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Emotional Intelligence
And Employability
Of Undergraduate
Students At Kampala
International University,
Uganda

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ABSTRACT

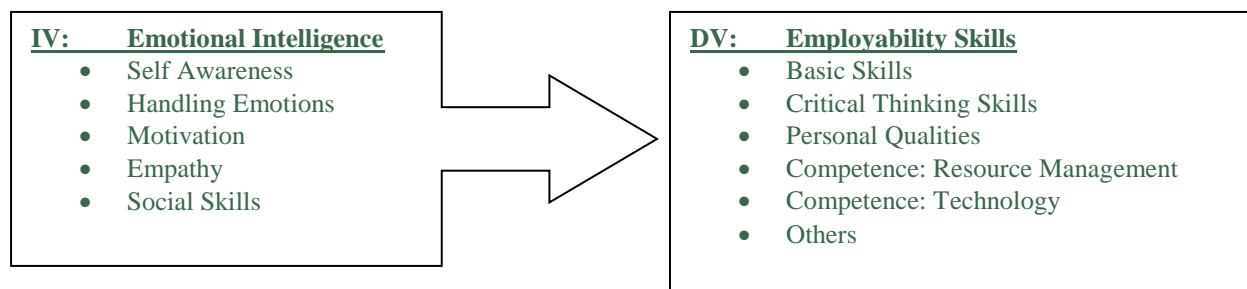
This study explored the effect of emotional intelligence on employability skills of students. Using non-probability sample of 265 students enrolled in business management degree program at Kampala International University. A quantitative survey research paradigm was employed. Multiple regression analyses revealed a significant relationships between the participants emotional Intelligence and Employability skills ($R^2=0.48$, $p<0.05$). The results further showed that handling emotions ($Beta=0.321$, $p<0.05$) and motivations ($Beta=0.204$, $p<0.05$) are key aspects of emotional intelligence that influence employability skills. The conclusion was drawn that emotional intelligence does influence employability skills and the recommendation was made on the need to enhance technological competence would further improve employability skills. It also emphasised the need to improve emotional intelligence in order to increase the prospect of employability.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Employability, Undergraduate Students, Uganda

1. INTRODUCTION

As the Fourth Industrial Revolution ushers a series of social, political, cultural, and economic upheavals that will unfold over the 21st century, it is vital that students are better equipped and empowered to navigate the evolving workplaces (Teng, Ma, Pahlevansharif, & Turner, 2019). Potgieter & Coetzee (2013) pointed out the fact that employability of employees and graduates has become important in a technology-driven knowledge economy. Faced with the contemporary challenges students are faced with decreased job security, fast-paced technology and increasing personal responsibility for continuous need to upgrade their skills, employability and lifelong learning as a means to remain relevant in the contemporary job market (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2011). Unlike work-related or technical skills, employability skills are general in nature and cut across all industry types, business sizes, and job levels. According to Singh & Singh (2008), employability skills are not job exact, but are skills which horizontally cut across all industry sectors and vertically across all job levels; from gateman to chief executive officer. Employability skills are essential for attainment, maintenance, and excelling on a job (Potgieter & Coetzee, 2013).

Ashkanasy & Daus (2005) argued that Emotional intelligence develops over a person's life span and can be enhanced through training, and through teaching and learning in formal educational contexts (Jaeger 2003). Emotional intelligence is generally regarded as a factor with the potential to contribute to more positive attitudes, behaviours and outcomes (Carmeli 2003) and has been related to career success (Goleman 1998). Researchers and career counsellors also increasingly recognise the significance of emotional intelligence in career success, career satisfaction and well-being (Kidd 2008; Sinclair 2009). This increased interest has led to the curiosity as to whether emotional intelligence has a role to play in employability skills among students.



Using the model above this study therefore sought to explore the effect of emotional intelligence on employability skills among undergraduate students at Kampala International University, Uganda.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

The concept of employability has been a topic of discussed for a number of years as the interest in promoting graduate employability has increased over the last decade. Employability skills are transferable core skill constellations that represent vital functional and enabling knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to succeed the 21st century workplace. They are essential for career success at all levels of employment and for all levels of education. Numerous studies (Coetzee & Beukes 2010) have produced detailed taxonomies of exact skills and attributes required to support graduate employability such as core skills; key skills; common skills; transferable skills; essential skills; functional skills; skills for life; generic skills and enterprise skills (Lowden, Hall, Elliot & Lewin, 2011). Similarly, the American Society for Training and Development (Carnevale, Gainer, and Meltzer 1990) emphasized 16 skill groups across all job families: (1) Basic Competence Skills - reading, writing, computation; (2) Communication Skills- speaking, listening; (3) Adaptability Skills- problem solving, thinking creatively; (4) Developmental Skills- self-esteem, motivation and goal-setting, career planning; (5) Group Effectiveness Skills- interpersonal skills, teamwork, negotiation; and (6) Influencing Skills- Understanding organizational culture, sharing leadership. These are the skills, attitudes and actions that allow employees to get along with their subordinates, co-workers and supervisors and to have a decisive impact on the organisations successful achievement of its goals. Many authors point out the significance of incessantly developing skills beyond those required for a specific job, and they identify employability skills that enable individuals to prove their value to an organization as the key to job survival. According to Robinson (2000) employability skills, while characterized in many different ways, are commonly divided into three skill sets: (a) basic academic skills, (b) higher-order thinking skills and (c) personal qualities. He argues that the three skill sets are usually subdivided into more detailed skill sets.

