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Perceived Employability of Students Studying in Higher Education

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Abstract
Nowadays, perceived employability has gained significant attention due to the competitive nature of the employment sector, which now requires individuals to possess not only academic qualifications but also relevant skills and competencies. These skills and competencies help students to align their academic pursuits with their career goals, thereby boosting their confidence in their ability to secure employment after completing their higher education. The present study aims to examine the perceived employability of higher education students. A quantitative approach was used, and 302 university students of Hemvati Nandan Bahuguna Garhwal University, Uttarakhand, India were selected as samples for data analysis. A normative survey research method was adopted to investigate the influence of stream (Arts & Humanities and STEM), level of study (UG and PG) and course (Traditional and Professional) of university students on their perceived employability. The perceived Employability Scale developed by K. P. Naachimuthu was used to measure the perceived employability of students. The study findings identify that most university students have a high level of perception towards employability. Arts & Humanities students and professional courses students have greater perceived employability as compared to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics) and traditional courses students respectively. There is no difference in perception towards employability among under graduation (UG) and post graduation (PG) students.
Keywords: Perceived employability, Career goals, Higher education students, Level of employability

1. Introduction

In the rapidly evolving global economy, the notion of perceived employability has gained notable importance as societies work to prepare their human resources for a competitive and dynamic job market. Perceived employability relates to how individuals assess their own readiness and attractiveness towards employment, based on their skills, academic qualifications and personal qualities. Vanhercke et al. (2014) describe perceived employability as an individual's assessment of their capability to secure and retain employment which encompasses both the probability of finding a new job and the likelihood of maintaining the current position. This concept sheds light on their career goals, job market preparedness and strategies for improving their employability. Additionally, as industries and technologies rapidly change, ongoing learning and skill development become increasingly important. Employers generally value those who show dedication, innovation and adaptability to acquire new skills which boost their employability. Continuous education certifications and proactive skill enhancement are key to remaining competitive. Networking and personal branding are also important. Developing a strong professional network both online and offline provides access to opportunities, mentorship, and industry insights. A positive online presence like LinkedIn, improves visibility and credibility, thereby enhancing perceived employability.

Beyond securing initial employment, perceived employability affects career advancement and job satisfaction. Those who actively manage and improve their employability are better positioned to seize career opportunities,

negotiate favourable terms and achieve long-term success. It encompasses both tangible and intangible qualities that contribute to professional success. By understanding and proactively working on their perceived employability individuals can realize their career goals and excel in their chosen field. Effective career self-management plays a vital role in improving an individual's perception of employability. Students who are actively engaged in career development activities such as setting career goals, networking and enhancing their skills generally feel more confident about their job prospects. Those who undertake self-assessment and strategic career planning are better able to align their academic and extracurricular pursuits with their career aspirations which enhances their perceived employability (Jackson & Wilton, 2016).

Students' personal background, work experience, institutional prestige and career support have a positive influence on their perceived employability. Students with rich learning experiences generally have more favorable views of their job prospects indicating that strong institutional career support can enhance students' confidence in their employability (Jung & Li, 2023). In this techno-driven era, for enhancing the level of employability there must be a strong collaboration between the industry and the academic institution. In order to meet the industry, demand every educational institute must provide career guidance to their students (Sharma, 2021). Furthermore, there is an intricate interaction among perceived employability, occupational self-efficacy and turnover intention. Strong self-efficacy could buffer against the adverse effects of high turnover intention suggesting that employees with high self-confidence are less likely to let turnover concerns affect their performance (Khalid, 2021).

Most students struggle with doubt about their capabilities and readiness for the job market. Some students feel like they are deceivers, despite their accomplishments. This feeling leads to doubt in pursuing opportunities they believe they are beyond their reach. Stress and insecurities can affect the quality of academic work and extracurricular activities. Inconsistent performance or limited participation impacts students' perceived employability. Negative external factors such as high unemployment rate, economic recessions, and poor academic performance generate stress and insecurities, which lessens individual's perception towards their own employability. Individuals who perceive significant financial threat are prone to feeling less employable. This perception can heighten anxiety and stress which can adversely affect their job seeking efforts (Silva et al., 2023).

