

Exploring Self-Perceived Employability and Ambition of Student Veterans in a Higher Education Institution in the United States

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ABSTRACT

In this study, we explore the perceived employability and ambition of student veterans, compare the perceived employability and ambition of student veterans and civilian students, and examine the impact of other variables (e.g., age, gender, GPA, etc.) on student veterans' perceived employability and ambition. An online survey was conducted among 85 students, including 37 veterans and 48 civilian students. The results show that most of the investigated student veterans were confident in their employability and future career success. In addition, student veterans had slightly lower perceived employability and ambition than either active military members or civilian students. The result of descriptive analysis showed clues that explained how other variables impacted the perceived employability and ambition of student veterans.

Keywords: ambition, career success, perceived employability, student veterans

INTRODUCTION

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020), there are 20.4 million veterans in the U.S. Approximately 200,000 veterans transition from the military each year; by the end of 2048, the number of veterans is projected to grow by more than 4.8 million (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2020). Veterans still face challenges in finding and securing careers in civilian workplaces. According to Curry et al. (2014), many veterans are concerned about employment prospects during the transition to civilian life. In addition, obtaining employment is a top priority among veterans in their transition (Perkins et al., 2017). One mission of higher education is to help adults improve “job or career enhancement and job stability” (Patterson & Paulson, 2016, p. 13). The U.S. government has provided U.S. Military veterans with financial assistance for attending college through the GI Bill of Rights since 1944 (Vacchi, 2012). As a result, many veterans decide to enroll in higher education following military service. Educational benefits offer a key incentive in the enlistment decisions of service members and veterans, which also becomes the most commonly cited reason for joining the military (DiRamio, et al., 2008; Vacchi, 2012). For example, returning from the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, approximately 2.3 million veterans chose to enroll in college as a method of reintegration (Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, 2010). There were an estimated 1,132,860 military-connected individuals in college in the 2011-12 academic year (Molina & Morse, 2017). Therefore, veterans in higher education are a growing population of nontraditional students, which is an important group of students with future expectations of employment.

Previous studies have examined veterans’ transition into higher educational experiences (Ackerman et al., 2009; Livingston et al., 2013) and addressed higher education as a tool for veterans’ transition to the civilian workforce (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2020; Minnis, 2014). However, there is a gap in the literature regarding how student veterans perceive their employment prospects and future career success, which are significant indicators of learning outcomes. Higher education needs to understand student veterans’ perceptions of employability and future career success so that higher education can identify strategies to improve student veterans’ employability and meet their needs. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the perceived employability and ambition of student veterans, compare the perceived employability and ambition of student veterans and civilian students, and examine the impact of other variables (e.g., age, gender, GPA, etc.) on student veterans’ perceived employability and ambition. The following three research questions guided the study design.

1. What are the levels of perceived employability and ambition for student veterans?

2. To what extent is the perceived employability and ambition of student veterans different from those of students who are active service members and civilian students?

3. How do the other variables (e.g., age, gender, GPA, etc.) influence student veterans' perceived employability and ambition?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concepts of Perceived Employability

Employability has been defined as “having the capability to gain initial employment, maintain employment and obtain new employment if required” (Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Holland, 2019). According to the literature, perceived employability refers to individuals' perceptions in terms of their capacity to obtain and retain a job (Álvarez-González et al., 2017; Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Kim et al., 2015; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). Different models have been proposed and utilized for studying perceived employability. A group of scholars used human capital theory to study employability (Becker, 1993; Berntson et al., 2006). Human capital theory suggests that human capital has been seen as an investment related to promotion, higher pay, and career success, which helps to increase one's work experience and competence (Berntson et al., 2006). Researchers have also adopted social cognitive career theory (SCCT) to study perceived employability (Lent et al., 1994; Lent et al., 2000). The SCCT is a model of career development that examines the impacts of person inputs, contextual affordances, and sociocognitive variables on the formation of vocational interests, career goals, and actions (Lent et al., 1994). According to the SCCT, perceived employability, influencing individuals' career choice and interests, has been seen as a strong predictor of an individual's ability to find employment. Furthermore, some scholars have used career construction theory to study employability, which provides a way of thinking about how individuals choose and use work to explain career choice and different aspects of vocational behavior and perceived employability (Savickas, 2005).

