

Chapter 24

ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN PSYCHO-EDUCATIONAL DETERMINANTS AND DYNAMIC CAREER ATTITUDES AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Monitoring and assessment of career attitudes are critical for the student's preparation for an adapted university-to-work transition. This problem remains partially addressed though optimal services proposed by universities which may enhance students' generic career capabilities. Our study explored the relationships between the psycho-educational and socio-demographic factors, and the perception of their career attitudes. Bachelor students in social sciences, engineering, applied management from University of Luxembourg were invited to complete a paper pencil questionnaire. Data were analyzed using correlation and multiple linear regression models. Of 278 students, 124 participated. The majority studied applied management, were women, unemployed and with six months or less of job experiences. The search for work self-efficacy score is linked to the employability soft-skills and job search techniques scores which are, in parallel, with the quality of life autonomy associated to the dynamic career attitudes. Greater are employability, search for work and quality of life autonomy, the higher are dynamic career attitudes. Students who were in their final academic year also had greater career capabilities. These findings may help to elaborate interventions aiming at improving psycho-educational determinants. It must be stimulated at the entry to university with appropriately collaborative supports, pedagogical workshops and interpersonal trainings.

Keywords: university to work transition, career attitudes, job search, employability soft-skills.

1. INTRODUCTION

With an increasing number of university students entering the labour market (OECD, 2011), more and more graduates fail to adopt a proactive approach to their careers (Jameson & Holden, 2000) with the consequences that they fail to distinguish themselves by being more active in furthering their career development and creating opportunities to ensure their sustainable employability (Engelberg & Limbach-Reich, 2012). In the frame of new career models (Hall, 2004) employment does not typically requires a fixed set of competences, particularly over the longer term (McMahon, Patton, & Tatham, 2003). Nowadays, employers seek greater skills, ambition and energetic drive in their future employees in terms of work-readiness.

During the study period, students are preoccupied with examinations and coursework deadlines at the expense of their career and job outcomes. Added to this, some students may present the socioeconomic difficulties to cope with their substantial needs (Roberts, Golding, Towell, & Weinreib, 1999). Everyday stress causes the development of strategies aimed to cope with these problems (Spitz, Costantini, & Baumann, 2007), which may have an impact on their academic performance and being more prone to depressive situations (Verger, Guagliardo, Gilbert, Rouillon, & Kovess-Masfety, 2010). The result of this is students may display passiveness in their career planning and expectation, neglecting the development of their attitudes to make a series of transitions where the labour market is in constant change (Savickas, 2005). In this context, the present research was aimed to identify to what extent the psycho-educational determinants of undergraduate students are associated to their career attitudes that were identified as important for their evolving careers.

The career attitudes have a strong effect on future career outcomes (career adaptability, career optimism, career-related knowledge and career planning) (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005; Brown, Cober, Kane, Levy, & Shalhoop 2010) and also increase perceptions of employability because they enhance an employee's options for employment development and capacity to negotiate during the job search. (Claes & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1998). Also, individuals who are confident of their employability are likely to perceive job seeking as less threatening, and consequently show higher degrees of life satisfaction (Berntson & Marklund, 2007), better psychological quality of life (Baumann, Karavdic, & Chau, 2013) and autonomy perception (Ryan & Deci, 2006). The “autonomy” dimension refers to the independence and therefore describes the level of ability to live independently and take the necessary decisions on your own (Leplège et al., 2012). Mayhew, Ashkanasy, and dan Gardner (2007) provided evidence that if employees are allowed the flexibility and freedom to plan and perform their work activity and control their work and environment, this will increase their work-related attitudes and behavior.

Some researches support the importance of career attitudes that positively affect the job seeking process (Brown et al., 2006). Moreover, search for work self-efficacy, the belief that one can successfully perform specific job search behaviours and obtain employment (Saks & Ashforth. 1999) has been found to be related to work search outcomes such as search status, duration, and the number of offers received (Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001). Becoming competitive in the labour market, developing generic skills through academic institutions is not the only issue facing students and graduates trying to obtain and sustain employment (Bridgstock, 2009); they also need a repertoire of active self-regulated and directed career-oriented attitudes (Murphy & Ensher, 2001).