From the above discussion, it is clear that perceived employability has become an important factor in today's job market, representing how individuals gauge their own preparedness and appeal for employment based on their skills, education and personal qualities. This self-assessment affects not only the chances of securing a job but also influences career growth and overall job satisfaction. By actively engaging in career development and adapting to market needs, individuals can better position themselves in a competitive world. It is equally important to address the psychological and external factors impacting self-perception, including stress, insecurities, economic conditions, the value of pursuing a course and personal doubts. Managing these challenges effectively can boost confidence and enhance job seeking efforts, leading to improved employment outcomes. Ultimately, perceived employability extends beyond meeting immediate job market requirements; it involves adopting a proactive and resilient approach to career growth. Therefore, both individuals and institutions should focus on strategies that build self-efficacy enhance skills and maintain a positive perspective on career opportunities.

1.1. Aim of study

The present study was undertaken to explore the level of perceived employability among students studying in higher education and determine the influence of stream, level of study and course on their perceived employability.

1.2. Hypothesis

For the present study following hypotheses were made:

H1. There is no significant difference between higher education students of arts & humanities and STEM stream for their perceived employability.

H2. There is no significant difference between under graduation and post graduation students of higher education for their perceived employability.

H3. There is no significant difference between higher education students of traditional and professional courses for their perceived employability.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Perceived Employability and its Influence on Higher Education Students

Perceived employability entails individual beliefs about how well their abilities and attributes meet employers' expectations, and influence their chances of obtaining and retaining employment. In today's competitive job

market, this concept is crucial in determining career outcomes and personal satisfaction of the individual. Perceived employability is influenced by several factors, such as academic achievement, experience-based skills, individual assets, personal circumstances and the context of the labour market (Alvarez et al., 2017; Hillage & Pollard, 1998; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Better academic performance is strongly associated with higher self-perceived employability. Students with superior academic records feel more assured about their career prospects. Institutions that offer comprehensive career services, networking opportunities and targeted support for international students are likely to positively influence students' perception of their employability (Pan & Lee 2011; Niu et al., 2022). Employers typically prefer candidates with relevant qualifications and work experience over those who lack these qualities. Students who had work experience before beginning their higher studies generally view themselves as more employable. They tend to have greater confidence in their ability to find a job after graduation compared to their peers without such experience (Bennett et al., 2023).

Additionally, the value of pursuing a course significantly influences the student's motivation in their studies. When students view their courses as crucial for future job prospects, they generally feel more motivated and try to achieve higher academic performance, which in turn reinforce their confidence and are more optimistic about their career prospects. When students consider their courses to be of high quality, they tend to have a more favourable view of their job prospects. Essentially better the course quality, the stronger the students' belief in their employability. Courses that effectively build student's skills and knowledge lead to higher confidence in their employability (Kee et al., 2023). When individuals view their courses as relevant and feel they have some level of choice their motivation is enhanced. This, in turn, increases their motivation associated with more effective job search efforts and improved employment outcomes. The perception of course usefulness and personal choices appear to foster greater engagement and better reemployment results (Koen et al., 2015).

Apart from this, skills and knowledge are also crucial in shaping an individual perception of employability. By sharpening relevant skills and gaining specific expertise, individuals can boost their confidence to find and retain employment. The transition from the academic world to the professional world also brings pressure related to academic performance, career planning, and personal growth, which, in turn, can influence self-perception and employability. Students who believe their coursework provides practical, relevant skills generally have a higher perception of their employability. Strong career support services are crucial in improving students' perception of their employability (Agnihotri et al., 2020).

2.2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework integrates the different concepts of perceived employability to understand its impact on higher education students. The framework examines how perceived employability influences an individual's career goals. Through the integration of these ideas, the framework seeks to offer an understanding of how individuals' perception regarding their employability influences their career decision making and guiding techniques for their career advancement.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Study Design

The study was quantitative. A descriptive survey research method was used to investigate the perceived employability of students studying in higher education.

