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Ewa Domagała-Zyśk

John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland

Piotr Mamcarz

John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland

Klaudia Martynowska

John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland

Agnieszka Fudali-Czyż

Pedagogical University, Cracow, Poland

Andrew Rothwell

School of Business and Economics, Loughborough University, United Kingdom

Self-Perceived Employability Scale – Polish Adaptation

Abstract

Employability, understood as a set of achievements – skills, knowledge, personal qualities – that make graduates employable and successful in their profession, is more and more often a subject of research, both in the context of improving the educational offer of universities, as well as examining the quality of life and professional satisfaction of graduates. Employability is differentiated from employment – the state of having a job. In today's unstable job market where temporary contracts and protean-type careers dominate – equipping graduates with the resources to effectively change or modify their career path is crucial. The paper aims to present the psychometric proprieties of a Polish adaptation of the A. Rothwell and Arnold Self-Perceived Employability Scale. The final version consists of 9 items and has good psychometric properties. The study of the perceived employability of students provides important knowledge regarding the graduates' competencies, and it is an important factor in modifying the educational offer at universities and planning graduates' satisfying careers in the contemporary unstable job market.

Keywords: *employability, students, career, employability scale*

Modern universities are highly interested in graduates achieving the highest possible educational results and the most favourable level of employment.

Contemporary research (Rothwell et al., 2008; Vargas et al., 2018; Lodi et al., 2020) shows that it is more and more evident that it is not simply employment that counts – but employability, widely recognised as a complex construct (Fugate et al., 2004; Fugate & Kinicki, 2010; Rothwell et al., 2007), defined as a “set of achievements – skills, knowledge, personal qualities – that make graduates employable and successful in their profession, which in turn benefits themselves, the labour market, society and the economy” (Knight & Yorke, 2003, p. 5; Rothwell et al., 2008; Rothwell & Rothwell, 2016; Vargas et al., 2018).

Numerous factors are studied to explain successful university-to-work transition and the role of perceived employability in this process. Gonzalez-Roma et al. (2016, N=7.881) established that factors connected with human and social capital were related to employment status, whereas factors of human and social capital and career identity were related to distinct job quality indicators. Indirect relation between career competencies and subjective career success through employability activities was observed by Lo Presti et al. (2021), while Okay-Somerville and Scholarios (2015) proved that the process view of employability (as contrasted with position and possession views) explains best its development, which is appearing thanks to factors such as engagement in career self-management, in particular in environment exploration, networking and guidance seeking.

Several operationalisations of the employability concept were proposed. A distinction was made between input-based employability’s operationalisations and outcome-based employability (i.e., perceived employability) (Forrier et al., 2018). Input-based approaches focus on the resources of the individual, which may increase their chances of getting a job (e.g., Fugate et al., 2004; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). While an outcome-based approach to employability – coined as self-perceived or self-rated employability – focuses on how a person perceives the chance of finding a job in the internal or external labour market (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). There are few established multidimensional measurement scales assessing perceived employability or input-based employability (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; Van Der Heijde & Van Der Heijden, 2006; Berntson & Marklund, 2007; Lo Presti et al., 2019).

This paper aims to present the adaptation procedure for the Polish version of the Self-Perceived Employability Scale (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). This tool may enable the measurements of students’ self-perceived employability, understand better this construct and provide important knowledge on employability as a factor modifying educational goals and conditioning successful career paths. The

procedure may also serve as a model for adaptations in other languages that may be a vital tool for students with migration backgrounds.

Self-Perceived Employability Scale – General Characteristics of the Tool

The basis for constructing the English version of the Self-Perceived Employability Scale was the authors' belief that employability can be measured as a subjective factor based on a person's beliefs about the level of their own competencies and skills, including the possibility of being employed. The tool's authors, Rothwell and Arnold (2007), examined the perception of the possibility of being employed by students, assuming that employability is understood as the "possibility of obtaining a job according to the qualifications". Four groups of factors were considered key in the research: 1. related to own beliefs; 2. related to the features of the external labour market; 3. Concerning the field of study; 4. Concerning the university. It was found that these factors remain in the relationships presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Matrix of the components of the perception of own employability – student research

		My University		
Self-beliefs	1. My engagement with my studies and academic performance	2. My perception of the strength of the university brand	3. The reputation my university has within my field of study	My field of study
	8. My confidence in my skills and abilities	My ambition	4. the status and credibility of my field of study	
	7. My awareness of opportunities in the external labour market	6. My perception of the state of the external labour market	5. the external labour market's demand for people in my subject field	
	The state of the external labour market			

Source: Rothwell et al., 2008.

