

Unlocking Success: The Relationship between Learning Outcomes and Employability.

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Abstract

This paper delves into the crucial connection between learning outcomes and employability, a focal point in educational research and policy. It seeks to unravel this link by delving into different theoretical viewpoints, empirical findings, and practical implications. Through an exploration of the elements impacting the smooth transition from education to employment, it proposes strategies to bolster both learning outcomes and employability. By amalgamating existing studies and suggesting future research directions, this paper enriches our comprehension of how education can more effectively equip individuals for the job market and nurture their professional advancement.

Keywords: Learning Outcomes, Employability, Outcome-Based Education, Workforce Readiness, Skill Development, Higher Education, Career Competencies

1. Introduction

The intersection of learning outcomes and employability has become increasingly pertinent in contemporary educational discourse, as societies worldwide grapple with the challenges of preparing individuals for an ever-evolving workforce. With the rapid pace of technological advancements and shifts in global labor markets, the traditional linkages between education and employment are being redefined. Educational institutions are increasingly adopting Outcome-Based Education (OBE) as a pedagogical approach to ensure that graduates possess the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for success in their careers. OBE focuses on defining specific learning outcomes and aligning educational activities to achieve these outcomes effectively. This paper seeks to explore the relationship between learning outcomes attained through OBE and graduates' employability, shedding light on the mechanisms through which educational experiences influence career trajectories. Against this backdrop, understanding the dynamics of how learning outcomes translate into tangible skills and competencies relevant to employers has emerged as a crucial area of inquiry. This topic holds profound significance not only for educators seeking to enhance the quality of education but also for policymakers aiming to foster economic growth and social mobility. Moreover, as individuals navigate increasingly complex career pathways, the ability of education to equip them with the requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes for lifelong success becomes paramount. Thus, delving into the relationship between learning outcomes and employability not only sheds light on the efficacy of educational systems but also has broader implications for individual well-being and societal progress. Understanding the key competencies that influence employability can help institutions and policymakers design better educational frameworks. To investigate these aspects, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. In what ways do learning outcomes contribute to graduates' employability in the modern workforce?
2. What core competencies do employers prioritize when assessing university graduates?
3. How do existing employability models incorporate learning outcomes to enhance career readiness?
4. How do university reputation and labor market dynamics influence the relationship between learning outcomes and employability?



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1. 1The Association between learning outcomes and the Employability of graduates

1.1.1 Learning Outcomes: Cedefop's definition of learning outcomes, established in 2009, delineates statements detailing the knowledge, comprehension, and skills that a learner acquires upon completing a learning experience. Similarly, Adam's definition characterizes learning outcomes as depictions of what a learner ought to understand, grasp, or demonstrate by the culmination of a learning period. Learning outcomes can be categorized into several types, each serving distinct purposes in educational assessment and curriculum design. Firstly, cognitive learning outcomes pertain to the acquisition of knowledge and intellectual abilities, encompassing areas such as understanding concepts, solving problems, and critical thinking. Secondly, affective learning outcomes focus on learners' attitudes, values, and emotional responses, aiming to cultivate qualities like empathy, tolerance, and ethical reasoning. Thirdly, psychomotor learning outcomes involve the development of physical skills and dexterity, including activities such as performing tasks, manipulating objects, and executing procedures. Additionally, interdisciplinary learning outcomes integrate knowledge and skills across multiple domains, fostering holistic understanding and application. These various types of learning outcomes collectively contribute to comprehensive educational experiences that prepare learners for diverse challenges and opportunities in their personal and professional lives.

1.1.2 Employability: Employability extends beyond mere job acquisition or possessing academic credentials, encompassing a range of factors determining an individual's preparedness for employment and success in the workforce. Within higher education, there's a growing emphasis on integrating employability expectations into student learning outcomes, particularly at the undergraduate level (Mawson and Haworth, 2018; Oliver, 2015; Wilks et al., 2017). While scholarly literature acknowledges the centrality of employability in higher education, there exists variability in defining and measuring it. Existing definitions generally fall into two categories: one focusing on inherent personal qualities contributing to employability (De Vos et al., 2011; Hillage and Pollard, 1998; Hogan et al., 2013; Sanders and Grip, 2004; Yorke, 2006)., and the other emphasizing the ability to navigate the job market independently, leveraging skills and adapting to varying employment contexts (Smith, Ferns, & Russell, 2014). Both definitions underscore the importance of skill development within a social context, recognizing the significance of competencies and their cultivation.