3.2. Selection of subjects

For the present study, the target population comprised all the under graduation and post graduation students studying in the Birla Campus of Hemvati Nandan Bahuguna Garhwal University (A Central University), Srinagar, Uttarakhand (India). The study was conducted with a sample size of 302, selected from the Birla Campus of H.N.B.G.U. out of which 178 are from the Arts & Humanities stream and 124 are from the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) stream. The sample was selected by using a disproportionate stratified random sampling technique.

3.3. Research Tool Used

The 'Perceived Employability Scale' developed by K. P. Naachimuthu was used to study the perceived employability of higher education students. This 'Perceived Employability Scale' has three dimensions namely Value of Pursuing course, Insecurity and Stress, Skill and Knowledge. Dimension 1, 2 and 3 consist of 13, 14 and 12 items respectively, resulting in a total of 39 items.

4. Findings

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Level of Perceived Employability of Higher Education Students

Scores	Count	Percentage	Level of Perceived Employability
132 & below	3	1.0%	Low
103 to 133	84	27.8%	Average
134 & above	215	71.2%	High

Table 1 reveals that 1% of higher education students have a low level of perceived employability, 27.8% of higher education students have an average level of perceived employability and 71.2% of higher education students have a high level of perceived employability. It implies that most of the higher education students have a high level of perceived employability.

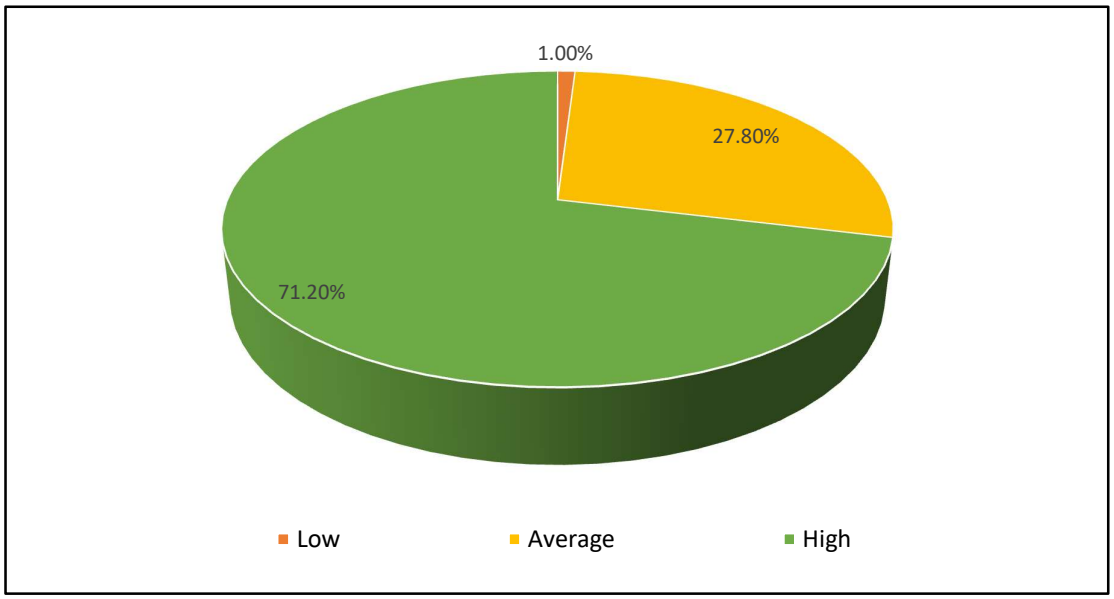


Fig 1: Percentage of Level of Perceived Employability of Higher Education Students

Table 2: Comparison between Arts & Humanities and STEM Stream Students for their Perceived Employability

Dimension	Stream	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	df	p-value
Value of pursuing course	Arts & Humanities	178	51.68	6.304	4.568	300	0.000
	STEM	124	47.83	8.330			
Insecurity and Stress	Arts & Humanities	178	51.97	5.365	2.215	300	0.028
	STEM	124	50.45	6.479			
Skill and Knowledge	Arts & Humanities	178	39.71	5.343	2.166	300	0.031
	STEM	124	41.15	6.066			
Total	Arts & Humanities	178	143.36	12.115	2.422	300	0.016
	STEM	124	139.43	16.082			

