

**UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT IN UNDERGRADUATES  
PERSONAL, ACADEMIC, SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH, AND FUTURE  
EMPLOYABILITY: CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES**

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**ABSTRACT**

Sociologist G. H. Mead's renowned theory on self-development and social behaviorism proposed that the self was composed of a self-image and self-awareness, which was a part of an individual's greater personality. This personality is a product of personal and social experience, and interaction. For this study, the process of personal development is viewed through this spectrum within a university environment. The purpose of this study is understanding the role of personal development in academia, and undergraduates' future employability prospects by factoring into the opportunities and challenges it presents. This study aims to determine how personal development undertaken by undergraduates at Iqra University Islamabad, serves as a foundation for students to build on their personal and academic development, and discover their career pathways. Selecting a sample of respondents from the academic year of 2018, this study investigates the response of 90 first semester undergraduates. It advances on data gathered through a student answered survey, uncovering students' response, feedback, and challenges.

**Keywords:** self-development, self-awareness, social behaviorism, personal development, academic development, undergraduates

## Overview

If we were to consider the current state of affairs across the globe with respect to prospects around future graduate employability, we will come to find that the idea of 'graduates co-creating and developing opportunities for employability' is more relevant now than ever. If career management skills are placed as a pivotal focus for graduates academic and personal development, then breaking in and excelling in a global knowledge economy would become second nature to the course of their career evolution. Personal Development, with a core focus on academic and career development, especially within the realm of higher education serves as a pivotal platform by engaging students in personal and career driven experiences that further translates into enhanced skills and characteristics applicable in multiple facets of their lives.

### Benefits of personal development in higher education:

Personal development is a self-education process. A personal development plan as a process, enables students to become independent, and well-rounded through the following spheres:

**Personal:** It enables consistent improvement in personal attributes, self-confidence, planning and achieving aspirations.

**Academic:** It helps create self-directed learners who thrive on independently achieving higher levels of academic excellence.

**Social:** It increases the ability to empathize with others, reinforces the importance of co-existence, and builds greater awareness of recognizing other people's needs.

**Professional:** It encourages students to discover and develop skills that can greatly increase their chances of employment.

According to Edwards and Usher (2000), the global future employability agenda has observed a shift from the enlightened student to the more autonomous self-directed lifelong learner. Barnett (2003) reinforced the same argument with a similar view, highlighting the growing interest in the self-generational capacities of students. PDP is conceptualized as a tool through which such changes are being implemented (Clegg, 2004), and similar patterns can be seen emerging across UK, Europe and in other advanced higher education systems around the globe (Hudson et al., 2004).

## Introduction

Growth in essence is a continual and endless process, and once observed on an individual level, it translates into personal development. This process is enabled when an individual begins to develop their knowledge parallel with skills, characteristics, and traits that add to the quality of their life. To look at it from a slightly different angle, say if we yearn for our future to be progressively and exponentially better from where we stand today, we then must actively equip ourselves with appropriate knowledge, skills and credentials that would help curb it into that which we desire.

### Defining concepts

#### **Personal development**

Personal development is widely recognized as a process that helps discover our strengths, the good parts of us, and then translates these attributes into creating a reality where we are able to fully

embrace, and actualize the greater purpose of our existence. To begin, it requires cultivating or identifying an already existing sincere inherent desire within the individual to want to become the best version of their self (Maslow, 1943). It stands in need of identifying the image they have created for themselves, and acknowledging the image the society as a whole has created of them. Finally, it calls for the individual to realize how far they are from the version of who they would like to become, in terms of their life purpose, personal values and self-importance, their ideal self (Morris, 283). This means that self-actualization begins to manifest when an individual's ideal self is congruent with their actual behavior, their self-image (Rogers, 1959).

### ***Self-concept***

If we were to imagine looking into a mirror, what do you think we would see? Our ideal self or our actual self? The ideal self is the image of our self which we aspire to become, the one we hope possess attributes and characteristics similar to someone we idealize in reality or our imagination. The actual self on the other hand is the one that we actually see, the image of self that embodies attributes and characteristics we were born with and have nurtured over the years.

Both these ideas of self are broader categories of self-concept, the ideal self and the actual self. Self-concept explains the level of self-awareness we exhibit, negotiating between the two selves. It identifies and separates the ideal self from others, while defining all the behavioral attributes of the actual self that help attain the ideal self.

### ***Self-knowledge***

Self-knowledge is the basis that births the actual self, derived by social interactions, it demonstrates how others react to us. Actual self defines who we inherently are, it embodies our thinking, feelings, outlook and behavior. More transparent to the viewer from the outside, since its truly difficultly to be able to fully understand how we are viewed by others, in a sense the actual self is our self-image.

On the other hand, the ideal self defines how we desire to be. It embodies a persona of our most idealized image of ourselves which has been developed over our lifetime, directly based on our exposure, experiences and knowledge. It exhibits a mix of fractions of our heritage, what is passed down to us and taught by our parents, the ideas we idealize and admire in other individuals, what we consider best in our interests and what the society describes as desirable.

Numerous complex exchanges between the ideal and actual self-demonstrate the negotiation that exists between the two. Derived from outcomes of social interaction, these exchanges present themselves in the social roles that an individual evolves from the age of infancy to adulthood. Once the way that an individual is (the actual self) in absolute harmony with the way they want to be (the ideal self), then they are likely to be at peace and experience highest degrees of mental wellbeing. If however, this alignment is derailed, and the way that we are does not align perfectly with the way we want to be, then the chances of anxiety, distress and mental illness magnifies drastically. The greater the level of incongruity between the two, the higher the degree of distress. Personal development focuses on targeting these two personality domains by ensuring that perfect levels of alignment are reached and sustained through the greatest levels of self-knowledge and awareness.

