Peer Reviewed Article

OJED
OPEN JOURNALS IN EDUCATION

Volume 7, Issue 1 (2022), pp. 1-30
International Journal of Multidisciplinary Perspectives in Higher Education
ISSN: 2474-2546 Print/ ISSN: 2474-2554 Online
https://ojed.org/jimphe

Investigating Self-Perceived Employability, Ambition, and University Commitment of Students in HRD Programs

Yuanlu Niu
University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, United States

Yidan Zhu
Lingnan University, Hong Kong

Xu Xu
Henderson State University, Arkadelphia, United States

Yvonne Hunter-Johnson
Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, United States

Abstract

This study was to explore the perceptions of employability, ambition, and university commitment held by students in Human Resource Development (HRD) programs and examine the relationships between these perceptions and other variables (e.g. age, gender, program level, employment status, etc.). A quantitative was conducted through an online survey among students (N=103) in the HRD programs within a midwestern public university in the U.S. A principal component analysis and ordinary least squares regression were conducted. The results of this study would benefit various audiences in making useful decisions for improving academic HRD programs in higher education. The findings could also help students predict their employability and career success, as well as make appropriate decisions to better prepare for their career development in the future. In addition, the findings could facilitate more research on students' career assessment and career development.

Keywords: Self-perceived employability, ambition, university commitment, students in HRD programs

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), approximately 60 percent of working-age people have a job or were looking for one. Formal education is one of the most important investments to increase individuals' human capital (Becker, 1993; Judge et al., 1995). The return on investment of higher education improves individuals' security in the modern labor market and creates more opportunities for them to have successful careers (Becker, 1993; Berntson et al., 2006). Growing attention has been paid to the perception of employability to measure the return on investment of higher education. Previous studies (e. g. Berntson et al., 2006; Wittekind et al., 2010) have indicated that individuals with a higher level of education are more likely to have high perceived employability. Therefore, improving employability remains a public policy concern.

The missions of higher education institutions are to train people for practical work, prepare people for lifelong employment and ensure that individuals are adaptable to changing demands of the labor market (Akdere & Conceição, 2009; Drange et al., 2018; Solbrekke & Karseth, 2006). To that end, the degree programs in the field of Human Resource Development (HRD) focus on providing "people acquire the knowledge and skills needed to establish and progress in a variety of careers, including careers related to training and development, talent development, and organizational development" (Greer & Waight, 2017, p.191). To address the needs of adult students, HRD programs were established to prepare future practitioners, provide continuing professional development, and educate the next generations of researchers and teachers. (Dwyer et al., 2013; Kuchinke, 2002).

It is important to understand the perceived employability of students, which is one of the most significant outcomes of education. However, while there were many studies on HRD academic programs (e.g. Akdere & Conceição, 2009; Dwyer et al., 2013; Greer & Collins, 2017), very few research focused on the HRD students' perceived employability. Only two studies (Greer & Waight, 2017; Niu et al., 2019) have explored the perceived employability and career success among graduates of HRD programs. To address this gap and help higher education institutes develop strategies for employment-

outcomes improvement, the present study aimed to explore the perceptions of employability, ambition, and university commitment held by both undergraduate and graduate students in the HRD programs and examine the relationships between these perceptions and other variables (e.g. age, gender, program level, employment status, etc.).

The results of this study would benefit various audiences in making useful decisions for improving academic HRD programs in higher education through promoting students' employability and career success, as well as make appropriate decisions to better prepare for their career development in the future. In addition, the findings could facilitate more research on students' career assessment and career development. Therefore, the present study was guided by the following two research questions:

1. To what extent do the HRD students perceive their employability, ambition, and university commitment?
2. To what extent are the HRD students' self-perceived employability, their ambition, and university commitment related to other variables (e.g. age, gender, program level, employment status, etc.)?

Literature Review

Perceived Employability

Employability, as a complex and multidimensional concept, refers to a set of achievements, skills, understandings, and personal attributes that enables individuals to gain initial employment, maintain employment and obtain new employment if required (Holland, 2019; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; Van der Heijde & van der Heijden, 2006; Yorke, 2004). Previous studies on employability focused on adaptability to the labor market (Hillage & Pollard, 1998), capacity for learning (Bagshaw, 1996; Lane, et al., 2002), career management and job-search skills (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007), and professional knowledge (Van der Heijden, 2002). Perceived employability focuses on "the perceived ability to attain sustainable employment appropriate to one's qualification level" (Rothwell et al., 2008, p. 2). Individuals' perception of their possibilities of obtaining and maintaining employment is considered one of the most important elements for understanding employability (Lo Presti & Pluviano, 2016; Niu et. al., 2019). Holland (2019) pointed out that employability depends on four key attributes for job seekers on an

individual basis, which includes a) their assets in terms of the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess, b) the way they use and deploy those assets, c) the way they present them the assets to employers, and d) the context (e.g., personal circumstances and labor market environment) within which they see work. In addition, Lo Presti and Pluviano (2016) argued that individuals' perceptions are more important than objective circumstances because accurate perceptions can result in adaptive attitudes and behaviors. Nazar and van der Heijden (2012) noted that employability was related to flexibility and mobility, meaning that individuals within a specific entity or sector might perceive fewer opportunities than those outside of the organization or sector. Baruch (2010) argued that individuals could improve employability by acquiring competencies valued in the labor market, participating in workplace-related training, becoming involved in a well-known project to gain experience and knowledge, and being employed by a reputable organization. On the other hand, organizations could enhance employee employability by providing educational opportunities, but in doing so, they risk employees leaving due to enhanced employability (Baruch, 2010).