Table 2 indicates a significant preference for arts & humanities (M=51.68, SD=6.304) over STEM students (M= 47.83, SD= 8.330) on the Value of pursuing the course, t (300) = 4.568, p = 0.000. Insecurity and Stress among higher education students reported a significant difference between arts & humanities and STEM students, t (300) = 2.215, p = 0.028 with arts & humanities students (M=51.97, SD=5.365) and STEM students (M=50.45, SD=6.479). A significant difference was also found in the dimension Skill and Knowledge, t (300) = 2.166, p =

0.031, with STEM students (M=41.15, SD=6.066) receiving higher scores than arts & humanities students (M=39.71, SD=5.943).

Table 2 also reveals that the mean and S.D. of overall perceived employability of arts & humanities and STEM students are 143.46 ± 12.12 and 139.43 ± 16.09, respectively. The mean scores of overall perceived employability of arts & humanities and STEM students differ significantly, and the arts & humanities students' mean (143.46) is significantly higher than the STEM students' mean (139.43), as shown in figure 2. Further statistical analysis indicates that the t-value is 2.422, which is greater than the tabulated value of 1.97 and hence significant at 0.05 level of significance with 300 df (p-value ≤ 0.05). Therefore, the hypothesis H1 is rejected.

Fig 2: Depiction of Mean and Standard Deviation of Perceived Employability of Students of Arts & Humanities and STEM Streams

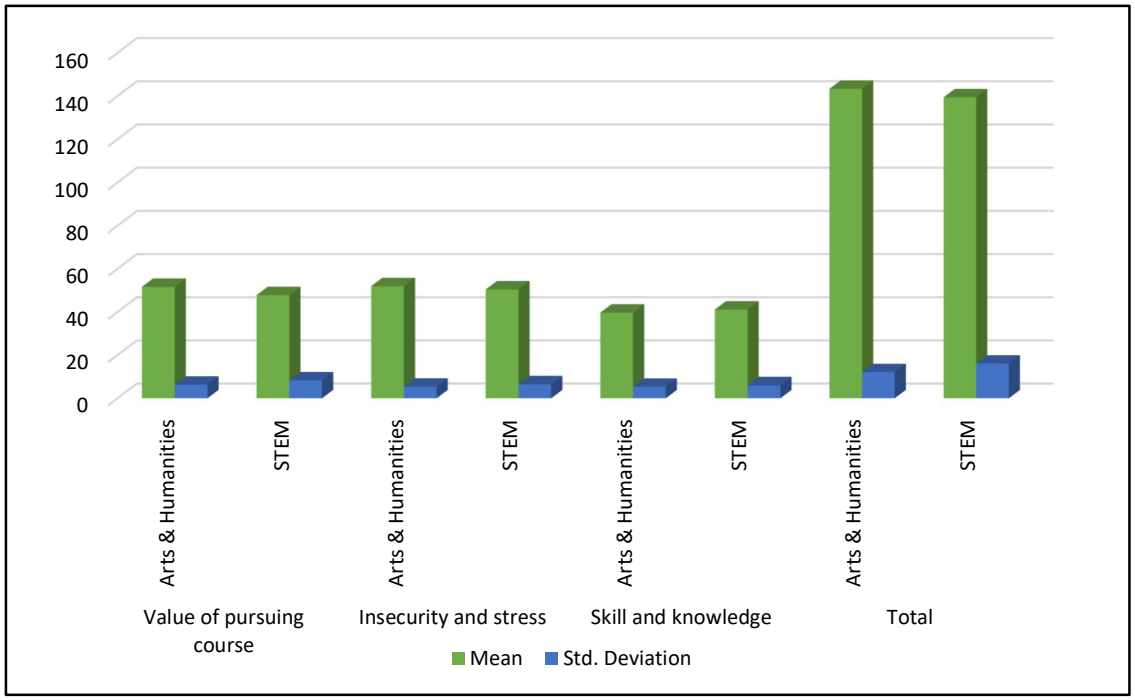


Table 3: Comparison between Under graduation and Post Graduation Students for their Perceived Employability

