Self-Perceived Employability of Students of International Relations of University of Warmia and Mazury in Poland

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Abstract—Nowadays, graduates should be prepared for serious challenges in the internal and external labor market. The notion that a degree is a "passport to employment" has been relegated to the past. In the last few years a phenomenon in the form of the increasing unemployment of highly educated young people in EU countries, including Poland has been observed. Empirical studies were conducted among Polish students in the scope of the so-called self-perceived employability review. In this study, a special scale was used which consisted of 19 statements regarding five components: student's perception of university; field of study; self-belief; state of the external labor market; and, personal knowledge management. The respondent group consisted of final-year master's students of International Relations at the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland. The findings of the empirical studies were compiled using statistical methods: descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. In general, in light of the conducted studies, the self-perceived employability of the Polish students was not high. Limitations of the studies were discussed, as well as the implications for future research in the scope of the students' employability.

Keywords—Self-perceived employability, students of international relations, university education.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE concept of employability stems from the second half of the 20th century [1]. It concerns the extent to which people possess the skills and other attributes necessary to find and remain in the kind of job they want. Contributions to the employability literature come from different disciplines, including labor economics, management science, psychology, and information science [2], [3]. Because of the changes in public employment policy, accelerating changes in economies and the competition of the workforce in global labor markets, the idea of employability has become particularly relevant. Today, individuals are encouraged to embrace career self-management, rather than rely on an organization for career planning and job security [4].

The literature of employability may be divided into three areas of work: (1) employability of the workforce, (2) employability as human resource strategy, and (3) employability of individuals [5], [6]. The first perspective on employability at a national workforce level is connected with government policy. The second perspective on employability within human resource management is related to the notion of employability as the individuals' ability to get or retain a job. It is worth highlighting that there are clear distinctions between the concept of entry level employability and an expert practitioner's employability. The third perspective, the most popular and originating in the UK, is connected with the ability of the university sector to provide graduates with employability skills [7].

The third aforementioned perspective, which is the employability of individuals, [6] is the closest to the subject of this article. The self-perceived employability is defined as the ability to keep the job one has or to get the job one desires. Moreover, from the individual perspective, self-perceived employability may be understood "in terms of skills and abilities, attitudes and behaviors, as a current state, a process or a future outcome, and individual characteristic made up of the sum of an individual's job related skills, or as a reflection of the individual's position within the labor market" [4, p. 262]. There is no doubt that lifelong employability is of great significance to individuals, and may be a source of one's identity and livelihood.

In the current economic climate, a major role of academia is to support students and graduates in developing the necessary qualities, behaviors, skills and competences for the modern workplace. Nowadays, graduates should be prepared for the serious challenges in the internal and external labor markets. A degree does not guarantee employment anymore [8]. Moreover, the unemployment rates among educated people in Poland and other EU countries have increased. Poland started implementing an ambitious higher education reform in the second half of 2011 that aims to strengthen university-business links and to address issues of skills and job mismatch.

The origin of the empirical studies in the scope of students' employability stems from the UK, were the first scale for examining the expectations and self-perceptions of employability was tested among business undergraduates and postgraduate students [5], [6]. The student self-perceived employability scale consisted of 16 statements regarding four components: student's perception of university, field of study, self-belief and the state of the external labor market. This model was a crucial pattern in the author's own research, described in this article.

Another model of self-perceived employability regarding graduates was developed by Pool and Sewell [9]. The essential components of this model were: career development learning,

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experience, degree (subject, knowledge and skills), generic skills and emotional intelligence.

Recently, the individual perspective of graduates' employability from a variety of disciplines was examined in such countries as Indonesia [10], Kuwait [11], Slovenia [12], and Greece [13]. Graduates from engineering programs in information technology were the focus in Sweden [14] and graduates of computer science in Sri Lanka [15].

Despite the discussion in Polish media about unemployment among graduates, very little is known about the relevant qualifications of our graduates and how they perceive their chances in the labor market. The pioneering studies in the scope of self-perceived employability of Polish students were carried out by the author of this article among Library and Information Science (LIS) students from nine Polish state universities [2], [3].

In general, it is difficult to find empirical studies regarding graduates of social sciences and humanities in the subject literature. The original British studies were connected with business undergraduates and postgraduates, so were the Kuwait studies. The abovementioned studies in Sri Lanka and Sweden were related to computer studies and information technology. In the light of the Indonesian and Slovenian studies, health graduates have the highest probability of employment. The Polish studies in humanities and social science – first [2], [3] and the current presented in this article connected with the International Relations major – give a new light to the research on this phenomenon.

II. METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

The above mentioned British model and scale [5, p. 10], [6, p. 159] were modified; that is, updated and adapted to Polish conditions. Regarding the newest studies, the British scale was supplemented by the PKIM-personal knowledge and information skills component [16], [17] because of its high correlation with the self-perceived employability tested in the empirical studies [2], [3].

In order to match the Polish conditions (despite the translation of English statements) the statement about the chance of finding a job abroad was added. This reflects the interests of Polish graduates of temporary and constant emigration.

Self-perceived employability of Polish students is represented by a four-sided model (Fig. 1), with scale items representing either the primary influence of each of the four components of the model (2,4,6,8), or the interaction of the two adjacent components (1,3,5,7). The central point (9) of this model is PKIM – personal knowledge and information management skills, which are connected with all the other components.

The questionnaire used in this study consisted of 19 statements corresponding to all abovementioned components of self-perceived employability. Respondents were to select an answer from a five-point Likert scale (1, *strongly disagree*; 2, *disagree*; 3, *undecided*; 4, *agree*; 5, *strongly agree*).

The research question described in the studies was: What is the level of self-perceived employability of students of International Relations at UWM in Olsztyn, Poland?

University

1. Engagement with the studies and academic performance	2. The university's brand	3. The field of study at the university
8. Confidence in the skills and competences	9. Personal Knowledge and Information Management (PKIM)	4. The status of the field of study
7. Opportunities in the labor market	6. Perception of the state of the labor market	5. The labor market's demand for professionals of the field of study

Self-belief (left)   *Field of study* (right)
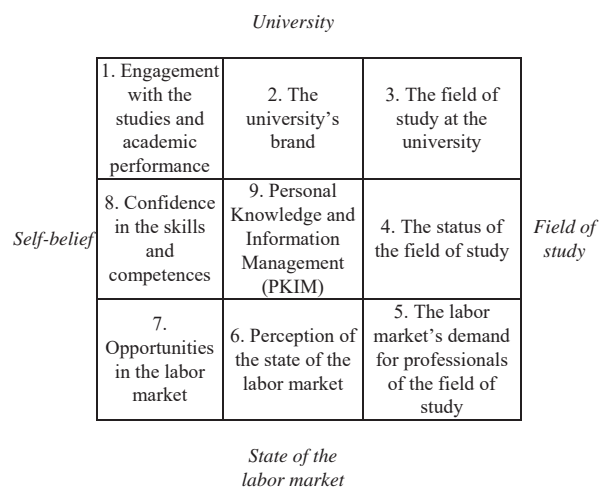
State of the labor market

Fig. 1 Self-perceived employability of Polish students [2], [3]

In addition to the abovementioned research question, the hypothesis guided data collection and interpretation: "There is no significant difference between male and female IR students as to their level of PEM self-assessment". The hypothesis was tested at a level of significance of 0.05.

The respondent group consisted of 60 students in their final year of International Relations; 27 were male and 33 female. The studies were conducted in spring 2015 and 2016.

The findings of the empirical studies were compiled using statistical methods: descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, percentile rank, etc.) and inferential statistics (chi-squared test). The interpretation includes a socio-cultural and economic context.

III. STUDIES RESULTS

The first component of self-perceived employability of students was engagement with the studies and academic performance (Tables I and II).

TABLE I
ACHIEVEMENTS IN STUDIES

1a. I achieve high grades at my studies	Male		Female		Both	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 – I strongly disagree	1	3.70	0	0.00	1	1.67
2 – I disagree	1	3.70	1	3.03	2	3.33
3 – I do not know	6	22.22	6	18.18	12	20.00
4 – I agree	16	59.26	17	51.52	33	55.00
5 – I absolutely agree	3	11.11	9	27.27	12	20.00
Sum	27	100	33	100	60	100
Chi-squared = 3.4, p = 0.483						

As can be seen in the Table III, half of the surveyed international relations students did not know whether employers are eager to employ graduates from UWM; and over 40% disagreed with this statement. A similar situation

was seen with the second issue (Table IV). The majority did not know or disagreed that the status of UWM is a significant asset in job seeking. No significant differences between genders were noticed.