The present study utilized Rothwell, et al.'s (2008, 2009) employability theoretical model as the underpinning and theoretical framework. According to Rothwell et al. (2008, 2009), there are four dimensions of self-perceived employability: self-beliefs, the state of the external labor market, the university's reputation, and the field of study. Self-belief refers to the perception of students on their skills and behaviors (Rothwell et al, 2009). The university reputation reflects the perception of university rankings and brand image (Fearn, 2008) and reputation with employers (Murray & Robinson, 2001). The field of study reflects the status and credibility of the study field as a recognition regarding employability outcomes (Mason, et al., 2003). The state of the external labor refers to the concerns of the influence of the external labor market (Bowers-Brown & Harvey, 2004; Brown & Hesketh, 2004). According to Rothwell et al. (2008), they concluded that self-perceived employability was strongly associated with ambition and university commitment, but they were different constructs. While self-perceived employability reflects the capacity of obtaining or maintaining a job in the future, ambition reflects the expectation of future achievement (Rothwell et al., 2008; 2009). In addition, students' commitment to the university reflects the

perception of the university's reputation which is considered as an asset in a crowded labor market (Rothwell et al., 2008; 2009).

Ambition

Ambition is a notion that is closely related to future career success (Rothwell et. al., 2008, 2009), which usually refers to "the persistent and generalized striving for success, attainment, and accomplishment" (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012, p. 759). For example, Elchardus and Smits (2008) indicated that people agreed to describe themselves as ambitious when they entertain plans for their professional development or intent on making a promotion. Judge, et al. (1995) defined career success as "positive psychological or work-related outcomes or achievements one has accumulated as a result of one's work experience" (p. 486). Heslin and Turban (2016) conceived career success as "an emergent process is in line with the notion of a career as an evolving sequence of work experiences over time" (p. 155). Ng et al. (2005) express the definition as "the accumulated positive work and psychological outcomes resulting from one's work experiences" (p. 367). Employability can serve as a proxy for career success, and several recent studies have found a positive correlation between employability and subjective career success (Bozionelos et al., 2016; Verbruggen et al., 2015). Using a decade-long, longitudinal data set of 335 Dutch university graduates, Verbruggen et al., (2015) found that constant underemployment negatively impacted subjective career success five years later. Similarly, a quantitative, questionnaire-based study of 207 information technology professionals working in small and medium-sized enterprises in three European countries indicated that employability was positively related to subjective career success (Bozionelos et al., 2016).

Studies have found that ambition is positively associated with extrinsic success (Ashby & Schoon, 2010; Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). Otto et. al. (2017) studied the impact of career ambition on psychologists' extrinsic and intrinsic career success. While career ambition expresses the motivation to actively further one's career by having a strong focus on one's work life and career in combination with a high motivation to excel, Otto et. al. (2017) argued that individuals with high achievement motivation and with a strong career orientation might be more subject to experience discrepancies between their ideal and real job situation. Thus, they found that career ambition might not be functional for intrinsic

success. In comparing achievement motivation and career orientation, they concluded that achievement motivation was negatively associated with intrinsic success and career orientation is positively associated with extrinsic success.

University Commitment

University commitment has been defined as the students' overall impression, sense of belonging, satisfaction, perception of quality, and willingness to attend a particular university (Braxton et al., 2000; Nora & Cabrera, 1993; Sandler, 2000; Tinto, 1987; Volkwein et al., 2000). This notion of university commitment could be understood based on the concept of career commitment. Career commitment refers to "one's attitude toward one's profession or vocation" (Womack et. al., 2018, p. 167). A three-component model, examining affective, continuance, and normative forms of commitment, has been proposed for studying career commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1984, 1991; Meyer et al., 2002; Womack et. al., 2018). Womack et. al. (2018) indicated that although each form of commitment showed individuals' relationship to their career, the separation of these forms of commitment was important because "each form has been shown to relate differently to other desirable job-related behaviors and attitudes" (p. 167). Recently, the three-component model has been modified for studying academic major commitment (Wowack et. al., 2018; Chang, 2009). Studies showed that one's major was more highly correlated with major commitment than an objective assessment of one's fit (Wessel et al., 2008; Womack, 2018). Graunke and Woosley (2005) conducted a study among 1,093 first-year students and found that there was a significant positive correlation between university commitment and academic major commitment. Strauss and Volkwein (2004) found that the measures of academic integration and growth, as well as the measures of social integration and growth, influenced university commitment more than other factors, such as financial aid, age, ethnicity, and marital status, among first-year students at 28 two-year and 23 four-year public institutions.

University commitment is closely associated with employability and ambitions. Rothwell et. al., 2009) proposed a model with employability, ambition, and university commitment for examining individuals' self-perception of employability and stated that the three components should be considered together since they

are associated positively with individuals' employability. Gunawan et. al. (2019) noted that perceived future employability would "correlate positively with career ambition and university commitment and correlate negatively with career distress" (p. 613). They further pointed out that since career distress reflected negative feelings toward the career decision-making process, it was expected to be associated negatively with perceived future employability. They argued that individuals' view of how employable they would be after graduation is closely related to their "current skills, experience, networks, personal traits, and their current perceived employability" (p. 613).

Other Variables

Researchers have explored the relationship between various factors and the perceived employability, ambition, and university commitment across different populations, contexts, and countries. However, the results of those studies were inconsistent, so it is still necessary to determine how perceptions of employability are related to variables, such as age, gender, educational attainment, employment status, work experience, family responsibility, etc.

Age

Kasler et al. (2017) conducted a study of 584 college seniors in Israel and found that age was not associated with perceived employability. Niu, et al. (2019) found the same result among graduates from a WED program in the U.S. A quantitative study of 480 UK and Australian business undergraduates also demonstrated a lack of correlation between age and perceived employability among Australian students but found a significant, positive association between age and perceived employability among UK students (Jackson & Wilton, 2017).

Gender

According to Greer and Waight (2017), no significant differences were found in either perceived employability or subjective career success based on gender among U.S. HRD-program alumni. Jackson and Wilton (2017) also found no differences in perceived employability between males and females. However, Rothwell and Arnold (2007) found that females were more confident about their employability than were males in a study of 200 UK human resource

professionals. In addition, Boye and Grönlund (2018) noted that women fell behind men on most indicators of labor-market success. In contrast, Vargas et al. (2018) found that, among Spanish students, males possessed higher self-perceived employability than females.