## Personal development planning

Personal Development Planning (PDP) is widely recognized as a method of identifying one's strengths and areas for improvement. It is a process of recording achievements and reflecting on personal progress. It assists in creating a personal future vision map, and subsequently helps set clear achievable goals and action plans. A personal development plan creates a roadmap to the best version of an individual's personal, academic and professional future self. It makes an individual proactively involved in all aspects relating to their life, especially with regard to preparing for their future.

Before being able to impact a work place, a local community, or the whole world at large, an individual must begin by self-reflecting and focusing on their personal development. The underlying logic behind this self-centric evolutionary model lays in the simple idea that the stronger an individual's personal development, the more valuable their contributions to the collective society. The influence and impact an individual can generate on a larger society is directly dependent on how successfully they have evolved through the following phases of their individual journey:

**Self-actualization:** Self-actualization (Goldstein, 1934) is achieved once an individual feels they have self-fulfilled (Maslow, 1943) their true purpose of existence, and have become the closest version to their self-proclaimed ideal self. Personal development focuses on personal growth by enabling individuals to achieve these personal milestones and needs that they have set out for their lives. A personal development plan helps individuals identify these needs, and motivates them to enable the process of self-actualization.

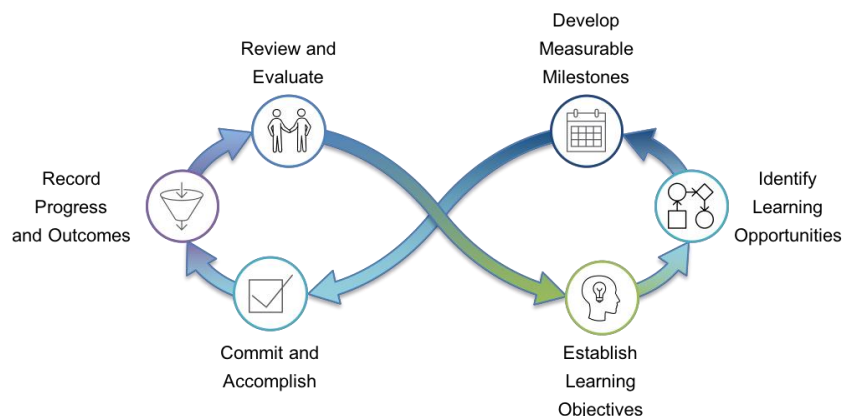
**Life's purpose:** While many of us continue to live without realizing there is a greater purpose (Metz, 2012) behind our existence here in this world, personal development is a tool that awakens individuals inherent understanding of their existence. This understanding helps individuals create lifetime goals and achieve them, giving more meaning and purpose to the quality of their everyday life experiences. Personal development starts with an individual accessing and assessing their current state. They first determine their areas of strength, and then reflect on areas in their life that can use further improvement. In the eventual course of discovering solutions for such areas, individuals begin a self-evolutionary process by following their passions. They narrow their focus on self-improvement, and align their goals with skill and talent advancement. This is one of the quickest and most effective method of uncovering one's true calling and greater life purpose.

**Personality development:** Personal development helps create opportunity to build a great personality which is essential to achieving one's lifelong milestones and goals (Rogers, 1959). It goes hand in hand with an individual developing varied interests, and new approaches to life. Benefits of positive personality development encompass a healthy self-image, a high level of self-love, a positive and warm outlook on life, a strong sense of self-initiative, improved self-confidence, pro-active character building skills, healthy brain-storming, effective communication and presentation skills, and an improved overall demeanor.

**A life vision map (life direction):** Personal development encourages and enables individuals to envision who they want to become, and what kind of a life they want to be living (Covey, 1991). It helps them identify with the potentially best version of themselves, and sets them out on a journey of actualizing their ideal self into reality. It also makes goal-setting and decision-making easier (Loehr and Schwartz, 2011).

Figure 1.

# Personal Development Plan



## Personal effectiveness

Personal effectiveness defines the act of taking advantage of all the personal resources such as our numerous talents, skills, knowledge, attributes, time and energy, in order to achieve our goals.

The knowledge we hold regarding our self, our self-awareness, and how we manage ourselves has a direct impact on our personal effectiveness. Key elements to improving our personal performance include and are not limited to:

- being self-aware
- make most of our strengths
- refine old and acquire new skills and techniques
- behavioral flexibility
- high levels of positivity and motivation
- self-initiating outlook

An individual's personal effectiveness is dependent on their innate natures, attributes, and characteristics, such as the experiences, skills, talents and knowledge inherited over the course of their personal development process. It is important that the practitioners are aware of using only the most effective methods, that not only help identify talent but also guide to developing and implementing it in the right field i.e. art, science, politics, sports, literature, sociology, etc.

Skills and knowledge acquired through the processes of practical and cognitive activities also account for personal experiences. Knowledge is pivotal to goal setting, defining action plans and consequential risk assessment and evaluation. Skills gauge and determine whether action steps have been undertaken in accordance with the plan. Once the same ability is routinized and used a number of times in the same method and situation, it evolves into a habit, which absorbs into our inherent nature.

Following is a list of personal effectiveness attributes that has the potential to greatly enhance efficiency with respect to personal development:

**Self-determination:** This attribute once manifested allows to maintain focus only on achieving a specific goal, with minimal distractions. It amplifies discipline, self-restraint, and helps control urges towards less important distracting things or spontaneous desires.