Dimension	Level of study	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	df	p-value
Value of pursuing course	Under graduation	228	49.53	7.900	2.349	300	0.019
	Post graduation	74	51.85	5.471			
Insecurity and stress	Under graduation	228	51.17	6.125	0.921	300	0.358
	Post graduation	74	51.89	5.074			
Skill and knowledge	Under graduation	228	41.04	5.669	4.087	300	0.000
	Post graduation	74	38.01	5.127			
Total	Under graduation	228	141.74	14.787	0.008	300	0.993
	Post graduation	74	141.76	11.276			

Table 3 reveals that 228 under graduation students (M=49.53, SD=7.900) and 74 post graduation students (M=51.85, SD=5.471) demonstrated a significant difference in the value of pursuing the course, t (300) = 2.349, p = 0.019, as expected post graduation students having high perceived employability than under graduation students on Value of pursuing course. Under graduation students (M=51.17, SD=6.125) and post graduation students (M=51.89, SD=5.074) show a non-significant difference, t (300) = 0.921, p = 0.358 for Insecurity and

Stress. Results display a significant trend in Skill and Knowledge of university students, t (300) = 4.087, p = 0.000 for under graduation (M=41.04, SD=5.669) over post graduation (M=38.01, SD=5.127).

From table 3 it is also evident that the mean and S.D. of overall perceived employability of under graduation and post graduation students are 141.74 ± 14.79 and 141.76 ± 11.28, respectively. Although the mean of overall perceived employability of post graduation students (141.76) is a bit higher than the mean of under graduation students (141.74), as depicted in figure 3, the difference is not an actual difference and is just because of chance error. The statistical analysis indicates that the t-value is 0.008, which is less than the critical value of 1.97 at 0.05 level and hence insignificant at 0.05 level of significance with 300 df (p-value > 0.05). It implies that the students of under graduation and post graduation do not differ significantly in their perceived employability. Thus, the hypothesis H2 is accepted.

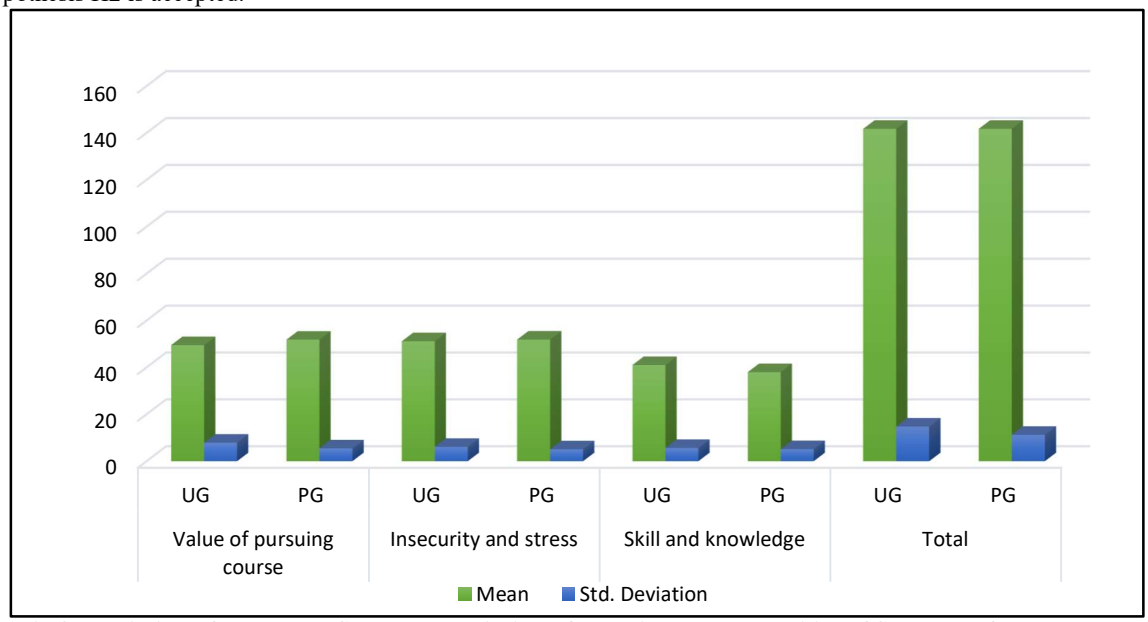


Fig 3: Depiction of Mean and Standard Deviation of Perceived Employability of Students of Under graduation and Post graduation