Educational attainment

Rothwell and Arnold (2007) found that educational attainment levels did not significantly influence perceived employability. Drange et al. (2018) demonstrated that educational level was positively related to basic and aspiring employability, as well as career advancement, among Norwegian employees. However, Niu et al. (2019) indicated that compared to the WED graduates with a bachelor's degree, graduates with a Ph.D. had lower perceived employability.

Work experience

According to Thang and Wongsurawat (2016), employability is influenced by the year of graduation due to economic variants of the given country, and people with more work experience are considered more employable. In addition, Qenani et al., (2014) and Jackson and Wilton (2017) found that work experience is positively related to perceived employability. According to Kirves et al. (2014), perceived mobility was positively related to perceived employability among permanent workers.

Employment status

Jackson and Wilton (2017) indicated that employment status is related to perceived employability because being employed enhances confidence. However, Nazar and van der Heijden (2012) found that being employed could lead to less mobility and fewer opportunities in the external labor market. In addition, Vanslambrouck et al. (2019) conducted an in-depth analysis of adult students in a blended environment and concluded that family responsibility is considered as a factor during their study.

Family responsibility

Family responsibilities influence individuals' learning and work. For example, employees, who need to take care of their children, are more likely to have family-work conflicts (Behson, 2002; Carlson, 1999). Also, family responsibilities are reported as the

main reason for reducing actual working hours (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2003). However, no research has investigated the impact of family responsibility on perceived employability.

The Context of HRD Programs

The first HRD program, a master level, was established in the school of education at George Washington University in 1970 (Cho & Zachmeier, 2015; Zachmeier & Cho, 2014). Most programs were established in the 1980s, the amount increased by about 15% in the decade of the 1990s (Kuchinke, 2002). Roberts (2015) identified at least 47 bachelor's degrees, 112 master's degrees, and 44 doctoral programs provided by 107 institutions in the 2015 Human Resource Development Directory of Academic Programs. HRD was conceptualized as a sub-field of practice within the disciplines of education, business, and psychology, so the academic programs of HRD were housed in different programs and departments focused on these three disciplines (Watkins & Marsick, 2016). Therefore, many academic programs did not have "human resource development" in their titles although the programs self-identified as HRD. For example, in the 2015 Human Resource Development Directory of Academic Programs (Roberts 2015), the variety of program names included Workforce Education and Development (WED), Human Resource and Workforce Development, Organizational Development, and Training and Development, etc.

As Human Resource Development (HRD) programs continue to develop in the United States, HRD programs experience strong demand with increased enrollments of students. The students of HRD programs include individuals who are already employed in the field of HRD and who plan to enter the field (Watkins & Marsick, 2016). The focuses of HRD programs are learning and improving performance (Watkins & Marsick, 2016). The undergraduate and graduate degree programs in the field of HRD continue to proliferate to create work-ready graduates (Akdere & Conceição, 2009). Students could gain professional opportunities in the organizations through studying in those degree programs (Jacobs, 2006).

Methods

The purpose of this study was to validate a self-perceived employability instrument among students in the HRD programs. Also, the present study aimed to explore the perceptions of employability, ambition, and university commitment held by students in the HRD programs and examine the relationships between these perceptions and other variables (e.g. age, gender, program level, employment status, etc.). To address the research questions, a quantitative study was conducted through an online survey among students of HRD academic programs within a midwestern public university in the U.S. The survey included demographic questions and a Likert scale questionnaire consisting of employability scale items, ambition scale items, and university commitment scale items (Rothwell et al., 2008). Participants were recruited via email through program professors and lecturers during 2018-2019.

Instrument

This study utilized Rothwell et al.'s (2008) instrument, including 16 self-perceived employability items, six ambition items, and seven university commitment items. Rothwell et al. (2008) reported that the alpha internal reliability coefficients were .75, .60, and .87 for self-perceived employability items, ambition items, and university commitment items among undergraduate students in the UK. Then, Rothwell et al. (2009) used the same instruments among graduated students in the UK and reported that the alpha internal reliability coefficients were .84, .61, and .90 for self-perceived employability items, ambition items, and university commitment items. Each item was scored on a Likert scale: strongly disagree (SD=1), disagree (D=2), neutral (N=3), agree (A=4), and strongly agree (SA=5). Participants were also asked to complete demographic-information questions about their age, gender, ethnicity, program level (undergraduate or graduate), enrollment status (on-campus or off-campus; undergraduate or graduate; the standing year), employment status, and family responsibility.

Participants and Sampling

The target population for this study is students in the HRD program at a Midwest, state university. A convenience sampling was conducted, which was used to identify and contact potential participants where researchers possess "limited resources available for sampling" (Gliner et al., 2011, p. 125). One hundred and fifteen

students participated in this study; however, 12 participants skipped several instrument items, therefore, 103 participants' responses were utilized in data analysis. Participants' ages ranged from 20 to 61 (*mean* =37.78, *SD* = 10.666). Table 1 shows the participants' demographic information.