**Self-confidence:** This attribute can be developed and refined through personal development activities such as becoming more self-aware. Once manifested it can appear visible in a person's body language, communication, thinking, dressing, and appearance. A positive attitude, outlook and self-belief are the setting stones for progression and success.

**Stress management:** This attribute without doubt helps maintain calm, composure and avoid anxiety, emotional distress, fatigue, breakdowns and burnouts. It combats stress consequentially arising from other people and the environment, and helps increase efficiency instead.

**Persistence:** This attribute helps enable consistency and aids in managing performance during roadblocks, obstacles and impediments. It reduces risk of disruption and delay, and help in maintaining continuity and completion.

**Creativity:** This attribute allows room for experimentation, and development leading to innovation. It helps in discovering extraordinary solutions to various problems, it also develops new methods and techniques of representation.

**Idea generation:** This attribute encompasses the use of unconventional ideas, and leads to the innovative creation of new original ones. Mental mapping, brainstorming and mind mapping are just a few tools used to visualize, create, manage, materialize and scrutinize ideas for rewarding results.

**Problem solving:** This attribute is solution oriented and aids in encountering and tackling issues, impediments and problems effectively. It looks to uncover the most effective ways of undertaking tasks, and adds to new experiences.

### **Research aims and objectives**

My study will focus on the following research questions:

- To what extent does Personal Development by way of creating a self-images help Iqra University's undergraduates identify with their natural human inclinations, individual talents, and personal interests and passions?
- To what extent does Personal Development Plans help these students discover their potential career pathways, aligned with their personal passion?
- To what extent does this treatment assist the university in directing students to identify their core area of specialization within the first year, and subsequently select appropriate coursework through the course of their undergraduate degree?

### **Materials and methodology**

A qualitative research design is implemented through a comprehensive review of existing literature in the first phase, and then a web-based survey is undertaken in the second phase. An online portal and survey tool recognized as the 'Survey Monkey' is used to conduct the survey. A self-completion questionnaire based on the reviewed literature along with the prescribed coursework with respect to the taught course manual of the subject was developed. It contained a combination of structured and open ended questions. 'Survey Monkey,' a web-based survey tool was used to make the questionnaire accessible to the respondents. It collected the data from 70 respondents, who had previously taken

the course in their first semester, in the academic year of 2018. The respondent list only included students from the first semester who had completed the coursework in this academic year at the university. They were approached via personal emails, and WhatsApp messages. This data was collected within the span of two weeks. Prior to the research, the students were briefed about the research and the intent of the study, and they were requested to respond fairly and honestly. It was made known that the information being gathered will be used to assess the effectiveness of the course, and will contribute to progressive policy reform, if needed and wherever applicable.

The objective was to study and assess the response of the students in regard to their experience curtaining to the effectiveness of “Personal Development” course at the Department of Social Science, Iqra University, and its institutional methods. Specifically, the objectives are:

- Investigate the impact of the course on Personal Development Students with respect to their personal, academic, social and professional development,
- Find out if the curriculum is effective with respect to achieving its aims and if it requires any change to meet its desired aims, and
- Seek student response and feedback along with suggestions to review and improve implementation policies for the future

Students were challenged to set their personal development plans, after reflecting on their strengths and weaknesses, identified and observed especially through:

drawing out self-images and conducting SWOT analysis, a personal JOHARI window used in class (Luft & Ingham, 1955)

- three self-assessment questionnaires
- personal manifesto essays
- self-profiling through personal statements
- online personality assessment quizzes

These activities were aimed to assist them both in the short term for the learning process at the university and in the long term for developing their future careers. However, the survey as part of the research was voluntary; thus, there were 70 students who agreed to undertake the self-assessment and evaluation survey.

Numerous policies and practices are already found to be in place, therefore, the aim of my research is to understand the implementation and practice, and research models already available for supporting and developing PDP. It also looks to consider the views of different stakeholders involved, especially with particular emphasis on the students, about the place and effectiveness of PDP in the curriculum. My research contributes to the growing sociology research on student learner experience in personal development, building on existing research, and adding to the insightful and innovative work by sociologists such as George Mead, Charles Cooley, Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan.

Personal Development is conceptualized as a continuous process, with each level building on the previous. The first academic year by design tends to focus on the personal and academic development of students. The second academic year gears towards professional development, work-based learning and off-campus study. The third year rotates around preparing students for interviews, and helping them in-still a vision to able to use this experience to either create employment opportunities, or initiate self-employment through start-ups. Identification of the students’ needs, through the use of

skills audit and reflection on personal skills, is designed to support preparation for the prospective employment placement interview questions. Encouragement in the development of an action plan and target setting is then used to develop skills and confidence in areas that require improvement. The focus on portfolio creation varies widely, including the development of portfolio assessment as a diagnostic tool (Barootchi & Keshavarz, 2002) and the development of self-reflection and target setting (Schroeder, 1996). Although it is a part of university curriculum and practice, my area of research does not focus on transcript creation, portfolio handling or skill auditing.

A rising trend has been observed where the instructor or professor is seen as a facilitator instead of a supplier of knowledge and information for the students. It is also a known fact that students are greatly influenced by their emotions and sense of self awareness in their process of learning. They cannot develop properly unless a considerable amount of focus and emphasis has been given to self-reflection and evaluation, incoherence with personal development planning. While the general goal of the course is to enhance the educational process and increase learning motivation, this paper aims to evaluate and explore students' self-awareness and its utility with respect to their career development and employability. A case-study method is used by relying on the voluntary participation of students who agreed to draw out some ideas about their strengths and weaknesses, and undertake a series of SMART objectives are meant to prove useful for their future careers. Students were also asked to explore some ways to attain their objectives. When analyzing their works, the focus was put on the reflective approach and on the students' motivation to learn.