Rothwell et al. (2008, 2009) proposed that perceived employability has four dimensions: self-beliefs, field of study, state of the external labor market, and university reputation. Self-beliefs refer to students' perceptions of their skills and behaviors, such as confidence in their skill and ability (Rothwell et al., 2009). The field of the study refers to the status and credibility of the study field (Mason et al., 2003). The state of external labor refers to the impacts of the external labor market on employability (Bowers-Brown & Harvey, 2004; Brown & Hesketh, 2004). University reputation refers to university rankings and brand image (Fearn, 2008), as well as the reputation with employers (Murray & Robinson, 2001).

Scholars have pointed out that perceived employability is formed by individual factors, personal circumstances, and external factors (McQuaid &

Lindsay, 2005). Individual factors include individuals' assets in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes for employment as well as the way they present these assets to their employers. Personal circumstances include the context relating to individuals' employment and career choice. External factors include the labor market environment and local and global circumstances. Understanding both internal and external factors could help to better explore the formation of employability.

Concepts of Ambition

Ambition is closely related to career success, which is strongly associated with perceived employability (Rothwell et al., 2008). The notion of ambition has been conceptualized to better study the influence of ambition on career success. Elchardus and Smits (2008) pointed out that people are ambitious "when they entertain plans and goals for their professional future, are intent on making promotion and on realizing a 'nice career,' and agree to describe themselves as ambitious" (2008, p. 248). Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller (2012) defined ambition as "the persistent and generalized striving for success, attainment, and accomplishment" (p. 759).

Previous studies have indicated that the assumption of career success is regarded as a sum of indicators consisting of two dimensions, including extrinsic success and intrinsic success (Arthur et al., 2005; Judge et al., 1995; Otto, 2007). Extrinsic success parameters, including objective, measurable, and independently verifiable indicators, are deficient for comprehensively defining career success. The intrinsic success parameters, including the subjective evaluations of one's working situation, job satisfaction, and goal attainment, are also important for understanding career ambition. Scholars have pointed out that individuals with a high level of self-efficacy will set more ambitious career goals (Clements & Kamau, 2017).

Factors Influencing Perceived Employability and Ambition

Previous studies have discussed various factors that influence perceived employability and career ambition across different populations. However, the results of those studies were not consistent, and it is still necessary to explore how perceived employability relates to other variables, such as age, gender, GPA, educational level, and family responsibilities.

Age. Individuals still face age discrimination in the workplace (Niu, 2019). According to Van de Heijden (2002), employability decreases with employee age. In addition, Wittekind et al. (2010) found that older workers were less confident in their employability than younger workers. Mature graduates experience a harder transition from higher education into the workplace than their younger counterparts (Purcell et al., 2007). Rothwell et al. (2008) indicated that older students had a lower level of perceived employability. However, Jackson and Wilton (2016) did not find a significant

relationship between age and perceived employability among US students but a significant relationship among UK students. Additionally, Niu et al. (2019) indicated that age did not influence the perceived employability or subjective career success among graduates of a workforce education and development program in the U.S.

Gender. Gender issues become more prominent as more women enter the workforce (Lloyd-Jones et al., 2018). Gender pay gaps exist in the workplace, and women have higher rates of underemployment and unemployment than men (Purcell et al., 2013). Qenani et al. (2014) reported that female students had lower perceived employability than male students. In addition, Niu et al. (2019) found that females had lower subjective career success than males. However, there are studies that did not find differences in perceived employability between males and females (e.g., Jackson & Wilton, 2016; Niu et al., 2019; Rothwell et al., 2009; Sok et al., 2013).

