

Employability of University Students as Prospective Specialists in the Context of Their Competitiveness

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Abstract: In light of globalisation, internationalisation, digitisation, the Covid-19 epidemic, geopolitical instability, and migration, the issue of employability is becoming increasingly important for individuals, universities, and companies. From the point of view of the social sciences, including education sciences and education management sciences, employability can be understood as a set of many different qualities possessed by a specialist. Additionally, employability is the ability to move freely and flexibly within the labour market and to adapt to its changing conditions, ensuring professional development and mobility. These qualities are included in the structure of the specialist's competitiveness, and they indicate the specialist's competitiveness which is influenced by a number of internal and external factors. The aim of the study is to develop a theoretical basis for the assessment and development of the employability of students as prospective specialists in the context of their competitiveness in current conditions, taking into account the recent developments and trends in the social sciences. The authors use the theoretical research methods that include desk study, as well as the evaluation and analysis of numerous documents and scientific literature. As a result, the most essential employability skills of students as prospective specialists have been identified.

Keywords: competitiveness, employability, employment, marketability, prospective specialists, university students.

Introduction

The topic of employability and employment is becoming relevant for individuals, universities, and companies because of globalisation, internationalisation, digitalisation, the Covid-19 pandemic, geopolitical crisis, and migration. Perspectives from the social sciences are applied to the concept of employability; these include the fields of education sciences and education management sciences.

Employability as a component of competitiveness is of interest to researchers from various fields (Bertagni et al, 2015; Grebennikova & Rybkin, 2017; Holmes, 2013; Katane & Troshkova, 2020; Katane & Troshkova, 2022; Kinash et al, 2015; Teichler, 2007; Tomlinson, 2012). With a globally interconnected labour market and the benefits of global sales, the social sciences examine a company's or a state's competitiveness as its ability to sell and supply products and services on the labour market (European Commission, 2019). Experts agree that a company's competitiveness is affected by a wide range of variables, such as labour costs, regulatory burden, productivity, skills, innovation, and infrastructure. The level of competitiveness between specialists, such as students with career goals in the field, and the level of competitiveness between companies may be compared.

The study aim is to develop a theoretical basis for the assessment and development of the employability of students as prospective specialists in the context of their competitiveness in the current conditions, taking into account the most recent developments and trends in the social sciences.

Methodology

The authors use the theoretical research methods, which include desk study, analysis, and evaluation of scientific literature and materials. The employability of a student as a prospective specialist was analysed from two perspectives. First, employability is viewed as the ability to secure and retain a fulfilling position that matches one's skills and professional knowledge and is fairly appreciated and compensated by the employer (Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Katane & Troshkova, 2020). The importance and impact of the internal and external components for employability are emphasized (Grebennikova & Rybkin, 2017; Hillage & Pollard, 1998; McQuaid & Lindsa, 2005). Another approach observed in the literature is that employability is viewed as an individual's set of qualities or skills (Holmes, 2013; Tomlinson, 2012), or an individual's set of previously acquired knowledge, skills, attitudes, competencies, experiences, and

other qualifications that support their ability to be a reliable source of efficiency, innovation, and productivity for an organisation (Smaldone et al, 2022). Numerous scientific publications (Hora, et al, 2020; Katane & Troškova, 2020; Kinash et al, 2015; Lowden et al, 2011; Mahmud & Wong, 2022; Mohan et al, 2018; OECD, 2018; Reimers, 2009; Teichler, 2007) on the employability skills of students as prospective specialists show the relevance of the topic. The study took place in 2022.

Results and Discussion

Literature review indicates that employability is closely related to work and the ability to be employed (Hillage & Pollard, 1998). Employability can be viewed as a single structure with internal and external components, where an individual's knowledge, skills, and competencies comprise the internal component, but the labour market or environment affect how the external component operates (Grebennikova & Rybkin, 2017).

Similarly to the above mentioned, the researchers (McQuaid & Lindsa, 2005) use a broad understanding of employability based on a combination of both individual and external factors that are equally important and are continually interacting with one another. Individual factors, personal circumstances, and external factors are the three main connected aspects that affect the employability of an individual, according to the holistic framework of employability. The employability skills and attributes are assessed individually, based on factors such as core qualities, personal competencies, various types of transferable skills, qualifications and educational attainment, work experience, and connections with the labour market. Personal circumstances can affect one's ability, willingness, or resistance to social pressure to accept a job opportunity. These factors include things such as social and household situations. External factors include elements that affect demand, such as the local labour market, macroeconomic conditions, vacancy characteristics, and recruitment practices (McQuaid & Lindsa, 2005).

