Management
Theory and Practice
in the
Post-Pandemic World

Editors

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31. **Working Capital Management of Steel and Industrial Forgings Limited (SIFL), Thrissur**
Amal Shaju and Dilna Devasya 177

32. **The Influence of Organizational Justice & OCB on the Employee Engagement of Nurses in South India**
George George and A.M.A. Jenita 182

33. **Divergent Workforce Diversity and Decisive HRM Practices**
Dr. Simon Jacob C. 191

34. **Psychological Well-being and Organizational Citizenship Behavior among Employees in Non-Banking Financial Institutions in Kerala**
Sarumol S. and Dr. Santhosh P. Thampi 196

35. **Role of Employee Psychological Safety in the Relationship between Inclusive Leadership and Creative Problem-Solving**
Clairine Rose, Dr. Jino Johny M., and Dr. Hima Elizabeth Mathew 205

36. **Psychological Capital and Job Embeddedness among Bank Employees**
Jeenu Mathew and Dr. Santhosh P. Thampi 211

37. **Examining the Role of Employee Belongingness in the Relationship between Inclusive Leadership and Creative Problem Solving**
Arathy Unni, Dr. Jino Johny M., and Dr. Hima Elizabeth Mathew 220

38. **Hybrid Workforce-Strategy and Transformation**
Nigil Thomas and Aruna Pushkaran 226

39. **The Influence of Familism on Risk Aversive Investment Behaviour: The Mediation Role of Risk Perception and Financial Discipline**
Dr. M. Reshma and Dr. J. Meena Maheswari 232

40. **A Critical Review of the Constructs of 'Employability' and 'Well-being' A-Priori 'Employee Engagement'**
Swati Basu, Dr. Habiba Hussain, and Dr. Bhavya 240

41. **Employee Well-being and Social Responsibility in Airport Operations: Assessing Workforce Diversity, Health and Safety**
Tiya Thomas and Dr. S. Annie Priyadharshini 253

42. **Self-Perceived Employability among College Students**
Janitha N.P., Shilpa Sundaran, and Sefiya K.M. 264

Chapter

42

Self-Perceived Employability among College Students

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ABSTRACT

This study examines self-perceived employability among college students, focusing on the influence of gender and the moderating effect of course quality on the relationship between self-efficacy and employability. Using data from 100 respondents through structured questionnaires, the findings reveal that while academic performance is viewed positively, other employability dimensions are less favorable. Gender differences in perceptions were not significant, but course quality had a notable positive impact. The study contributes to understanding the education-to-employment transition and the development of future workforce talent.

Keywords: Self-perceived employability, College students, Course quality, Self-efficacy, and Moderation analysis

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary landscape of higher education, the concept of employability has garnered significant attention, especially concerning the perceptions and readiness of college students to enter the workforce. Self-perceived employability (SPE) has emerged as a crucial construct, encapsulating individuals' beliefs in their abilities to secure and succeed in employment opportunities. As stated by Bandura (1977), individuals' perceptions of their capabilities in different areas, such as employability, are significantly influenced by their self-efficacy beliefs. These beliefs are shaped by a complex interplay of personal, social, and contextual factors, ultimately impacting individuals' attitudes, actions, and career paths.

The dimensions of self-perceived employability encompass both internal and external facets, as elucidated by Rothwell *et al.* (2008). These dimensions include students' confidence in their skills and abilities, their engagement with academic pursuits, their perceptions of the external labour market, and the reputation of their educational institution. Understanding these dimensions is crucial for comprehensively assessing students' perceptions of their employability and identifying areas for enhancement. Furthermore, the study aims to analyze whether the dimensions of self-perceived employability, encompassing internal and external aspects, are uniformly perceived among college students, and to

explore moderators that influence the relationship between self-efficacy and self-perceived employability. One such moderator of interest is the quality of courses, as proposed by Kee *et al.* (2023). Course quality may shape students' perceptions of their own efficacy and, consequently, their perceived employability. Investigating this moderation effect contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics between academic experiences and students' beliefs about their career prospects. By addressing these objectives, the research endeavours to contribute valuable insights to the existing literature on self-perceived employability, informing educational practices and interventions aimed at enhancing students' employability outcomes.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is a psychological construct that refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to successfully carry out the various tasks and actions involved in making informed career choices and progressing in their desired career paths (Huang, 2015). It's not just about having the skills or knowledge but also about having the confidence and belief that one can use those skills effectively to accomplish what they sets out to do. This concept is crucial across various domains, including education, work, and personal development. In education, self-efficacy plays a significant role in shaping students' academic performance, motivation, and persistence. High self-efficacy fosters goal-setting, effort, and perseverance, while low self-efficacy may result in helplessness, reduced effort, and poorer academic outcomes, as evidenced by various studies across age groups and academic subjects. Students who possess greater self-assurance typically show a greater readiness to persevere through challenges, while those who aim to "master a task" tend to dedicate themselves to concentrated effort (Hsieh *et al.*, 2007).