GPA. GPA is a measure of academic achievement. Previous studies have indicated that graduates with lower academic achievement have less confidence in their employability and future career success (Huang, 2015; Niu et al., 2019; Thang & Wongsurawat, 2016). However, Greer and Waight (2017) did not find a significant difference in perceived employability based on individuals' GPA. In addition, scholars did not find a significant relationship between GPA and subject career success (Bretz, 1989; Greer & Waight, 2017; Ng & Feldman, 2014).

Educational Level. The relationship between perceived employability and educational attainment level has been examined by previous studies. For example, Rothwell and Arnold (2007) found that there was no significant relationship between educational attainment level and perceived employability. However, Drange et al. (2018) found that perceived employability was positively related to educational level. Interestingly, Niu et al. (2019) indicated that graduates with a bachelor's degree had higher perceived employability than those with a PhD, but the educational level did not influence their subjective career success.

Family responsibilities. Family responsibilities play an important role in the study and work. According to the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2003), family responsibilities were the main reason for reducing actual working hours. Mayrhofer et al. (2008) indicated that the amount of time investigated influenced individuals' assessments of mobility, flexibility, and opportunities in labor markets. In addition, individuals who had children at home were more likely to have family-work conflicts (Behson, 2002; Carlson, 1999).

However, there is a lack of studies examining the relationship between family responsibilities and perceived employability.

Work Experience. According to Qenani et al. (2014) and Jackson and Wilton (2017), work experience is positively related to perceived employability. Additionally, Kirves et al. (2014) found that perceived mobility was positively related to perceived employability among permanent workers. In addition, Thang and Wongsurawat (2016) indicated that 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.

Employability and Ambition of Student Veterans

Student veterans have constructed a unique group for achievement and success based on their military experience, work ethics, and steadfast commitment. A student veteran is defined as “any student who is a current or former member of the active-duty military, the National Guard, or Reserves regardless of deployment status, combat experience, legal veteran status, or GI Bill use” (Vacchi, 2012, p. 17). The primary reasons for veterans attending higher education are career enhancement and career opportunities increasing after retirement and the expectation of a faster promotion or higher income (Brauchle, 1997; Brown, 1993). In addition, education benefits, such as the Post 9-11 GI Bill, are meaningful in motivating veterans to pursue degrees in higher education (Patterson & Paulson, 2016).

Student veterans are also defined as “a subpopulation of adult learners” (Brown & Gross, 2011, p. 45). In comparison with traditional students, several barriers and myths have been identified (Hill et al., 2019). First, veterans may not consider a wide array of choices while they are applying for higher education. Their perceptions of some institutions with the highest graduation rates and most resources might not be usable for them because of sticker prices, high academic selectivity, or elite campus culture. Second, many higher graduation-rate universities may have different transfer policies, which limit the admission and enrollment of veteran students. Third, full-time enrollment and on-campus residency might bring difficulties for veteran students who have family or work responsibilities. Last but not least, a lack of standardized studies or reports regarding student veterans’ enrollment and learning outcomes might present challenges for prospective student veterans.

Previous scholars have found that veterans believe that pursuing higher education could help them achieve greater economic opportunities and career goals (e.g., Hunter-Johnson, et al., 2020; Lighthall, 2012; Norman et al., 2015; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014). For example, Schiavone and Gentry (2014) noted that veterans had to acquire an educational degree for specific positions to enter the workplace. Hunter-Johnson et al. (2019) conducted three

focus groups among 11 veterans and concluded that veterans utilize higher education to help their transition to civilian workplaces. However, student veterans still face great challenges before, during, and after studying in higher education. For example, the setting of higher education is very different from military environments, so veterans had to change their learning styles to be appropriate in the new environment (Olsen et al., 2015). Moreover, Hunter-Johnson et al. (2020) indicated that veterans felt a clear gap between their needs and the services they received on campus. Higher education institutions might assume that student veterans were very knowledgeable of issues regarding their situations, but that was not the case for many of them (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2020).