2.2 EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

According to the literature, there are several definitions of emotional intelligence (EI) and what the concept encompasses. Emotional intelligence can be conceptualized as either ability (Ciarrochi, Chan & Caputi, 2000)

or a personality trait (Schutte & Malouff, 1999). Thorough research has indicated the important role that emotions play in our lives in many fields.

The idea of Emotional Intelligence originally appeared in the notion of Thorndike's "social intelligence" in 1920. In 1983 the psychologist Howard Gardner suggested the theory of multiple intelligence. Salovey and Mayer (1990), who together introduced the concept in 1990, define emotional intelligence "as the ability to monitor one's own and other's emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one's thinking and actions" (p. 189). It has been postulated that individuals with high emotional intelligence have the capability to use their emotions to direct thoughts and behavior and to comprehend their own feelings and others' feelings with significant accuracy.

Research on emotional intelligence has been divided into two distinct areas of perspectives in terms of conceptualizing emotional competencies and their measurements. There is the ability EI model (Petrides, Pita, & Kokkinaki, 2007), and the trait EI (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). The Trait EI is defined as a collection of self-perceptions situated at the lower echelon of personality hierarchies (Petrides, Pita, & Kokkinaki, 2007), while ability EI is conceptualized as a form of intelligence, suggesting that cognitive processing is concerned with emotions, and that it should thus be assessed through performance measures (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). The ability EI model has been criticized in the empirical studies for lacking face and predictive validity in the workplace. This study adopted the trait model.

According to Goleman (1998), an American psychologist who helped to popularize emotional intelligence, there are five key elements to it: (i) Self-awareness, (ii) Self-regulation, (iii) Motivation, (iv) Empathy and (v) Social skills. Goleman (1998) defines Emotional Intelligence/Quotient as the aptitude to distinguish our own feelings and those of others, to motivate ourselves, and to handle our emotions well to have the best for ourselves and for our relationships. Self-awareness is the ability to objectively analyze one's self, behavior and interact with others daily. Self-regulation deals with controlling and constructively monitoring one's own emotions. The ability to motivate is one of the most essential skills to possess as a leader. This calls for emotional intelligence, implying having one's own source of motivation. Empathy is the ability to put one's self in someone else's shoes and assume the emotions and feelings that they are experiencing. Strong social skills help manage relationships in such a way that one can move and inspire the people around them (Goleman, 1998).

Goswami (2013) researched the importance of Soft Skills in the employability of IT students. The findings indicated that skills for employability are Communication skills, managerial skills, critical thinking and problem solving skill, skills to work in a team, Time Management, Stress Management and Anger Management skills, Leadership Skills, Decision Making, Motivation, Perception Building, and Goal setting skills. Exploring the Soft skills-the importance of cultivating emotional intelligence Wheeler (2016) asserts in the findings that

emotional intelligence is the basis of what we commonly call soft skills, and although for some these skills are innate, they can be developed and sharpened over time.

2.3 EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND EMPLOYABILITY

It is confirmed that emotional intelligence positively relates to less dysfunctional occupational thinking, better profession decision-making self-efficacy, a higher level of enthusiasm to investigate a variety of career choices, and willingness to commit to attractive career options (Puffer 2011). Maynard (2003) found in his study that interns rating high on emotional intelligence have a high chance of being considered for employment by the internship host organization than those scoring low. People's emotional intelligence is also positively linked with significant employment experiences and emotional attachment to current careers and jobs (Carson & Carson 1998). Palmer and Gignac (2012) affirmed emotional intelligence as increasingly validated predictor for job performance. Coetzee & D. Schreuder (2011) discovered a statistically significant relationship between individuals' career anchors, emotional intelligence and employability satisfaction. Similarly others scholars such as Aziz and Pangil (2017), Matsouka and Mihail (2016), Jameson et al. (2016), Belagodu (2013) assert that employers prefer the application of graduate as employable who possessed high emotional intelligence. Coetzee and Beukes (2010) results suggest that higher levels of trait emotional intelligence (particularly managing one's own emotions) lead to greater self-confidence in displaying employability skills.