1.1.3 Learning and employability: Research conducted by Finch et al. (2013) underscores the clear connection between employability and the learning outcomes attained through university degree programs. Numerous studies further emphasize this correlation, with Knight and Yorke (2004) noting that quality learning experiences in universities significantly contribute to graduates' successful employability. Essentially, employability is widely regarded as a key outcome of university degree programs, with the skills and knowledge acquired during these programs directly shaping graduates' readiness for the workforce. A multitude of conceptual frameworks have been developed to explore the correlation between learning and employability. Among the most notable are the USEM (University Skills Employability Model), Career EDGE Model, and LEPO (Learning, Employability, and Progression Outcomes) model.

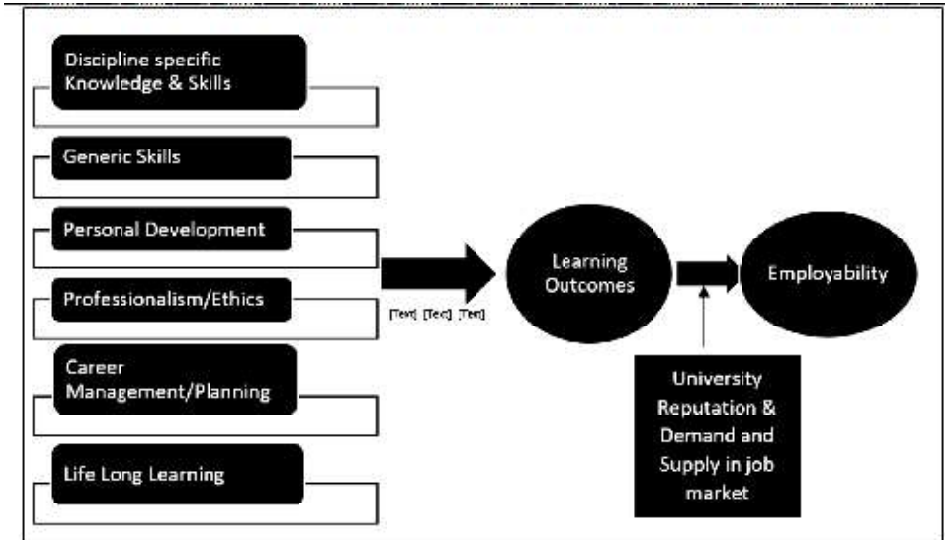
- USEM Model: This model (Knight and Yorke 2002) focuses on fostering particular skills and attributes throughout university education to improve employability. Its elements consist of academic abilities, which entail subject-specific knowledge acquired through academic courses and research, transferable skills like communication and problem-solving, and individual qualities such as resilience and emotional intelligence. While the University Skills Employability Model (USEM) offers valuable insights into the factors influencing employability within higher education, it also has several limitations. USEM primarily concentrates on the role of university education in enhancing employability. It may not fully account for the contributions of other forms of learning and skill development, such as vocational training, internships, or