2. BACKGROUND

Monitoring and assessment of career attitudes are critical for the preparation of students and the best university-to-work transition. This problem remains partially addressed though optimal information and services proposed by universities which may enhance students' career behaviors. In order to develop a “Pass Career Programme”, a research project entitled “Capital Employability of Students” CapJob – was initiated to evaluate the efficacy of the content of the training interventions elaborated by the University of Luxembourg – the youngest academic institution, in one of the smallest country in Europe (531,400 habitants, 2600 km²) – with the aim to better prepare students for their first employment and improve their transition to the job market. The CapJob project team accompanies the implementation of the Pass Careers activities program and will be in charge of the first step to assess the students' generic capabilities for employment. The objective of the study is to analyze the relationships between the work-search self-efficacy, job techniques, employability soft skills, quality of life autonomy and the dynamic career attitudes among university students pursuing Bachelor degrees.

3. METHODS

3.1. Participants

Bachelor students in applied management, social sciences and engineering degree programs from the University of Luxembourg were invited to participate in the survey.

3.2. Data collection

During a class period, the research team (with the cooperation of representatives of the student career center) presented the aims of the survey and its relations to the “Pass Career activities program”. Students were then asked to complete, a self-administered paper pencil questionnaire via an anonymous process assessing:

- *Dynamic Career Attitudes*: Dynamic Career Attitudes (DCA-13 items) was adapted from the work of (Rottinghaus, Day, & Borgen, 2005); (De Vos, De Clippeleer, & Dewilde 2009) and regrouped into items exploring career-related adaptability (4-items), optimisms (4-items), knowledge (3-items) and career planning (3-items). All item responses were on a 5-point Likert

scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) and showed satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach $\alpha = .822$)

- *Psycho-educational factors*: They were measured using the: Search for Work Self-Efficacy Scale (SWSES - 12 items; $\alpha=0.882$; 1=not well at all; 5=very well) which assesses students' perceptions of their capability in building employment strategies (Pepe, Farnese, Avalone, & Vecchione, 2010); and Job Search Techniques (JST-14 items) (1=not well at all; 5=very well) and Employability Soft-Skills (ESS-20 items) (1=not capable at all; 5=perfectly capable). The items were constructed using a qualitative research analysis realized with focus groups among students (Amara & Baumann, 2012) and professionals (Engelberg & Limbach-Reich, 2012). The two scales have demonstrated a single factorial structure, their internal consistencies were $\alpha = .937$ for JST and $\alpha = .934$ for ESS, respectively.

- *Quality of life Autonomy and socio-demographic characteristics*: Quality of life-Autonomy (Whoqol- domain -QoLA-4 items; Cronbach $\alpha = .679$) (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree) assesses the ability to live independently and to make necessary decisions on your own (Leplège et al., 2012)

- *Socio-demographic characteristics* susceptible to describe the social disparities between the students: age, gender, parents' education level, (higher/lower than bachelor), work experience (less vs. more than 6 months), year of bachelor (1st year, 2nd year, 3rd year) and actual employment (yes/no).

3.3. Procedure and data analysis

Statistical analyses: For each instrument a score was calculated so that a higher score represented a better level. Bivariate and adjusted partial correlations were used for association analyses. Separated simple regressions were performed to evaluate the relationships for each of the socio-demographic variables related to the dynamic career attitudes score. Only the significant ones were integrated and adjusted in the multiple regression model.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Socioeconomic characteristics of students

The participation rate was 44.6%. As describe in the Table 1, the mean age was about 23 years (nb. in Luxembourg students enter university at 19). Women slightly predominated among respondents. One-third came from third year and two-fifths from the second year of study. The majority were from the Bachelor in Applied Management program.

Table 1. Socioeconomic characteristics of students mean (standard deviation) or %.

		N=124
		M (SD) or %
Age		22.6 (4.53)
Gender	Women	51.9
	Men	48.1
Bachelors in	Social Sciences	16.9
	Engineering	25.0
	Applied Management	58.1
Year of Study	1 st Year	23.4
	2 nd Year	41.9
	3 rd Year	34.7
Educational level of parents (higher than undergraduate)	Mother	32.1
	Father	37.0
Work experience	Less than 6 months	64.2
	More than 6 months	35.8
Actual employment	Yes	24.7

4.2. Relation between socio-educational factors and dynamic career attitudes

As shown in Table 2, all variables were significantly positively related. For the partial correlation adjusted on other variables, SWSES score was positively correlated with the ESS and JST scores. But the QoLA, ESS and JST were positively linked to the DCA score.

Table 2. Associations between socio-educational factors scores and dynamic career attitudes of undergraduate students.

