Willingness to Enhance Employability

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Abstract

This exploratory study was conducted across two different institutions in the United States and in Australia. The online surveys applied two instruments: the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire and the Multidimensional Work Motivation Scale to investigate the correlations between the constructs of employability, emotional intelligence, and motivation. The results showed a positive significant relationship between campus program internship and perceived employability. Further, emotional intelligence was significantly positively correlated with motivation. These results may reinforce institutions in their effort to design or refresh teaching intervention programs improving students' employability. Beyond focusing on skills acquisition, these programs could also aim for enhancing students' emotional intelligence.

Keywords: Employability; Emotional Intelligence; Motivation; Willingness to Enhace Employability; Internship.

1. Introduction

Recognizing the importance of educating college students to enter the 21st century workforce in a way that they are prepared for the employment-related opportunities and challenges they will face throughout their adult lives, it becomes incumbent on higher educational institutions to identify what factors help prepare students to become employable. Multiple studies have found that higher emotional intelligence positively relates to work engagement (George et al., 2021). There is an increased attention from organisations on such initiatives. One of the key findings of Google's Project Aristotle is that emotional intelligence with its domains (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management) is essential to productive teamwork (Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute, 2021). Other studies show that new graduates might not meet employers' expectations for these competencies, and that these skills should be taught as part of their undergraduate education (Mitchell et al., 2010).

The purpose of this exploratory study is to investigate the effects of motivation and emotional/social intelligence on employability success of undergraduate college students. This study examines the main effects and interactions of several factors that have been identified as potentially beneficial to students' employability such as work experience through a campus program internship, paid work or volunteerism. Students were assessed on motivation and emotional intelligence and answered questions about their employability/employment progress. The goal of this study is to identify which of the factors measured in the study are instrumental to students' employment success.

2. Willingness to Enhance Employability

Employers look for graduates with certain skills in communication, teamwork and problem-solving as well as adaptability, initiative, and digital skills as a result of labour market transitions under the global pandemic of COVID-19 (Dyki et al., 2021; Soares & Berg, 2021) putting higher education providers under the pressure of producing even more employable and flexible graduates (Gill, 2018). Employability skills are defined as the skills necessary for a work-ready graduate (Jackson & Chapman, 2021; Suleman, 2018) and as a psycho-social construct of acquiring, maintaining, and/or creating work through the use of competencies (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008). Higher education institutions increasingly argue the importance of integrating academic programs into their current offer aiming to enhance such employability skills (Bonesso et al., 2019; Dyki et al., 2021).

Are these employability skills sufficient to prepare employable graduates for the volatile 21st century world of work? How willing are students to take on such initiatives while tackling academic skills, private life issues, and setting career aspirations? Such questions challenge the authors while wanting to engage students in education for responsible individuals. In

addition to the employability skills, personal attributes, which are centering on one's relationship with self and with others, are gaining importance in the creation of the future workforce (Dyki et al., 2021) rendering institutions to create programs addressing emotional and social intelligence competencies (Bonesso et al., 2019).

2.1. The Role of Emotional Intelligence and Motivation in Employability

Emotional intelligence is gaining increasing importance in educational programs targeting a whole person approach (Barbera, Bernhard, Nacht, & Mccann, 2015). The whole person learning approach brings together the learners' personal responsibilities in a high level of active involvement where the learners process skills, attributes and knowledge cognitively, behaviorally and emotionally (Hoover et al., 2010). Numerous studies have investigated teaching interventions to enhance students' emotional/social intelligence with outcomes suggesting that emotional intelligence relates to academic and career success (Dacre Pool & Qualter; 2012; MacCann et al., 2011).

In response, institutions have developed programs of such initiatives in different format, namely, curriculum-based, or extra-curricular programs, internships or work-placements, and other work-integrated learning modules (Jackson, 2015). Students' engagement level in such activities might vary, the major inhibitors of participation being part-time work, lack of information (or promotion) of the activities, unprofessional organisation of the activities, and the competition from curriculum-based activities (Tran, 2017). Although programs aiming to develop employability skills and emotional intelligence competencies are increasingly offered by institutions, motivation seems to be an important factor in improving one's employability. Further investigation is needed on the relationship between emotional intelligence and motivation to support institutions in designing relevant programs.

3. Methods

The pilot study used quantitative methods. The 67-item online surveys were distributed at both institutions after gaining ethics approval at on both research sites. Data collection was organized after the study periods and exams were concluded to minimize the potential for receiving biased or coerced responses.