- extracurricular activities, which are also significant in shaping graduates' employability. This model also overlooks contextual factors such as economic conditions, industry trends, and regional differences in labor markets. These external factors can profoundly influence graduates' employability but are not explicitly addressed within USEM. Moreover, USEM categorizes employability factors into academic skills, generic skills, and personal attributes. However, this classification may oversimplify the complexity of skills and qualities valued by employers. Employability is multifaceted, and other dimensions such as technical expertise, cultural competence, and creativity might not be fully accounted for within the framework.
- Career EDGE Model: This model (Pool and Sewell (2007) underscores five pivotal elements shaping employability, comprising Experience, Degree, Graduate Attributes, Employability Skills, and Emotional Intelligence. Experience encompasses practical exposure acquired through internships, co-op programs, and industry projects, while Degree denotes academic qualifications obtained from university education. Graduate Attributes represent personal qualities and professional competencies developed throughout the academic journey. Employability Skills encompass critical competencies highly prized by employers, including communication, problem-solving, and digital literacy. Additionally, Emotional Intelligence, which refers to the capability to comprehend and regulate emotions efficiently, is acknowledged as vital for attaining success in professional environments. Comparable employability competencies were identified by Smith et al. (2014) and Finch et al. (2013) in their respective research endeavors on the subject. Despite its popularity and simplicity in elucidating the fundamental aspects of employability, this model also possesses several limitations. This model also fails to consider contextual factors which can significantly impact graduates' employability. While emotional intelligence is recognized as an essential element of employability, its inclusion as a separate component in the Career EDGE Model may overlook its interconnectedness with other employability skills and attributes. Emotional intelligence is often intertwined with communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills, and its isolated consideration may not fully capture its impact on employability outcomes.
 - LEPO Model: This model proposed by Phillips et al. (2010) underscores the interrelation among learning, employability, and career progression outcomes. Its components comprise Learning Outcomes, which encompass the specific knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired through educational experiences. Employability denotes the extent to which individuals possess the necessary skills and qualities to obtain and excel in employment prospects. Progression Outcomes denote career advancement and development attained through ongoing learning and professional growth. Together, these elements highlight the dynamic and interconnected nature of individuals' educational experiences, employability, and career trajectories. Though LEPO model provides valuable insights into the interconnectedness of learning, employability, and career outcomes, it is important to recognize its limitations. The model primarily focuses on learning outcomes derived from formal educational experiences. It may not adequately account for informal learning, experiential learning, and non-traditional educational pathways, which also contribute to individuals' employability and career progression. This model also does not sufficiently consider the contextual factors that shape individuals' employability and career progression. Indeed, the connection between employability and learning outcomes has been well-established in various academic studies and models. Storen & Aamodt (2010) and Finch et al. (2013) have contributed significantly to our understanding of this relationship. The studies underscore the significance of aligning university education and degree programs with the skills and competencies essential for achieving success in the labor market.
- In essence, these studies emphasize the importance of aligning learning outcomes with the requirements of the job market to improve the employability prospects of

graduates. By integrating insights from the above mentioned three research models into the proposed Integrated Model of Learning Outcomes and Employability (IMLOE), universities can better prepare students for successful transitions from education to employment.

2. Integrated Model of Learning Outcomes and Employability (IMLOE)

Integrating the USEM (University Skills Employability Model), Career EDGE Model, and LEPO (Learning, Employability, and Progression Outcomes) into a unified framework can offer a holistic approach to comprehend the connection between learning outcomes and employability. The proposed integrated model is outlined as under:



In this representation, skills form the foundation leading to learning outcomes, which subsequently contribute to employability. The moderating factors of university reputation and supply and demand dynamics impact the association between learning outcomes and employability. The common skills identified by all three models (USEM, Career EDGE Model, and LEPO) are represented in the framework. By combining these models, a broader range of skills and competencies are covered, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing employability. These skills are consistently recognized as essential for both academic success and employability across various frameworks and models. This model visualizes how these skills and competencies intersect and complement each other, creating a comprehensive framework for both learning and employability. Each element contributes to the overall development of individuals, equipping them with the necessary tools to succeed academically and in the professional world.

2.1 Significance to the field

This paper is particularly relevant in light of the ongoing shifts in global labor markets, the rise of automation, and evolving employer expectations. The study introduces a novel Integrated Model of Learning Outcomes and Employability (IMLOE), synthesizing key existing frameworks to offer a comprehensive understanding of employability determinants. By incorporating recent findings and realigning traditional models with contemporary workforce demands, this research provides fresh insights into how education can better equip graduates for career success. The Integrated Model of Learning Outcomes and Employability (IMLOE) holds potential as a valuable instrument for curriculum design, pedagogical improvements, and bridging skill disparities between industry needs and university provisions. The subsequent section provides an in-depth analysis of the ten constructs within the integrated framework

2.2 Skills and Competencies

In our proposed model as well, discipline specific knowledge is regarded as the central

concept, aligning with the emphasis placed on these aspects in the Career EDGE model. Discipline-specific knowledge and skills play a crucial role in shaping learning outcomes by providing students with a deep understanding of their chosen field, facilitating the application of concepts in practical contexts, fostering critical thinking and analysis and preparing students for future careers or further study (Copps & Plimmer, 2013). In the proposed framework Discipline-specific knowledge encompasses a wide range of components fundamental to a particular field of study. This includes understanding foundational principles, theories, and concepts that underpin the discipline, alongside specialized terminology and vocabulary unique to its context. Furthermore, a comprehensive grasp of the historical context, including key developments and influential figures, is crucial. Theoretical frameworks provide analytical tools for interpreting phenomena within the discipline, supported by familiarity with research methodologies, experimental techniques, and analytical methods. Awareness of current trends, ethical considerations, and practical skills for application in real-world settings are also essential. Moreover, recognizing interdisciplinary connections and integrating diverse perspectives enriches one's understanding and contributes to a holistic mastery of the discipline.