The focal point of this paper is the perceived employability and career ambition of student veterans. There is a lack of literature about veterans' perceived employability and career ambition. The employability of veterans refers to the "military service member planning for and obtaining a skillset consisting of either general human capital (e.g., an undergraduate college degree) or firm-specific human capital (e.g., learning how to be a proficient welder beneficial to an organization)" (Rhodes, 2017, p. 15). Only a few studies have researched the employability of veterans and have explored veterans' workplace perceptions and concerns. For example, Yanchus et al. (2018) used qualitative interviews to examine differences in workplace perceptions between military veterans and nonveteran employees at the Veterans Health Administration. They found that in terms of workplace concerns, veteran employees stated that favoritism and unfairness were an overarching theme. They suggested that to improve veterans' workplace perceptions, enhancing vocational strategies for helping them transition into civilian employment will be one of the keys for their socialization into workplaces. Rhodes (2017) found that demographic variables, veterans' educational attainment, employment inequality, and their career awareness all correlated with their employment and unemployment. There is a gap in the literature that studies student veterans' career ambitions.

METHODS

Measures

To investigate the perceived employability and ambition of student veterans, a survey was conducted during 2018-2019 among students who were studying at a mid-western public university in the United States. Four self-perceived employability items and four ambition items from Rothwell et al.'s (2008) instrument were adopted to measure the perceived employability and ambition of participants. The four self-perceived employability items were 1) I can easily determine about opportunities in my chosen field; 2) the skills and abilities that I possess are what employers are looking for; 3) I am generally confident of success in job interviews and selection events; 4) I feel

I could get any job so long as my skills and experience are reasonably relevant. The four ambition items were 1) I am satisfied with the progress I have made meeting my goals for the development of new skills; 2) I have clear goals for what I want to achieve in life; 3) I regard myself as highly ambitious; and 4) what I do in the future is important. Each item was scored on a Likert scale: strongly disagree=1, disagree=2, neutral=3, agree=4, and strongly agree=5. The survey also included six demographic questions, such as age, gender, ethnicity, degree pursuing level (undergraduate vs. graduate), GPA, family responsibility (child caregiving vs. no child caregiving), military experience (veteran vs. civilian), and work experience. Undergraduate refers to the level of bachelor’s degree. Graduate refers to the level of master’s or doctoral degree.

Table 1: Demographic Information of Participants

| Variables | Student Veterans | | Civilian Students | |
|------------------------------|------------------|-------|-------------------|-------|
| | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % |
| <i>Gender</i> | | | | |
| Male | 27 | 73% | 13 | 27.1% |
| Female | 10 | 27% | 35 | 72.9% |
| <i>Ethnicity</i> | | | | |
| African American | 9 | 24.3% | 11 | 22.9% |
| Asian | 1 | 2.7% | 2 | 4.2% |
| Hispanic or Latino | 5 | 13.5% | 2 | 4.2% |
| White | 20 | 54.1% | 29 | 60.4% |
| Other | 2 | 5.4% | 4 | 8.3% |
| <i>Degree pursuing level</i> | | | | |
| Undergraduate | 27 | 73% | 18 | 37.5% |
| Graduate | 10 | 27% | 30 | 62.5% |
| <i>Family responsibility</i> | | | | |
| Child caregiving | 27 | 73% | 24 | 50% |
| No child caregiving | 10 | 27% | 24 | 50% |
| <i>Work experience</i> | | | | |
| Less than 1 year | 0 | 0 | 5 | 10.4% |
| 1- 3 years | 1 | 2.7% | 7 | 14.6% |
| 4-6 years | 2 | 5.4% | 6 | 12.5% |
| 7-10 years | 5 | 13.5% | 4 | 8.3% |
| More than 10 years | 29 | 79.4% | 26 | 54.2% |

Sampling

Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants among students from a midwestern public university in the United States. The convenience sampling technique is most frequently used in quantitative studies, which allows researchers to identify and contact potential participants when they possess “limited resources available for sampling” (Gliner et al., 2011, p. 125). One hundred and five students participated in this study, and 20 participants skipped several survey items without indicating reasons. As a result, 85 participants’ responses were utilized in the data analysis. The 85 students included 37 veterans and 48 civilian (nonveteran) students. Table 1 shows the demographic information of the participants. In addition, participants’ ages ranged from 20 to 61, and the mean age was 40.1 ($SD=10$) for student veterans and 35.2 ($SD=9.8$) for civilian students. Additionally, the participants’ GPAs ranged from 2.8 to 4.0, and the mean GPAs were 3.7 ($SD=0.4$) for student veterans and 3.7 ($SD=0.4$) for civilian students.