Table 4: Comparison between Traditional and Professional Courses Students for their Perceived Employability

Dimension	Course	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	df	p-value
Value of pursuing a course	Traditional	58	46.05	8.376	4.775	300	0.000
	Professional	244	51.06	6.873			
Insecurity and stress	Traditional	58	49.16	6.566	3.200	300	0.002
	Professional	244	51.86	5.601			
Skill and knowledge	Traditional	58	40.97	6.294	0.990	300	0.323
	Professional	244	40.14	5.533			
Total	Traditional	58	136.17	17.071	3.435	300	0.001
	Professional	244	143.07	12.843			

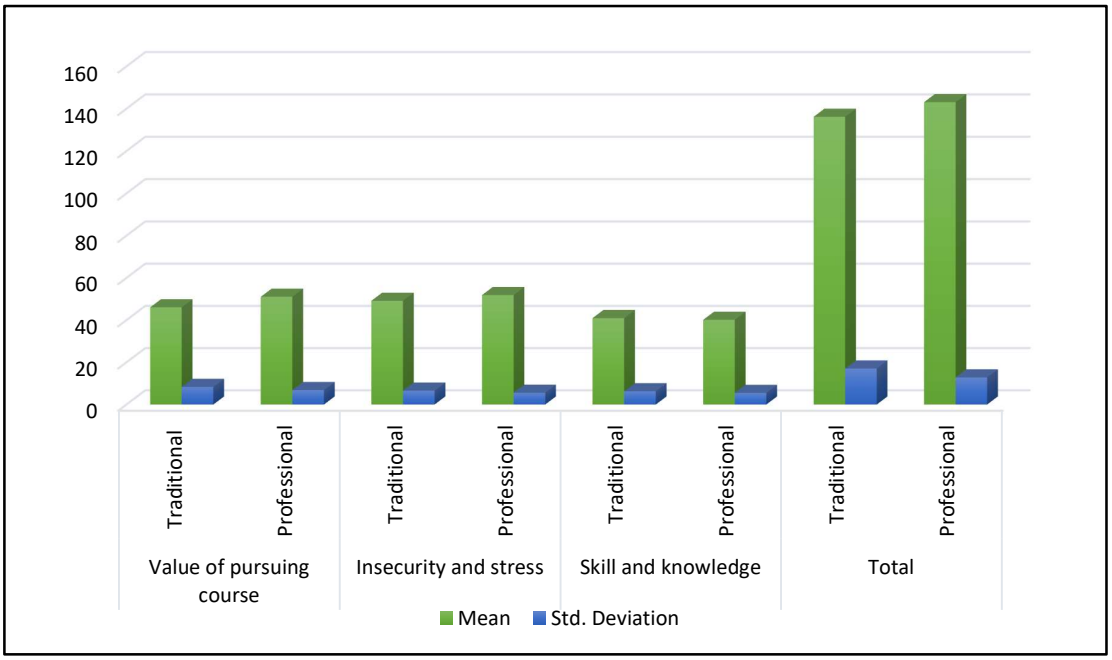
Table 4 indicates a significant difference in the Value of pursuing course dimension, t (300) = 4.775, p = 0.000 of higher education students for traditional courses (M=46.05, SD=8.376) and professional courses (M=51.06, SD=6.873). A significant difference was found in the dimension of Insecurity and Stress, t (300) = 3.200, p = 0.002, with professional courses students (M=51.86, SD=5.601) receiving higher scores than traditional courses students (M=49.16, SD=6.566). Skill and Knowledge among university students reported a non-significant difference between traditional and professional courses students, t (300) = 0.990, p = 0.323, with traditional courses students (M=40.97, SD=6.294) and professional courses students (M=40.14, SD=5.533).