Table 1

Demographic Information of Participants

Variables	**n**	**%**
Gender		
Male	48	46.6%
Female	52	50.5%
Not indicated	3	2.9%
Ethnicity		
Asian	6	5.8%
Black or African American	23	22.3%
Hispanic or Latino	7	6.8%
White	56	54.4%
Other	8	7.8%
Not indicated	3	2.9%
Are you currently enrolled as:		
On-campus student	27	26.2%
Off-campus student	74	71.8%
Not indicated	2	1.9%
Program level		
Undergraduate	55	53.4%
Graduate	46	44.7%
Not indicated	2	1.9%
What year of your program are you presently in?		
1st	25	24.3%
2nd	19	18.4%
3rd	16	15.5%
4th	29	28.2%
5th	4	3.9%
6 and more	4	3.9%
Not indicated	6	5.8%
What is your current employment status?		
Full time	73	70.9%
Part time	16	15.5%
Unemployed	12	11.7%

Not indicated	2	1.9%
How many hours do you work per week?		
0 – 10	11	10.7%
11 – 20	15	14.6%
21 – 30	7	6.8%
31 – 40	37	35.9%
41+	31	30.1%
Not indicated	2	1.9%
Do you supervise any other staff?		
Yes	45	43.7%
No	52	50.5%
Not indicated	6	5.8%
Do you have children who live with you?		
Yes	56	54.4%
No	44	42.7%
Not indicated	3	2.9%
Total	103	100%

Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis and inferential statistical data analysis were conducted based on the research questions. A principal component analysis (PCA) was also conducted to explore and confirm the related measures. PCA is concerned with "how a particular variable might contribute to that component" (Field, 2009, p. 638). Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was used on the self-perceived employability, ambition, and university commitment scales to explore the relationship between the students' perceptions and other variables. OLS regression "usually produce[s] unbiased estimates for the regression coefficients themselves" (LaHuis et al., 2014, p. 5) and applies to "data with correlated disturbances results in coefficient estimators that are unbiased but inefficient and standard errors that are biased" (Moulton, 1990, p. 334).

Results

A PCA was conducted on the sixteen self-perceived employability, six ambition, and eight university commitment items. The *Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)* measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis. For the full 29 items, *KMO* = .8892, and all KMO values for each item were over .74, which are well above the acceptable limit of .5 (Field, 2009). Bartlett's test of sphericity (*Chi-*

square = 2025.339, p <0.000) indicated that correlations between items were sufficiently large for PCA. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistic and the rotated component matrix of all 29 items. Mean scores for perceived employability items ranged from 4.3883 to 2.8252, and only one item's (Emp7) mean score was less than 3, so the students were confident in their employability. Mean scores for ambition items ranged from 4.5049 to 4.2136, and all of the items had a mean score larger than 4, so the students were more likely confident in their ambition than employability. Mean scores for university commitment items ranged from 3.6505 to 4.1748, and all of the items had a mean score larger than 3.6, so the students were more likely confident in their university commitment than employability.

The three rotated components explained 23.69, 19.67, and 14.34 percent of the total variance respectively. The items that clustered on the same components suggested that Component 1 represented the university commitment; Component 2 represented self-perceived employability; and Component 3 represented the ambition. Items UC1-UC7 had loadings of .2712 to .3879 on Component 1. These seven university commitment items had high reliability (*Cronbach's Alphas =0.8762*). Items A1, A4, A5, and A6 had loadings of .3440 to .3854 on Component 3. The reliability of four ambition items was *Cronbach's Alphas = 0.8317*. The items A2 and A3 failed to make the .25 cut-off criterion, so they were removed from the data analysis in the next step. Items Emp3-5, Emp8-11, and Emp13 had loadings of .2773 to .3877 on Component 2. The eight employability items also have high reliability (*Cronbach's Alphas = 0.9406*). Items Emp1, Emp2, Emp6, Emp7, Emp12, and Emp14-16 failed to make the cut-off criterion, so they were removed for the next step data analysis.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistic and Rotated Component Matrix of the Scales for Employability, Ambition, and University Commitment

Items	**M**	**SD**	**Comp 1**	**Comp 2**	**Comp 3**
Emp1. I achieve high grades in relation to my studies.	4.3883	.7440			.4434
Emp2. I regard my academic work as a top priority.	4.2843	.8370			

Emp3. Employers are eager to employ graduates from my university.	3.4466	.8601		.2773	
Emp4. The status of this university is a significant asset to me in job seeking.	3.6214	1.0301		.3206	
Emp5. Employers specifically target this university in order to recruit individuals from my subject area(s).	3.2621	.9178		.2831	
Emp6. My university has an outstanding reputation in my field(s) of study.	3.8058	.9606			
Emp7. A lot more people apply for my degree than there are places available.	2.8252	.8792			
Emp8. My chosen subject(s) rank(s) highly in terms of social status.	3.2233	.8624		.3143	
Emp9. People in the career I am aiming for are in high demand in the external labor market.	3.6990	.8726		.3877	
Emp10. My degree is seen as leading to a specific career that is generally perceived as highly desirable.	3.7184	.7849		.3622	
Emp11. There is generally a strong	3.5340	.8946		.3132	

demand for graduates at the present time.					
Emp12. There are plenty of job vacancies in the geographical area where I am looking.	3.1942	1.0006			
Emp13. I can easily find out about opportunities in my chosen field	3.8431	.8871		.2795	
Emp14. The skills and abilities that I possess are what employers are looking for.	3.9320	.8076			
Emp15. I am generally confident of success in job Interviews and selection events.	4.0000	.8284			
Emp16. I feel I could get any job so long as my skills and experience are reasonably relevant.	4.0194	.8162			
A1. I want to be in a position to do mostly work which I really like.	4.4660	.7115			.3854
A2. I am satisfied with the progress I have made meeting my goals for the development of new skills.	4.2330	.7567			
A3. I have clear goals for what I want to achieve in life.	4.2136	.8123			

A4. I regard myself as highly ambitious.	4.2233	.8036			.3440
A5. I feel it is urgent that I get on with my career development.	4.2912	.8475			.3523
A6. What I do in the future is really important.	4.5049	.6984			.3469
UC1. I talk up this university to my friends as a great university to be at.	4.0000	1.0098	.3241		
UC2. I find that my values and this university's values are very similar.	3.9126	.9712	.3478		
UC3. I am proud to tell others that I am at this university.	4.1373	.9444	.3773		
UC4. Being at this university really inspires the best in me in the way of study performance.	3.9709	1.0238	.3879		
UC5. I am extremely glad I chose this university over others I was considering at the time I joined.	4.0291	.9747	.3480		
UC6. I really care about this university and its future.	4.1748	.9643	.2712		
UC7. For me this is the best of all universities to be a member of.	3.6505	1.0375	.2838		

Note. Blanks are abs (loading) < .25

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations of three variables, including self-perceived employability, ambition, and

university commitment. The total mean scores of self-perceived employability items, ambition items, university commitment items were larger than 3.5, so the students were confident in these measures. The results showed that self-perceived employability was significantly positively correlated with ambition ($r = .3631$, $p < .001$) and university commitment ($r = .6443$, $p < .001$). In addition, ambition is significantly positively correlated with university commitment ($r = .5050$, $p < .001$).