3.1. Instrument

The survey questions looked at academic achievement defined in Grade Point Average, students' engagement in internships, work experience or volunteerism. It also asked respondents about their perceived employability and whether they had been offered a full-time position related to their studies and/or career aspirations. Emotional Intelligence was operationalized through the self-report Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue) Respondents (n=102) were all in their final year of their undergraduate studies majoring in

arts, business, information technology, and science across an American and an Australian university. Table 1 presents a summary of the sample distribution across relevant demographics.

Table 1: Demographics of the respondents

Variable	Categories	Freq (%)	Motivation score		Emotional intelligence		Employability score	
			Mean (SD)	p-value	Mean (SD)	p-value	Mean (SD)	p-value
Location				**0.001**		0.182		**0.049**
	James Cook	39 (38.2)	3.96 (1.26)		3.56 (1.02)		6.56 (1.83)	
	Siena	63 (51.8)	4.32 (0.93)		3.93 (1.52)		7.22 (2.01)	
Gender				0.195		0.186		**0.043**
	Male	41 (40.2)	4.22 (0.96)		3.79 (1.08)		7.29 (1.65)	
	Female	56 (55.9)	4.17 (1.07)		3.83 (1.21)		6.86 (2.05)	
	Non-binary	5 (3.9)	3.83 (1.31)		3.20 (1.56)		5.25 (3.10)	
Race				**0.006**		0.124		**0.001**
	Caucasian	49 (48.0)	4.21 (1.05)		3.85 (1.08)		7.59 (1.90)	
	Asian	34 (33.3)	4.15 (0.95)		3.61 (1.01)		6.71 (1.43)	
	African/Black	8 (7.9)	3.77 (1.42)		3.86 (1.67)		4.00 (2.00)	
	Hispanic	3 (2.9)	4.78 (0.43)		4.37 (0.86)		5.67 (1.15)	
	Other	8 (7.9)	4.18 (1.04)		3.91 (1.09)		7.75 (1.49)	
Campus program internship				<0.001		0.223		0.001
	Yes	49 (48.0)	4.33 (0.81)		3.95 (1.28)		7.57 (1.90)	
	No	53 (52.0)	4.04 (1.30)		3.64 (1.45)		6.42 (1.87)	
Work experience				0.061		0.232		0.030
	Yes	83 (81.4)	4.21 (1.04)		3.83 (1.27)		7.14 (1.97)	
	No	19 (18.6)	4.04 (1.25)		3.63 (1.39)		6.21 (1.78)	
Volunteer experience				0.010		0.324		0.025
	Yes	62 (60.8)	4.26 (0.98)		3.88 (1.18)		7.27 (1.80)	
	No	40 (39.2)	4.06 (1.23)		3.66 (1.26)		6.50 (2.12)	

Bold text indicates significance difference at 0.05 level of significance.

3.2. Respondents

Respondents (n=102) were all in their final year of their undergraduate studies majoring in arts, business, information technology, and science across an American and an Australian university. Table 1 presents a summary of the sample distribution across relevant demographics.

On sample size sufficiency for the estimation of structural equation modelling (SEM), Kline (2015) suggest at least 100 observations. Sample adequacy was sufficient based on the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) = 0.705. The Bartlett's test of sphericity further produced a p-value = 0.032, indicating that the dataset diverges significantly from the identity matrix, making the dataset suitable for data reduction.

4. Results

The standardized factor loadings for the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) model, all of which were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). The observed scores for measures of construct and divergent validity and composite reliability (CR) of the measured constructs were; for emotional intelligence (Cronbach's alpha = 0.891, CR = 0.910, average variance extract (AVE) = 0.507) and motivation (Cronbach's alpha = 0.912, CR = 0.930, AVE = 0.655). The internal consistencies of the measured constructs were good with Cronbach's α and CR statistics lying between $0.7 < α < 0.9$. Convergent validity was achieved across all the five domains, as their observed AVE scores were greater than 0.5.

The measurement model had a good fit ($\chi^2(82) = 132.71$, p-value =0.197), as indicated by the Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.806) and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI = 0.837) being above the recommended level of 0.90, and Root Mean Square Error Approximation (RMSEA = 0.07) and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR = 0.08) being in the reasonable region the cut-off value of 0.08.

Based on the SEM model in Figure 1, there was a positive significant relationship ($p = 0.008$) between campus program internship and perceived employability (see also Table 1). Emotional intelligence was significantly positively correlated with motivation ($p < 0.001$).

A trend toward significance was observed for the following relationships;

- Race and perceived employability (p-value = 0.072) – with Caucasians having a slightly higher perceived employability compared to the other groups.

- Gender and perceived employability (p-value = 0.160) – males slightly perceived employability highly compared to the other groups.