Data Analysis

To address the first research question, descriptive analysis of mean scores was conducted to explore the perceived employability and ambition of student veterans. In addition, one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the perceived employability and ambition of student veterans and civilian students, which addressed the second research question. The post hoc test to compare group means was not conducted since there were no statistically significant group differences based on the ANOVA results. Additionally, descriptive analysis and OLS regressions were conducted to investigate the impact of other variables on perceived employability and ambition, which addressed the third research question. Both perceived employability and ambition variables contain four items with a Likert-type response format. Since we did not use single items as the dependent variable, the common approach is to treat our measurements as interval variables, and the OLS regressions are appropriate (Carifio & Peria, 2007). See Carifio and Peria (2007) for details.

For a one-way ANOVA comparing two groups, we calculated the sample size required in each group to obtain a power of 0.80, with a significance level of 0.05. For a one-way ANOVA model, the suggested guidelines (Cohen, 1988) for effect size are as follows: Small - 0.10, Medium - 0.25, Large - 0.40. To detect a medium effect size of military experience in our model, the required sample size per group is 63. To detect a large effect size, we only need 25 observations per group. Therefore, our sample size ($N_{\text{civilian students}} = 48$, $N_{\text{student veterans}} = 37$) is sufficient to detect effect size ranges from medium to large.

FINDINGS

Perceived Employability and Ambition of Student Veterans

According to the descriptive analysis, a summary of student veterans' responses to each of the perceived employability items and ambition items is shown in Table 2. The overall mean score of perceived employability items is 4.0, suggesting that student veterans were confident in their employability. The distributions of participants on the overall perceived employability spectrum show that, on average, approximately 78.4% ($n=29$) of the student veterans agreed or strongly agreed with the perceived employability items. Only approximately 5.4% ($n=2$) disagreed or strongly disagreed. The overall mean score for the ambition of student veterans was slightly higher than the perceived employability (see Table 2). On average, approximately 81.1% ($n=30$) of the student veterans agreed or strongly agreed with the ambition items, suggesting that they believed they would be successful in their future careers. Only 5.4% ($n=2$) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations of Perceived Employability Items and Ambition Items for Student Veterans (N=37)

| Items | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|---|-------------|-----------|
| 1. I can easily determine about opportunities in my chosen field; | 3.9 | 0.9 |
| 2. The skills and abilities that I possess are what employers are looking for. | 4.0 | 0.9 |
| 3. I am generally confident of success in job Interviews and selection events. | 4.0 | 1.0 |
| 4. I feel I could get any job so long as my skills and experience are reasonably relevant. | 4.1 | 0.9 |
| <i>Overall Perceived Employability</i> | 4.0 | 0.8 |
| 1. I am satisfied with the progress I have made meeting my goals for the development of new skills. | 4.2 | 0.9 |
| 2. I have clear goals for what I want to achieve in life. | 4.3 | 0.9 |
| 3. I regard myself as highly ambitious. | 4.1 | 1.0 |
| 4. What I do in the future is important. | 4.4 | 0.9 |
| <i>Overall Ambition</i> | 4.2 | 0.8 |

Comparisons among Student Veterans and Civilian Students.

According to the results of one-way ANOVA, the perceived employability of student veterans was not significantly different from civilian students, $F(1, 83)=0.131, p=0.718$. The overall mean score of perceived employability for student veterans was the same as that for civilian students ($Mean=4.0, SD=0.6$). Additionally, the ambition of student veterans was not significantly different from civilian students, $F(1, 83)=1.335, p=0.251$. However, the overall mean score of ambition for student veterans was slightly lower than that for civilian students ($Mean=4.4, SD=0.5$).

