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EMPLOYABILITY OF YOUNG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS UNDERSTOOD THROUGH EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND DIGITAL COMPETENCIES

A EMPREGABILIDADE DOS JOVENS UNIVERSITÁRIOS ATRAVÉS DA INTELIGÊNCIA EMOCIONAL E DAS COMPETÊNCIAS DIGITAIS

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ABSTRACT

The Spanish economy represents an unemployment rate of close to 40% in people under 29 years of age with higher education, a fact that has led to investigate what other elements are necessary in this group to find employment. This study analyzes the emotional intelligence and digital competencies that young people possess in relation to the perception of employability. For its analysis, a questionnaire has been distributed among 111 young people that includes the Employability Perception Scale in University Students, the Trait Emotional Meta-cognition Scale (TMMS-24) and the European model of digital competencies. As for the results, emotional intelligence was found to be more relevant in relation to perceived employability, especially in the dimension of clarity and repair. Digital competencies have obtained a significant but slight relationship with perceived employability. With these results, conclusions and teaching implications for universities can be drawn.

Keywords: Employability, University Graduates, Emotional Intelligence, Digital Competences

RESUMO

A economia espanhola regista uma taxa de desemprego de cerca de 40% entre as pessoas com menos de 29 anos com formação superior, facto que levou a que se investigasse que outros elementos são necessários para que este grupo encontre emprego. Este estudo analisa a inteligência emocional e as competências digitais que os jovens possuem em relação à sua perceção de empregabilidade. Para a sua análise, foi distribuído um questionário a 111 jovens, que inclui a Escala de Perceção de Empregabilidade dos Estudantes Universitários, a Escala de Traços de Conhecimento Meta-Emocional (TMMS-24) e o modelo europeu de competências digitais. Em termos de resultados, verificou-se que a inteligência emocional é mais relevante em relação à perceção de empregabilidade, especialmente na dimensão de clareza e reparação. As competências digitais obtiveram uma relação significativa, mas ligeira, com a empregabilidade percebida. Estes resultados conduzem às seguintes conclusões e implicações pedagógicas para as universidades.

Palavras-chave: Empregabilidade, Diplomados Universitários, Inteligência Emocional, Competências Digitais

1. INTRODUCTION

At present, according to the Ministry of Labor and Social Economy of Spain, young people up to 24 years of age with a high level of education have an employment rate of 53.1%, and those up to 29 years of age have an employment rate of 66.7%. Therefore, in general, young people under 29 years of age with a high level of education represent an average of 40% of the unemployment rate in Spain.

The literature shows that there are other employability competencies with a higher level of importance, which today are essential for acquiring a job. As indicated by Lazarus (2013), knowledge, techniques and skills are the minimum requirement to perform in a position. However, along with these "minimum acceptable skills" (hard skills), much importance is now being given to "soft skills". In this order of ideas, the former are the technical expertise and knowledge necessary to perform a job, while the latter are the intrapersonal and relational qualities (Tito Maya & Serrano Orellana, 2016). Among others, there are examples of soft skills such as creativity, persuasion, collaboration, adaptability, emotional intelligence, innovation, cultural awareness and critical thinking. On the other hand, examples of hard skills include data analysis and interpretation, knowledge management, project management, change management, social networking skills, digital skills, programming skills, language skills, writing skills and software skills (Nilufar, 2020).

The current precarious situation of young workers makes it necessary to emphasize the importance of employability. In this sense, among the main barriers for higher education graduates to enter the world of work is the gap between the labor skills they possess and the skills needed or required by the job. It is therefore essential to analyze the perception that young graduates have about entering the labor market, since, as pointed out by Gamboa et al. (2007), it is the individual's perception of the opportunities to obtain a job of their choice or to improve the one they have, bearing in mind that these opportunities will depend on their characteristics and behaviors and on the contextual factors that surround them.

