



Bridging the Gap: How Universities Can Enhance Student Employability Through Personality Development and Targeted Interventions

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Abstract. This study explores the factors influencing university students' employability, focusing on their academic knowledge and professional capabilities. We propose that university students' proactive personality and self-efficacy positively impact on their employability. Mentoring programs and organizational socialization within universities also contribute positively to students' employability. In addition, the employability of university students directly influences the quality of their employment opportunities.

This research framework demonstrates that emphasis should be placed on developing university students' proactive personalities and boosting their self-efficacy. Moreover, implementing effective mentoring programs and employment orientation initiatives can aid in fostering students' employability and improve their employment outcomes.

Keywords: employability, proactive personality, self-efficacy, mentoring, organizational socialization, employment satisfaction.

1 Introduction

Researchers have suggested that developing graduates' employability skills is an effective strategy to enhance their social value, as these skills are crucial in all economic sectors [1]. Governments and corporations have urged universities to cultivate the talent needed skills [2]. In response, universities are exploring the qualities and competencies most demanded by industry practitioners and investigating methods for assessing and developing these attributes. Their shared objective is to equip university students to fulfill societal needs, with the aspiration that graduates will secure jobs that maximize their potential[3,4].

In most studies, employability encompasses a broad range of career-related competencies in the labor market. It involves recognizing job opportunities, securing employment, self-development, adapting to workplace changes, and continuous learning. Brown contended that employability has a dual nature: absoluteness and relativity. Absoluteness in employability lies in whether employees possess adequate knowledge and skills to perform their roles, while relativity depends on the supply and demand

laws in the labor market. This study defines employability as whether university students possess sufficient knowledge and skills to perform their roles effectively. These include discipline-specific knowledge; basic capabilities like physical, intellectual, and emotional intelligence; general skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing; and pertinent career management skills [5].

Previous research on factors influencing employability offers valuable insights into this study. However, this study develops a research framework based on self-determination theory to examine the factors affecting university students' employability from individual and organizational perspectives.

2 Influencing Factors of Individual-level on Employability from the Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory, formulated by Deci and Ryan in the 1980s, centers on examining the impact of both internal and external motivators on human behavior [6]. This framework posits that the intensity of an individual's motivation for participating in an activity depends on the activity's capacity to satisfy three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Within the context of employability enhancement, educational and instructional practices that cater to these essential needs in university students are likely to significantly bolster their motivation to augment their employability skills [7].

Closely related to autonomy in self-determination theory is the concept of proactive personality. Proactive personality describes a stable, proactive behavioral tendency individuals exhibit in response to challenges. It offers incremental validity in explaining individual differences beyond what the Big Five personality traits capture.

Research indicates that individuals with proactive personalities are more active in seeking and identifying suitable job opportunities, comparing their competencies with market demands, and actively acquiring job-seeking knowledge and skills to better meet market needs [8]. Researchers have found that a proactive personality directly affects individuals' employability and can indirectly influence university students' employability through occupational adaptability [9]. In addition, studies have shown that individuals with higher proactive personality scores tend to have greater employability [10].

Self-efficacy is "the degree of confidence an individual has in his or her ability to perform a given task" and directly affects an individual's cognitive processes, affective states, and behavioral choices. Individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to engage in challenging activities, demonstrate greater cognitive capacity, and elicit higher stress levels and response [11].

As such, high self-efficacy is associated with positive self-ratings of employability [12]. Furthermore, individuals with high self-efficacy demonstrate a greater willingness for lifelong learning and are more motivated to act. If university students possess a prominent level of self-efficacy, their career transitions from study to work are likely to be smoother and their performance higher [13].

3 Influencing Factors of University-level on Employability from the Self-Determination Theory

The mentoring program is designed to assist young individuals entering the workforce in quickly adapting to the work environment and acquiring necessary job skills. The mentor provides guidance to the apprentice in two aspects: the first involves career-related behavior, such as supporting the apprentice in completing challenging tasks to increase their sense of competence, and the second encompasses offering psychological support to the apprentice (psycho-social support). This mentoring relationship represents the acceptance and recognition of the apprentice, as well as understanding and empathy, thereby fostering the apprentice's feeling of belonging. Based on the self-determination theory, both the perception of skillfulness and the feeling of belonging are critical elements in cultivating intrinsic motivation [14].

In universities, this mentoring program is termed mentorship, where many institutions implement a dual mentoring system for students comprising academic and career mentors. The academic mentor supports students in continuously improving their knowledge and skills, while the career mentor assists in understanding the workplace and employers' needs, aiding students in discovering their career interests.

Through mentoring, university students enhance their job-related knowledge and skills and understand the labor market and employer requirements. Mentors also assist in developing job search strategies, writing resumes, and cultivating generic skills sought by employers [15]. Mentors encourage students to engage in trial and error by stimulating self-reflection, and support students to develop their employability competences, which will, in turn, foster their transition to the workplace [16]. According to self-determination theory, external factors fulfilling an individual's needs for autonomy, competence, and relationships will strengthen their internal motivation and drive actions. The mentoring system, freely chosen by mentors and students, satisfies these needs and thus promotes the development of students' employability.