Employability encompasses the ability to find their first job after graduation, the ability to retain that job, the ability to move from one job to another within the same organisation, taking up new responsibilities, and, if necessary, the ability to obtain a job with a different organisation to ensure career development (Grebennikova & Rybkin, 2017; Hillage & Pollard, 1998). If the compensation is below average in the field or below the person's expectations, or the position is found in the field where there are low requirements for particular specialists, it is considered undesirable or unsustainable for the individual's professional development. To put it differently, employability is the ability to secure and retain a rewarding position that matches one's skills and professional knowledge and is fairly appreciated and compensated by the employer (Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Katane & Troškova, 2020).

According to the authors (Katane & Troškova, 2020), employability is also the ability to move freely and flexibly within the labour market and adapt to its changing conditions, which ensures career development and mobility. Discourses on graduates' employability have a tendency to emphasise both their economic role and the university's capability to prepare them for the labour market which can be explained by graduates playing an essential role in the economy. In an economy that requires more advanced skill sets and technological expertise, it is believed that graduates can play a crucial role in the drive toward developing products and services with added value (Tomlinson, 2012).

Employability can be confused with employment, although in reality it is a different concept. Employment is a contractual relationship between an employer and employee in which labour is exchanged for remuneration, according to government and market economy laws (Budd & Bhavé, 2010).

Graduate full-time employment rates are becoming an indicator for graduate employability that is used to measure graduate employability. In both Australia and the UK, the government places a strong emphasis on initial graduate employment, jobs obtained within a few months of graduation. As a consequence of this, universities in both nations are under significant financial pressure to guarantee that their graduates will secure permanent employment as soon as possible after graduation (Bridgstock, 2009).

The term employability capital is used to refer to the personal resources that support the employability of a person (Peeters et al., 2017). The employability capital is understood as the capacity to find and

keep a job. The four types of capital - human, social, cultural, and psychological - are related to employability and career changes. The psychological capital, self-efficacy for job hunting, and ambition have the most effects on employability. Social capital, networking, human capital, knowledge, and skills, as well as the work culture of cultural capital, come next, and then personal circumstances of cultural capital. Knowledge, skills, networking, work culture, personal circumstances, and self-efficacy for job searching are factors of employability capital relevant to university students. In this study, capital is defined as a set of human (knowledge and skills), social (networking), cultural (work culture and personal circumstances) and psychological (ambition and self-efficacy for job searching) assets an individual acquires through formal and informal experiences. In other words, university students who do not identify their own human capital will not be able to show initiative and self-management abilities when it comes time to look for employment. This implies that initiatives in education may change how people view university students. The components of knowledge and skills form a basis of the human capital. This suggests that investing in education may improve the perception of university students' chances of finding a suitable job (Caballero et al, 2020).

The terms marketability and employability frequently take the place of competitiveness in various scientific papers (Īriste, 2018; Katane, 2011; Katane & Īriste, 2013; Katane et al, 2017). Both marketability and employability are significant competitiveness indicators and its manifestations (Katane & Troškova, 2020). Maintaining and enhancing an individual's attractiveness in the labour market (Parker, 2008) is the primary objective of a specialist in today's dynamic economy, which no longer offers stable and long-term employment opportunities. This, in turn, ensures the marketability of the specialist as a professional.

The researchers in the publications (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007) demonstrate their concerns regarding the employability and marketability of graduate students on the labour market after obtaining their higher education and professional qualifications. According to K. Lowden, St. Hall, D. Dr. Elliot, and J. Lewin's (Lowden et al, 2011) hypothesis, businesses and universities ought to collaborate in order to improve the marketability of graduates. This is something that can be accomplished if the development of employability skills is incorporated as a desired learning outcome into the curriculum of university study programs.

When comparing the marketability of goods to the marketability of a specialist, we can say that marketability determines how quickly and easily products can be sold, and in the case of marketability of a specialist, it similarly refers to an individual's capacity to keep the employment and, if necessary, quickly find a new position (Parker, 2008). As a result of this, employability and marketability are two concepts that are closely related to one another.

A specialist's marketability can be analysed through two perspectives: a specialist's marketability as a person and as a specialist in the field, and the marketability that comes from the labour market environment. Every professional has an environmentally determined marketability due to changes of the external environment, i.e., in the case of a reduction in the number of jobs for such a specialist, their marketability is reduced. These results can also be explained by students' marketability as an indicator of competitiveness (Katane & Īriste, 2013; Katane & Troškova, 2020).