Table 3: *Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations*

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Self-perceived Employability	3.5421	.6531	1.000		
2. Ambition	4.3713	.6192	.3631*	1.000	
3. University Commitment	3.9815	.8490	.6443*	.5280*	1

Note. *$p < .001$

Table 4 presents the OLS regression results for self-perceived employability, ambition, and university commitment. Thirteen participants were dropped off in the OLS regression because they skipped some demographic questions. The results indicated that ambition was negatively significantly influenced by age, and neither self-perceived employability nor university commitment was significantly affected by the student's age. None of them was significantly influenced by individuals' gender.

There was no difference in self-perceived employability, ambition, and university commitment among programs, such between graduate and undergraduate, or between on-campus or off-campus. The students who were in the 5th year of the program significantly had more confidence in ambition, compared to the students who had stayed shorter or longer in the program. However, as students stayed longer, they had lower and lower university commitments. Compared to the students with part-time jobs or unemployment, students with full-time employment had higher self-perceived employability, ambition, and university commitment. However, the number of work hours had a negatively significant effect. In addition, the students with supervision responsibility in their workplace had higher self-perceived employability, ambition, and university commitment. Interestingly, having children does not significantly influence students' perception of employability or ambition, but does negatively affect university commitment.

Table 4: *OLS Regression Results*

Variables	**Self-Perceived Employability**	**Ambition**	**University Commitment**
Age	-.0006	-.0141*	.0162
	(.0087)	(.0084)	(.0108)
Gender			
Male	0	0	0
	(.)	(.)	(.)
Female	-.1717	.1939	-.1433
	(.1714)	(.1548)	(.2031)
Are you currently enrolled as:			
On campus student	0	0	0
	(.)	(.)	(.)
Off campus student	.0864	-.1477	.2704
	(.1953)	(.1619)	(.197)
Program level			
Undergraduate	0	0	0
	(.)	(.)	(.)
Graduate	-.2227	-.2878	-.0467
	(.2388)	(.2114)	(.2775)
What year of your program are you presently in?			
1st	0	0	0
	(.)	(.)	(.)
2nd	.0858	.0173	-.2091
	(.1957)	(.1899)	(.2214)
3rd	-.3707	-.057	-1.009***
	(.268)	(.204)	(.2705)
4th	-.2555	-.1722	-.673***
	(.1968)	(.2036)	(.2528)
5th	.0441	.3814**	-.3315
	(.3162)	(.1875)	(.2907)
6 and more	-.5599	-.1048	-.9692***

	(.4044)	(.2828)	(.3408)
What is your current employment status:			
Full time	0	0	0
	(.)	(.)	(.)
Part time	-.7923**	-.7252**	-.9761**
	(.3571)	(.3519)	(.4597)
Unemployed	-.8849***	-.4803	-1.124***
	(.2968)	(.3661)	(.3978)
How many hours do you work per week?			
0 - 10	0	0	0
	(.)	(.)	(.)
11 - 20	-.1917	-.7688**	-.8236*
	(.333)	(.3213)	(.4198)
21 - 30	-.2886	-.0923	-.3253
	(.4437)	(.2832)	(.4003)
31 - 40	-.8487**	-.8248**	-1.148**
	(.3475)	(.4079)	(.4846)
41+	-1.022***	-.8739**	-1.215**
	(.3654)	(.4356)	(.5156)
Do you supervise any other staff?			
Yes	0	0	0
	(.)	(.)	(.)
No	-.4034**	-.2493*	-.4758**
	(.1527)	(.1333)	(.1844)
Do you have children who live with you?			
Yes	0	0	0
	(.)	(.)	(.)
No	-.2438	.0304	-.3421*
	(.1546)	(.1579)	(.1831)
_cons	5.536***	6.27***	5.906***
	(.6461)	(.6374)	(.7747)
N	90	90	90

Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$. Standard deviations in parentheses.

Discussion

This study was conducted to explore the perceptions of employability, ambition, and university commitment held by students in the HRD programs and examine the relationships between these perceptions and other variables (e.g. age, gender, program level, employment status, etc.). The finding reported that students had higher ambition than the confidence of employability, which was opposite to the results of Greer and Waight's (2017) study among HRD-program graduates. Compared to graduates, the students were still in the progress of the study so they might have more uncertain factors in employability. At the same time, students were still in the early stage of their careers, so they might have higher expectations about their future success. The results also found that self-perceived employability was positively correlated with ambition and university commitment, which supported and extended previous studies (Rothwell et al., 2008; 2009). Students with higher confidence in employability were probably having higher career ambition and university commitment.

Regarding the associations between other variables and perceptions of employability, ambition, and university commitment, the results of this study revealed that perceived employability and university commitment were not affected by age. This finding was confirmed by previous studies (Kasler et al., 2017; Niu et al., 2019). However, older students were more likely to have less ambition. Older students might experience a difficult career transition and have lower expectations for their career success. No difference in perceived employability, ambition, and university commitment is found based on gender in this study. The result is consistent with the previous studies (Greer & Waight, 2017; Jackson & Wilton, 2017). Compared to undergraduate students, graduate students do not believe they are more employable or have a higher ambition or university commitment in this study. This result is different from previous research (Drange et al., 2018; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). According to Torpey and Watson (2014), only around 3% of all jobs in the United States labor markets required a doctoral degree or professional degree. Therefore, the labor market for people with a higher level of education is smaller.

