Chapter 2
Exploring Employability Competence of Traditional and Non-Traditional Students:
An Emerging Economy Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study examined whether there were significant differences between traditional and non-traditional students and gender on six experts-based employability competencies. The study was anchored on social cognitive theory and obtained data from 405 students using simple random sampling and analyzed using an independent T-test. The study established significant differences between traditional and non-traditional students on employability competencies—emotional regulation, lifelong learning, and efficacy beliefs—but not in social competence, metacognitive and oral and written communication. Significant differences were also observed based on gender with emotional regulation, lifelong learning and oral communication but not in social competence, meta cognitive and oral, and written communication. The study established the fact that employability competencies are not universal but contextual and provides the bases for HEIs in emerging economies to re-examine curriculum to prepare students for the world of work.

INTRODUCTION

Evidence suggests that, even though most general provisions for nurturing employability among students are inconsistent across universities, many universities are making great efforts on nurturing employability of their students (Arranz et al., 2022; Bonnard, 2020; Cheng et al., 2022; Hou et al., 2021; Monteiro et al., 2020a). Yet, extant literature continues to show that graduates do not possess the requisite skills needed in current workplace (Hou et al., 2021; Singh Dubey et al., 2022) Indeed, some scholars have noted that reports from Human Resource Departments (HRDs) and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) often differ on their understanding and expectations of graduate employability competencies (Björck, 2021; Hou et al., 2021). Whilst scholars explore how both HRDs and HEIs can bridge the gap on their expectations regarding employability competencies, the research regarding students personal assessment of their own employability competence have not been fully explored in literature (Akkermans et al., 2024; Clements, 2019; Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020; Tymon, 2013)

Given that HEIs are currently under pressure to increase employment prospects of their graduates and graduates enrolling in higher education programs hold the belief that it will increase their employment prospects, there is the need to assess career expectations, planning and decision making of students employability competencies since students' beliefs about their own employment prospects may differ from both HRDs and HEIs. Therefore, the objective of this research, which is anchored on the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SSCT) was to examine the statistical difference between various students groups [traditional and non-traditional/ male and female] and the elements of employability competence [metacognitive, efficacy belief, social competence, lifelong learning, emotional regulation, oral and written communication] and test the hypothesis that

1. There is a significant difference between traditional and non-traditional students and employability competences
2. There is a significant difference between male and female students on employability competencies.

Undoubtedly, enrollment statistics of traditional and non-traditional students have been on the high for some time now (Brändle, 2017; McCall et al., 2020). Factors such as governments' overt and covert policies to widen educational participation, career advancement and personal satisfaction account for increasing enrolment (Carreira & Lopes, 2021a; Hanover Research, 2018; Tieben, 2020). Nonetheless, given the fact that fast changes in knowledge, globalization, evolving technologies, and career segmentations are influencing human capital dynamics, both traditional and

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