TABLE II
STUDIES AS A PRIORITY

1b. I regard my academic work as a top priority.	Male		Female		Both	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 – I strongly disagree	3	11.11	0	0.00	3	5.00
2 – I disagree	7	25.93	6	18.18	13	21.67
3 – I do not know	4	14.81	4	12.12	8	13.33
4 – I agree	11	40.74	17	51.52	28	46.67
5 – I absolutely agree	2	7.41	6	18.18	8	13.33
Sum	27	100	33	100	60	100

TABLE III
EMPLOYABILITY PROSPECTS FOR GRADUATES

2a. Employers are eager to employ graduates from my university.	Male		Female		Both	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 – I strongly disagree	4	14.81	1	3.03	5	8.33
2 – I disagree	10	37.04	12	36.36	22	36.67
3 – I do not know	12	44.44	18	54.55	30	50.00
4 – I agree	1	3.70	2	6.06	3	5.00
5 – I absolutely agree	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Sum	27	100	33	100	60	100
Chi-squared = 2.94, p = 0.400						

TABLE IV
UNIVERSITY STATUS AS AN ASSET

2b. The status of this university is a significant asset to me in job seeking.	Male		Female		Both	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 – I strongly disagree	5	18.52	4	12.12	9	15.00
2 – I disagree	11	40.74	14	42.42	25	41.67
3 – I do not know	10	37.04	6	18.18	16	26.67
4 – I agree	1	3.70	8	24.24	9	15.00
5 – I absolutely agree	0	0.00	1	3.03	1	1.67
Sum	27	100	33	100	60	100
Chi-squared = 7.38, p = 0.116						

The next part of the questionnaire related to the reputation of the university within the international relations field of study (Tables V-VI).

TABLE V
PROSPECTS FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS GRADUATES

3a. Employers specifically target this university in order to recruit individuals from my subject area(s).	Male		Female		Both	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 – I strongly disagree	3	11.11	3	9.09	6	10.00
2 – I disagree	8	29.63	11	33.33	19	31.67
3 – I do not know	15	55.56	19	57.58	34	56.67
4 – I agree	1	3.70	0	0.00	1	1.67
5 – I absolutely agree	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Sum	27	100	33	100	60	100
Chi-squared = 1.35, p = 0.715						

Only one female agreed with the statement that employers specifically target UWM in order to recruit individuals from the international relations subject area (Table V). An important observation was that over half of the respondents really did not know anything about it.

TABLE VI
UNIVERSITY REPUTATION

3b. My university has an outstanding reputation in my field(s) of study.	Male		Female		Both	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 – I strongly disagree	3	11.11	4	12.12	7	11.67
2 – I disagree	9	33.33	12	36.36	21	35.00
3 – I do not know	11	40.74	12	36.36	23	38.33
4 – I agree	4	14.81	5	15.15	9	15.00
5 – I absolutely agree	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Sum	27	100	33	100	60	100
Chi-squared = 0.12, p = 0.988						

Some 15% of students said that their university has an outstanding reputation in the international relations field of study (Table VI). Again, a big group of respondents (almost 40%) were not acknowledged with this issue; and no differences were observed between answers from the male and female respondents.

The fourth element included in this study was the status and credibility of the field of study (Tables VII and VIII).

TABLE VII
NUMBER OF CANDIDATES

4a. There are more people applying for my degree than the places available.	Male		Female		Both	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 – I strongly disagree	11	40.74	11	33.33	22	36.67
2 – I disagree	8	29.63	9	27.27	17	28.33
3 – I do not know	4	14.81	11	33.33	15	25.00
4 – I agree	4	14.81	2	6.06	6	10.00
5 – I absolutely agree	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Sum	27	100	33	100	60	100
Chi-squared = 3.42, p = 0.330						

TABLE VIII
MAJOR VS. SOCIAL STATUS

4b. My chosen subject(s) rank(s) highly in terms of social status.	Male		Female		Both	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 – I strongly disagree	10	37.04	6	18.18	16	26.67
2 – I disagree	5	18.52	12	36.36	17	28.33
3 – I do not know	10	37.04	5	15.15	15	25.00
4 – I agree	1	3.70	10	30.30	11	18.33
5 – I absolutely agree	1	3.70	0	0.00	1	1.67
Sum	27	100	33	100	60	100
Chi-squared = 13.44, p = **0.009**						

Over half of the respondents ascertained that there are more people applying for this degree than there are available places (Table VII). It is true; however, that the number of students in various social studies majors in Poland has decreased. And almost 20% of the surveyed students in the final year of the master's studies, more females than males (a statistically significant difference) agreed that international relations ranks highly in terms of social status (Table VIII).

The external labor market's demand for professionals in the subject field (Tables IX and X) was the fifth element of the model presented on Fig. 1.

