

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (All Submissions)

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Institutional employability drivers in difficult times.

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Research Domain: Employability, enterprise and graduate careers (EE)

Abstract:

In difficult times, tertiary education employability policy can be used to influence student employability figures. This study builds on Santos' career boundary theory, recognising organisational boundaries; labour market boundaries; personal-related boundaries and cultural boundaries (Santos, 2019). This theory focusses on the institutional and economic drivers to employability, in an international context. The top 193 Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) internationally ranked universities in terms of employment rate within 12 months of graduation, are analysed through quantitative regression methods. Institutional drivers are measured by the presence or tertiary education employability funding policy, institutional reputation through survey responses, and partnerships with employers through research and placement data and number of publications. Economic drivers include the country's growth rate and tertiary education spend in the University. Do universities with funding incentives driven by employability factors, result in more employed graduates and therefore act as an institutional driver for employability?

Paper:

Introduction

Improving graduate employability boosts economic growth (Bhorat, 2016) and enhances a university's reputation (Lafuente-Ruiz-de-Sabanda, 2018). Santos (2019) identified four types of career boundaries namely organisational and work related, contextual and labour market, personal related and cognitive-cultural boundaries to employability. This study focuses on institutional and economic drivers to university employability in an international context, as the first two have been covered in the literature. The graduate employment outcomes of the top 193 universities as ranked by their QS graduate employment ranking are analysed quantitatively through regression methods.

Institutional drivers are measured through whether subsidy is dependent on *employability measures* ([St. Petersburg State University et al., 2017](#); Clayeys-Kulik, 2015; Snyder, 2018; *the institutional reputation* utilising survey responses and number of publications ([Chhinzer Nita, 2018](#); [Lafuente-Ruiz-de-Sabando, 2018](#)) as well as *partnership with employers* ([Zacharewicz et al., 2019](#); Lowden, 2011).

Graduate Employment Literature

It can be argued that students attend a University to prepare them to find employment (Chinyamurindi, 2016). Employability is understood to refer to the skills and competencies that graduates need to enhance their chances of employment as well as the development of the country ([Jeswani, 2016](#); Figueiredo et al., 2017). Higher education is perceived as the means to achieve this ([Adrian, 2017](#)). This definition however limits us to the interpersonal/cultural aspects of employability and does not focus on the institutional and economic drivers of employability (Clarke, 2018).

Moving higher education closer to markets has been debated in neo liberal economics extensively, and some see this as looking to the market as the solution to the problem ([Fairclough et al., 2013](#); Mudge, 2008; Zacharewicz et al., 2019). Some institutions see the role of driving employability as out of their realm of responsibility (Lafuente-Ruiz-de-Sabanda, 2018). The current gap in employability studies is that they concentrate on individually focussed explanations ([St. Petersburg State University et al., 2017](#); [Williams, 2016](#); [Okay-Sommerville, 2017](#); [Sin, 2016](#)) neglecting the institutional and economic drivers to employability - the focus of this research.

Methodology

The research paradigm is positivistic and employs quantitative methods. The objective of this research is to examine the relationships between employability subsidy policy, employers reputation, partnership with employers, a country's growth rate as well as their educational spend to determine institutional and economic drivers to employability. The data was analysed through a regression. N=193 as 193 of the 500 top QS Top Universities database provided their employability data, one year after graduation.

Employability Drivers:

$$Y_1(\text{Employability}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 [\text{Subsidy for Graduate Employment}] + \beta_2 x_2 [\text{Employer Reputation}] + \beta_3 x_3 [\text{Partnership with Employers}] + \beta_4 x_4 [\text{Number of Publications}] + \beta_5 x_5 [\text{Country Growth rate}] + \beta_6 x_6 [\text{Country Tertiary Education Spend}] + \epsilon_1$$

Figure 1 Employability Boundaries Model

The hypothesis is therefore that institutions with an employability funding policy, high institutional reputation, strong partnerships with employers and high number of publications, operating in an environment with a high growth rate and tertiary education spend, will graduate more employed alumni.

Results

The regression only explained the coefficient 29% of the time.

Employability
Subsidy for Graduate Employment
Institutional Reputation
Partnership with employers
Growth Rate
Tertiary Education Spend
Number of Publications

Table 1 Employability Regression

Limitations

Where data was unavailable for any reason the previous known value for the indicator has been used. More universities should be included in future studies as this study was limited by Universities that provided their employability data.

Conclusion

This study sought to establish whether institutional and economic drivers drive employability. Our regression only predicted the chance of being employed 29% of the time. Chernova ([St. Petersburg State University et al., 2017](#)) however found that Universities with funding formula and performance contracts perform better than those without. We do however need to recognise that the outcome itself, i.e. increased employability and economic growth, is assumed as desirable and equated to a public good, while this may not be the case (Signe, 2018; Hillman, 2015). This work is significant because increasing the number of graduates employed will boost economic activity. This theory builds on Santos (2019) employability boundary theory. We can however conclude that employability is not only driven by personal and cultural drivers but is influenced by institutional and economic factors too.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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