Generic skills, also referred to as transferable skills or employability skills, are essential proficiencies that hold value across different industries and positions. These competencies are not limited to any particular job or area of study but can be utilized in various settings (Pool & Sewell, 2007). In our proposed model, we utilize the following elements to implement and assess generic skills.

1. Communication Skills:
 - Proficiency in conveying messages effectively through spoken and written means.
 - Engaged listening abilities.
 - Competence in delivering presentations.
 - Digital literacy (proficiency in using digital tools for communication).
2. Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking:
 - Analytical skills.
 - Generating innovative solutions.
 - Decision-making skills.
3. Teamwork and Collaboration:
 - Working effectively in diverse teams.
 - Valuing diverse perspectives.
 - Leadership skills (influencing, motivating, managing conflicts).
 - Lifelong learning orientation.
4. Enterprise and Entrepreneurship (Innovation):
 - Creativity.
 - Innovation.
 - Risk-taking.
 - Identifying and exploiting opportunities.

Good communication skills correlate with improved learning outcomes. This connection stems from the ability to effectively convey and understand information, ultimately enhancing learning achievements. Moreover, communication fosters student motivation, facilitating goal attainment. Collaboration relies heavily on communication; effective teamwork necessitates clear communication channels (H. Z. Matin and A. Hamidizadeh, 2010). During collaboration, communication clarifies implicit thoughts, aiding group cohesion (N. M. Webb, 2009).

Personal development skills encompass a variety of skills and qualities that may add to an individual's growth, self-improvement, and overall well-being. These skills are essential for personal and professional success. Personal development skills, as conceptualized in this study, encompass the following components:

1. Self-awareness and Self-management
2. Self-confidence
3. Emotional intelligence
4. Goal setting

- 5. Resilience
- 6. Time management
- 7. Stress management
- 8. Adaptability

Professionalism and ethics are also prominent factors which may enhance employability (Gowsalya & Kumar, 2017, p.16). Ethics is taken as a separate factor in this study because in the context of India's expanding global economy, it's crucial to anticipate the condition of its workforce regarding practical, cultural, and moral obstacles in both local and international settings. We advocate for an education system that aims to cultivate cosmopolitan values, honesty, and integrity in students.

Career management is deemed essential for university graduates as they aim for successful and fulfilling careers (Pool & Sewell, 2007). Dawson and Howitt (2019) emphasized in their study that unless university students can identify and effectively market their newly acquired employability skills to suitable job markets, their value remains restricted.

Research on career development education has recognized a range of elements, such as decision-making capabilities, awareness of opportunities, readiness for transitions, skills in self-presentation, and self-awareness (Diamante, 2014; Watts, 2006; Hillage & Pollard, 1998). Career Management/Planning construct in this study involves such as self-assessment, goal setting, skill development, job search strategies, networking, and decision-making related to career choices and advancement.

Lifelong learning entails the ongoing process of acquiring knowledge, skills, and competencies throughout one's life, extending beyond formal education. It encompasses both formal and informal learning experiences and can take place in diverse environments such as schools, workplaces, communities, and personal settings (Copps & Plimmer, 2013). Based on the finding that lifelong learning involves continuous acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies across various settings, we can operationalize the construct into three factors:

- Recognition and appreciation of the learning opportunities inherent in work experiences.
- Cultivation and expansion of professional and personal networks.
- Community Involvement

2.3 Operationalization of the learning outcome

Operationalization of the learning outcome construct involves specifying observable and measurable indicators or behaviors that demonstrate the attainment of the intended learning outcomes. The subsequent six statements are utilized to translate learning outcomes into measurable terms in this investigation:

1. Students effectively communicated ideas through verbal and written means, demonstrating active listening and proficiency in digital communication tools.
2. Students applied critical thinking and problem-solving skills to identify, analyze, and resolve complex challenges in diverse contexts.
3. Students collaborated effectively in teams, valued diverse perspectives, and demonstrated leadership in motivating and managing conflicts.
4. Students exhibited creativity and innovation in generating new ideas, taking calculated risks, and identifying opportunities for growth.
5. Students developed self-awareness, confidence, and emotional intelligence to navigate personal and professional challenges with integrity and resilience.
6. Students in career management and planning, set realistic goals, developed relevant skills, and made informed decisions to pursue successful and fulfilling careers.