Two more questions were prepared for each model element, so finally, the scale consisted of 16 items relating to external and internal factors determining the level of perceived employability. Particular items related to factors building the employability of a given person, such as professional skills and social competencies,

coping with difficulties, social support in finding and obtaining a job, knowledge about the labour market and knowledge of job search strategies. The 16-item scale showed good psychometric values: Cronbach's alpha is 0.83.

Statistical analyses and validation studies resulted in the reduction of the scale to 11 items (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007), which built two dimensions: external employability (items No. 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11) and internal (1, 2, 3, 4, 7). The analyses carried out by the authors of this version of the scale showed good psychometric values: reliability for the subscale of external factors: Cronbach's alpha = 0.78, and for internal factors, 0.83. The scale was also used in graduate studies (Rothwell et al., 2008) and used in other studies in Great Britain and abroad, e.g., in Luxembourg (Engelberg & Limbach-Reich, 2012), Italy (Maiolo et al., 2013; Lodi et al., 2020), Taiwan (Huang, 2015), Australia (Creed & Gagliardi, 2015), South Africa (Goodman & Tredway, 2016), Iran (Alibaygi et al., 2013) and Spain (Vargas et al., 2018).

Research Results: Self Employability Perception Scale – Polish Version

Descriptive statistics

The basis for the Polish adaptation was the 16-item scale (Rothwell, Arnold, 2008), but following the work of Vargas, Sanchez-Queija, Rothwell, & Parra, (2018) we used the 12-item scale. A group of 1013 students participated in the adaptation of the Polish version of the test, including 724 women (71.5%) and 289 men (28.5%). The mean age of the subjects was 20.2 years (SD = 2.67; age range = 17–57 years) (see Table 2). The respondents declared that they come from large cities (26.9%), medium-sized cities (10.6%), small towns (12.6%) and villages (50%). Notably, 30% of students were employed alongside studying full-time.

Table 2. Psychometric properties of the participants' age

	n	M(SD)	95% CI		Range		Skew(SD)	Kurtosis(SD)
			LL	UL	Min	Max		
Age	1013	20.20(2.67)	20.04	20.37	17	57	6.20(0.08)	61.60(0.15)

Descriptive statistics for the developed Polish version of the tool show a normal distribution, with values of slope and kurtosis in the range from .00 to -.97 (see Table 3). The mean value for the overall test score was 41.60 (SD = 6.71). The mean value for the individual test items ranged from 2.86 (for item 3, there were more

candidates than places for my field of study) to 4.00 (for item 2. Studying is my priority), and the value of the standard deviation was from 0.77 (for the item 1. I get high marks) to 1.30 (for item 3, there were more candidates than places for my field of study).

Table 3. Psychometric properties of the overall score and 12 test items (n = 1013)

Variable	M(SD)	95% CI		Range		Skew.	Kurt.
		LL	UL	Min	Max		
1. I achieve high grades in relation to my studies	3.70(0.77)	3.65	3.75	1	5	-.37	.37
2. I regard my academic work as the top priority	4.05(0.88)	4.00	4.11	1	5	-.73	.11
3. A lot more people apply for my degree than there are places available	2.94(1.30)	2.86	3.02	1	5	.03	-.97
4. My chosen subject(s) rank(s) highly in terms of social status	3.35(1.06)	3.29	3.42	1	5	-.31	-.44
5. People in the career I am aiming for are in high demand in the external labour market	3.68(0.91)	3.63	3.74	1	5	-.40	-.01
6. My degree is seen as leading to a specific career that is generally perceived as highly desirable	3.45(1.03)	3.39	3.52	1	5	-.42	-.27
7. There is generally strong demand for graduates at present	3.39(0.98)	3.33	3.45	1	5	-.28	-.31
8. There are plenty of job vacancies in the geographical area where I am looking	3.06(0.95)	3.00	3.12	1	5	.00	-.15
9. I can easily find out about opportunities in my chosen field	3.36(0.96)	3.30	3.42	1	5	-.18	-.28
10. The skills and abilities that I possess are what employers are looking for	3.42(0.84)	3.36	3.47	1	5	-.20	.10
11. I am generally confident of success in job Interviews and selection events	3.53(0.89)	3.48	3.59	1	5	-.26	.03
12. I feel I could get any job so long as my skills and experience are reasonably relevant	3.66(0.88)	3.60	3.71	1	5	-.32	-.18

Note. M (SD) = mean (standard deviation); 95% CI = 95% confidence interval; LL = lower bound of the confidence interval; UL = upper limit of the confidence interval; Skew. = skewness of the distribution; Kurt. = decomposition kurtosis; The standard deviation for skewness was 0.08, and for kurtosis 0.15.