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding self-efficacy and its influence on behavior. According to this theory, self-efficacy beliefs are developed through four primary sources of information: These sources influence individuals' perceptions of their capabilities by integrating past experiences, observations of others, feedback from social interactions, and physiological reactions to stressors. Students' interpretations of their past successes or mastery experiences significantly influence their self-efficacy beliefs. Positive mastery experiences play a crucial role in shaping students' confidence in their academic abilities, ultimately influencing their motivation and persistence in learning (Usher & Pajares, 2008). These interpretations of personal performance outcomes contribute to the formation of self-efficacy (van Dinther *et al.*, 2011). Besides this, assessments of self-efficacy are closely linked to students' decisions regarding college majors, performance in coursework, and persistence (Zimmerman, 2000). Furthermore, educational institutions could proactively enhance students'

self-efficacy by implementing a program that offers authentic tasks, prompting students to apply their knowledge and skills across various scenarios more frequently (van Dinther *et al.*, 2011)

Self-perceived Employability

The employability of graduates is progressively gaining importance as a significant factor or indicator of institutional success, attracting attention from various stakeholders such as government, employers, and educational institutions ((Ng *et al.*, 2022). Employability is the ability to independently navigate the job market to achieve one's potential through securing stable employment (Botha, 2021). In the current era characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), the traditional expectation of lifetime employment and guaranteed job security is no longer prevalent, and it may lead to numerous challenges for students in terms of securing a stable employment (Chen *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, for undergraduate students pursuing a bachelor's degree, self-perceived employability refers to their perception of their capability to obtain stable employment that matches their level of qualifications (Rothwell *et al.*, 2008). While qualifications by themselves cannot ensure future employment, they do play a role in enhancing one's employability ((Botha, 2021). Recent studies emphasize the diverse aspects of self-perceived employability. Botha (2021) identifies several dimensions including external job prospects, academic involvement and achievement, belief in personal skills, and the reputation of the educational institution. These dimensions reflect individuals' confidence in their employability, academic readiness, and how they perceive their suitability for the job market. A multitude of personal, contextual, and socio-economic factors influence how individuals perceive their employability. Research indicates that academic performance, involvement in extracurricular activities, adaptability in career choices, and social connections play crucial roles as highlighted by studies (Duggal *et al.*, 2023; Atitsogbe *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, demographic factors like gender, academic discipline, and socioeconomic status also impact individuals' perceptions of their employability, as found in studies (Vargas *et al.*, 2018; Cáceres-Reche *et al.*, 2022). Individuals' perceptions of their employability not only influence their career choices and ambitions but also have an impact on their psychological well-being. Petruzziello *et al.* (2022) illustrate a favourable correlation between self-perceived employability and flourishing, underscoring its wider significance for individuals' general life contentment and sense of fulfilment. Ma *et al.* (2024) find that job market knowledge moderates the link between individuals' future work self-perceptions and their perceived employability. Ren *et al.* (2024) highlight how the COVID-19 pandemic introduces challenges, with career shock affecting self-perceived employability as both a challenge and a

hindrance. Understanding the dimensions, antecedents, outcomes, and moderators of self-perceived employability is crucial for designing effective interventions and support systems to enhance individuals' confidence in their employability.