Secondly, it is important to bear in mind that the current labor dynamics have involved a constant modification of working conditions and labor requirements, with digitalization being the factor that has had the greatest impact on the labor market (Azpiazu Arrieta & Bayón Pérez, 2022). Therefore, there is a perceived need to analyze to what extent young university students present sufficient digital skills to be able to cope with the new technological era prevailing in the workplace. Moreover, digital competence is considered an essential element in the Information Society and is directly related to the degree of employability (Lombardero, 2015).

Third, it is noteworthy that emotional intelligence has received increasing attention in different fields in recent years. More specifically, in the context of business management, it has been argued that emotional intelligence can predict job performance, team success, leadership ability and employee satisfaction (Zeidner et al, 2004). Moreover, it is an important and crucial competency that leaders must take into account in today's work context (Ceballos et al, 2017). Continuing in this line, Nikolaou and Tsaousis (2002) found a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and organizational commitment, thus suggesting that emotional intelligence is a determinant factor of employees reflecting loyalty to organizations. In addition, authors such as Formichella and London (2012) highlight the attitude towards one's own job search, pointing out that the higher the motivation, a factor

directly related to emotional intelligence, the greater the possibility of joining and rejoining the labor market.

It should be noted that, in the study of emotional intelligence, one of the models that has received most attention is that of Salovey and Mayer (1990), which evaluates the skills with which a person can be aware of his or her own emotions, as well as his or her ability to regulate them. From this perspective, emotional intelligence is related to the employability of young university students through the definition made in 2005 by the International Labor Organization on employability, conceiving it as "the transferable skills and qualifications that strengthen people's ability to take advantage of the education and training opportunities open to them with a view to finding and keeping a decent job, progressing in the company or changing jobs, and adapting to the evolution of technology and labor market conditions" (International Labor Organization, 2005).

In view of the above, the aim of this paper is to analyze the relationship between the dimensions of emotional intelligence and digital skills and the perception of employability, with the purpose of verifying which factors of each variable are more transcendental for the development of greater employability.

2. METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

Participants

A total of 111 people participated in the study, of whom 33 were men (29.70%) and 78 women (70.30%). The age range ranged from 21 to 30 years, with a mean of 24.68 years (SD = 2.05). In addition, among other data of interest collected, there is information regarding degree completion and vocation for the degree. In this regard, 73 participants (65.80%) had already completed their degree when they responded to the survey, while the remaining 38 (34.2%) were still pursuing their degree. As for the vocation for their chosen discipline, 88 people (79.30%) stated that they felt a true vocation for their degree.

On the other hand, information was also collected on the university where the participants studied their degrees (Table 1). As can be seen, most of the people who responded to the questionnaire studied their degree in the Valencian Community. However, students from other communities, such as Murcia, Andalusia, Madrid and Castilla La Mancha, also participated.

Table 1. Number of people per university

University of study of the degree	Frequency	Percentage
University of Alicante	69	62.2
Miguel Hernández University	16	14.4
Polytechnic University of Valencia	8	7.2
University of Murcia	6	5.4
University of Almeria	4	3.6
Complutense University of Madrid	1	0.9
University of Castilla La Mancha	3	2.7
CEU	2	1.8
European University of Madrid	1	0.9
University of Granada	1	0.9

Variables and instruments

Perception of employability: defined by Rothwell et al. (2008) as the perceived ability to obtain a job appropriate to the level of qualification. The questionnaire used to assess this variable is the Employability Perception Scale for University Students (Hernández-Fernaud et al., 2011). It consists of 10 items that collect different propositions about the process of insertion into the labor market. These propositions refer to the probability of finding a job once studies are completed, professional skills and competencies, and job prospects. Participants must indicate their degree of agreement with each statement on a ten-point Likert-type scale, ranging from "I do not agree at all" (0) to "I totally agree" (10). The Cronbach's alpha obtained by Hernández-Fernaud et al. (2011) is .83. In the present work, the value of this index was .84.