However in their study Pathak and Shankar (2018) found that Self- Awareness, Self- Regulation, Social Skills and Empathy show statistically insignificant results. Out of these, Empathy showed negative and statistically insignificant results, whereas others showed positive but statistically insignificant results. Jaeger (2003) and Pool and Sewell (2007) additional observe the progress of emotional intelligence as advantageous for enhancing a person's employability. In summation, as a career meta-competency, research is more and more recognising emotional intelligence as a significant attribute of people's employability and career decision-making (Coetzee & Beukes 2010; Pool & Sewell 2007).

On the basis of the literature reviewed, the following null hypothesis was stated:

H₀: Emotional intelligence has no significant effect on employability skills among undergraduate students at Kampala International University.

3. METHODOLOGY

A quantitative research approach was adopted in this study. The unit of analysis is the major entity (the "what" or "whom") that is being studied (Babbie & Mouton, 2001) and in this study they were the undergraduate students. It involved a non-probability sample of 265 students enrolled in business management degree program at Kampala International University. This study examined one dependent variable (Employability skills) with a Correlation and Regression analysis, with the help of 5 independent variables (Goleman's EI Competencies).

The questionnaires consists of 74 items (40 on emotional intelligence and 34 on employability), measured on the 5-point likert scale. A selection of 1 indicates “strongly disagree” and 5 indicate “strongly agree”. Interpretations were based on 4.21-5.00 – Very High, 3.41-4.20 – High level, 2.61-3.40 – Moderate, 1.81-2.60 – Low, and 1.00-1.80 – Very low. The employability section of the questionnaire focused on Basic skills, critical thinking skills, Personal Qualities, Competencies (resource management & technology), and others (business, collaborative, presentation and team) as suggested by Carnevale, et al (1990), Robinson (2000), Lowden, et al (2011), and Coetzee & Beukes (2010). Reliability refers to the consistency or stability of a measuring instrument. A common statistic used to estimate internal consistency reliability is Cronbach’s Alpha (Landy & Conte, 2004,). High Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were obtained for the present study:

	Cronbach’s Alpha	N of Items
Emotional Intelligences	0.967	40
Employability Skills	0.934	34

Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) use 0.70 as a basis, whilst Bartholomew, Antonia, and Marcia (2000) argue that between 0.80 and 0.60 is acceptable.

Validity in the study will be ensured content validity. Content validity considers whether or not the items on a given test accurately reflect the theoretical domain of the latent construct it claims to measure (Gregory, 2007). The instrument was subjected to intuitive judgments made by experts in the field, such as recruitment managers, business owners, educators and the youth themselves to assess clarity of content and readability of the instrument. The data was analyzed in SPSS using Means, Standard deviations, Correlations and multiples regression for obtaining informative results.

4. RESULTS

4.1 PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

A majority of the 267 participants where in the age range of 21-24 years old (82.4%), following by those below 20 years old (13.5%). Male respondents accounted for 137(51.3%), Most of the respondents are single (95.1%), and majority are unemployed (74.5%). Those who have been employed for 2-5 years made of 16.5% (44 people) and most of the respondent, 94.4 %(252) are in their second year of study.

4.2 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 display the descriptive statistics for the two variables (employability skills and emotional Intelligence)

Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics of Employability Skills

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Basic Skills	265	3.8231	.63296	High
Critical Thinking	265	3.8434	.74716	High

Foundational skills: Personal qualities	265	4.0453	.81958	High
Competency: Resource Management	265	3.8629	.82983	High
Competency: Technology	265	3.2302	.84406	Moderate
Others	265	3.9821	.80945	High
Employability Skills	265	3.7997	.59473	High

Table 4.1 shows the levels of constructs of Employability and Employability itself. It reveals that all the level are High, with the exception of Technology Competence which was moderate (mean=3.23). Employability skills overall was High (Mean = 3.80).

Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics of Emotional Intelligence

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Self-awareness	266	4.0856	.73794	High
Handling Emotions	265	3.9377	.71436	High
Motivation	266	4.1038	.78710	High
Empathy	266	3.8784	.72601	High
Social Skills	265	4.0419	.72578	High
Emotional Intelligence	265	4.0068	.64564	High

The levels of the constructs of emotional intelligence and emotional intelligences (mean = 4.01) itself are all high according to table 4.2.

4.3 CORRELATIONS ANALYSIS

Table 4.3 displays the correlations results for the study variables.