	Means	SD ^b	Correlations (with adjusted partial correlations, in parentheses)				
			DCA	ESS	JST	SWSES	QoLA
Dynamic Career Attitudes (DCA) ^a	3.66	.46	1	.623*** (.204*)	.565*** (.248*)	.607*** (.163)	.572*** (.325***)
Employability Soft Skills (ESS) ^a	3.75	.60		1	.551*** (.094)	.712*** (.478***)	.502*** (.217*)
Job Search Techniques (JST) ^a	3.68	.68			1	.619*** (.323***)	.377*** (.026)
Search for Work Self-Efficacy (SWSES) ^a	3.78	.60				1	.407*** (-.024)
Quality of Life Autonomy (QoLA) ^a	3.73	.69					1

^a Scale from 1(low level) to 5 (high level); ^b Standard deviations (SD)
Significant p-value: * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001.

4.3. Associations between Socio-demographic characteristics and dynamic career attitudes score

Year of study and professional experience were significantly linked with DCA score, indicating for higher academic year of study and/or for more than six months of professional experience a greater DCA score. As seen in Table 3, no effects reached the .05 significance level for age, sex and education level of parents.

Table 3. Associations between socioeconomic variables and dynamic career attitudes score - regression coefficient - Standard error - (SE).

	Dynamic Career Attitudes Score				
	b	L95	U95	SE	p ¹
Age	.017	-.008	.041	.012	.181
Gender : male (vs female)	-.150	-.368	.068	.110	.175
Bachelor year 1 st & 2 nd (vs 3 rd) ²	-.288	-.485	-.091	.100	.017*
	-.123	-.324	.079	.112	-
Work experience < 6 (vs > 6 months)	-.313	-.555	-.071	.122	.012*
Educational level of mother (higher than bachelor) (vs father)	-.092	-.327	.143	.118	.439
	-.171	-.396	.054	.113	.134

¹ Significant p-value: * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001.

² Fisher's F-test

Note: separated linear regression was realized independently for each socioeconomic variable.

4.4. Associations of psycho-educational factors on dynamic career attitudes

The multiple regression results indicated that year of study, employability soft skills, SWSES, JST and QoLA all together explained 55.6 % of variance (adjusted R- Square) for the dependant variable. The residuals of the regression have been verified showing a normal distribution. All of β coefficients were significantly different from zero, except for SWSES. As seen in Table 4, the first and second years of undergraduate bachelors were negatively associated with the DCA score.

Table 4. Associations of psycho-educational factors on dynamic career attitudes by undergraduate students - regression coefficient - Standard error - (SE).

	Dynamic Career Attitudes Score				
	b	L95	U95	SE	p ¹
Intercept	1.296	.872	1.721	0.215	.000***
Bachelor year 1 st & 2 nd (vs 3 rd) ²	-.181	-.322	-.041	.071	.038*
	-.139	-.297	.019	.080	
Work experience < 6 months (vs > 6 months)	-.080	-.261	.102	.092	.386
Employability Soft Skills	.224	.076	.373	.075	.003**
Search for Work Self Efficacy	.086	-.065	.237	.076	.261
Job Search Techniques	.137	.027	.247	.055	.015*
Quality of Life Autonomy	.217	.122	.313	.048	.000***

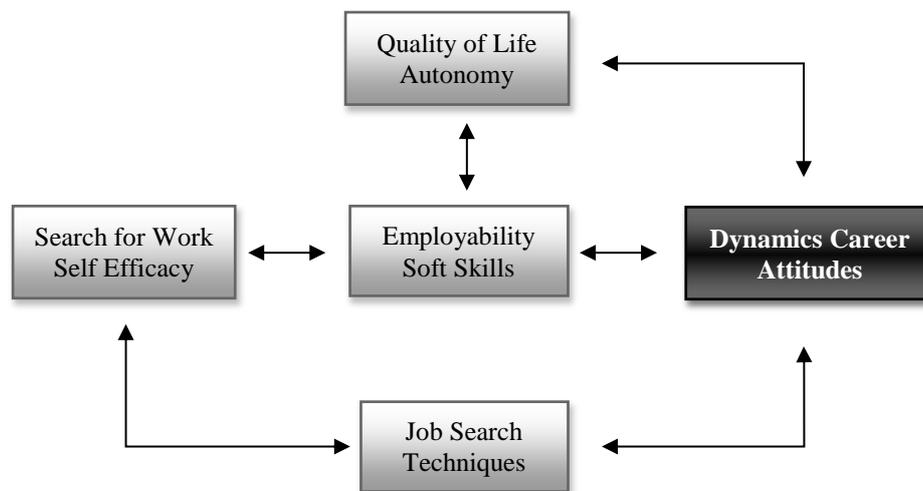
Adjusted R Squared =55.6%; F (7, 116) =22.995

¹ Significant p-value: *: p<.05; **: p<.01; ***: p<.001.