## **Results and discussions**

### **Personal development at an academic level**

#### ***Education and students' development plans***

In education 'motivation' refers to the various factors that play a part in stimulating and energizing the learning process (Hrbackova & Suchankova, 2016; Radu, 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2000). As many authors have suggested in their works, self-reflection and personal development planning should be used in education in order to support students' motivation. In order to develop leadership skills and boost their individual careers (Benjamin & O'Reilly, 2011; Hunt, Langowitz, Rollag, & Hebert-Maccaro, 2017; Nesbit, 2012). A lot of emphasis is laid out on understanding that self-reflection is a combination of self-judgement and self-reaction (Zimmerman, 2002). Thus, while self-reflection is initiated with thoughts (self-judgement), it should be followed by a series of emotions and actions (self-reaction).

#### **Relationship between personal development and employability**

This paper advances on the proposition that the one dimension that stands central to the developmental capacity of learners and their ability to recognize, articulate and evidence their learning is the relationship between Personal Development Planning (PDP) and Employability. This relationship is key to the learners' overall development, and effective progression through the course of their academic learning as well as throughout their work life. The closer their academic and career is to their personal passion, the more they are expected to excel and become successful.

Employability itself has been defined and has been given meaning to through a number of classifications, however Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT) has defined it as:

‘a set of skills, knowledge and personal attributes that make an individual more likely to secure and to be successful in their chosen occupation(s) to the benefits of themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy ’(Yorke, 2004, reissued 2006).

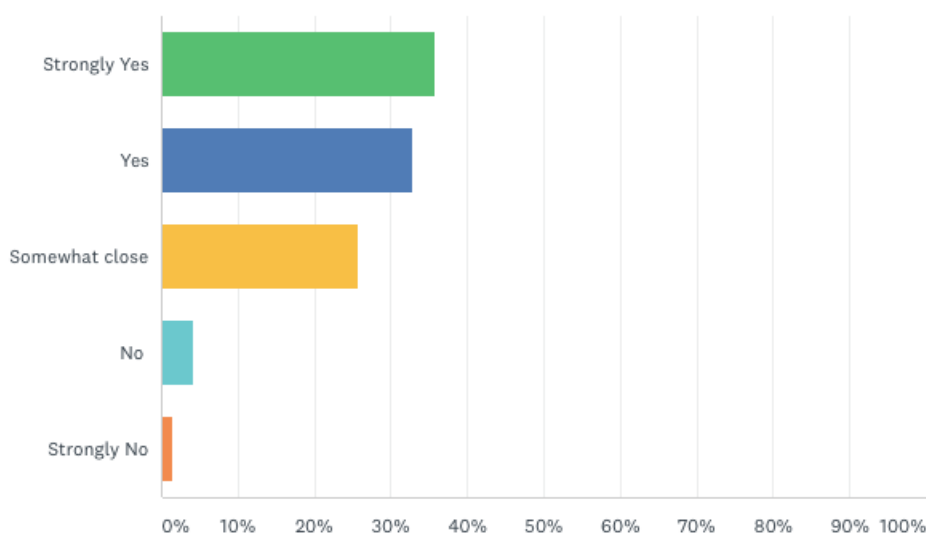
ESECT’s (Knight and Yorke, 2004) approach focuses on connecting learning support with enhancing employability, and emphasises on defining employability as a process instead of a state. This approach accords a central role to Personal Development Planning and it bases its arguments on the importance of:

- Students knowledge bank in terms of knowing what they should be learning, and being aware of the purpose behind how their credentials and achievements will be judged.
- The need for students to develop effective approaches and ways for presenting these credentials and achievements to their future prospective employers, and graduate schools.

Figure 2.

## Is your academic focus and potential career choice same as your personal passion?

Answered: 70 Skipped: 1



35.71% students responded with ‘Strongly Yes’ when asked if their academic focus and potential career choice was aligned with their personal passion. 32.86% responded with ‘Yes’ and 25.71% responded with ‘Somewhat Close’ with only 4.29% retorting to ‘No’ and 1.43% choosing ‘Strongly No’. 48 out of the 70 respondents were following their desires

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Yes	35.71%	25
Yes	32.86%	23
Somewhat close	25.71%	18
No	4.29%	3
Strongly No	1.43%	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>70</b>

and seemingly happy with their choice. Remaining 18 were satisfied, while 3 were not content and only 1 was extremely discontent.

In order to explain the importance and relevance of encouraging students to follow their passion and talents, and how this may relate to their academic and career progression, allow me to reference the following case of UK's education and development policy: Taking the case of UK's development policy on Personal Development, the National Committee of Inquiry and Higher Education (the Dearing Report, 1997) have presented guidelines that are incorporated with Progress Files (QAA, 2001):

Defining PDP as a support process structured to develop and strengthen the existing skills, natural talents, and capacity of learners to be able to reflect on their personal development, learning and achievements, and to be able to independently plan for their educational and career development.

States PDP's primary objective is focused on improving learners' capacity to understand what they are learning, the methods of learning being adopted, the skills being learnt, and the ability to be able to review, plan, and take proper responsibility for their own learning.

