

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CAREER CENTERS IN CULTIVATING EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS THROUGH THE EMPOWERMENT OF STUDENT POTENTIAL

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Abstract. In the Albanian reality, students are still not familiar with the importance of the career office. It is still considered a new concept, which is already finding space to gain more visibility in educational institutions, but not only there. Nowadays, the capacity to clearly communicate what a graduate brings to the table for employers, framed around skills and illustrated with compelling narratives, plays a crucial role in demonstrating potential employability (Blaquière et al., 2019, p. 15). Over the past 10 years, employers have been more outspoken regarding the importance of employability skills. These skills encompass a range of transferable abilities, including higher-order thinking skills and personal attributes essential to workplace success (Dacre Pool, Sewell, 2007; Lowden et al., 2011). In the realm of employability skills, the issue of skills awareness has garnered significant attention over the past 15 years (Knight, Yorke, 2003; Jiang, Alexakis, 2017). This study reviews employability skills among students and the effectiveness and support that the Excellence and Career Development Branch at the Faculty of Economics, University of Tirana, offers for them. The entire analysis aims to present the services the branch offers and how students who participate in them can explore, develop, and improve their employability skills, and to make it easier for them to enter the labor market by having the right information. This aim was achieved with the participation of six students from different years of the Bachelor's program of the Faculty of Economics, University of Tirana. Employers seek graduates who demonstrate resilience and adaptability, along with the essential skills, attitudes, and beliefs needed to secure a job, excel in their positions, and progress to even more rewarding opportunities in the future (Helyer, Lee, 2012; 2014).

Keywords: career services, student expectations, employability, education

Introduction

Globalization, generational shifts, and frequent labor-market changes have influenced today's employers regarding the skills and abilities they require from recent graduates. First, diplomas and certificates are seen as reliable indicators of graduate employability, followed by activities, traits, and soft skills (Mishra, Braun, 2021, p. 91). The gap between graduate skills and employment opportunities is also noted in a second Sri Lankan study, which suggested that 'there is a need for significant structural reforms on both the supply side and the demand side to make graduates more employable and employed' (Dayaratna-Banda, Dharmadasa, 2022). Today, universities are considered the most important source of human capital, and as a result, there is a need to promote employment. University-industry collaboration on innovation is often regarded as an important channel through which these deliberate actions to realise knowledge transfer can be enacted (Østergaard, Drejer, 2022). This paper discusses how students of the Faculty of Economics at the University of Tirana use the services of the career office to become employable and to equip themselves with skills and abilities for the labor market.

Employment remains one of the most debated topics, primarily in terms of perspective and skills focus. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of employability, it is essential to view it as a process of learning that is ongoing and constantly changing depending on the circumstances. At the same time, it is important to understand that the contentious terminology surrounding skills and the need to showcase competence through specific examples are ingrained in employers' hiring practices. Consequently, the capacity to clearly communicate what a graduate brings to employers, framed around skills and illustrated with compelling narratives, plays a crucial role in demonstrating potential employability (Blaquière et al., 2019, p. 15).

According to UNESCO, transferable skills, such as self-esteem, motivation, and aspiration, are developed outside of school and are crucial for employability and other life outcomes. Still, a good education can help students learn these skills, especially those without a supportive home (UNESCO, 2012). UNESCO emphasizes employability as a multifaceted concept that includes curricular and extracurricular activities, is relevant to specific fields and interdisciplinary approaches, and goes beyond and within educational frameworks and their many structures. In line with the logical progression of this report, Pegg et al. (2012) emphasized the importance of universities in supporting students in linking their learning experiences with the development of employability skills. However, Tymon (2013) found that first and second-year students

failed to see the link between the activities. Not until the third year, when the students began looking for jobs on their own, did the connection become apparent.

Employers seek graduates who demonstrate resilience and adaptability, along with the essential skills, attitudes, and beliefs needed to secure a job, excel in their positions, and progress to even more rewarding opportunities in the future (Helyer, Lee, 2014; 2012). Understanding employability is crucial because “Learning and doing cannot be separated and therefore to use knowledge to its fullest potential it must be implemented, performed and enhanced as part of a synergy” (Helyer, 2010, p. 21). Thus, graduates must understand employability to apply their skills and succeed in a changing job market.