Compared to the students who had stayed shorter or longer in the program, the students who were in the 5th year in the program significantly had more confidence in ambition. As students gain more knowledge and skills, students have more ambition. However,

students might incur barriers or difficulties in their studying if they used more than five years to complete the program, so they might have less ambition. Those who were employed in full-time positions while enrolled as students had more confidence in their employability, ambition, and university commitment. Being employed during one's studies leads to additional workplace experience, as well as the application of what was being studied (Jackson & Wilton, 2017). As a result, these individuals might develop more hands-on experience in honing relevant skill sets, as well as an enhanced understanding of the applicability of such skills. Additionally, they had more opportunities to develop a professional network. Therefore, they may feel more confident in their employability and ambition.

Implications

Practical Implications

The present study has validated the self-perceived employability instrument (Rothwell et al., 2008; 2009) among students in HRD programs. Also, it has identified the perceptions of students' employability and its' factors. Therefore, the results may be useful to faculty, students, researchers, and policy makers in higher education. The study has shown students with full-time jobs were more likely to have higher confidence in employability. It is important for students that could have opportunities to practice their academically-acquired knowledge in the workplace and gain hands-on experience. Therefore, employers and higher education institutes should work together to create more practice opportunities for students. For example, employers could provide more internship opportunities, and higher education institutes should provide more support for their students to obtain the opportunities. Also, more transition training should be offered to prepare students for career/workplace entry and furnish a solid understanding of employers' demands (Ishengoma & Vaaland, 2016). This study provided evidence of the validity of Rothwell et al. (2008; 2009) scale of perceived employability among students in the HRD program. As a result, researchers can be confident of their use in future studies. Also, both enrolled students and potential students can use this instrument to predict their employability, which could help them make career-related decisions. For example, enrolled students could use the results of the instrument to decide any efforts they should make to improve their employability. Potential students could use the results to decide

if they invest themselves through higher education. Moreover, higher education institutes could use the information to recruit and attract students.

Future Research

The sample size of participants is too small to conduct further analysis, such as confirmatory factor analysis, to verify the construct validity. Future studies should recruit more participants. In addition, this study did not verify the test-retest reliability. Future studies could conduct two waves or enlarge the sample size to enable it to do that. Moreover, the instrument used in this study was a self-report measure, so it may not reflect students' employability realistically. A longitudinal study could be conducted to investigate the students' employment status and career path after graduation. The sample of this study was from only one university, so the findings may be not generalized to students in other universities. Future research could include students across different universities.

It is important to learn the perceived employability of students in the degree programs in higher education institutes, which underlie the quantitative survey responses demonstrated by this study. Therefore, qualitative studies should be conducted to explore what skills or abilities students could obtain or improve, which help them succeed in the workplace. Also, the degree programs could improve their quality after understanding the needs to improve students' employability. Moreover, future studies could explore more variables that influence employability. Also, it is important to learn about employers' perspectives regarding their potential employees' employability.

References

Akdere, M., & Conceição, S. C. O. (2009). An assessment of graduate adult education and human resource development programs: A U.S. perspective. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, *23*(4), 38–50. https://doi.org/10.1002/nha3.10358

Ashby, J. S., & Schoon, I. (2010). Career success: The role of teenage career aspirations, ambition value and gender in predicting adult social status and earnings. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *77*(3), 350-360. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2010.06.006

Bagshaw, M. (1996). Creating Employability: how can training and development square the circle between individual and corporate interest? *Industrial and Commercial Training, 28*(1), 16-18.

Baruch, Y. (2010). Employability: a substitute for loyalty? *Human Resource Development International, 4*(4), 543-566. https://doi.org/10.1080/136788600100245l8

Becker, G. (1993) *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis with special reference to education* (3rd ed.). The University of Chicago Press.

Behson, S. J. (2002). Which Dominates? The relative importance of work–family organizational support and general organizational context on employee outcomes. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *61*(1), 53–72. https://doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.2001.1845

Berntson, E., Sverke, M., & Marklund, S. (2006). Predicting perceived employability: Human capital or labour market opportunities? *Economic and Industrial Democracy, 27*(2), 223-244. https://doi.org/10.1177/0143831X06063098

Bowers-Brown, T., & Harvey, L. (2004). Are there too many graduates in the UK? *Industry and Higher Education 12,* 243–254.

Boye, K., & Grönlund, A. (2018). Workplace skill investments–an early career glass ceiling? Job complexity and wages among young professionals in Sweden. *Work, Employment and Society*, *32*(2), 368-386.

Bozionelos, N., Kostopoulos, K., Van der Heijden, B., Rousseau, D. M., Bozionelos, G., Hoyland, T., & Mikkelsen, A. (2016). Employability and job performance as links in the relationship between mentoring receipt and career success: A study in SMEs. *Group & organization management*, *41*(2), 135-171.

Braxton, J. M., Milem, J. F., & Sullivan, A. S. (2000). The influence of active learning on the college student departure process. *Journal of Higher Education, 71*(5), 569–590.

Brown, P., & Hesketh, A. (2004). *The Mismanagement of talent: Employability and jobs in the knowledge economy.* Oxford University Press.

Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2018). *Labor force statistics from the current population survey.* https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNS12300000

Carlson, D. S. (1999). Personality and role variables as predictors of three forms of work–family conflict. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *55*(2), 236–253. https://doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.1999.1680

Chang, Z. (2009). *An investigation of contextual factors and dispositional characteristics in the career development of Hmong American and Caucasian American college students: A comparison study using a social cognitive career theory perspective* (UMNI No. 3373381) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database.

Cho, Y., & Zachmeier, A. (2015). HRD educators' views on teaching and learning: An international perspective. *Advances in Developing Human Resources, 17*, 145-161.

