

264 The role of the university services in international student employability: A systematic literature review

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Research Domains

Employability, enterprise and graduate careers (EE)

Abstract

This paper examines the role of the university services in international student employability. While there has been focus on the wage and employment outcomes of international students following their graduation, the development of employability through engagement with university services requires further attention. A systematic literature review of 47 research papers was conducted. Findings show that international students do indeed experience unique challenges, e.g., accessing labour markets, especially in host country. Nevertheless, amongst the papers reviewed, only six research articles specifically focused on the role of the university services on the transition experience. Discussion in these papers centred around (i) the broader role of the universities and (ii) career service support. This literature review suggests that there are tensions between neoliberal and transitional approaches to international student employability. Employability development needs of international students lies very much on the intersection of degree-related skills and knowledge, and their personal and professional relationships.

Full paper

The higher education internationalisation policies have resulted in increased the movement of students across borders to obtain university degrees with the expectation of a beneficial academic and employment outcomes (Furukawa et al., 2013). It is recognised that international students have become increasingly mobile for career development (Tzanakou and Behle, 2017), yet there is limited empirical representation of their graduate outcomes of employment attainment and level related to their unique employability development. While there has been some focus on the occupation, wage and skill-level outcomes of international students following their graduation, the development of employability through the engagement with university services requires further attention. Within this context, this paper examines the role of the university in international students' employability. The overarching research question this paper aims to address is: how employability is studied in relation to international students in the existing literature? With a specific focus on: how is the role of the university in international student employability represented in the current research?

Method and analysis

A systematic literature review of 47 research papers drawn from the Web of Science database that were published in journal articles in English between 2001 and 2022 was conducted. The search terms were a combination of keywords related to "international student", "transition", "graduate" and "employability". An analytical synthesis of the included articles was conducted. The analytical framework was developed based on the research questions.

Findings and discussion

The majority of the articles included in the analysis examined the international graduate transition to the labour market and the role of stakeholders in graduate employability within the internationalisation of higher education. In general, international students have expressed specific employability-related needs while at university which include gaining employment experience, having services available for international student needs, help with understanding the job search process, a better understanding of cultural nuances through building social networks, support accessing the local labour market, and identifying employers who are accepting of international students (Linkes et al., 2018). Amongst the papers reviewed, only six research articles specifically focused on the role of the university services on the transition experience. Discussion centred around role of (i) the universities and (ii) career service support.

The role of the university in student employability has been widely debated: for some the institution is merely for the obtainment of knowledge and learning, for others higher education prepares future employable individuals (Lopez-Duarte et al., 2021). Particularly within the neoliberal agenda, there is an assumption and some empirical evidence that knowledge obtained from degrees will lead to higher wages and better job opportunities for international students, especially in their home country (Brooks and Waters, 2022). Within this context, the 'duty of care' of universities to support student employability is contested. As internationalisation continues to be a priority for many institutions, so has the call for the internationalisation of the curriculum to incorporate an intercultural dimension which prepare graduates to meet employer expectations on a global scale. Nevertheless, there is also tensions between university and academic staff understanding of the role of the university, and some staff may be reluctant to incorporate skills (Jones, 2013). Not surprisingly, some of the international student employability research focuses on post-study work visa issues (Tran et al., 2022).

Often career services are viewed as the gatekeepers of information to prepare students to transition from university to a career. While these are essential services, they can be homogenously delivered and not recognise the unique needs of the international student population (Linkes et al., 2018). In the case of international students, their needs often come due to acculturative stressors related to financial, academic, and cultural stress. One-to-one careers counselling can be difficult for international students due to a lack of language proficiency or differences in cultural nuances (Linkes et al., 2018; Sangganjanavanich et al., 2011). There is some evidence of the efficacy of group career counselling sessions for international students (e.g., reduced interview anxiety), as these eliminate some of the cultural barriers and serve to encourage networking and validating experiences (Linkes et al., 2018).

Conclusion

Despite considerable literature on graduate employability and international student experience, our understanding of how universities can support international student employability is still limited. This literature review suggests that there are tensions between neoliberal and transitional approaches to international student employability. With the increase of diversification and internationalisation agendas in higher education, the support provided for students to successfully navigate their employability development lies on understanding how universities facilitate employability through network and relationship development.

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