Literature Review

However, in today's world, careers have become significantly more engaging and diverse. Therefore, individuals possessing those skills are in high demand for such types of jobs. Today, organizations value the skills, knowledge, and talents of their employees over their intellectual capabilities. Employability skills encompass all the abilities required to secure employment. These skills pertain to an individual's capacity to secure employment, maintain their position, transition within the same organization, seek new opportunities when necessary, and ideally, find work that aligns with their interests and provides a sense of fulfillment (Hillage, Pollard, 1998). Employability is no longer understood solely as the possession of discipline-specific knowledge, but rather as a multidimensional construct encompassing technical and digital skills, interpersonal and communication skills, cognitive and metacognitive abilities, and career management competencies (Abidoye et al., 2022; Vlachopoulos, Makri, 2024).

Employability refers to an individual's capacity or quality that enables them to secure a job initially and sustain it over an extended period. Moreover, this skill and characteristic enable them to change careers or pursue various job opportunities. The concept of employability skills mainly emphasizes an individual's knowledge, specifically what they understand, but it also encompasses various skills and attitudes, including their approach to tasks (Dacre Pool, Sewell, 2007). Over the past 10 years, employers have been more outspoken regarding the importance of employability skills. These skills encompass a range of transferable abilities, including higher-order thinking skills and personal attributes essential for success in the workplace (Dacre Pool, Sewell, 2007) (Lowden et al., 2011). In the realm of employability skills, the issue of skills awareness has garnered significant attention over the past 15 years (Knight, Yorke, 2003; Jiang, Alexakis, 2017). Graduate employability is commonly understood as a multidimensional and dynamic construct that extends beyond immediate employment outcomes to encompass graduates' capacity to obtain, sustain, and adapt within employment over time (Sumanasiri et al., 2015; Wahab et al., 2025). However, the understanding of employability has matured beyond mere job acquisition (Pilz, Zenner-Hoffkes, 2023) and now encompasses self-awareness and the efficient use of competencies (Lo Presti et al., 2022).

Cryer (1998) says schools struggle to teach “transferable skills.” Graduates can use these skills at work. The Careers Office at the Faculty of Economics offers various services to students, including debate clubs, open lectures, seminars, training, and individual advice, in order to prepare students for the job market with the required skills. These services help them develop the skills necessary to be employable individuals in the future. Therefore, it is important that educational institutions ensure students are prepared for the job market with all the elements required today. Academic certification is still important, but does not always guarantee employment (Yorke, 2006). Moreover, employers today have shown that students should have employability skills that help them to contribute best in the workplace (Confederation of British Industry, 2008). Consequently, collaboration operates as a bridge between higher education learning processes and labor market participation (Evers, Østergaard, 2026).

Today, higher education is seen as an opportunity to improve the future. Credentials are important, but they do not always guarantee a job (Yorke, 2006). In short, to achieve career success and secure a job, today it is possible to have the right skills and adapt to other changes. And precisely, nowadays Career Services Offices are helping students develop and improve their skills to stay ahead of the job market and advance in their careers.

Methodology

In this study, a qualitative methodology was used to identify and discuss students' experiences with the services used by the Excellence and Career Development Branch at the Faculty of Economy, University of Tirana. A semi-structured interview approach through a focus group was employed to collect extensive

information from students about the impact of career support services on their job preparedness and the skills that would help them secure employment.

The study participants were six students who had previously used the Career Services offered by the Faculty, which were observed for 6–8 weeks. Participants used many services, including cover letters and resume writing, interview preparation, and job and internship searches. Because the students came from such a diverse range of academic levels and fields of study, it was possible to ensure that the services were examined from a wide variety of perspectives. Four of the six students were enrolled in the Finance branch, while the remaining two were from Business Administration.

The selected students are those who have participated in training and meetings with the Excellence and Career Development Branch and have received a certain service from it. The selection was deliberately based on the objectives of this study and paper regarding how this office serves students professionally, and its connection with the labor market. This focus group was held in February and lasted 90 minutes. The discussion was conducted by the head of the Excellence and Career Development Branch using an interview with questions to understand more about the effectiveness of the office and what services, and how these have helped students in the formation of their documents (CV, motivation letter), in mock interviews, or in finding an internship, etc. The collected data were transcribed, and based on the paper's purpose, it was possible to identify the main themes related to the study's objective.

