instead, they underscore the importance of aligning higher education programs with market needs by focusing on practical skills alongside academic knowledge. Therefore, universities must address skill gaps and enhance curricula to balance theoretical understanding with real-world applications, ensuring that graduates are better equipped for diverse career paths. Moreover, in Oman, the demand for advanced degrees reflects the country's efforts toward economic diversification and the growing need for specialized expertise in sectors such as technology, healthcare, and education. While doctoral degrees are often viewed as pathways to influential positions, the mismatch between academic outputs and labor market demands further emphasizes the need for reforms in higher education. Additionally, flexible learning formats, such as online and hybrid programs, illustrate the evolving expectations of doctoral candidates who seek to balance professional and academic goals. Furthermore, gov-

ernment policies supporting research and innovation play a pivotal role in shaping the demand for PhD holders in Oman. These policies are particularly important in driving economic progress and addressing emerging sectoral needs. However, the broader focus should remain on fostering practical, transferable skills to enhance workforce readiness. By prioritizing program quality, interdisciplinary learning, and experiential education, universities can better prepare students to navigate the complexities of the job market and contribute meaningfully to national development.

## 5. Conclusions

This study highlights the growing trend of doctoral pursuits among master's graduates and students, particularly within governmental contexts. This trend is motivated not only by a desire for skill acquisition but also by aspirations for career advancement and prestige. However, concerns have been raised regarding the preferred countries and institutions for master's degrees, especially in distance learning, which calls into question the efficacy of these programs in fostering comprehensive understanding. The study also emphasizes the need to align educational offerings with changing market demands, focusing on bridging the gap in skills through skill-based evaluation. Looking forward, it is crucial to assess how doctoral programs can better align with market demands and stimulate innovation, using methodologies like in-depth interviews and thorough data analysis to extract meaningful insights. Overall, the demand for doctoral holders in Oman is driven by various factors, which require careful consideration by policymakers, educational institutions, and employers to ensure that strategies are aligned with market needs and contribute to social progress.

The results of this study also indicate a shift in societal perceptions of success, where the focus is moving from academic credentials, such as PhDs, towards roles that offer tangible societal benefits. This change encourages individuals to prioritize impactful contributions over traditional notions of prestige. Promoting careers in public service, for example, could enhance governance and foster social innovation, as these roles hold significant influence in shaping policies and driving transformative societal change. Furthermore, there is an increasing recognition of skill-based achievements over academic credentials, promoting a culture that values prac-



tical contributions and problem-solving abilities. This shift further underscores the importance of developing capabilities that address societal needs and challenges.

In a similar vein, organizations are adapting to these changes by placing greater emphasis on practical skills, such as communication, critical thinking, and adaptability, rather than academic degrees. To facilitate this transformation, companies must invest in professional development and training programs to build a more agile and capable workforce. The findings suggest that organizations are increasingly prioritizing certifications and practical experience over higher academic qualifications, pointing to the need for strategic recruitment practices that align with market demands. By focusing on employees who can drive innovation and operational efficiency, organizations can ensure they meet the evolving needs of the workforce. Additionally, to address the disconnect between academic programs and industry requirements, organizations should collaborate with educational institutions to co-design programs that integrate practical learning, internships, and project-based experiences.

For students, the evolving job market presents a broader range of career opportunities beyond academia. Students are encouraged to explore roles in public service, entrepreneurship, and other purpose-driven fields, aligning their careers with their skills, interests, and values. To thrive in this environment, educational programs must prioritize the development of practical skills, such as problem-solving, leadership, and digital literacy, to better prepare students for real-world challenges. Students should also consider pursuing professional certifications that complement their career goals. Staying informed about market trends and acquiring in-demand competencies is crucial, as pursuing higher academic degrees without a clear professional alignment may not enhance employability. Thus, it is essential for students to focus on acquiring skills that directly contribute to their career success. However, the study does have limitations, such as the sample size used for interviews and the limited time period for analysing job posting data. Future research should expand data sources to include a wider range of job portals and industry-specific datasets for a more comprehensive understanding of market trends. A comparative analysis across different regions would also help assess how the relevance of advanced degrees, like PhDs, varies geographically. Additionally, a longitudinal study would

provide valuable insights into the evolving demands of the job market. Further research could also examine sectors where advanced qualifications are still valued and reduce subjective bias by incorporating more quantitative methods alongside qualitative data to ensure a more reliable and rigorous analysis.

## Author Contributions

Conceptualization, R.A.; methodology, R.A.; data collection, R.A.; formal analysis, R.A.; writing—original draft preparation, R.A.; writing—review and editing, R.A. and H.A.G.; supervision, H.A.G. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

## Funding

This work received no external funding.

## Data Availability Statement

Data are available upon reasonable request.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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