² Fisher's F-test

The ESS, the JST and the QoLA were positively related to the DCA score. No link exists with SWSES. However, as presented in Figure 1, its association seems to be partially related with the ESS and JST scores.

Figure 1. Socio-educational determinants of the Determinants of Dynamic Career Attitudes.



5. FURTHER RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Targeting intervention strategies early in the course of career progression may positively affect outcome. In line with this statement, students with high dynamic career attitudes would be more likely to be able to make their own decisions, influence what happens in their life, manage their career development and resist social and academic pressures. To develop a Pass Career program at the University of Luxembourg, these findings may help to elaborate interventions aiming at improving psycho-educational determinants. However, it must be stimulated at the beginning of the entrance to the university with appropriately collaborative supports based on pedagogical workshops and interpersonal trainings in order that all participants in the learning environment have something specific to contribute to the overall learning of the group.

The constructs studied seem to provide a useful theoretical framework for increasing student's career outcome; however, since it was limited to a small sample of undergraduate students the findings cannot be generalized to other contexts. Future research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of identified determinants related to the "Pass Career" activities program. In addition a longitudinal study based on a semi-experimental design is needed to demonstrate the impact of career intervention training on psycho-educational determinants and career outcomes.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our research analyses the association between psycho-educational determinants scores and dynamic career attitudes scores among university students pursuing bachelor degrees. The main finding showed that the greater were the employability, job search and quality of life autonomy, the higher was the dynamic career attitudes. These findings are in relation to the theoretical outcome indicating that self-efficacy beliefs held by students could act as a motivating mechanism through which they perceive their own level of competence (Bandura, 2001) and in our case to the employability soft skills. Indeed the construct of employability has been conceptually related to self-efficacy in different ways (Darce-Pool & Qualter, 2013). As to the career area, interventions aimed at increasing self-efficacy related to the tasks of given career fields have been shown to enhance students' interests and expectations for their career (Turner & Lapan, 2004).

In addition, the better were the students' quality of life autonomy and their employability soft-skills, the higher was the dynamic career attitudes. In others words, students with higher quality of life autonomy scores may want to regulate themselves and may more easily develop the capacity to take some control of their career. Higher autonomy perception may allow them to take initiatives and give them an adequate attitude to plan their career path and further develop their career outcome. In addition, learning appropriate strategies may help students to cope with the different types of potentially stressful situations that they might need to face in their academic period or further in their professional activity by taking initiative in performing a job (Ryan & Deci, 2006). Indeed the promotion of individual autonomy could free individuals to experience attachment and intimacy and enhance the capability to make a series of appropriate transitions where the labour market is in constant change. Perceived autonomy and an autonomy supportive environment are concerned with setting up a dynamic and stimulating setting, which motivates and fosters self-directed approaches and perceptions of competences (Guay, Ratelle, Senecal, Larose, & Deschenes, 2006).

The second main finding showed that students in their final academic year had greater career capabilities. We suggest that if freshmen are not concerned with their employment in the first year of study, their passiveness could result in stressful periods when they graduate (Jameson & Holden, 2000). During this time individuals could be vulnerable and they may feel disoriented and unduly affected by any career plans proposed by potential employers, while they display passiveness in their career attitudes, resulting in a job below their qualification. In line with this, some recent researchers suggest that interventions should be developed and implemented during an individual's tertiary education and at early stage in the individual's career development in order to either (a) match the individuals to better fitting jobs (Lyubomirsky, Dickerhoof, Boehm, & Sheldon, 2011) or (b) to provide individuals with necessary skills, knowledge, abilities and attitudes to flourish in their later position (Van Zyl & Rothmann 2012).

Enhancing a successful transition may be done by career preparation (Jepsen & Dickson, 2003). Providing newcomers with the necessary resources may help them cope with the transition from school to work and prevent any negative consequences to their further careers and social outcome. Particularly the acquisition of a repertoire of active self-regulated career-oriented attitudes can be facilitated with workshops and interpersonal trainings (Koen, Klehe, & van Vianen, 2012). This could be seen as the fundamental first step in the promotion of career development and sustainable employability. In this context, career training will need to focus more on the implementing of activities through a screening process during the early

academic years. Providing an individual training based on needs with an interactive process would permit students to become more a) active in furthering their career path by creating opportunities to improve their employability and b) able to make their own decisions and influence the choices which happen in their life.

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