Emotional intelligence: is defined as the ability to perceive, appraise and express emotions accurately and to recognize feelings that facilitate thinking (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). The instrument used to assess this variable was the reduced version of the Trait Emotional Meta-Cognition Scale (TMMS-24) questionnaire, developed by Salovey et al. (1995) and adapted by Fernández et al. (2004). The questionnaire assesses the dimensions of emotional attention, emotional clarity and emotional repair, by means of 24 items on a five-point Likert-type scale ("Not at all agree" (1) to "Strongly agree" (5)). Regarding the psychometric properties, in its adaptation to the Spanish population, Fernández et al. (2004) found Cronbach's alpha values of .90 for the emotional attention and emotional clarity dimensions, and .86 for the repair dimension. Similarly, in the present study, the values obtained for Cronbach's alpha were .88 for the emotional attention and emotional clarity dimensions, and .84 for the repair dimension.

Digital competencies: are defined as the set of skills configured around the search, selection, processing and application of information from a number of sources, adding, in addition, the

ability to strategically use this information to improve the position of the units of society (van Dick, 2005). To assess digital competencies, the questionnaire developed by Conde-Jiménez (2017) was used, which is based on the European model of digital competencies DIGCOMP (Ala-Mutka, 2011). Said instrument is composed of 22 items in Likert format, in which the frequency of a series of behaviors related to the digital environment and the use of devices and information on the network must be indicated, with a gradation from 1 ("not at all") to 5 ("very much"). The questionnaire is grouped into seven factors: 1) basic computer and internet knowledge and management skills; 2) participation and collaboration through the network; 3) resource and content creation skills; 4) digital awareness; 5) use of devices as tools and resources; 6) ethics in the digital environment; and 7) access to and use of digital platforms. The Cronbach's alpha obtained for the total scale is .93 (Conde Jiménez, 2017), while, in the present study, the value of this index is .85.

Sociodemographic variables: ad hoc items were established to collect data on gender, age, degree, university of study, degree completion and vocation, etc.

Procedure

The procedure followed for data collection was by inviting participants to fill in a questionnaire created in "Google Form". This procedure allowed the questionnaire to be disseminated electronically in order to reach a representative number of participants for the study.

Data analysis

Descriptive analyses were performed to determine the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample. To meet the objectives of this study, Spearman correlation and ANOVA analyses were performed with post hoc Scheffé contrasts, with a confidence level of 95%. The analyses were performed with SPSS statistical package version 26.

3. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Before choosing the statistical tests, the normality of the distribution of the variables was analyzed with the Kolmogórov-Smirnov test with Lilliefors correction. Table 2 shows that the variables perception of employability and digital competencies have a Kolmogórov-Smirnov statistic with an associated probability of .200, so it is assumed that the variables follow a normal distribution. In contrast, for the rest of the variables, in this case the corresponding statistics have an associated probability of less than .05, thus assuming that the variables do not follow a normal distribution.

Table 2. Kolmogórov-Smirnov Test

Variables	K-S statistic	*p*
Perception of employability	.068	.200
Digital Competencies	.067	.200
Emotional Intelligence - Attention	.130	.000
Emotional Intelligence - Clarity	.102	.006
Emotional Intelligence - Repair	.100	.009
Basic computer and internet knowledge and skills.	.202	.000
Participation and collaboration through the network	.095	.016
Resource and content creation skills	.098	.011
Digital awareness	.206	.000
Computer as a tool	.151	.000
Ethics in digital culture	.154	.000
Access and use of digital platforms	.180	.000

With regard to the study of the relationship between the variables of interest, firstly, the relationship between emotional intelligence and perceived employability is analyzed. Thus, first of all, a Spearman correlation analysis was carried out between both variables (Table 3). As can be seen, only the dimensions of clarity and repair have obtained a significant relationship with the total score of the employability perception variable.

Table 3. Spearman's correlation between perceived employability and EQ.