Relationship Between Self-efficacy and Self-perceived Employability

The connection between self-efficacy and self-perceived employability is a significant subject of investigation in modern research, attracting considerable interest because of its far-reaching implications for interventions in education, strategies for career development, and practices within organizations. Bandura (1977) was the first to define self-efficacy as individuals' confidence in their ability to perform actions necessary to achieve particular goals. Following studies, such as Zimmerman (2000) and Usher & Pajares (2008), have further emphasized the complex nature of self-efficacy, explaining how it influences academic motivation, learning methods, and, ultimately, academic success. Zimmerman (2000) emphasized how self-efficacy beliefs serve to guide students' self-regulation and maintain their persistence in difficult academic endeavors. In contrast, Usher & Pajares (2008) underscored the intricate relationship between different sources of self-efficacy and their ability to predict academic outcomes, highlighting the importance of precise measurement techniques and contextual factors. Beyond academic settings, self-efficacy beliefs are increasingly acknowledged as significant factors shaping individuals' perceptions of their employability across various professional fields. Atitsogbe *et al.* (2019) provided empirical evidence demonstrating a positive correlation between career adaptability, general self-efficacy, and individuals' perceptions of their employability among working professionals. This underscores the importance of personal resources in influencing career outcomes. Similarly, Huang (2015) shed light on how perceived internal and external employability mediate the relationship between personality traits and individuals' confidence in making career decisions, revealing the complex mechanisms underlying individuals' beliefs and behaviors related to their careers. The research underscores self-efficacy's vital role in moderating factors shaping individuals' employability perceptions. For instance, Ma *et al.* (2024) found a positive link between individuals' perceptions of their future selves and employability, where career exploration acts as a mediator. This highlights the significance of proactive behaviors in shaping perceived employability. Studies underscore the reciprocal link between self-efficacy and self-perceived employability. Enhanced self-efficacy boosts confidence in employability, while positive job experiences reinforce it. Grant-Smith *et al.* (2021) identified education, personal traits, and work experiences as key determinants of self-perceived employability, implying proactive strategies to boost employability and confidence in future careers. The literature underscores the complex and mutually influential connection between self-efficacy and self-perceived employability, emphasizing the crucial role of self-efficacy beliefs in shaping individuals' readiness for the job market.

METHODS

Participants and Procedures

Data was collected through a structured questionnaire. It contained questions relating to the variables self-efficacy, course quality and self-perceived employability. Additional question intended for obtaining the gender of the participant was also included in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms to the final-year graduate students of a college. A total of 116 responses were obtained after the distribution. Among these 16 responses were discarded due to the outliers in responses. The final sample comprised 65% female and 35% male.

Measures

Existing scales were adopted for measuring self-efficacy, course quality and self-perceived employability. For measuring the self-efficacy of students six items of scale proposed by Midgley *et al.* (1993) was adopted. Course quality was measured using the scale proposed by Kee *et al.* (2023) which comprises six items. A 16-item scale was used for measuring self-perceived employability (Rothwell *et al.*, 2008). Participants were given the option to rate their agreement towards the statement on a 5-point Likert scale.

Data Analysis

Data was analysed using Jamovi 2.3.28. Moderation analysis was performed using the medmod module available on the Jamovi library.

RESULTS

To analyse whether the four dimensions of self-perceived employability are viewed alike in the student community or not paired samples t-test was done. Table 1 and Table 2 represent the results related to this.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Dimensions of Self-perceived Employability

	Academic Performance	University Reputation	External Job Market	Self-belief in Skills	SPE
N	100	100	100	100	100
Mean	3.66	3.47	3.50	3.42	3.49
Standard deviation	0.710	0.727	0.751	0.773	0.635

The mean score for Academic Performance is 3.66, for University Reputation is 3.47, for External Job Market is 3.50, and for Self-belief in Skills is 3.42. These scores indicate the average level of self-perceived employability across each dimension.

Table 2: Paired Samples T-test of Dimensions of Self-perceived Employability

		t-statistic	df	p
Academic	University Reputation	2.832	99.0	0.006
	External job market	2.152	99.0	0.034
	Self-belief in skills	3.099	99.0	0.003
University Reputation	External job market	-0.493	99.0	0.623
	Self-belief in skills	0.829	99.0	0.409
External job market	Self-belief in skills	1.412	99.0	0.161

The paired samples t-test results in Table 2 reveal significant differences between dimensions in some comparisons but not in others. Academic Performance is significantly different from University Reputation, External Job Market, and Self-Belief in Skills. However, the University's Reputation, External Job Market, and Self-Belief in Skills are not significantly different from each other. These results suggest that while Academic Performance is perceived differently from other dimensions, University Reputation, External Job Market, and Self-Belief in Skills are viewed similarly within the student community.

The influence of gender on self-perceived employability is examined using an independent sample's t-test. Table 3 shows that the mean score for females is 3.52, while the mean score for males is 3.43. These scores reflect the average level of self-perceived employability for each gender.

Table 3: Self-perceived Employability of Male and Female

	Group	N	Mean	SD
SPE	Female	65	3.52	0.567
	Male	35	3.43	0.752

The t-statistic for the independent samples t-test as shown in Table 4 is 0.648, with 98 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.518. A p-value of 0.518 is greater than the conventional significance level of 0.05. Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis, which suggests that there is no statistically significant difference in self-perceived employability between males and females in the sample.