It enables and equips students to:

- grow in effectiveness and enables them to become independent and confident self-directed learners
- grow in understanding of what and how they are learning, and relate the methods of learning and the knowledge being gained to a wider context
- grow in skill acquisition and improve their capacity with regard to their study and career management
- grow in their capacity and ability to evaluate their progress towards their achievements, and articulate their personal goals
- grow in developing a positive attitude towards learning, progression and self-sufficiency throughout the course of their lives

The development of both student self-understanding and the ability to present themselves accurately to others, as identified by Knight and Yorke, are explicitly identified within many if not all elements of PDP provisions.

Inferring from the existing literature available on practices of Personal Development, the literature is known to vary widely. Personal development planning has had various incarnations within the higher education sector (Assiter & Shaw, 1993; Ashcroft & Foreman-Peck, 1994). It is not a phenomenon relative to only a hand few regions (West & Hore 1989; Hudson, 2003), instead it is widely applicable across various academic sectors around the world. The development of PDP is fetched far beyond evidence collection; it forms an intermediary stage leading to continuing professional development (CDP) and lifelong learning (Slusarchuk, 1998; Pickles, 2000). PDP concentrates an integral portion on aspiring to provide the opportunity for students to develop skills relevant in the workplace (Kneale, 2002). It is used as a dominant model to develop a holistic view of personal development in undergraduate education.

The EPPI-Centre review of PDP (Gough et al., 2003) as part of its systematic review surfaced over 14,000 references. Analysis of the Generic Centre (Clegg, 2004), now known as the Higher Education Academy, 'Guides for Busy Academics' finds that a wide range of arguments have been adopted, and a broad scope of practices exist. It is this holistic nature of the concept that gives it its pedagogic power,

and a variety of distinct practices can only justifiably describe implementation of PDP by higher education institutions.

UK's higher education emphasizes academic and professional development through support process, focused on enhanced student learning and development (Floud, 2002). While ensuring academic practices are kept consistent with Quality Assurance Agency Guidelines (QAA, 2001), and acknowledging the diversity of disciplinary and professional traditions. UK's organization responsible for defining and setting explicit standards for higher education institutions, The Quality Assurance Agency recommends inclusion of the following in the personal development student progress files:

the transcript: which is identified with as a record of an academic individual's learning and achievement, provided by the institution;

the portfolio: is considered an individual's personal records of learning and achievements, it includes progress review reports and future plans that are used to clarify personal goals. This also serves to provide a resource from which material is further selected to produce personal statements (e.g. CVs) etc. for employers;

structured self-evaluation processes that develop the capacity of individuals to reflect on their own learning and achievement so they can plan for their personal educational and career development independently. Personal Development Planning (PDP) is used as a term to denote this process (QAA, 2001).

Figure 3.

## Overall, how would you rate the course?

Answered: 71 Skipped: 0



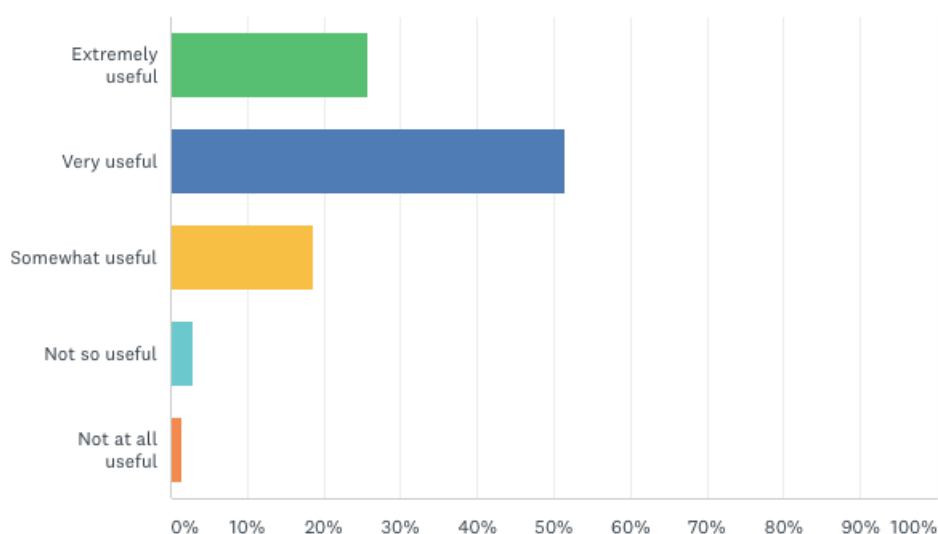
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Excellent	54.93%	39
Very good	18.31%	13
Good	25.35%	18
Fair	0.00%	0
Poor	1.41%	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>71</b>

When questioned over how well the students would rate the course, 39 respondents (54.93%) rated it 'Excellent,' while 13 respondents (18.31%) rated 'Very Good' and 18 respondents (25.35%) selected 'Good.' 70 respondents gave a positive review in favor of the effectiveness of the course, while only 1 respondent (1.41%) responded negatively. A clear trend of a positive response can be seen in favor of the course, thereby showcasing a clear majority for its implementation and effectiveness. 70 students benefitted from the course and strongly recommend its inclusion in the curriculum.

Figure 4.

### To what extent did Personal Development help you identify your natural human inclinations, personal interests and individual talents?