Table 4.3: Correlations Analysis between variables

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.Employability Skills	Pearson Correlation	1						
	Sig. (2-tailed)							
2.Emotional Intelligence	Pearson Correlation	.691**	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000						
3.Self-awareness	Pearson Correlation	.621**	.872**	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000					
4.Handling Emotions	Pearson Correlation	.655**	.890**	.806**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000				
5.Motivation	Pearson Correlation	.616**	.886**	.725**	.701**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000			
6.Empathy	Pearson Correlation	.550**	.838**	.606**	.661**	.672**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		
7.Social Skills	Pearson Correlation	.571**	.885**	.674**	.730**	.741**	.726**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	

** Correction is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed).

Table 4.3 confirms that are significant positive correlation between the emotional intelligence and employability ($r = 0.69$, $n = 262$, $p < 0.05$). Similarly all the constructs of emotional intelligence show significant positive correlations with employability skills. This suggests a positive relationship between the two variables which is confirmed by table 4.5.

4.4 REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Tables 4.4 and 4.5 display the multiple and simple regression results for the study variables.

Table 4.4: Self awareness, Handling Emotions, Motivation, Empathy and Social Skills on Employability skills

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
	(Constant)	1.269	.168		7.566	.000		
	Self-awareness	.115	.066	.142	1.742	.083	.298	3.354
	Handling Emotions	.267	.071	.321	3.791	.000	.278	3.603
	Motivation	.154	.058	.204	2.649	.009	.334	2.994
	Empathy	.089	.057	.108	1.558	.120	.410	2.437
	Social Skills	.008	.065	.010	.124	.901	.317	3.152
R	0.701							
R ²	0.491							
Adjusted R ²	0.481							
F	49.459							
Durbin-Watson	1.948							

Table 4.4 reveals that the construct of emotional intelligence (Self awareness, Handling Emotions, Motivation, Empathy and Social Skills) have a significant positive effect on employability skills by causing a variance of 49% ($R^2=0.49$, $p<0.05$). This suggests that a combination of Self awareness, Handling Emotions, Motivation, Empathy and Social Skills contribute significantly to employability skills. Only Handling emotions (Beta=0.321, $p<0.05$) and Motivations (Beta=0.204, $p<0.05$) are significant predictors. Handling emotions stands out as the biggest contributor. The Durbin-Watson ($d = 1.948$), which is between the two critical values of $1.5 < d < 2.5$. Therefore, we can assume that there is no first order linear auto-correlation in our multiple linear regression data. The multicollinearity in the multiple linear regression models indicate that both Tolerance and VIF are in the acceptable range. Tolerance should be > 0.1 (or $VIF < 10$) for all variables, which they are in accordance to table 4.4. and table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Emotional Intelligence on Employability Skills

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
	(Constant)	1.251	.168		7.465	.000
	Emotional Intelligence	.636	.041	.691	15.401	.000
R	0.691					
R ²	0.477					
Adjusted R ²	0.475					
F	237.190					
Durbin-Watson	1.934					

Table 4.5 further confirmed the effect of emotional intelligence on employability skills. These results confirm that 48% of the variations in employability skills can be explain by emotional intelligence ($R^2=0.48$, $p<0.05$).

This echoes the same sentiment as table 4.4. This implies that for every 1 unit increase in emotional intelligence there is a 0.64 increase in Employability skills.

The null hypothesis for this study stated that: Emotional intelligence has no significant effect on employability skills among undergraduate students at Kampala International University. On the basis of the finding on table 4.5, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate is accepted. Thus implying Emotional intelligence has a significant effect on employability skills among undergraduate students at Kampala International University. The effect is also confirmed to be positive.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion can be drawn from these study findings that emotional intelligence does statistically affect employability. This finding is in agreement with several others studies (Coetzee and Beukes, 2010; Jaeger (2003); and Pool and Sewell, 2007). In this study handling emotions and motivation are key contributor, which is in sync with Coetzee and Beukes (2010), who found that managing one's own emotions lead to greater self-confidence in displaying employability skills. This study is also in agreement with Pathak and Shankar (2018) that found that Self- Awareness, Social Skills and Empathy show statistically insignificant results. Contrary to Pathak et al (2018) where none of the constructs of emotional intelligence had a significant effect and Goleman (1995) who showed that showed that all the constructs are statistically significant. This study therefore suggests that handling emotions and motivations are key to employability skills.

From this study, though the levels of employability skills are high, the aspect of technological competence is lack due to the fact that it ranked the lowest among the respondents. It is therefore recommended that more emphasis should be placed on technological competence among the students in order to further enhance their employability skills. The debate of whether emotional intelligence is teachable or inborn (Petrides, et al 2007; Mayer & Salovey, 1997) is not the issue of focus in this study, but it is however recommended that the acquisition or development of emotional intelligence will enhance the employability skills of the respondents in this study.

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