TABLE IX
LABOR MARKET DEMAND

5a. People in the career I am aiming for are in high demand in the external labor market.	Male		Female		Both	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 – I strongly disagree	12	44.44	6	18.18	18	30.00
2 – I disagree	11	40.74	10	30.30	21	35.00
3 – I do not know	4	14.81	12	36.36	16	26.67
4 – I agree	0	0.00	5	15.15	5	8.33
5 – I absolutely agree	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Sum	27	100	33	100	60	100
Chi-squared = 10.55, p = **0.014**						

TABLE X
DESIRABLE CAREER

5b. My degree is seen as leading to a specific career that is generally perceived as highly desirable.	Male		Female		Both	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 – I strongly disagree	9	33.33	7	21.21	16	26.67
2 – I disagree	4	14.81	12	36.36	16	26.67
3 – I do not know	12	44.44	9	27.27	21	35.00
4 – I agree	2	7.41	5	15.15	7	11.67
5 – I absolutely agree	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Sum	27	100	33	100	60	100
Chi-squared = 5.41, p = 0.143						

It is a worrisome issue that over 60% of students disagreed that people in the career they were aiming for, are in high demand in the external labor market; and there were more often men than women (Table IX). Moreover, about 60% disagreed that an international relations diploma is seen as leading to a specific career that is generally perceived as highly desirable; with no differences between male and female respondents (Table X).

The next component of the described self-perceived employability of students was perception of the state of the labor market (Tables XI and XII).

TABLE XI
DEMAND FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

6a. There is generally a strong demand for graduates at present.	Male		Female		Both	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 – I strongly disagree	7	25.93	5	15.15	12	20.00
2 – I disagree	11	40.74	13	39.39	24	40.00
3 – I do not know	6	22.22	3	9.09	9	15.00
4 – I agree	3	11.11	10	30.30	13	21.67
5 – I absolutely agree	0	0.00	2	6.06	2	3.33
Sum	27	100	33	100	60	100
Chi-squared = 6.73, p = 0.150						

Every one in four respondents agreed that there is generally a strong demand for graduates at present (Table XI) and that there are plenty of job vacancies in the geographical area in which they are looking for employment (Table XII). Unfortunately, over half of the whole group disagreed with both statements. No differences between male and female respondents were observed.

The awareness of opportunities in the labor market was the seventh component (Tables XIII and XIV).

TABLE XII
REGIONAL MARKET DEMAND

6b. There are plenty of job vacancies in the geographical area in which I am looking for a job.	Male		Female		Both	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 – I strongly disagree	11	40.74	11	33.33	22	36.67
2 – I disagree	5	18.52	11	33.33	16	26.67
3 – I do not know	4	14.81	2	6.06	6	10.00
4 – I agree	6	22.22	9	27.27	15	25.00
5 – I absolutely agree	1	3.70	0	0.00	1	1.67
Sum	27	100	33	100	60	100
Chi-squared = 3.95, p = 0.411						

TABLE XIII
INFORMATION ABOUT JOB OPPORTUNITIES

7a. I can easily find out about job opportunities in my chosen field.	Male		Female		Both	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 – I strongly disagree	9	33.33	11	33.33	20	33.33
2 – I disagree	12	44.44	15	45.45	27	45.00
3 – I do not know	3	11.11	3	9.09	6	10.00
4 – I agree	3	11.11	4	12.12	7	11.67
5 – I absolutely agree	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Sum	27	100	33	100	60	100
Chi-squared = 0.07, p = 0.994						

TABLE XIV
DEMAND FOR SPECIFIC SKILLS

7b. The skills and abilities that I possess are what employers are looking for.	Male		Female		Both	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 – I strongly disagree	2	7.41	1	3.03	3	5.00
2 – I disagree	5	18.52	7	21.21	12	20.00
3 – I do not know	11	40.74	14	42.42	25	41.67
4 – I agree	8	29.63	9	27.27	17	28.33
5 – I absolutely agree	1	3.70	2	6.06	3	5.00
Sum	27	100	33	100	60	100
Chi-squared = 0.82, p = 0.934						

Some 80% of students in their final year of study in international relations said that it is not easy to find out about job opportunities in this field (Table XIII). A much better situation was with the second issue in this part of the model; that is because one in three students are convinced that the skills and abilities they possess are what employers are looking for (Table XIV). A lack of differences between males and females was observed.

TABLE XV
SELF-CONFIDENCE

8a. I am generally confident of success in job interviews and selection events.	Male		Female		Both	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 – I strongly disagree	0	0	3	9.09	3	5.00
2 – I disagree	4	14.81	5	15.15	9	15.00
3 – I do not know	7	25.93	13	39.39	20	33.33
4 – I agree	15	55.56	10	30.30	25	41.67
5 – I absolutely agree	1	3.70	2	6.06	3	5.00
Sum	27	100	33	100	60	100
Chi-squared = 5.70, p = 0.222						

Students' confidence in the skills and competences was the eighth component of the described phenomenon (Tables XV-XVI).

