

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF FACTORS AFFECTING UNDERGRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY

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ABSTRACT

Purpose - The current study was conducted to increase our understanding of factors that influence the employability of university graduates. Through the use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, the paper explores the relative importance of 17 factors that influence new graduate employability.

Design/methodology/approach - An extensive review of the existing literature was used to identify 17 factors that affect new graduate employability. A two-phase, mixed-methods study was conducted to examine: Phase One, whether these 17 factors could be combined into five categories; and Phase Two, the relative importance that employers place on these factors. Phase One involved interviewing 30 employers, and Phase Two consisted of an empirical examination with an additional 115 employers.

Findings - Results from both the qualitative and quantitative phases of the current study demonstrated that 17 employability factors can be clustered into five higher-order composite categories. In addition, findings illustrate that, when hiring new graduates, employers place the highest importance on soft-skills and the lowest importance on academic reputation.

Research limitations/implications - The sectors in which employers operated were not completely representative of their geographical region.

Practical implications - The findings suggest that, in order to increase new graduates' employability, university programmes and courses should focus on learning outcomes linked to the development of soft-skills. In addition, when applying for jobs, university graduates should highlight their soft-skills and problem-solving skills.

Originality/value - This study contributes to the body of knowledge on the employability of university graduates by empirically examining the relative importance of five categories of employability factors that recruiters evaluate when selecting new graduates.

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