Table 4: Independent Samples T-Test

		Statistic	df	p
SPE	Student's t	0.648	98.0	0.518

Moderation analysis was performed to analyse the interaction between self-efficacy and course quality on self-perceived employability. Table 5 shows that Self-efficacy (SE) alone does not have a significant effect on self-perceived employability

(β = 0.0641, p = 0.531). Course quality has a significant positive effect on self-perceived employability (β = 0.2302, p = 0.004), indicating that higher course quality is associated with higher self-perceived employability. The interaction term between self-efficacy and course quality (SE * Course quality) is significant and negative (β = -0.2826, p = 0.015), suggesting that the effect of self-efficacy on self-perceived employability depends on the level of course quality.

Table 5: Moderation Estimates

	Estimate	SE	Z	p
SE	0.0641	0.1024	0.626	0.531
Course quality	0.2302	0.0808	2.849	0.004
SE * Course quality	-0.2826	0.1159	-2.439	0.015

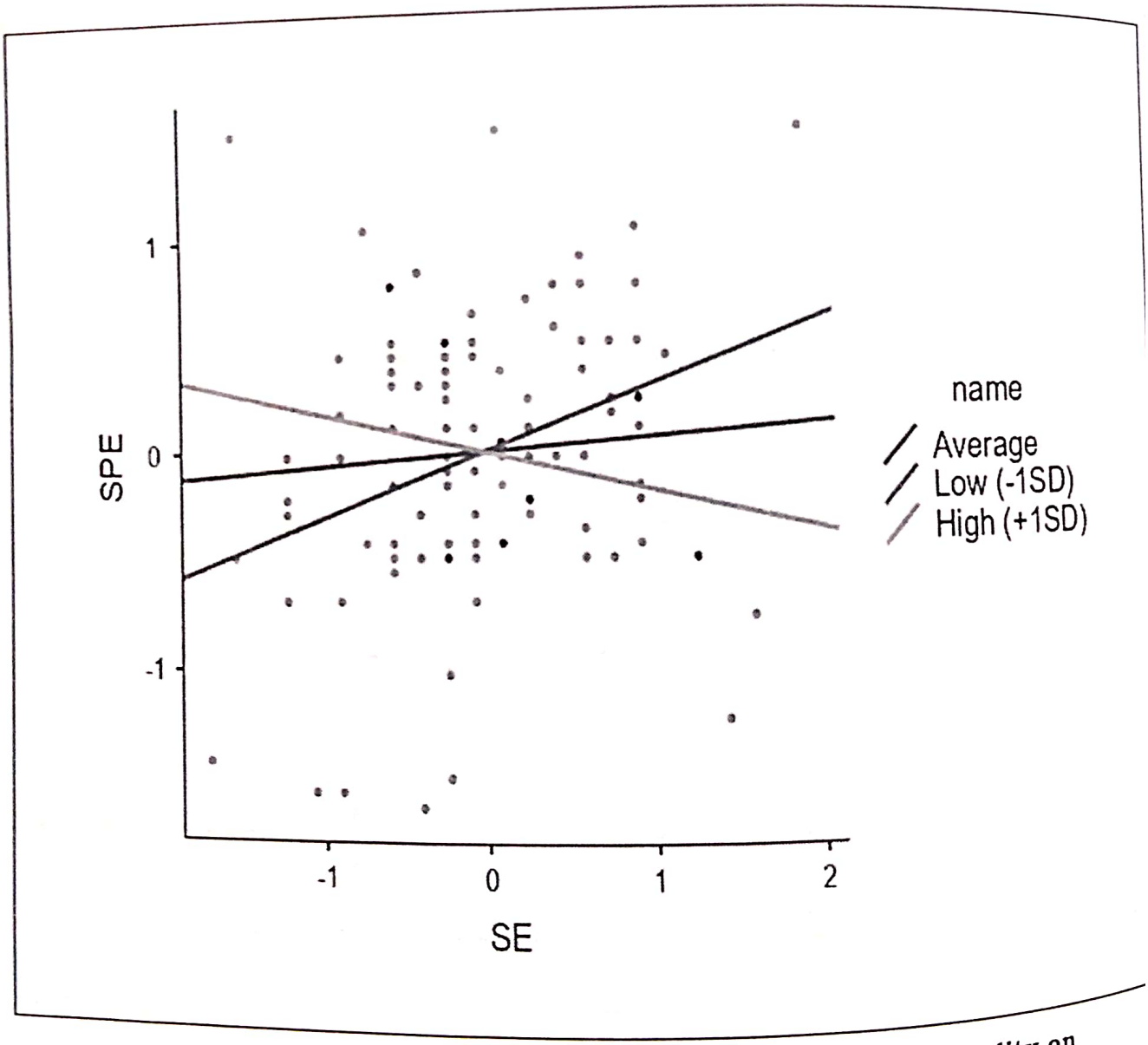

Figure 1: Interaction between Self-efficacy and Course Quality on Self-perceived Employability