Impacts of Other Variables

Regressions were conducted to investigate the impacts of other variables on the perceived employability and the ambition for student veterans. The results indicated that none of the investigated variables had a significant impact on either the perceived employability or the ambition, and all the p values were larger than 0.05. \sqrt{VIF} of all explanatory variables are smaller than 2, indicating that multicollinearity is not a problem with our chosen set of variables. However, the descriptive analysis was conducted and showed some interesting findings. For example, although age did not significantly influence the student veterans' perceived employability, the older veterans' perceived employability was slightly lower than the younger veterans' (see Figure 1). Civilian students exhibited the same tendency. In addition, there is not much difference in ambition between older veterans and younger veterans.

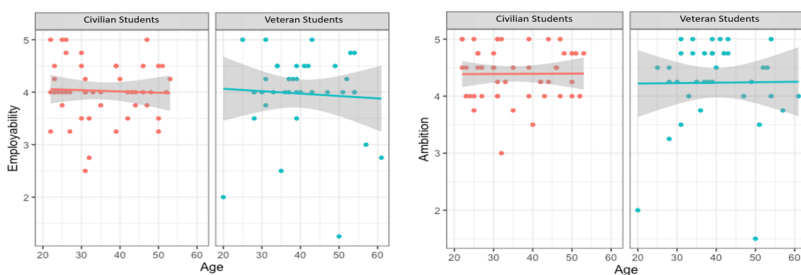


Figure 1. *The impact of age on perceived employability and ambition*

The impact of gender was not significant on either the perceived employability or the ambition of student veterans. According to the results of descriptive analysis, the perceived employability of female veterans ($Mean=3.9, SD=0.9$) was slightly lower than that of males ($Mean=4.0, SD=0.8$); the same pattern was visible among civilian students. Additionally, female veterans ($Mean=3.9, SD=0.9$) had lower ambitions than males ($Mean=4.4, SD=0.7$).

There was no significant impact of GPA on either the perceived employability or the ambition of student veterans. According to Figure 2, veterans with a higher GPA had slightly higher perceived employability, and there is not much difference in perceived employability between male and females among civilian students. Additionally, veterans with a higher GPA had higher ambitions. However, it was opposite to the situation of civilian students.

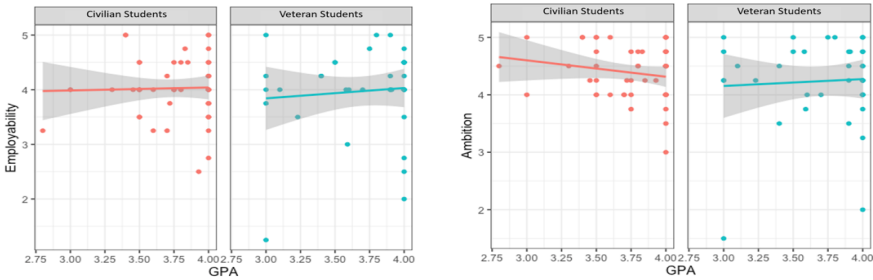


Figure 2. *The impact of GPA on perceived employability and ambition*

The level of degree pursued did not significantly influence either the perceived employability or the ambition of the veterans. However, the results of descriptive analysis have shown that graduate students had lower perceived employability ($Mean=3.6, SD=1.2$) and ambition ($Mean=3.8, SD=1.1$) than undergraduate students among veterans ($Mean=4.1, SD=0.5$ for perceived employability; $Mean=4.4, SD=0.5$ for ambition). Interestingly, there is not much difference between undergraduate students and graduate students among civilians.

The result of regressions did not find that child caregiving had a significant impact on either the perceived employability or ambition of the student veterans. However, the findings of the descriptive analysis have shown that veterans without child caregiving had lower perceived employability ($Mean=3.5, SD=0.9$) and lower ambition ($Mean=4.0, SD=0.9$) than those with child caregiving ($Mean=4.1, SD=0.7$ for employability; $Mean=4.3, SD=0.7$ for ambition). Interestingly, there is not much difference in the perceived employability based on the responsibility of child caregiving among civilian students, while civilian students had a similar situation to the ambition of veterans.