We obtained information via individual interviews. The interviews presented students with a range of open-ended questions, prompting them to articulate their perspectives and experiences regarding the career services they accessed, the assistance provided by Career Services programs in preparing for job interviews, acquiring job market skills, and securing internships. Participants noted that the services helped them prepare for the job market, enhanced their job search skills, made it easier to secure internships, and resulted in their overall satisfaction with the services provided.

Results

Students, after completing their education, find it difficult to find a job in their profession if, during their journey, they have not been engaged in various activities or in the improvement and development of their skills. Today, it is necessary for each student to have their own portfolio, including a well-formulated CV, participation in various activities, and engagement in professional practices during the academic year. The Excellence and Career Development Branch of the Faculty of Economics is an office at the service of students that helps them build and personalize a portfolio tailored to their career requirements.

This study aims to examine how career services help students become employable individuals and are prepared for the job market. This research presents the experiences of each participating student in evaluating the services received.

Students were asked at what stage of their studies they first engaged with Career Services at the Faculty of Economics. Four of six students used the services in their second year. One first-year student joined Career Services, another in their third year. In their second year, students realize how important job preparation is and actively seek advice on improving their skills. In the first year, students may be proactive, but in the third year, they may need help quickly before entering the job market. Students can select preferred graduate careers early and acquire work experience, which is vital for securing a job post-graduation. It is during these initial stages that students can identify graduate career options that align with their interests, as well as opportunities to gain pertinent work experience, which is critical for employment after graduation (High Fliers, 2018).

This investigation aimed to gain insights into how students used Career Services by examining the primary motivations behind their usage. The majority of students expressed that their primary objective was to explore different career options and enhance their skills in the workplace. Each of the six students reported using Career Services to prepare for the real world by performing tasks such as composing cover letters, creating curriculum vitae, and obtaining information on job and internship opportunities. One student explained, *"There are numerous career paths for finance students, yet I felt uncertain about how to differentiate myself. I aimed to demonstrate my abilities in a polished manner and step into the job market with assurance and a strategy."* Another student said, *"The main reason was an open call from the Career Office to take part in a training program/public debate competition. This activity attracted me as it offered the opportunity to develop communication skills, critical thinking, and active involvement outside the academic curriculum. Later, my interest expanded towards academic orientation and future professional opportunities."* Due to the fact that these responses demonstrate that students are motivated by both

acquiring new skills and getting ready for a career, it is clear that Career Services plays a significant role in assisting students in feeling prepared to enter the workforce.

We asked students which job skills Career Services at the Faculty of Economics improved most. They said the services improved communication, self-confidence, career planning, and analytical thinking. A student mentioned, *“The public debate program was extremely beneficial. In the trainings offered, we have learned in a practical way how to communicate our beliefs, formulate our arguments, and speak with confidence.”* It is precisely this service of the Career Office, like the Debate Club, that helps students develop those soft skills, such as communication, to best interact in a workplace.

Referring to the question of whether career services have identified an understanding of employers' expectations and the labor market. All students responded positively to this question. Three of the students stated that professional practices in finance and human resources helped them further develop their skills. Internships give students the opportunity to get to know their profession better, develop skills in which they may be lacking, and collaborate in a work group. This makes them more aware of whether this is the career they want.

When asked which career service they found most helpful, all the students said it had helped them in three main ways. Two students said resume organization and interview preparation were the best services. They also liked the help with job skills and appearance. The study found that individualized career counseling and skill development preparation are the most beneficial career services. By using these services, they were able to define their goals for both their personal lives and their professional lives. A student emphasized that training activities like the Debate Club help students develop soft skills like confidence, communication, and critical thinking. Individualized career counseling and skill development preparation services are the most beneficial aspects of career services, according to the study.

To increase student interest in Career Services, most students agreed that they should expand their advertising. According to one respondent, many students lack sufficient knowledge about the Career Office and its functions. In Albania, these services are still not very widespread or known to students, so it is important to create mechanisms to make them more visible. One of the students suggested that the career office's activities and services should be given greater voice and more promotion. This reflects that students who are part of career services value it, but visibility should be higher for every student. One of the students, who has won an internship opportunity, says: *“The career office has given me the opportunity to get involved in my career by learning more about my future profession through an internship in the field of human resources. From the moment I formed my CV and prepared the mock interview, I gained more confidence the day I showed up at the workplace.”*

Conclusions

We aimed to answer two essential questions. First, how does the Faculty of Economics Career Center prepare students for careers and professional growth? Second, do students know and use the Career Center's services? How can we improve communication to engage more people and make a difference?