Answered: 70 Skipped: 1



Students were requested to share to what extent personal development aided them in identifying their natural human inclinations, personal interests and individual talents, to which 18 respondents (25.71%) found it to be 'Extremely Useful', 36 respondents (51.43%) found it to be 'Very Useful'. 13 respondents (18.57%) felt it was somewhat useful while 2 respondents (2.86%) felt it was 'Not so useful' and only 1 respondent (1.43%) found it 'Not at all useful'. 67 students responded in favor of this enquiry while 3 took a stand against it. Again, a clear majority seem to find it effective in self-identity and self-awareness.

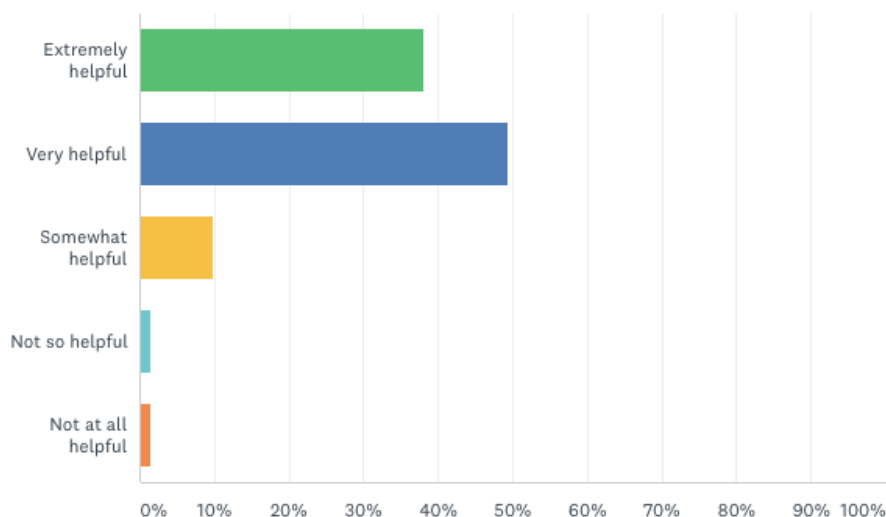
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely useful	25.71%	18
Very useful	51.43%	36
Somewhat useful	18.57%	13
Not so useful	2.86%	2
Not at all useful	1.43%	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>70</b>	

## Building on strengths and working on weaknesses

Figure 5.

How helpful was the class activity of creating self-Images in identifying your strengths and weaknesses?

Answered: 71 Skipped: 0



By drawing out self-images and conducting personal swot analysis, students were encouraged to uncover their strengths, weaknesses, and potential areas of academic opportunities based on these finding. This activity assisted them in identifying and actively working on their areas of improvement, and helped them better equip themselves to

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Extremely helpful	38.03% 27
Very helpful	49.30% 35
Somewhat helpful	9.86% 7
Not so helpful	1.41% 1
Not at all helpful	1.41% 1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>71</b>

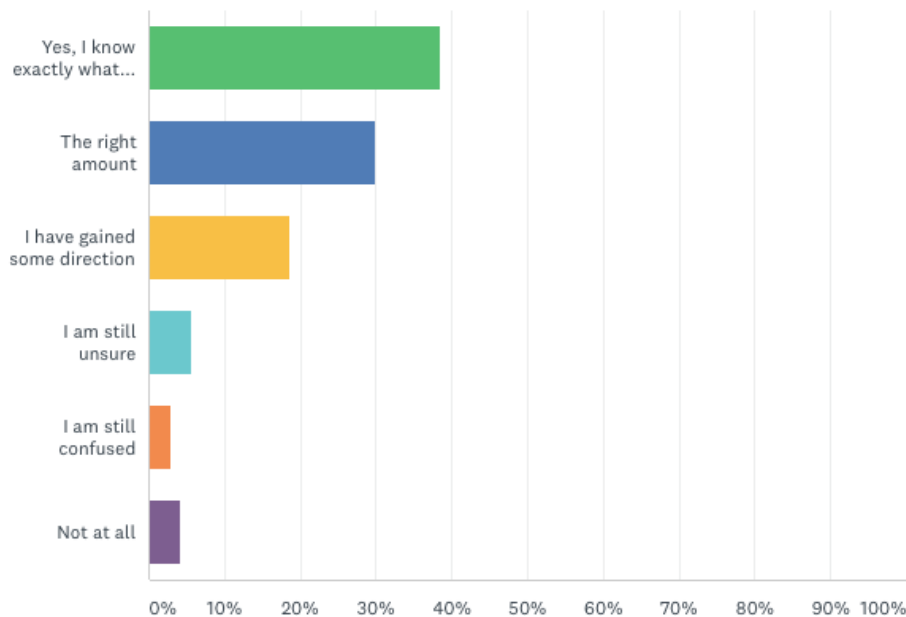
counter any potential threats or roadblocks. Most failures emanate from weaknesses that have not been fully recognized, and if they have then they have not been given appropriate attention or remedy. These weaknesses could range from poor communications, to a poor personality or lack of ability. Instead of simply focusing on their weaknesses, and recognizing their talents and abilities, students realized and shared that saw opportunities to build on these areas, aiming to utilize them to their greatest

advantage. This allowed them to build on their name and popularity through planned personal development. They felt more encouraged and motivated to take action, instead of giving up or indulging in self-pity.

Figure 6.

