

Role of Quality Education and Professional Skills in Perceived Employability among Professionals: A Case of Potential Managers

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Abstract

This study examines the role of quality education and professional skills in self- perceived employability among professionals. Higher education sector is an essential for creation of suitable human capital with desired skill-set according to dynamic changes and demand of the emerging markets at local, regional and global level. It aims to conduct comparative investigation among potential project managers by assessing the influence of academic performance and selected skills in the perceived employability among individuals who were enrolled in professional degree programs at two educational streams i.e. distance learning (off campus) as well as on-campus.

The data is collected from professionals who are pursuing MS in Project Management at both educational streams i.e. distance learning (off campus) and on-campus through a structured questionnaire in English. Selected statistical tools enable to analyze the data by application of Descriptive Statistics, Independent T-test, Pearson's Correlation and Regression analysis etc. through SPSS. Results indicate that both academic performance and Professional Skills have positive correlation with Perceived Employability. However, academic performance has comparatively stronger association to perceived employability in case of on campus stream. Moreover, it is also evident from findings that professionals who are pursuing on-campus degree program reported better academic performance and more Professional Skills have greater perceived employability scores as compared to professionals who were enrolled in distance learning programs (off-campus). This study could help to enhance the understanding of relevant stakeholders for the selected variables to address the prevailing issues indicated especially in case of distance learning programs for professionals.

Keywords: Quality education, professional skills, perceived employability, academic performance, potential managers.

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Introduction

Quality of education activities serves as the backbone of a nation HR employability. Therefore, in the international education forum, the idea of quality addressed regularly. The forum of World Education for all has discussed quality education in their EFA goals and framework and the Framework containing six key goals. Improve and monitor quality of education in every phase and achieve excellence so that recognize d and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills' (UNESCO, 2000, p. 17). There may be a different concept regarding quality of education in different stakeholder (Garira, 2020). According to the Williams (2001), quality of education is measured against the output. Despite student attainment in public examinations and tests may shows better quality of education to several, a complete understanding of quality of education should be measure against the processes, inputs, outputs and outcomes of knowledge which cover student overall knowledge (cultural heritage and academic), personal improvement (educational and personal interest and requirements) and also social preparation (requires and trends of societal) (Thijs & Van den Akker, 2009). According to the quality of education creates better opportunity for employment (Leu E, 2005). Therefore, the existing research study elaborate it impact on student perceived employability.

Literature Review

Professional Skills

Skills of professional, sometime called "generic" (De La Harpe et al., 2000) or "soft" (Shuman et al., 2005). Industry delegate recognize skills as the key aspect of practices of engineering educators (Connelly & Middleton, 1996). Research suggested employees are need to encourage to enhance their professional skills by using three kind of extrinsic motivation such as integration, identification and introjection (Ryan & Deci,2000).

Perceived employability

Employability is studied across a wide range of academic disciplines, such as business and management studies, human resource management, human resource development, cognitive and social psychology or educational science (Knight and Yorke, 2002; Heijde and Heijden, 2006). Drawing on different frameworks such as human capital theory (Kim et al., 2015), the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

(Chou and Shen, 2012; Qenani et al., 2014), the competence-based approach (Heijde and Heijden, 2006) or the career construction theory (De Guzmán and Choi, 2013) researchers have analyzed the concept of employability and the variables which play an important role in determining it. Research highlighted that students follow their education, what they will evaluate is their perceived employability, defined by Rothwell et al., (2009) as the perception of the personal capacity to obtain appropriate employment in terms of the level of qualification that is expected to be acquired during their studies.

Regarding the perceived employability factors much of the research is theoretical (Finch et al., 2013) and diagnostic tools available in this area are very limited (Dacre et al., 2014). In the few validated scales that exist, validation is incomplete. Some authors only perform exploratory validation (Chou and Shen, 2012; Rothwell et al., 2009). In a very few cases some confirmatory validation is performed, but there is no full analysis of psychometric properties, convergent and discriminant validity is not always demonstrating (Dacre et al., 2014) or the sample size is very small (Yusof et al., 2012)

Research Objectives

- To examine influence of quality of education (academic performance) and professional skills on perceived employability of professionals who aspire to become potential managers
- To compare quality of education and professional skills on perceived employability of professionals who are availing online education and on-campus education

Research Methodology

The data is collected from professionals who are pursuing MS in Project Management at both educational streams i.e. distance learning (off campus) and on-campus through a structured questionnaire in English. Population of the study consist upon professional who pursuing MS Project Management degree and considered as potential managers in the two universities i.e. COMSATS University, Islamabad and Riphah International University, Islamabad. A sample of 700 professionals was selected from the both universities to get their response through convenience sampling. Research Instrument developed in the light of existing literature (Príncipe, 2005; Martha, 2009; Gargallo et al. 2009; Linda and Jackson, 2013). Five point likert scale was used ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree to quantify the responses. Selected

statistical tools enable to analyze the data by application of Descriptive Statistics, Independent T-test, Pearson's Correlation and Regression analysis etc. through SPSS.

Result

Table 1

Correlation between Academic Performance, Professional skills and Perceived Employability

Construct/Variables	R	Sig.
Academic Performance and Perceived Employability	.755**	.0000
Professional Skills and Perceived Employability	.722**	.0000

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The value of correlation between Professional Skills and Perceived Employability is .755 which shows that its correlation is positive and significant (shown by the p value .000). It shows that perception about employability is directly related with Professional Skills. As one gains and improves more and more Professional Skills, one's perception about employability improves. Similarly, a positive association is observed between professional skills and perceived employability i.e. 0.722 It means a person having good academic performance tends to have more skills or better learning of Professional Skills leads to improved academic performance. All these relations are measured through 2-tailed test at 0.01 level of significant. As the results shows that the value of Pearson correlation for academic performance is .755 and for professional skill is .722 that indicates a positive association among selected variables. The influence of selected variables is indicated by Table 2 that reveals coefficients of regression model.