Another approach to employability is that it creates a balance between supply and demand in the labour market (Smaldone et al, 2022) where employability is viewed as a set of qualities or skills of individuals (Holmes, 2013; Tomlinson, 2012), or an individual's set of previously acquired knowledge, skills, attitudes, competencies, experiences, and other qualifications that support their ability to be a reliable source of efficiency, innovation, and productivity for an employer (Smaldone et al, 2022).

The need for young people to be innovative, responsible and aware has been highlighted by the OECD (OECD, 2018) in its report on the Transformative Competencies of Young People for the 21st Century. The report underpins the competencies that students need to thrive in the future: adaptability, creativity, curiosity and open-mindedness; these are the required skills for students to create new values. In a world of interdependency and conflict, people will secure their well-being only by developing the capacity to understand the needs and desires of others. Innovation emerges as a result of individuals cooperating and collaborating with one another to build on existing knowledge. Besides learning to resolve conflicts, tensions, and dilemmas, students must learn to deal with compromises and adjust to change, diversity, ambiguity, and uncertainty. In addition to critical thinking, it requires self-awareness, self-regulation,

reflective thinking, and learning skills. A person's ability to deal with novelty, change, diversity and ambiguity assumes that individuals can think for themselves and work with others. Creativity and problem-solving require the capacity to consider the future consequences of one's actions and to be able to evaluate risk and reward.

The changing nature of work has long been used as a justification for developing soft skills, primarily because it is argued that given the special human potential for empathy or creative problem-solving, the skills that cannot be replaced by robots (Hora, et al, 2020).

Having global competence (Reimers, 2009), means having the ability to comprehend current events on a global scale and to react accordingly. People who participate in international educational experiences are capable of forming a positive attitude toward different cultural traditions and develop a deeper understanding of the cultures of others. The ability to speak, understand, and think in multiple languages is one of the benefits that comes from having international experience. People, who have travelled extensively, have expanded their horizons and gained knowledge in a wide range of areas because of their experiences abroad.

The scientist U. Teichler (Teichler, 2007) suggests focusing on increasing the professional relevance of studies rather than graduate employability, whereas the Austrian scientists (Unger & Zaussinger, 2010) reach the controversial conclusion that higher education should not be based on current labour market demands because professional skills can quickly become outdated. Instead, universities must teach transdisciplinary skills and abilities, also referred to as key competencies, which are essential for long term employment.

The employability of graduates (Lowden et al, 2011) is viewed as a complex set of interrelated knowledge, skills and competences which help individuals to become both safely and well-employed. There is also the opinion that employers particularly value general skills, analytical abilities and abilities that promote flexibility and adaptability. Employers highly value graduates being able to adapt to the organisational culture of the workplace, using their abilities and skills to develop in the organisation and to work with the new team. Graduates and specialists in general are expected to be proactive, to be able to use advanced skills, including analysis and critical thinking.

In addition to the generic skills needed to perform in a work environment, employability skills also encompass career management skills, divided into two categories: self-management and career building. Knowledge and skills related to career management are essential to employability since they determine which, to what extent, and in what manner generic and discipline-specific skills are acquired, displayed, and utilised (e.g. in job applications) (Kinash et al, 2015).

Graduate attributes are the qualities, skills and understandings that a university community agrees its students will desire to acquire during their time at the institution (Bowden et al, 2000). These qualities, skills, and understandings shape the contributions students can make to their profession and their community.

The scientists (Mohan et al, 2018) in their substantiation of employability, describe various employability manifestations, particularly highlighting those qualities, skills and abilities of a competitive specialist that are most valued by employers and which can be considered competitive advantages. For example, the ability to work in a team; ability to solve problems; communication; computer skills; analytical thinking; leadership; time management; interaction and organisational skills; interaction, including cooperation, skills; the ability to solve problems is valued highest. Specialists need these qualities, skills and abilities for work in all industries and at all levels of the organisational hierarchy. Critical thinking, digital literacy, and creativity are also defined as the three most important skills for employment (Mahmud & Wong, 2022). According to the findings of another study, one of the most important skills for employers is the ability to work well in a team (Katane & Troskova, 2020).

The study results organised by the Finnish researchers (Räty et al., 2019) revealed that the perceived proximity to graduation and the working life was discovered to be connected with the perception of employability, independent of the topic of study. Additionally, a number of self-attributed abilities, including extroversion, ambitious competition, mental toughness, and the qualities of a good employee, were linked to students' assessments of employability; conversely, the attribution of academic abilities

had the opposite impact. It was shown that the formation of students' optimism about their employability includes both self-representational and live-historical positions.

In accordance with another study (Hora, et al, 2020), universities should work to make their students more employable by focusing on personal responsibility and in-demand skills in their skills discourse. The discourse which is driven by three fundamental assumptions: the human capital theory, the ideology of personal responsibility, and the notion that soft skills are commodities with market value, is based on the relationship between capital, labour, and education.