Figure 1 shows three lines representing the effect of self-efficacy on self-perceived employability at high (yellow line), average (blue line) and low (grey line) levels of course quality. When course quality is average (blue line), the slope is relatively flat, indicating that self-efficacy has a weak or non-significant effect on self-perceived employability. However, when course quality is high (yellow line), the slope is negative, suggesting that higher self-efficacy is associated with lower self-perceived employability.

DISCUSSIONS

After the comparison of various dimensions of self-perceived employability, it could be understood that students may perceive their academic performance more positively compared to other dimensions of self-perceived employability. This result is in alignment with the result of the study conducted by Botha (2021). The current study did not find significant differences in self-perceived employability between genders as some of the previous studies (Botha, 2021; Kasler *et al.*, 2017) and contradicts the findings of some other studies (Cáceres-Reche *et al.*, 2022; Fudali-Czyż *et al.*, 2022; Räty *et al.*, 2020; Vargas *et al.*, 2018).

The moderation analysis reveals that while self-efficacy alone does not have a statistically significant direct effect on self-perceived employability, course quality does. This underscores the importance of educational experiences, as indicated by the significant positive effect of course quality on self-perceived employability. The significant interaction effect between self-efficacy and course quality highlights the nuanced nature of the relationship between these variables and self-perceived employability. The negative coefficient suggests that the positive effect of self-efficacy on self-perceived employability is weakened when course quality is high. This indicates that the impact of self-efficacy on employability perceptions varies depending on the quality of the educational experience.

Theoretical Contribution and Practical Implications

Understanding how students perceive different dimensions of self-perceived employability is crucial for educators and career counsellors. Identifying areas where students may have lower perceptions of their skills or external job market opportunities can inform interventions and support services aimed at enhancing students' employability and career readiness.

Despite the lack of statistically significant differences in self-perceived employability between genders, it is essential to continue monitoring and addressing potential gender disparities in education and employment. This includes promoting equal opportunities, reducing gender biases, and providing support for both female and male students to enhance their perceptions of employability.

The findings also suggest that enhancing self-efficacy alone may not be sufficient to improve self-perceived employability, especially in contexts where course quality is

high. Educators and career counsellors should consider the quality of educational programs and experiences as a critical factor in shaping students' perceptions of their employability. Investing in high-quality courses and learning environments may amplify the positive effects of self-efficacy on employability perceptions.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The findings from this study open avenues for further research into factors influencing self-perceived employability among students. Future studies could explore the role of individual characteristics, educational experiences, and career aspirations in shaping perceptions of employability across different dimensions.

While the current study did not find significant differences in self-perceived employability between genders, it's important to acknowledge potential limitations such as sample characteristics, measurement methods, and contextual factors. Future research could explore additional factors that may influence perceptions of employability across genders, such as societal norms, cultural expectations, and personal experiences.

Further exploration of the underlying mechanisms and contextual factors influencing the moderation effect is warranted. Understanding why self-efficacy has a weaker impact on employability perceptions in the presence of high course quality could inform the design of targeted interventions and policies aimed at optimizing both educational experiences and students' self-beliefs. Future research could delve deeper into specific aspects of course quality (e.g., teaching methods, curriculum relevance, resources) that moderate the relationship between self-efficacy and self-perceived employability. Longitudinal studies could also examine how changes in course quality over time influence the dynamics of this relationship.

CONCLUSION

The comparison of various dimensions of self-perceived employability indicates that students may hold a more positive view of their academic performance compared to other dimensions. Contrary to some previous studies, the current research did not find significant differences in self-perceived employability between genders. While this suggests progress towards gender equality in perceptions of employability, ongoing efforts are needed to address potential disparities and promote equal opportunities for all students. The moderation analysis highlights the critical role of educational experiences in shaping students' perceptions of their employability. Additionally, the interaction effect between self-efficacy and course quality underscores the nuanced relationship between these variables, indicating that the impact of self-efficacy on employability perceptions varies depending on the quality of educational experiences.

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