2.4 University Reputation and Demand & Supply

The reputation of a university can significantly impact the employability of its graduates (Chevalier & Conlon, 2003, Finch et al. 2013). The reputation of a university can influence the correlation between learning outcomes and employability by enhancing perceived value, providing access to opportunities, and offering a competitive advantage in the job market. Reputable institutions may validate competencies, leverage networks, and prioritize candidates from renowned universities. To operationalize university reputation in this study,

we have considered the following 3 factors:

- Academic Excellence: This factor encompasses indicators such as research output, faculty expertise, program accreditation, and academic rankings.
- Graduate Outcomes: This factor focuses on the success of graduates in securing employment or pursuing further education.
- Perception and Prestige: This factor considers the perception of the university among stakeholders, including employers, students, alumni, and the general public. Indicators may include surveys or assessments of reputation.

Research also shows that fluctuations in labor market demand for specific skills or qualifications affect graduates' employment prospects, while the supply of graduates in certain fields also plays a role. Labor market dynamics impact graduates' opportunities and the alignment between education and industry needs.

2.5 Operationalization of Employability

In the realm of defining employability, three prominent authors frequently referenced are Hillage and Pollard (1998), Harvey (2001), and Yorke (2006). They all converge on the notion that employability essentially pertains to an individual's perceived capability, encompassing skills, comprehension, and personal traits, to secure and sustain employment over the course of their career. Given the established competence-based perspective on employability, we have chosen to employ a similar approach to operationalize this concept in our research.

3. Utilizing the Integrated Model of Learning Outcomes and Employability (IMLOE) for Enhanced Workforce Readiness

The proposed Integrated Model of Learning Outcomes and Employability (IMLOE) offers a comprehensive framework to bridge the gap between education and workforce readiness. By amalgamating insights from established models like the University Skills Employability Model (USEM), Career EDGE Model, and Learning, Employability, and Progression Outcomes (LEPO) model, IMLOE provides a holistic approach to understanding the relationship between learning outcomes and employability. This integrated model acknowledges the multifaceted nature of skills and competencies essential for career success, encompassing discipline-specific knowledge, generic skills, personal development attributes, professionalism, career management, and lifelong learning orientation. Furthermore, IMLOE recognizes the moderating influence of university reputation on the translation of learning outcomes into employability. By operationalizing this model, educational institutions can tailor their curriculum design, pedagogical strategies, and career guidance initiatives to align with industry demands and enhance graduates' employability prospects. IMLOE serves as a valuable tool for stakeholders in academia, industry, and policymaking, facilitating informed decision-making and fostering a symbiotic relationship between education and employment.

4. Prospects for Advancements in the Study

Future developments of the above study could encompass several avenues aimed at further refining and extending the Integrated Model of Learning Outcomes and Employability (IMLOE) framework. Empirical studies can be conducted to validate the IMLOE framework across diverse educational contexts and industries. It is also suggested to Investigate the intersectionality of factors such as gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and disability status in shaping individuals' access to education and employability outcomes. This could involve examining how the IMLOE framework can be tailored to address the unique needs and challenges faced by marginalized or underrepresented student populations.

5. Conclusion

This study has extensively examined the intricate relationship between learning outcomes and employability, shedding light on the mechanisms through which educational experiences influence graduates' readiness for the workforce. By exploring various theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence, the research underscores the significance of aligning curriculum design and pedagogical strategies with evolving industry needs. The proposed Integrated Model of Learning Outcomes and Employability (IMLOE) offers a comprehensive

framework for understanding and enhancing graduates' employability prospects. IMLOE synthesizes insights from existing research models such as USEM, Career EDGE, and LEPO, providing a holistic approach to addressing the skill gaps between educational offerings and industry demands. Moreover, the operationalization of key constructs within the IMLOE framework offers practical guidelines for curriculum development, pedagogical enhancements, and addressing the evolving needs of the job market. Importantly, the study highlights the moderating roles of both university reputation and demand-supply dynamics in shaping the relationship between learning outcomes and employability. University reputation significantly impacts graduates' perceived value in the job market, providing access to opportunities and offering a competitive advantage. Additionally, demand-supply dynamics influence the availability of job opportunities, affecting graduates' employability prospects in specific industries or regions.

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