The year of work experience did not significantly influence either the perceived employability or ambition of student veterans. According to Figure 3, students with more years of work experience had a higher level of perceived employability and ambition among veterans. However, there was not much difference in the perceived employability and ambition based on the year of work experience among civilian students.

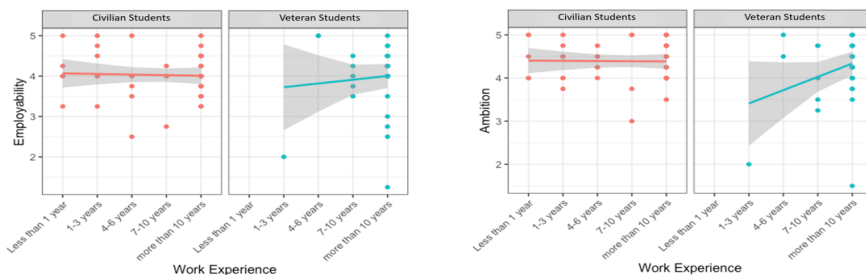


Figure 3. *The impact of work experience on perceived employability and ambition*

DISCUSSION

The results of descriptive analysis have shown that most of the investigated student veterans were confident in their employability and future career success. These results support previous studies (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2020; Lighthall, 2012; Minnis, 2014; Norman et al., 2015; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014), which indicated that veterans gained confidence in transitioning to the civilian workplace through studying in higher education. For example, according to Hunter-Johnson et al. (2020), veterans believed that higher education could bring more and better career and employment opportunities. In the present study, all the veterans were the students who were pursuing a postsecondary degree in the university, so they have positive perspectives on their future career opportunities.

Although the results of one-way ANOVA did not show significant differences in either perceived employability or ambition among student veterans and civilian students, the descriptive mean scores still showed clues that explained the situation of student veterans when compared to civilian students. The results found that student veterans had slightly lower ambition than civilian students, which confirmed the findings of previous studies (Hill et al., 2019; Yanchus et al., 2018). Compared to nonveteran individuals, veterans experienced barriers in higher education, such as fewer academic choices, unfriendly transfer policies, family or work responsibilities, and a lack of information for learning outcomes (Hill et al., 2019). In addition, Mobbs & Bonanno (2018) noted that veterans experienced transition stress, which was multifaceted and can lead to serious mental health problems. Therefore, all these reasons might lead to less confidence in future career success among student veterans.

The results of regressions indicate that factors such as age, gender, GPA, educational degree level, child caregiving responsibilities, and the year of work experience do not significantly influence the perceived employability and ambition for student veterans. These results were consistent with some previous studies (e.g., Bretz, 1989; Greer & Waight, 2017; Jackson & Wilton,

2016; Niu et al., 2019; Ng & Feldman, 2014; Rothwell et al., 2009; Sok et al., 2013). In the present study, one reason for this finding might be that the sample size was too small to detect any significant results. However, the results of the descriptive analysis still showed clues that explained how other variables impacted the perceived employability and ambition of student veterans. For example, the results have shown that while older veterans had slightly lower perceived employability than younger veterans, older veterans had a similar level of ambition compared to younger veterans. Older individuals experienced more labor market entry barriers and more challenging transitions from college to the workplace than their younger colleagues (Purcell et al., 2007). Additionally, older individuals feel discouraged from finding jobs because of age discrimination and the undervaluing of their professional experiences and skills (Krekanova, 2017). However, older individuals perceived that they had more experience and achievements (Niu, 2019), which made them more confident of their career success. Higher education institutions should provide more strategic support for aging veterans and pay attention to their specific needs and interests while increasing their awareness of age biases and discrimination.