Drange, I., BernstrÃ¸m, V. H., & Mamelund, S.-E. (2018). Are you moving up or falling short? An inquiry of skills-based variation in self-perceived employability among Norwegian employees. *Work, Employment & Society*, *32*(2), 387–406. https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017017749720

Dwyer, D., Thompson, D. E., & Thompson, C. K. (2013). Adult learners' perceptions of an undergraduate HRD degree completion programme: Reasons for entering, attitudes towards programme and impact of programme. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, *38*(2), 131–141. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2011.608906

Elchardus, M., & Smits, W. (2008). The vanishing flexible: Ambition, self-realization and flexibility in the career perspectives of young Belgian adults. *Work, Employment and Society*, *22*(2), 243-262. https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017008089103

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2003). *Work time preferences and work-life balance in the EU: Some policy considerations for enhancing for quality of life,* European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Dublin.

Fearn, H. (2008). Makeover Mania. *Times Higher Education, 6,* 39–43.

Field, A. (2009). *Discovering statistics using SPSS.* Sage Publications.

Gliner, J. A., Morgan, G. A., & Leech, N. L. (2011). *Research methods in applied settings: An integrated approach to design and analysis*. Routledge.

Graunke, S. S., & Woosley, S. A. (2005). An exploration of the factors that affect the academic success of college sophomores. *College Student Journal, 39*, 367–376.

Greer, T. W., & Collins, J. C. (2017). Leveraging research to advance undergraduate HRD education: An introduction. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, *19*(2), 115–123. https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422317695200

Greer, T. W., & Waight, C. L. (2017). The value of an undergraduate HRD degree: An exploratory investigation of perceived employability and career success. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, *19*(2), 190-206.

Gunawan, W., Creed, P. A., & Glendon, A. I. (2019). Development and initial validation of a perceived future employability scale for young adults. *Journal of Career Assessment*, *27*(4), 610–627. https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072718788645

Heslin, P. A., & Turban, D. B. (2016). Enabling career success as an emergent process. *Organizational Dynamics. 45*(3), 155-164. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2016.07.001

Hillage, J. & Pollard, E. (1998), Employability: Developing a framework for policy analysis, *Institute for Employment Studies Research Report RR85*, DfEE.

Holland, B. (2019). The design and uses of an employability index to evaluate the vertical workforce development process. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, *31*(2), 41–59. https://doi.org/10.1002/nha3.20249

Ishengoma, E., & Vaaland, T. I. (2016). Can university-industry linkages stimulate student employability? *Education+ Training*, *58*(1), 18–44. https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-11-2014-0137.

Jackson, D., & Wilton, N. (2017). Perceived employability among undergraduates and the importance of career self-management, work experience and individual characteristics. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *36*(4), 747-762.

Jacobs, R. L. (2006). Perspectives on adult education, human resource development, and the emergence of workforce

development. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, *20*(1), 21-31.
Judge, T. A., & Kammeyer-Mueller, J. D. (2012). On the value of aiming high: The causes and consequences of ambition. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *97*(4), 758-775. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0028084
Judge, T. A., Cable, D. M., Boudreau, J. W., & Bretz, R. D. (1995). An empirical investigation of the predictors of executive career success. *Personnel Psychology*, *48*(3), 485–519. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.1995.tb01767.x
Kasler, J., Zysberg, L., & Harel, N. (2017). Hopes for the future: demographic and personal resources associated with self-perceived employability and actual employment among senior year students. *Journal of Education and Work*, *30*(8), 881-892.
Kirves, K., Kinnunen, U., & De Cuyper, N. (2014). Contract type, perceived mobility and optimism and antecedents of perceived employability. *Economic and Industrial Democracy, 35*(3), 435–453.
Kuchinke, K. P. (2002). Passions for excellence: HRD graduate programs at US universities. In *Academy of Human Resource Development proceedings, Baton Rouge, LA*. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED474240.pdf#page=82
LaHuis, D. M., Hartman, M. J., Hakoyama, S., & Clark, P. C. (2014). Explained variance measures for multilevel models. *Organizational Research Methods, 17,* 433–451. https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428114541701.
Lane, D., Puri, A., Cleverly, P., Wylie, R., and Rajan, A. (2002). Employability: Bridging the gap between rhetoric and reality. *Second report: Employee's perspective.* Create Consultancy/Professional Development Foundation.
Lo Presti, A., & Pluviano, S. (2016). Looking for a route in turbulent waters: Employability as a compass for career success. *Organizational Psychology Review*, *6*(2), 192–211. https://doi.org/10.1177/2041386615589398.
Mason, G., Williams, G., Cranmer, S., & Guile, D. (2003). How much does higher education enhance the employability of graduates? *Higher Education Funding Council for England*.
Meyer, J. P., & Allen, N. J. (1984). Testing the "side-bet theory" of organizational commitment: Some methodological

considerations. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *69*(3), 372–378. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.69.3.372

Meyer, J. P., & Allen, N. J. (1991). A three-component conceptualization of organizational commitment. *Human Resource Management Review*, *1*(1), 61–89. https://doi.org/10.1016/1053-4822(91)90011-Z

Moulton, B. R. (1990). An illustration of a pitfall in estimating the effects of aggregate variables on micro units. *The Review of Economics and Statistics, 72*(2), 334-338.

Murray, S., & Robinson, H. (2001). Graduates into sales—employer, student and university perspectives. *Education and Training, 43*(3), 139–144.

Nazar, G., & van der Heijden, B. (2012). Career identity and its impact upon self-perceived employability among Chilean male middle-aged managers. *Human Resource Development International, 15*(2), 141-156.

Ng, T. W. H., Eby, L. T., Sorensen, K. L., & Feldman, D. C. (2005). Predictors of objective and subjective career success: A meta-analysis. *Personnel Psychology, 58,* 367-408.

Niu, Y., Hunter-Johnson, Y., Xu, X., & Liu, T. (2019). Self-perceived employability and subjective career success: Graduates of a workforce education and development program. *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, *67*(2–3), 55–71. https://doi.org/10.1080/07377363.2019.1660843

Nora, A., & Cabrera, A. F. (1993). The construct validity of institutional commitment: A confirmatory factor analysis. *Research in Higher Education, 34*(2), 243–262.