To answer these questions, the first phase analyzed the answers from structured interviews from a focus group of six students in different years and majors at the Faculty of Economy, University of Tirana, who were observed for 6–8 weeks, from creating a great CV, cover letter, mock interview, and other activities that the career services offers. In light of the findings, it is clear that the Career Center within the Faculty of Economics plays a significant role in assisting students in preparing for the competitive job market. The Center provides one-on-one counseling, resume and cover letter writing, mock interviews, and internships to help students get better jobs. Students learn how to communicate, analyze critically, and use technical job application abilities, all of which are important for success in the workplace.

Career Services, early on, particularly in their second year, may assist students in making better choices about their majors and jobs. Therefore, the Career Services should serve as a bridge for students to learn about their abilities, choose a career path by setting goals, and receive appropriate counseling.

Moreover, these skills are in continuous decline. Also, researchers conceptualise employability not only in terms of what graduates can do, but also how they perceive themselves as emerging professionals and how they enact professional norms in workplace contexts (Soupeze, 2025; Villegas, 2024). Studies emphasise that such skills enable graduates not only to secure initial employment but also to navigate career transitions, adapt to organisational change, and engage in continuous professional development (Mohan et al., 2025).

On the other hand, the results show that such services require greater promotion and visibility among students to understand the opportunities they have to progress in their professional development. And in this way, the visibility of the career office increases, and as a result, more students benefit from these services

dedicated to them. The career office offers important services to help students grow professionally by developing their skills and abilities in the job market.

This research has some limitations. This study included only students with a bachelor's degree from the Faculty of Economy at the University of Tirana, excluding students with a master's degree and students from other fields.

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KARJEROS CENTRŲ REIKŠMĖ UGDANT ĮSIDARBINIMO ĮGŪDŽIUS IR ĮGALINANT STUDENTŲ POTENCIALĄ

Santrauka

Albanijoje studentai vis dar nėra susipažinę su karjeros centro svarba. Tai vis dar laikoma nauja koncepcija, kuri jau randa vietą ir tampa vis labiau matoma švietimo įstaigose, tačiau ne tik jose. Šiandien gebėjimas aiškiai perteikti, ką absolventas gali pasiūlyti darbdaviams, apibūdinant jo įgūdžius ir iliustruojant įtikinamais pasakojimais, atlieka lemiamą vaidmenį įrodant potencialų įsidarbinamumą (Blaquière ir kt., 2019, p. 15). Per pastaruosius dešimt metų darbdaviai vis atviriau kalba apie įsidarbinimo įgūdžių svarbą. Šie įgūdžiai apima įvairius perkeliamus gebėjimus, įskaitant aukštesnio lygio mąstymo įgūdžius ir asmenines savybes, būtinas sėkmei darbo vietoje (Dacre Pool, Sewell, 2007; Lowden ir kt., 2011). Įsidarbinimo įgūdžių srityje per pastaruosius penkiolika metų didelio dėmesio sulaukė įgūdžių suvokimo klausimas (Knight, Yorke, 2003; Jiang, Alexakis, 2017). Darbdaviai ieško absolventų, kurie demonstruoja atsparumą ir prisitaikymo gebėjimus, taip pat turi būtinus įgūdžius, požiūrį ir įsitikinimus, reikalingus norint gauti darbą, pasižymėti savo pareigose ir ateityje siekti dar geresnių galimybių (Helyer, Lee, 2012; 2014). Šiame tyrime apžvelgiama studentų įsidarbinimo įgūdžių tema bei Tiranos universiteto Ekonomikos fakulteto Kompetencijos ir karjeros plėtros skyriaus jiems teikiama pagalba ir jos veiksmingumas. Visos analizės tikslas – pristatyti šio skyriaus teikiamas paslaugas ir parodyti, kaip jose dalyvaujantys studentai turi galimybę tyrinėti, ugdyti ir tobulinti įsidarbinimo įgūdžius, taip pat lengviau įsilieti į darbo rinką, turėdami reikiamą informaciją. Šis tikslas buvo pasiektas dalyvaujant šešiems studentams iš skirtingų Tiranos universiteto Ekonomikos fakulteto bakalauro studijų programos kursų.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: karjeros paslaugos, studentų lūkesčiai, įsidarbinamumas, švietimas

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