The results show a slight gender gap, which supported previous studies that females had lower perceived employability and ambition than males (Niu et al., 2019; Qenani et al., 2014). Women still experience lower rates of workforce participation and a gender-based wage gap in the workplace. For example, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), female workers constituted only 46.9% of all workers. In addition, U.S. women are paid only 80 cents for every dollar paid to their male peers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Compared to male veterans, female veterans face different challenges, such as more family responsibilities than men, experiencing sexual trauma, while in the military, there are negative impacts of gender politics (Sander, 2012). To meet female veterans' needs and provide better services, higher education institutions should form all-female support groups and hire women to work in veteran centers or offices (Sander, 2012).

The findings of the present study have shown that veterans with higher GPAs had slightly higher perceived employability and ambition, which confirmed the findings of previous studies (Huang, 2015; Niu et al., 2019; Thang & Wongsurawat, 2016). GPA is considered an indicator of academic performance and a predictor of job performance. For example, GPA has been utilized to screen for entry-level job applicants (Johansen, 2014), and job applicants with higher GPAs had better evaluations (Hassanbeigi et al., 2011) and were more likely to get job interviews (Thoms et al., 1999). Therefore, in addition to providing support services, educators should improve veterans' academic performance by understanding the learning style and needs of veterans in classes and developing learning activities to meet their needs. In addition, educators and higher education institutions should

address the gap and differences between the military learning environment, which is grounded in behaviorism, and higher education, which is grounded in andragogy/humanism, on the two complete ends of the educational spectrum.

The results of descriptive analysis have shown that veterans studied at a graduate program had lower perceived employability and ambition than those at an undergraduate program, which was partially consistent with Niu et al.'s study (2019). In the U.S. labor markets, very few positions have required a graduate-level degree (Torpey & Watson, 2014), so graduate students might feel less confident in completing the small number of available jobs. Interestingly, the results of the descriptive analysis suggest that veterans with child caregiving responsibility have higher perceived employability and ambition than those living without children. These findings contradict previous studies, which indicated that family responsibilities negatively influenced employment opportunities and career success (Behson, 2002; Carlson, 1999; Mayrhofer et al., 2008). According to the results of the descriptive analysis, student veterans with more work experience had a higher level of perceived employability and ambition. This finding supported previous studies that showed that perceived employability was positively influenced by work experience (Jackson & Wilton, 2017; Qenani et al., 2014).

LIMITATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There were three limitations in this study. First, the sample size was very small; only 29 student veterans participated in this study, so it was impossible to conduct complex statistical analysis with the data. The small sample size made it difficult to detect the patterns and relationships between the variables accurately. Future studies could enlarge the sample size. In addition, more variables could be included, such as the available support, the activities of career development, the years of military experience, the years in higher education, and the study field. Second, the participants were recruited from the same university, so the results cannot be generalized to student veterans at other universities. Future research could include participants from more universities. Third, we used self-reported GPA scores without verification. Future research could use GPAs from student records. Fourth, employability was measured by self-assessments, so it might not reflect the true employment potential of the individuals. In the future, longitudinal studies could be conducted to track veterans' employment status. Future studies should also investigate the perceptions of employees' employability from both employees and employers. In addition, qualitative studies should be conducted to explore the experience and factors that increase veterans' employability in civilian workplaces.

CONCLUSION

The present study explored the perceived employability and ambition of student veterans. Many previous works in the literature have focused on the career transition of veterans. However, very few studies have examined the employability and career ambition of veterans, which are important measures of the success of their career transition. Among the veteran population in higher education, knowledge about their employability and career success is necessary. This study may enlighten and attract more scholars' attention to research the outcomes of career transition for veterans and explore how to improve the outcomes. The university and student veterans must work together to ensure their career success. Rhodes (2017) mentioned that higher education institutions must provide career advice, which will help to enhance student veterans' career awareness. Student veterans are unique participants in higher education, and it is important to understand their situation and needs. Student veterans could gain confidence or explore problems through the self-assessment of employability. Educators could also identify strategies to help veterans improve their academic performance and provide more support to meet their needs.

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