Otto, K., Roe, R., Sobiraj, S., Baluku, M. M., & Garrido Vásquez, M. E. (2017). The impact of career ambition on psychologists' extrinsic and intrinsic career success: The less they want, the more they get. *Career Development International*, *22*(1), 23–36. https://doi.org/10.1108/CDI-06-2016-0093.

Qenani, E., MacDougall, N., & Sexton, C. (2014). An empirical study of self-perceived employability: Improving the prospects for student employment success in an uncertain environment. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, *15*(3), 199-213.

Roberts, P. B. (Ed.). (2015). *Human resource development directory of academic programs in the United States.* The University of Texas at Tyler.

Rothwell, A., & Arnold, J. (2007). Self-perceived employability: Development and validation of a scale. *Personnel Review*, *36*(1), 23–41.

Rothwell, A., Herbert, I., & Rothwell, F. (2008). Self-perceived employability: Construction and initial validation of a scale for university students. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *73*(1), 1-12.

Rothwell, A., Jewell, S., & Hardie, M. (2009). Self-perceived employability: Investigating the responses of post-graduate students. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *75*(2), 152-161. doi: 10.1016/j.jvb.2009.05.002

Sandler, M. E. (2000). Career decision-making self-efficacy, perceived stress, and an integrated model of student persistence: A structural model of finances, attitudes, behavior and career development. *Research in Higher Education, 41*(5), 537–580.

Solbrekke, T. D., & Karseth, B. (2006). Professional responsibility -- An issue for higher education? *Higher Education, 52*(1), 95–119. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10734-004-5762-5

Strauss, L. C., & Volkwein, J. F. (2004). Predictors of student commitment at two-year and four-year institutions. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *75*(2), 203-227. doi: 10.1080/00221546.2004.11778903

Thang, P. V. M., & Wongsurawat, W. (2016). Enhancing the employability of IT graduates in Vietnam. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, *6*(2), 146-161.

Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. University of Chicago Press.

Van der Heijde, C. M., & Van der Heijden, B. I. (2006). A competence-based and multidimensional operationalization and measurement of employability. *Human Resource Management*, *45*(3), 449-476.

Van der Heijden, B. (2002). Prerequisites to guarantee life-long employability. *Personnel Review*, *31*(1), 44-61.

Vanslambrouck, S., Zhu, C., Pynoo, B., Thomas, V., Lombaerts, K., & Tondeur, J. (2019). An in-depth analysis of adult students in blended environments: Do they regulate their learning in an ‘old school’ way? *Computers & Education*, *128*, 75-87.

Vargas, R., Sánchez-Queija, M. I., Rothwell, A., & Parra, Á. (2018). Self-perceived employability in Spain. *Education+ Training*, *60*(3), 226-237.

Verbruggen, M., van Emmerik, H., Van Gils, A., Meng, C., & de Grip, A. (2015). Does early-career underemployment impact future career success? A path dependency perspective. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *90*, 101-110.

Volkwein, J. F., Valle, S., Blose, G. & Zhou,Y. (2000). *A Multi-Campus Study of Academic Performance and Cognitive Growth among Native Freshman, Two-year Transfers, and Four-year Transfers*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Association for Institutional Research Forum, Cincinnati, OH.

Watkins, K. E., & Marsick, V. J. (2016). Development of academic programs in human resource development in the United States. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, *18*(4), 467–480. https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422316660967

Wessel, J. L., Ryan, A., & Oswald, F. L. (2008). The relationship between objective and perceived fit with academic major, adaptability, and major-related outcomes. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 72*, 363–376.

Wittekind, A., Raeder, S., & Grote, G. (2010). A longitudinal study of determinants of perceived employability. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *31*(4), 566–586. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.646

Womack, A., Leuty, M. E., Bullock-Yowell, E., & Mandracchia, J. T. (2018). Understanding commitment: Relations between major commitment, satisfaction, involvement, fit, university commitment, and intention to quit. *Journal of Career Development*, *45*(2), 166–182. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845316676904

Yorke, M. 2004. Employability in the undergraduate curriculum: Some student perspectives. *European Journal of Education, 39*(4), 409– 27.

Zachmeier, A., & Cho, Y. (2014). Taking stock of the literature on HRD education. *European Journal of Training and Development, 38*, 347-363.

Author Bios

YUANLU NIU (corresponding author), PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Human Resource and Workforce Development at the University of Arkansas in the United States. Her research focuses on lookism in the workplace, career development, human resource development, women's studies, and workforce diversity.
Email: yn005@uark.edu

XU XU, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Economics and Data Analytics at the School of Business at Henderson State University in the United States. Her research examines the flow of people, which includes international migration as well as international tourism, and specifically, her work empirically measures the determinants of such cross-border movement; studies how factors such as the exchange of information affecting the flow.
Email: xux@hsu.edu

YIDAN ZHU, PhD, is a Research Assistant Professor at Lingnan University in Hong Kong. Her research addresses three focal areas: 1) adult learning in multicultural contexts; 2) professional learning and health professions education; and 3) ageing adult education.
Email: yidanzhu@LN.edu.hk

YVONNE HUNTER-JOHNSON holds a PhD in Adult Education with emphasis in Human Resource Development and Research and Evaluation from University of South Florida. Currently, she is an Associate Professor at Southern Illinois University (Carbondale) in the department of Workforce Education and Development. Dr. Hunter-Johnson's research interests include (a) Adult learners and learning, (veterans and international students), (b) Career Transition (veteran and international students), (c) Transfer of Training, (d) Learning Organizations, (e) Motivation to Learn, and (f) Employability and Support Systems in Higher Education. Dr. Hunter-Johnson is actively involved in the field of Adult Education, Workforce Education, and Human Resource Development.
Email: Yvonne.hunter-johnson@siu.edu