According to the human capital theory (Becker, 1962), a person's skills and knowledge are a kind of capital that have the potential to generate returns in the form of increased productivity and wages. The view of social mobility assumes that, in education, whether it be as a first credential for a university graduate or an up-skilling of existing workers, it is crucial to go ahead. The only way of being competitive in today's economy is to be proactive and to take responsibility for your own life on your own time and budget, go to school, earn a degree, diploma, or another credential, and then you will succeed (Hora, et al, 2020).

According to Coursera Campus Skills Report 2022 (Coursera Campus Skills Report 2022, 2022), business students are considering a variety of jobs, including marketing specialist and entrepreneur. Data analyst and financial analyst feature among their top job choices. This finding may reflect the growing overlaps between business and data skills. Higher education institutions can foreground data fluency as an essential aspect of business curricula.

The concept of employability is seen as being relative and dependent on the norms that govern the labour market. In the scenario when there were more people looking for jobs than there were openings, it would be highly likely that every single candidate who is qualified and skilled would be hired. On the other hand, this does not reflect the actual state of the labour market. One's standing in a particular career hierarchy can have a significant impact on whether or not he/ she is able to find work, in addition to a person's ability to fulfil the requirements of a particular job. Therefore, the employability of a single person can be influenced by the employability of other people (Brown et al, 2002). A person's employability can be affected by factors related to society, institutions, and the economy (Sin & Amaral, 2017). Besides having a set of attributes, the employability centres how the knowledge, skills and competences are used and presented to employers and directly depend on the presentation skills (Hillage & Pollard, 1998).

The relationship between an individual's mental health and their employment is one that cannot be ignored, and the amount of emphasis given to this topic has increased since the epidemic first started. When a person's mental state is healthy, they are in a better position to successfully perform, study, and work, and as a result, they are able to realise their full potential. On the other hand, if they suffer from mental diseases, it's possible that they will not be able to carry out the responsibilities of their jobs, which will impede their ability to advance in their careers (World mental health report ..., 2022).

Developing skills, know-how, and personal attributes that make people more likely gain employment, or change occupations, and to be successful, thereby benefiting themselves, the workplace, the community and the economy. The employability of a person is determined by the knowledge, skills, and abilities he or she possesses. This refers to one's ability to gain and maintain productive work over the course of their working lives. Employability is also related to the institutional environment in which he or she operates and which he or she contributes to (Bertagni et al, 2015).

Employability and work readiness are ideas that are gaining importance across the globe in the workplace and in universities. Another term that is frequently used interchangeably with employability is work readiness, which emphasises a person's potential to obtain desired employment (Chigbu & Nekhwevha, 2022). People who are already competitive often choose careers that involve a higher level of competition for themselves, which can cause them to become even more competitive over time (Valenti, 2006).

According to the findings of the study (Lo Presti & Gamboa, 2021), based on employment measures, there is an indirect link between career competencies and subjective career success (Subjective Career Success - SCS), where academic satisfaction plays an important part in the connection. Besides providing useful insights into the graduates' transition to the labour market, it also includes employment

opportunities and activities, as well as additional information about their past events, and career competencies, which are an important resource that graduates can develop in the transition from education to the labour market.

Conclusions

- Employability can be viewed from two different perspectives. It encompasses the ability to find their first job after graduation, the ability to retain that job, the ability to move from one job to another within the same organisation, taking up new responsibilities, and, if necessary, the ability to obtain a job with a different organisation to ensure career development. An individual's knowledge, skills, attitudes, competencies, experiences, and other qualifications that support their capacity to be a dependable source of efficiency, innovation, and productivity for an employer are analysed as the employability of an individual, which is defined as a set of personal qualities or skills.
- Certain set of employability skills have been identified as needed for students as prospective specialists. They include such skills as adaptability, open-mindedness, creativity, curiosity, critical thinking, proactive and responsible behaviour, self-awareness, self-regulation, reflective thinking, and learning skills are among the skills that students need to succeed in the future and that employers require. Employability is dependent not only on acquiring a set of talents but also on how those abilities, together with knowledge and competences, are utilised and presented to potential employers. Employability is strongly tied to presentation skills. Employers place a high value on employees who are able to collaborate well within a group setting and value this skill. When it comes to a person's employability, having a global mindset and being in good mental health are both very important factors.
- Given the above-mentioned, it is possible to conclude that the employability of a specialist is composed of a set of qualities that make up an individual's competitive structure and serves as an indicator of the competitiveness of that specialist, which in turn is influenced by various internal and external factors.

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