Adaptation procedure

All statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 25.0. IBM Corp. IBM SPSS AMOS, Version 22.0.0 IBM Corp. was used to perform confirmatory factor analysis.

In the first stage, an exploratory factor analysis was carried out to determine individual items' structure and discriminant power. Principal component analysis with Varimax rotation and Kaiser normalisation was selected. The analyses showed the adequacy of the selection of input variables for the factor analysis $KMO = .842$ with a statistically significant Bartlett sphericity test ($\chi^2 = 3754.879$, $df = 66$, $p < .000$). Based on the screen plot and the matrix with the results of the principal component analysis, it was possible to distinguish 3 factors (Table 4), which together explain 57.99% of the variance with an initial eigenvalue above 1 (Ledesma et al., 2015).

Table 4. Principal component analysis results with factor loadings.
Three-factor model

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
1. People in the career I am aiming for are in high demand in the external labour market	.752	.102	.241
2. My degree is seen as leading to a specific career that is generally perceived as highly desirable	.732	.073	.359
3. I can easily find out about opportunities in my chosen field	.698	.311	-.125
4. There are plenty of job vacancies in the geographical area where I am looking	.679	.278	-.145
5. My chosen subject(s) rank(s) highly in terms of social status	.620	-.047	.492
6. There is generally strong demand for graduates at present	.570	.150	.182
7. I feel I could get any job so long as my skills and experience are reasonably relevant	.176	.811	.046
8. I am generally confident of success in job Interviews and selection events	.176	.810	.130
9. The skills and abilities that I possess are what employers are looking for	.482	.577	.145
10. I regard my academic work as the top priority	.093	.193	.690
11. I achieve high grades in relation to my studies	-.097	.418	.611
12. Many more people apply for my degree than there are places available.	.284	-.134	.571

¹ Factor loadings <0.50 are shown in bold.

Based on the factor loadings, a good structure fit can be found. Items saturating several factors, assuming a cut-off point of $> .50$, did not appear (Hair et al., 2010).

The next stage of the analysis was to check the reliability of the selected subscales and the overall result. For the third factor, Cronbach's alpha score was too low to be able to assume a three-factor structure ($\alpha = .41$). Therefore, this factor was removed from further analyses (Table 5).

Table 5. Results for the reliability test. Two-factor model

Factor	Item	Cronbach's alpha
I	6	.811
II	3	.765
General result	9	.836

Two factors explain 47.55% of the variance and consist of 9 items (Factor 1–6 items, Factor 2– 3 items). Compared to the adaptation carried out by scientists from Italy, the model we obtained after removing the third factor explained less variance (47.55%), and in the Italian version, the third factor obtained an acceptable level ($\alpha = .67$) (Lodi et al., 2020).

After the content analysis of the items, it was decided that the names of the factors would be the same as in the original version of the tool: internal and external employability. This structure is similar to the adaptation prepared by a team of Spanish scientists (Vargas et al., 2018). Their model explained 44.28% of the variance. However, the items had higher factor values. The reliability obtained in our study was slightly higher than in the case of the original version (for the 11-item alpha scale = .83). The method's stability was established on a group of 119 people who were tested again after 4 weeks. The correlation coefficient between the results for the internal employability scale is $r = .937$ $p < .001$, external employability is $r = .747$ $p < .001$, and for the overall result, $r = .859$ $p < .001$. Cronbach's alpha level for the entire scale in the first measurement (test) was $\alpha = .851$, and in the second (retest) $\alpha = .803$. Additionally, in order to determine the absolute stability, a parametric difference test was used for the results in individual scales and the overall result (test – retest) (Table 6). The obtained results confirm the method's stability, as there are no significant differences between the first and the second measurements.