TABLE XVI
LONG-TERM SKILLS

8b. I feel I could get any job so long as my skills and experience are reasonably relevant.	Male		Female		Both	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 – I strongly disagree	0	0.00	2	6.06	2	3.33
2 – I disagree	4	14.81	6	18.18	10	16.67
3 – I do not know	4	14.81	10	30.30	14	23.33
4 – I agree	17	62.96	12	36.36	29	48.33
5 – I absolutely agree	2	7.41	3	9.09	5	8.33
Sum	27	100	33	100	60	100
Chi-squared = 5.48, p = 0.240						

Regarding the previous answers of respondents, it is very optimistic that almost half of them are generally confident of success in job interviews and selection events (Table XV). Moreover, about 60% agreed that they feel they could get any job so long as their skills and experience are reasonably relevant (Table XVII). Only about 20% disagreed with both statements, with no differences between genders.

The last (but not the least) issue in the survey was the so-called PKIM skills of students (Tables XVII and XVIII). This issue was connected, as has been said in the introduction, with earlier Polish studies, in which the strong correlation between employability and personal knowledge management was confirmed.

TABLE XVII
PKIM SKILLS VS. EMPLOYABILITY

9a. I think that appropriate management of personal knowledge by students makes looking for work and employment easier.	Male		Female		Both	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 – I strongly disagree	1	3.70	0	0.00	1	1.67
2 – I disagree	3	11.11	3	9.09	6	10.00
3 – I do not know	8	29.63	9	27.27	17	28.33
4 – I agree	10	37.04	14	42.42	24	40.00
5 – I absolutely agree	5	18.52	7	21.21	12	20.00
Sum	27	100	33	100	60	100
Chi-squared = 1.47, p = 0.831						

TABLE XVIII
PKIM TRAINING

9b. At my studies I am well prepared to manage information and knowledge (searching, evaluating, presenting etc.).	Male		Female		Both	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 – I strongly disagree	3	11.11	3	9.09	6	10.00
2 – I disagree	5	18.52	7	21.21	12	20.00
3 – I do not know	7	25.93	10	30.30	17	28.33
4 – I agree	12	44.44	9	27.27	21	35.00
5 – I absolutely agree	0	0.00	4	12.12	4	6.67
Sum	27	100	33	100	60	100
Chi-squared = 4.73, p = 0.315						

Exactly 60% of students agreed that appropriate management of personal knowledge by students (information and ideas searching, evaluating, creating, presenting, etc.) makes looking for work and employment easier (Table XVII).

Moreover, 40% of them said that at their studies they are well prepared to manage information and knowledge (searching, evaluating, presenting etc.). No statistical differences were observed between genders.

The specific Polish component was connected, as was mentioned, with the chance of finding work abroad (Table XIX). The answers were laid out evenly. In other words, one third of the respondents agreed, one third did not know and one third agreed with this statement. No differences between male and female respondents were observed.

TABLE XIX
PERSPECTIVES OF EMPLOYMENT ABROAD

10. I think that I have a good chance of finding employment abroad which matches my qualifications and expectations.	Male		Female		Both	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 – I strongly disagree	1	3.70	4	12.12	5	8.33
2 – I disagree	9	33.33	5	15.15	14	23.33
3 – I do not know	10	37.04	9	27.27	19	31.67
4 – I agree	4	14.81	12	36.36	16	26.67
5 – I absolutely agree	3	11.11	3	9.09	6	10.00
Sum	27	100	33	100	60	100
Chi-squared = 6.46, p = 0.167						

IV. CONCLUSION

In the light of the conducted studies, it can be said that the level of self-perceived employability of students in their final year of study in international relations is not high. Moreover, it was hypothesized that there is no significant difference in the employability self-perception for either male or female respondents. Because of the similar layouts of answers in almost all tables there is no evidence to reject the hypothesis. Only two exceptions of this rule were observed (in the sum of 19 statements). It is worth adding that a revision of faculty curriculum is certainly needed and is expected to happen later in 2016. In other words, a modified and modern study program is waiting for new students at UWM in the coming 2016/2017 academic year.

Nobody expects universities to produce fully fledged practitioners but the set of knowledge, skills and competences, the learning outcomes at entry level employability are the first crucial step to further development and to lifelong employability. Universities and other institutions of higher education, general and vocationally oriented, play a major role in broadening the competences of adult learners, current employees, along with preparing them, if needed, for new professions.

Unfortunately, most of the issues described in these studies are not connected with the study program or individual skills and self-belief, but they are influenced by macroeconomic trends and a difficult situation for graduates in today's Polish labor market.

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