## Did Personal Development coursework help you identify the academic and career path you want to pursue?

Answered: 70 Skipped: 1



27 respondents (38.57%) reported to now know exactly what they wanted, while 21 (30%) felt personal development coursework helped them identify their academic and career pathway the right amount. 13 respondents (18.57) felt they gained some direction, while 4

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ Yes, I know exactly what I want to do	38.57%	27
▼ The right amount	30.00%	21
▼ I have gained some direction	18.57%	13
▼ I am still unsure	5.71%	4
▼ I am still confused	2.86%	2
▼ Not at all	4.29%	3
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>70</b>

(5.71%) remained uncertain. 2 (2.86%) respondents were still confused and 3 (4.29%) felt they gained no assistance at all. For those who responded positively, implementation of personal development plans enabled them use this information to draw out a personal

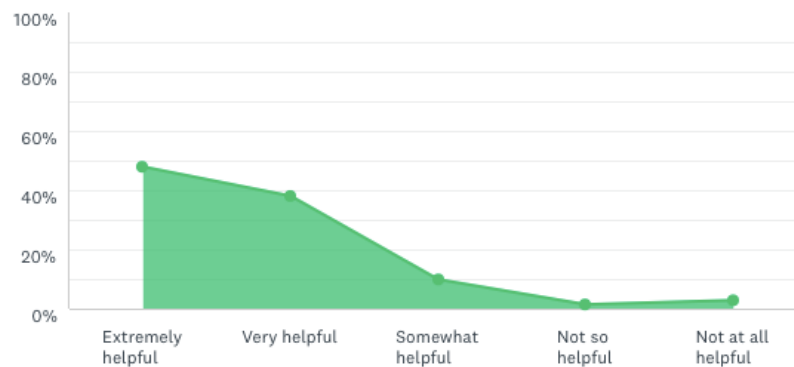
vision map of their future self, which further directed them to set out clear academic goals and objectives within timelines adhering to their university academic tenure.

By identifying their academic goals and career pathways, students shared they were easily able to identify with and seek support to find opportunities of future employment with respect to their ongoing academic endeavors. This helped them narrow down potential areas of employment that they were seeking to become eligible to qualify for. It also helped outline prospective positions of employment and created opportunity for them to direct their academic progression towards sought out areas of employment at an early stage. This information helped students vision out a list of achievements, and enabled them to assess and measure where they stand in terms of their future employment probability and current academic qualifications.

Figure 7.

### How helpful were the assignments and activities to your understanding of the material?

Answered: 71 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely helpful	47.89%	34
Very helpful	38.03%	27
Somewhat helpful	9.86%	7
Not so helpful	1.41%	1
Not at all helpful	2.82%	2
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>71</b>

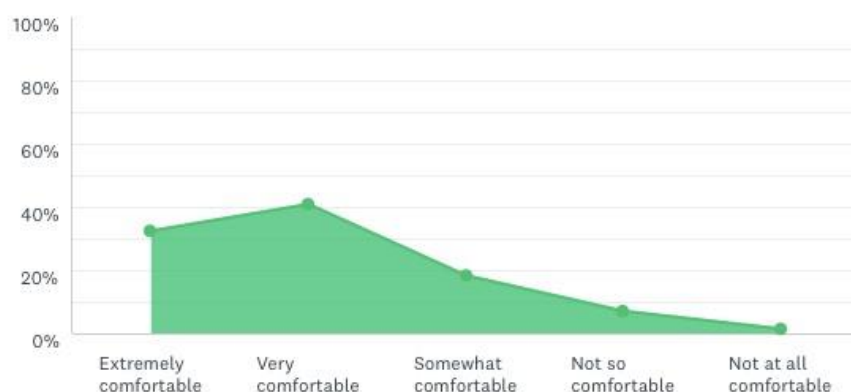
34 respondents (47.89%) found the assignments, activities and techniques 'Extremely helpful,' 27 respondents (38.03%) found them 'Very helpful' while 7 respondents (9.86%) found them somewhat helpful. 68 students presented a positive response whereas 1

respondent (1.41%) found it 'Not so helpful' whereas 2 respondents (2.82%) found them 'Not at all helpful.'

Figure 8.

How comfortable did you feel voicing your opinions in class?

Answered: 71 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely comfortable	32.39%	23
Very comfortable	40.85%	29
Somewhat comfortable	18.31%	13
Not so comfortable	7.04%	5
Not at all comfortable	1.41%	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>71</b>

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of personal development techniques, the confidence and self-assurance level of the students was judged by asking them how comfortable they felt voicing their 'Opinions' in class. 23 respondents (32.39%) felt 'Extremely comfortable' while 29 respondents (40.85%) felt 'Very comfortable' and 13 respondents (18.31%) felt 'Somewhat comfortable'. 65 students accounted for a positive response while 5 students (7.04%) felt 'Not so comfortable' and only 1 student (1.41%) felt 'Not at all comfortable'.

## Personal development at a social level

### Relationships

It is no secret that relationships can either make you or break you which shows that they are two-sided. Through the process of personal development by working on ourselves, we become capable of increasing the capacity we withhold to become better individuals not only on a personal level, better also in terms of our behavior towards others. It enables the creation and sustenance of prolonged, healthier and more fulfilling relationships, while discarding unhealthier ones. It helps us grow in realization of our self-worth, which allows us to identify the relationships that contribute to our growth and are worth keeping from the ones that dampen our growth and should be discarded.

Personal development as a tool assists in refining and acquiring new skills that further add to strengthening our existing relationships, creating a positive impact on our life as well as on those in our company such as our family and friends. Personal development integrates personal and career development with high quality academic learning and employability. Reinforcing the fact that success doesn't come by chance, but by making plans and executing them.

Full of useful practical features, it enables its practitioners to improve their abilities to co- relate with others at higher levels of understanding, and allows for their newly gained knowledge, learning and skillset to ultimately be transferred and applied to all facets of their lives.