The last stage was to conduct a confirmatory factor analysis on the 9-item version (Fig. 1). Chi2 is significant, and the CIM/DF ratio is < 5 . The remaining model fit indices are satisfactory: CFI = .963; NFI = .953; RMSEA = .071; AIC = 202.40; PCLOSE = .001. It should be noted that in the studies by Lodi et al. (2020), it was

Table 6. Test of differences for dependent groups (test-retest)

		t	df	Sig.
Pair 1	EX_T - EX_RT	-1,154	117	,251
Pair 2	IN_T - IN_RT	-1,747	118	,083
	GS_T - GS_RT	-1,632	117	,105

Note: EX_T – External Employability (Test group); EX_RT – External Employability (Retest group); IN_T – Internal Employability (Test group); IN_RT – Internal Employability (Retest group); GS_T – Employability General Score (Test group); GS_RT – Employability General Score (Retest group)

not possible to confirm the two-factor model as the fit indicators did not meet the criteria: $\chi^2(34) = 449.53$; CFI = 0.89; RMSEA = 0.14; SRMR = 0.09; AIC = 518.55. Similarly, the Italian team in their research confirmed the three-factor structure: $\chi^2(32) = 155.49$; CFI = 0.97; RMSEA = 0.08; SRMR = 0.05; AIC = 215.04 (Lodi et al., 2020).

As a result of the adaptation work, a 9-item Polish version of the Self Employability Perception Scale was created, with very good psychometric properties. Items 1-6 form the subscale of internal employability, and items 7-9 – external employability (see Appendix)

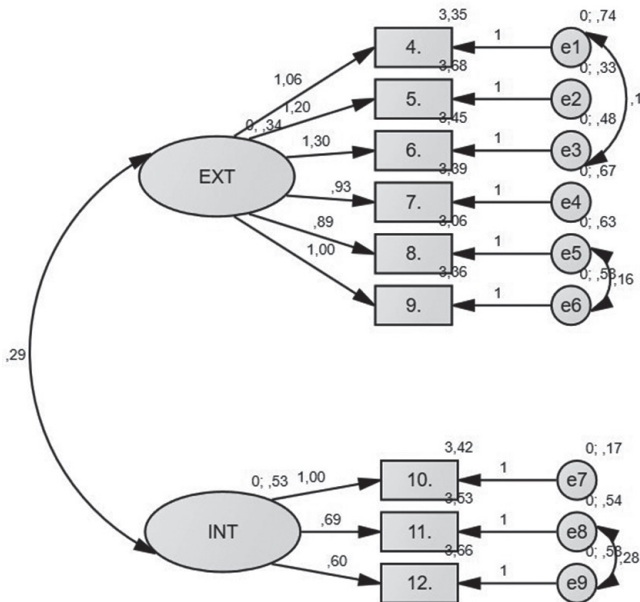


Fig. 1. Confirmatory factor analysis

Discussion:

Application of the Scale for Research and Practice

Contemporary universities must not only take care of the high quality of the academic offer, which has always been their task, but also a specific “too” of their graduates, diploma marketability. It means the necessity of close cooperation of universities with the labour market and adapting education programs to the requirements of employers. Ultimately, this process also brings benefits for universities – students are more likely to undertake an active learning effort if they are convinced that their studies will result in good preparation for finding their place in the employment market.

The use of the employability category as an important dimension of preparing students for the labour market will allow them to be successful not so much in finding a first job quickly (which is usually an indicator of rankings) but in acquiring the beliefs and competencies that allow them to be ‘employable’ also in the longer term, also when they are faced with the need to change jobs, supplement or raise their qualifications, and sometimes a total change of profession.

The scale can therefore be useful in researching students at any stage of university education, both for first-year students and graduates. In the early stages of education, it can be used in screening to spot students who need more support than others and to undertake post-diagnostic activities (Domagala-Zyśk et al., 2021, Fudali-Czyż et al., 2022). It can also be a tool in individual tutoring, both academic and personal.