- Race and motivation (p-value = 0.183) – again Caucasian scored slightly higher on their motivation scores compared to the groups.

- Work experience and perceived employability (p-value = 0.137), students with some work experience had slightly higher perception of employability.

5. Future Work & Limitations

5.1 Future Work

Continued research might be extended onto the roles of gender, race, and participation in campus internship programs with special regards to perceived employability and motivation as a function of emotional intelligence.

5.2 Limitations

A convenience sample at two small colleges in different countries present challenges to attempt to generalize results to other, dissimilar, higher educational institutions, locations or the population at large.
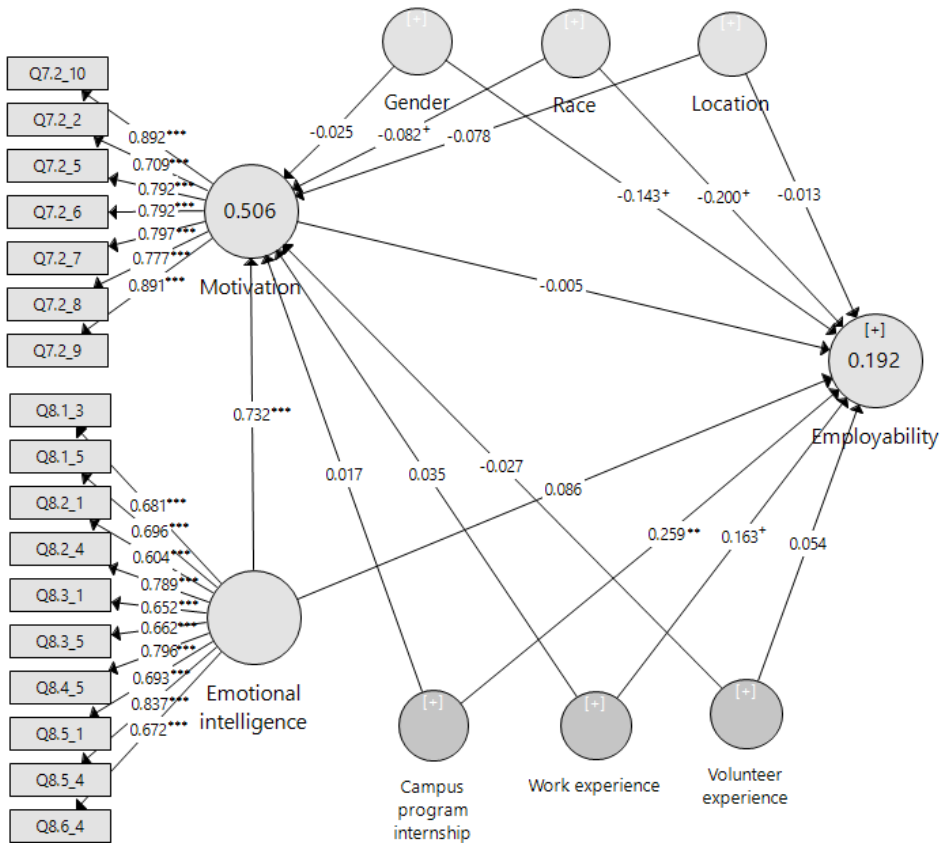

Figure 1. Standardized estimates with bootstrapped p-values evaluation the fit of estimates of the path model. Note that *** indicates p-value < 0.001, ** , 0.01 < p-value < 0.05 and + indicates a trend towards significance.

6. Discussion & Conclusion

An exploratory study was called for investigating the potential factors in designing programs with the aim of enhancing students' employability on two different campuses in the US and in Australia. Since emotional intelligence competencies have been increasingly sought by employers, these might be beneficial to be incorporated into existing employability programs. This finding corresponded with the numerous studies that have been done on the positive effects of increased emotional intelligence on work engagement (George et al., 2021) and career success (Dacre Pool & Qualter; 2012; MacCann et al., 2011). The current study produced insightful results regarding the relationships between race, gender, work experience and perceived employability. The key finding was motivation being a function of emotional ingelligence. These have served as a confirmation on refreshing current offers on employability programs.

Throughout the years, academic programs have been implemented to improve students' employability (Bonesso et al., 2019; Dyki et al., 2021) along with internship and work placement opportunities (Jackson, 2015). These academic programs address the desired content to improve students' employability but the authors wanted to search for ways in which students might be more involved in such initiatives to intentionally build competencies related to higher emotional intelligence. The findings of this study was in line with Bonesso et al.'s (2019) initiative on adding emotional intelligence competencies when addressing employability skills in academic programs.

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