Organizational socialization is the process through which individuals acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors necessary for seamless integration into the workplace. This process bolsters an individual's sense of job competence and belongingness and fortifies their intrinsic motivation. Organizational socialization involves actions by the employer to orient new employees, who in turn strive to assimilate new knowledge and skills essential for organizational integration. Several methods exist by which employers can influence new hires.

Studies indicated that organizational socialization assists employees in comprehending politics and power dynamics within their organizations, teaching them to acquire influence and power, significantly impacting their career success [17].

In this context, organizational socialization refers to activities organized by universities to facilitate graduates' transition from academia to the professional sphere. These activities include job search skills training, career planning guidance, job vacancy information dissemination, and sharing job search experiences among students.

Employing organizational socialization strategies to aid students in transitioning from academia to the workforce similarly enhances their sense of job competence and belonging, boosting their motivation to improve their self-employability [18]. In addi-

tion, alumni often recommend students for employment opportunities. Based on signaling theory, endorsements from esteemed alumni significantly boost graduates' chances of employment success.

4 Mediating Role of Employability Between Influencing Factors and Employment Satisfaction

Previous studies have demonstrated that individuals with proactive personality traits exhibit higher levels of job satisfaction. These individuals actively adapt to their work environments and seek opportunities to create or select a work setting that aligns with their career aspirations and values. In the employment process, the individuals proactively improve their vocational skills and engage in early career planning. By externally obtaining more employment information and internally improving their qualification and competitiveness, they finally achieve satisfactory employment [19].

A longitudinal study explains how proactive personality influences career success, with mechanisms including speaking out, innovative behavior, career initiative, and corporate political awareness. Further research suggests that career success for such individuals stems from creating more opportunities and resources for self-development through proactive behaviors [19].

Moreover, self-efficacy has been identified as an effective predictor of an individual's perseverance in the face of challenges, with those possessing high self-efficacy experiencing greater job satisfaction. A significant correlation between self-efficacy and job satisfaction was established through meta-analytical methods [20].

Mentoring plays a crucial role in developing the professional skills and work capabilities of recent graduates. Through mentorship, graduates better understand their career interests and employer expectations, enhancing their employability and achieving better employment outcomes. Studies have shown that participants in mentoring programs report higher levels of job and career satisfaction and receive more promotions. Mentor support enhances the adoption of the mentee's dominant behaviors, directly or indirectly influencing career satisfaction [21]. Using a time-lagged approach, employability also mediates the relationship between support from teaching staff and psychological well-being [22].

Each year, university career management centers offer employment support to graduates. This includes disseminating timely employment information, organizing job fairs, conducting job search-related lectures, and providing skills training. In addition, colleges facilitate employment experience exchanges between successive student cohorts, enabling current students to learn from the job-seeking experiences of their predecessors and understand employer needs. These organizational socialization activities play a significant role in developing career-related skills among university students. Researchers have indicated that such activities can enhance job satisfaction and organizational commitment among recent graduates.

5 Conclusions

Based on the above discussion, at the individual level, self-efficacy and proactive personality significantly influence employability; at the organizational level, organizational socialization and mentoring programs significantly affect employability and may directly impact employment satisfaction. Employability significantly influences employment satisfaction and mediates the relationship between individual/organizational-level factors and employment satisfaction. The research framework is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

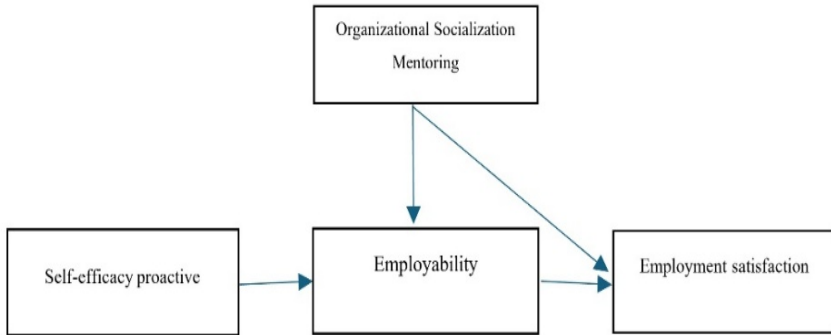


Figure 1: research framework of university students' employability

Fig. 1. research framework of university students' employability

This framework, grounded in Self-Determination theory, identifies four key factors affecting university students' employability from two aspects: the individual level of university students and the organizational level of higher education institutions. The framework demonstrates that emphasis should be placed on developing university students' proactive personalities and boosting their self-efficacy. Moreover, implementing effective mentoring programs and employment orientation initiatives can aid in fostering students' employability and improve their employment outcomes.

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