For universities, the indicators of perceived employability may be an important indicator for assessing the quality of education and the position of a given field of study and the entire university on the labour market. The results of students may constitute the basis for the university management to make strategic decisions regarding both strengthening the individual potential of students (e.g., by not suspending the offer of optional classes/training, building soft skills), as well as efforts to change or improve the image of the university or a given field in the local and the domestic market. Currently, great importance in building study programs is assigned to external stakeholders – the scale can help in assessing the effectiveness of such cooperation by indicating to what extent taking action increases students’ beliefs about the level of their own employability. Research on the perception of the possibility of being employed may also help in shaping the employment policy in a given region or country, especially in the aspect of counteracting unemployment by creating activation programs and building “ordered” programs, the graduates of which will be needed on the labour market.

Candidates for studies – as well as their parents, educators and career advisers – should receive information on the determinants of employment and the broader context of this phenomenon, including obtaining a university diploma and acquiring general competencies (Jackson, 2020). Inviting applicants to study the results achieved by their older colleagues can be an important factor in deciding to study at a university.

The study has some limitations. The research sample is limited in age and geography, which must be considered when formulating the conclusions of the results obtained using this method. Moreover, some paths between the error terms were added to the model to improve it. Correlating the error terms to minimise the redundancy of items in measuring the same construct was justified, as the items were semantically related in Polish. The study will be replicated in a broader and more diversified group. Longitudinal research has also been designed to check the development of the perception of employability in the same group at different stages of university education or career development.

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Skala Postrzegania Własnej Zatrudnialności – wersja polska

Self-Perceived Employability Scale – Polish version

Self-Perceived Employability Scale, A. Rothwell, I. Herbert, J. Arnold 2008

Polish adaptation: E. Domagała-Zyśk, P. Mamcarz, K. Martynowska,

A. Fudali-Czyż, A. Rothwell 2022

Instrukcja:

Proszę zaznaczyć w jakim stopniu zgadza się Pan/i z poniższymi twierdzeniami

1 – zupełnie się nie zgadzam, 5 – w pełni się zgadzam

Instruction:

Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements

1 – I do not agree at all, 5 – I fully agree

Numer	Item	Twierdzenie	
1	My chosen subject(s) rank(s) highly in terms of social status	Wybrany przeze mnie kierunek studiów postrzegany jest jako prestiżowy	1--2--3--4--5
2	People in the career I am aiming for are in high demand in the external labour market	Absolwenci mojego kierunku są poszukiwani na rynku pracy	1--2--3--4--5
3	6. My degree is seen as leading to a specific career that is generally perceived as highly desirable	Ukończenie studiów na moim kierunku jest postrzegane jako droga do sprecyzowanej i wysoce cenionej ścieżki kariery	1--2--3--4--5
4	There is generally a strong demand for graduates at the present time	Generalnie, absolwenci studiów wyższych są obecnie bardzo poszukiwani na rynku pracy	1--2--3--4--5
5	There are plenty of job vacancies in the geographical area where I am looking	Obecnie jest wiele ofert pracy w regionie, w którym jej poszukuję	1--2--3--4--5
6	I can easily find out about opportunities in my chosen field	Łatwo jest znaleźć informacje o możliwościach zatrudnienia po ukończeniu mojego kierunku studiów	1--2--3--4--5
7	The skills and abilities that I possess are what employers are looking for	Pracodawcy poszukują osób, które mają takie kompetencje, jakie ja posiadam	1--2--3--4--5
8	I am generally confident of success in job Interviews and selection events	Generalnie, jestem pewny, że powiedzie mi się w czasie rozmów kwalifikacyjnych i w procesie rekrutacji do pracy	1--2--3--4--5
9	I feel I could get any job so long as my skills and experience are reasonably relevant	Czuję, że mogę dostać każdą pracę dopóki jest ona dość zgodna z moimi kompetencjami i doświadczeniem	1--2--3--4--5

AUTHORS

EWA DOMAGAŁA-ZYŚK

dr hab. prof. KUL, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland

ewadom@kul.pl

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2227-7102>

PIOTR MAMCARZ

dr, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland
pmamcarz@kul.pl
ORCID: 0000-0001-6307-6326

KLAUDIA MARTYNOWSKA

dr, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Lublin, Poland
martynowska.klaudia@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0003-1010-3057

AGNIESZKA FUDALI-CZYŻ

Pedagogical University, Cracow, Poland
agnieszka.fudali.czyz@gmail.com
0000-0002-6769-2975

ANDREW ROTHWELL

School of Business and Economics, Loughborough University, United Kingdom
A.T.Rothwell@lboro.ac.uk
<https://orcid.org/>
0000-0003-2740-2598