Drawing out a personal development plan is relatively easier than the process of implementing and following through on the plan. A good amount of motivation is essential to begin this process of self-improvement.

**Setting personal targets:** Also widely recognized as mini-goals they aid in achieving lifelong goals in the long run. In their absence, the idea of achieving a goal may begin to seem like a pipe dream which may lead to demotivation and a low morale. The grader a goal, the more targets should be set to make them achievable.

**Maintaining a positive, calm and controlled outlook and attitude:** Needless to say, there may exist various many instances and impediments along the way that can de-motivate. Tackling them immediately may at times seem to be a bit out of our own control, therefore remaining calm and positive in the tough times helps create solutions and keeps the process going. It helps build resilience which can help strive towards the goals without quitting or giving up. Failing to do so can result in problems caving in, making success further out of reach. There is no denying that there will always be hurdles, but believing in the end, you will be the winner is key.

**Developing and building on positive relationships:** It is essential to be surrounded in the company of people who lift you up, motivate you, help you strive towards your goals and support you through all aspects of the journey. Never allow yourself to be dragged down and under by of someone else, and never become victim to others validation. Realizing that your goals are your own, therefore, so keeping them yourself is extremely pivotal. Only allow the right people with the right energy around you, who have the skills and qualities to help you run towards your goals. Surround yourself with likeminded strong successful people who grow on building each other up and find strength in one another's progression.

## Personal development at a professional level

### Workplace

The following are ideas combined with practical initiatives developed with the purpose of connecting personal development with work, to enhance prospects concerning student employability. Under the umbrella of personal development, students are taught to value their personal, academic and prospective professional lives through the same spectrum. The idea of valuing oneself is closely linked with personal development, which is further closely tied to professional development and achieving lifelong personal and career goals. When an individual is focusing and working on their growth, be it in a private or professional capacity, both relate to them personally developing themselves. When growth is tied to organizational goals, personal development can play a key role in assisting and enabling individuals to achieve outstanding results.

### Personal development benefits in the workplace:

***Drives, uplifts and boosts motivation:*** Personal Development enables you to run a personal SWOT Analysis, and makes you more aware of your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities for growth and improvements, and possible threats blocking potential growth and development. This knowledge can help you become more productive, and make effective decisions, resulting in achieving positive outcomes which not only boosts confidence but also motivates to achieve more.

***Enhances skill advancement:*** Personal Development plan involves creation of a vision board and life plan, including career goals which highlights a roadmap to initiatives that must be undertaken. This helps identifying skill development in detail, enabling Individuals to devise a step by step process of skill improvement and acquisition of new ones.

***Mastering goal-setting:*** Personal development planning encompasses both short-term and long-term goal setting and planning. It allows you to break down major goals into achievable smaller goals, through a daily plan which not only makes the process easier and less intimidating, but also a lot less burdensome. Committing to goals set personally are also easier to follow compared to the ones being imposed on you, which makes personal development planning a much more effective choice.

***Beneficial for everyone:*** Personal development does not only benefit an individual alone, it has an impact on a greater level, such as the productivity of an entire organization. This is the primary reason why professional development training and employee self-evaluation is an integral part of some of the most successful organizations across the world.

### Conclusion

By undertaking personal development strategies, exercises, assignments and techniques, and through successfully task completion students can obtain more in terms of discovering

themselves and can also take substantial steps further towards being more self-motivated to learn and achieve.

Although the results from my findings express the reality of the context in which my research took place, they cannot be generalized. Moreover, it is important to highlight that these results reflect only one side of the educational process (the learner), it should be taken into account that it is just as important to consider the other side's perceptions (the teachers and institutions)—to gain a more objective perspective.

There is little doubt that a student-centered approach enables better communication with students, and also plays a vital role in implementing a proper method of challenging them to be more self-aware. Although these are easily some fundamental keys to success in the process of teaching and learning, it must be noted that personal development has some potential for improvement in future by initiating and undertaking a more structured approach.

### ***Recommendations***

By endorsing a paradigm shift from behaviorism to constructivism, research can be used as an effective tool as a much needed addition to personal development. Research in itself is an explorative learning activity, adaption of which involves the natural development of cognitive and psychomotor skills. Introduction of more rigorous methods of implementing 'Applied Theory' can help take this process a step further. Equal importance needs to be reflected on teaching them supplementary skills need to translate the theory into a practical demonstration of work so effective value addition is seen to the implementation and application process of the knowledge being gained. This will help ensure students understand the basis of their learning and research. Including the multiple aspects and areas of their life they can guide and apply this knowledge to, inclusive of the methods required for converging theory into practice. Enabling them to develop the tools and craft they have a natural inclination towards, all the while encouraging them to be their most authentic selves so the development and practice can be sustained over a very long course of time. Another important aspect to be recognized is that teachers should be given the space and freedom to innovate, devise appropriate methods of communication and activities relevant to the needs and concerns of their students as this ultimately improves the quality of institutes education, and no one understands the needs of the students better than them.

### ***Research limitations***

Personal Development literature encompasses several multiple meaning concepts which are often ill-defined. They are poorly under-researched, and found to be highly dependent on context. This research therefore is only focused on students understanding, and response to a range of activities involving self-reflection, identification, visualization, goal setting, planning, monitoring, decision-making and career management. I have not explored issues relating to the production of transcripts, creation of student portfolios, or the issues relating to student employment. It is highly unlikely that such problems can be fixed through some conceptual resolutions which is why my research was restricted to conducting an empirical study of the

experience of students who have undertaken personal development as part of their undergraduate coursework.

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