It is also observed from table 4 that the mean and S.D. of overall perceived employability of traditional and professional courses students are 136.17 ± 17.07 and 143.07 ± 12.843, respectively. Figure 4 shows that the mean scores of overall perceived employability of traditional and professional courses students differ significantly, and the professional courses students' mean (143.07) is significantly higher than the traditional courses students' mean (136.17). Further, the statistical analysis indicates that the t-value is 3.43, which is greater than the tabulated value of 1.97 and hence significant at 0.05 level of significance with 300 df (p-value ≤ 0.05). Eventually, the hypothesis H3 is rejected.

Fig. 4: Depiction of Mean and Standard Deviation of Perceived Employability of Students of Traditional and Professional Courses

5. Discussion

The present study indicates a high level of positive attitude of higher education students towards perceived employability. This finding is contrary to the finding of Sharma (2021), which indicates that graduation students'



perceived employability was not consistent and augmented to reflect in their actions. Results of the study indicate that arts & humanities students show a positive attitude towards job opportunities, career goals, economic worthiness, career self-management, capacity enhancement, adaptability of alternative jobs, career decision making, course satisfaction, national and international job securement, and employment prospects than STEM students. Whereas STEM students show a significant preference for unemployment problems, job insecurity, present job trends and vocational guidance as compared to arts & humanities students. It is inferred from the study that post graduation students perceived their pursuing course as more valuable in terms of economic worthiness, job opportunities, practical information regarding employment, career advancement, and perceived capacity development than under graduation students. Also, under graduation and post graduation students have identical perceptions of Campus placement, self-confidence, essential achievement records, proactive skill enhancement, and employment prospects. In the cases of job insecurity and stress, ignorance of getting a job, confusion about employment and unemployment problems under graduation students were found more vulnerable than post graduation students. It is also revealed from the study that professional course students have great expectations from their pursuing courses regarding preparedness for job opportunities, happiness related to employability courses, flexibility of alternative jobs and course satisfaction. Professional courses students were also found to be more optimistic than traditional courses students for campus placement, skills and techniques, national and international job securement, and survival in work situations. Besides this, students in traditional and professional courses have similar thoughts about their job insecurity and stress, unemployment problems, present job trends, career guidance, and employment satisfaction.

6. Conclusion

It is concluded from the study that the majority of students pursuing higher education are highly employable. The findings reveal significant differences in perceived employability between students of different academic streams, levels of study, and types of courses. Firstly, there is a notable distinction between students of the arts & humanities and STEM streams across all dimensions of perceived employability, namely Value of pursuing courses, Insecurity & Stress, and Skill & Knowledge. Interestingly, students from the arts & humanities stream demonstrate significantly greater perceived employability compared to those in the STEM stream. Secondly, differences in perceived employability are evident between under graduation and post graduation students. Specifically, under graduation and post graduation students differ significantly in the dimensions of Value of pursuing courses and Skill & Knowledge, though no significant difference was found regarding Insecurity & Stress. Overall, under graduation and post graduation students exhibit similar levels of perceived employability. Finally, when comparing traditional and professional course students, the study found significant differences in the dimensions of Value of pursuing courses and Insecurity & Stress, with professional course students exhibiting significantly higher perceived employability. However, no significant difference was observed in the dimension of Skill & Knowledge.

Overall, perceived employability varies significantly based on academic stream and course type, with arts & humanities and professional courses students generally reporting higher employability perceptions. However, under graduation and post graduation are largely comparable in this regard.

Contribution of authors:

Author[1]: The author contributed to the research paper through comprehensive involvement in data collection, data analysis, tabulation, graphing, and typing. She also played a key role in designing the research framework and developing the outlines, ensuring a structured approach to the study and its presentation.

Author[2]: The author contributed to the research paper by actively participating in both drafting and proofreading. His efforts included developing initial content, refining the structure, and ensuring clarity and coherence throughout the document. Additionally, he meticulously reviewed the final version to ensure accuracy and proper formatting.

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