Table 2

Summary of Professional Skills and Academic Performance on Perceived Employability

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.793 ^a	.629	.626	.40389

a. Predictors: (Constant), Professional Skills, Academic performance

Table 2 shows that the Value of R2 is .629 for defined model. It demonstrates the effect of academic performance and Professional Skills on Perceived Employability. It means that 62.9% changes in Perceived Employability are explained by these two factors. While value of standard error shows that 40.389% changes are due to other factors. These selected variables don't explain 40.389% changes in the dependent variables.

Table 3

ANOVA for Professional Skills, Academic Performance and Perceived Employability

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	53.213	2	26.607	163.102	.000a
	Residual	31.321	192	.163		
	Total	84.534	194			

Table 3 indicates the Value of F statistic for selected model is 163.102 with p-value 0.000 which shows that the purposed model fits the regression line and linearity exist between dependent and independent variables. Moreover, coefficients of regression are placed in Table 4.

Table 4

Coefficient of Regression: Professional Skills, Academic Performance & Perceived Employability

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	.330	.198		1.663	.098
	Academic performance	.566	.075	.489	7.503	.000
	Professional Skills	.326	.059	.360	5.520	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Perceived Employability

Table 4 shows the coefficient of regression almost the same thing as explained by R2 but its individual value for each variables shows which one explains more changes in dependent variables. The beta value of academic performance is 0.566 with standard error 0.075 and for Professional Skills is 0.326 with standard error 0.059. It means that academic performance affects Perceived Employability more as compared to Professional Skills. Table 5 and 6 presents the output of Independent T-test.

Table 5

Group Statistics for Professional Skills of On-campus and Distance Learning

	Mode of study	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Professional Skills	Distance learning	124	3.5185	.68367	.06140
	On campus	71	3.8351	.76649	.09097

Table 5 shows that the sample data is grouped into two categories on campus and distance learning. This table shows that how many respondents were from on campus institute and from distance learning institutes (N), their mean and standard deviation. This is aim to explore what is difference between Professional Skills of distance learning and on campus institutes. The table 4.12 shows more respondent belong to distance learning institute (124) with mean 3.5185 with standard deviation .68367, and respondent belongs to on campus students are 71 with mean 3.8351 and standard deviation .76649. The

table shows that the mean value of Professional Skills of on-campus students is high then distance learning students.

Table 6

Independent t Test of Professional Skills of On-Campus and Distance Learning

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper	
Professional Skills	Equal variances assumed	.702	.403	-2.976	193	.003	-.31663	.10638	-.52645	-.10681
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.885	132.636	.005	-.31663	.10975	-.53371	-.09955

Table 6 contains the result of Levene’s test for Equality of Variances and t-test for Equality of Means. In the table the value of P for F statistic is .403 that is greater than alpha (0.05) this shows the variance is equally distributed. It reveals that T-value for academic performance is -2.976 and P=0.003 value of P is less then alpha (0.05) so there is significance difference of on campus students and distance learning students in case of Professional Skills.

Table 7

Group Statistics for Perceived Employability of On-campus and Distance Learning

		Mode of study	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Perceived Employability	Distance learning		124	3.6310	.63415	.05695
	On campus		71	3.8257	.69033	.08193

Source: Generated

Table 7 and 8 reflects that the sample data is grouped into two categories on campus and distance learning. This table shows that how many respondents were from on campus institute and from distance learning institutes (N), their mean and standard deviation. This is aim to explore what is difference between Perceived Employability of distance learning and on campus institutes. The table 4.14 shows more respondent belong to distance learning institute (124) with mean 3.6310 with standard deviation .63415, and respondent belongs to on campus students are 71 with mean 3.8257 and standard deviation .69033 The value of mean shows that Perceived Employability of on-campus students is high than distance learning students.

Table 8

Independent T-test of Perceived Employability of On-campus and Distance Learning

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.		t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Dif.	Std. Error Diff	95% Confidence Interval	
									Lower	Upper
Perceived Employability	Equal variances assumed	816	.367	1.997	93	.047	-.194	0.979	.386	-.0023
	Equal variances not assumed			1.951	35.928	.053	-.194	0.9978	.391	-.0026

Table 8 contains the result of Levene's test for Equality of Variances and t-test for Equality of Means. In the table the value of P for F statistic is .367 that is greater than alpha (0.05) this shows the variance is equally distributed. It shows that the T value for academic performance is -1.997 and P=0.047, value of P is less than alpha (0.05) so there is significance difference of on campus students and distance learning students in case of Perceived Employability.

Conclusion

Results indicate that both academic performance and Professional Skills have positive correlation with Perceived Employability. However, academic performance has comparatively

stronger association to perceived employability in case of on campus stream. Moreover, it is also evident from findings that professionals who are pursuing on-campus degree program reported better academic performance and more Professional Skills have greater perceived employability scores as compared to professionals who were enrolled in distance learning programs (off-campus). It is may be due to their interaction with colleagues and teachers in actual environment where one can learn a lot from others' experiences. This study could help to enhance the understanding of relevant stakeholders for the selected variables to address the prevailing issues indicated especially in case of distance learning programs for professionals.

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