	1	2	3	4
1. Perception of employability	1			
2. Attention	.14	1		
3. Clarity	.33**	.17	1	
4. Repair	.26**	-.04	.37**	1

†$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$

Thus, for a more in-depth analysis, we proceeded to perform a one-way ANOVA, a robust technique against non-compliance with the normality criterion (Blanca et al., 2017; Schmider et al., 2010). For this purpose, three groups were created according to the cut-off points of the emotional intelligence questionnaire with which the low, medium and high scores for each

dimension are delimited. Table 4 shows the results corresponding to the ANOVA performed.

Table 4. ANOVA of perceived employability as a function of EQ dimensions.

	N	Mean	*SD*	F	Difference of means (I-J)	ω²
Low attention	20	6.97	1.08			
Adequate attention	53	6.99	0.89	2.01		
Excellent service	38	7.39	1.12			
	N	Mean	*SD*	F	Difference of means (I-J)	ω²
Low clarity	21	6.81	0.62		-0.83*	
Adequate clarity	65	7.03	1.05	4.75**	-0.61*	.06
Excellent clarity	25	7.64	1.04			
	N	Mean	*SD*	F	Difference of means (I-J)	ω²
Low repair	19	6.71	1.26		-0.77*	
Adequate repair	64	7.09	0.97	3.48*		.04
Excellent repair	28	7.48	0.83			

†$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$

The ANOVA performed shows that there are significant differences in the perception of employability according to the clarity dimension ($F_{2, 108} = 4.75$, $p = .011$) and according to the repair dimension ($F_{2, 108} = 3.48$, $p = .034$). In order to find out between which groups these differences occur, we resorted to Scheffé's post-hoc test. Thus, the comparisons made determined that the significant differences occurred between low and excellent clarity (I-J = -0.83, $p = .021$), and medium and excellent clarity (I-J = -0.61, $p = .036$). As for the repair dimension, in this case, the differences occur between the low repair and excellent repair group (I-J = -0.77, $p = .037$). Likewise, the calculation of the ω^2 index as an effect size estimator yielded a value of .06 for the ANOVA of clarity and perceived employability, indicating a moderate effect. On the other hand, in the ANOVA of repair and perceived employability, the ω^2 index was .04, indicating a slight effect (Cohen, 1977).

Next, the relationship between digital skills and perceived employability was analyzed. Again, a Spearman correlation was calculated (Table 5). As can be seen, only three dimensions of digital competencies are positively and significantly related to perceived employability, which are participation and collaboration through the network, resource and content creation skills, and ethics in digital culture. However, the correlation coefficients are very low.

Table 5. Spearman's correlation between perceived employability and digital competencies.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. PE	1							
2. HB	.476	1						
3. PCR	.049*	.087	1					
4. HCC	.029*	.000**	.000**	1				
5. CD	.204	.403	.391	.700	1			
6. O	.125	.000**	.420	.000**	.338	1		
7. ECD	.041*	.018*	.128	.000**	.699	.000**	1	
8. APD	.266	.002**	.049*	.000**	.471	.006**	.001**	1

PE: Perception of employability; HB: Basic computer and internet knowledge and management skills; PCR: Participation and collaboration through the network; HCC: Resource and content creation skills; CD: Digital awareness; O: Computer as a tool; ECD: Ethics in digital culture; APD: Access to and use of digital platforms. †$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$

Finally, we proceeded to perform an ANOVA corresponding to the perception of employability as a function of the levels of digital skills (Table 6). Although two cut-off points were designated to make three groups, only two were obtained, since there were no participants who scored low in digital skills.

Table 6. ANOVA of Perception of Employability as a function of Digital Competences

	N	Mean	*SD*	F	Difference in averages	ω^2
Average Digital Competencies	62	6.89	0.96	4.77*	-0.60*	.04
High Digital Competencies	49	7.49	1.01			

†$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$

As can be seen, there are significant differences in the perception of employability as a function of digital skills ($F_{1, 99} = 4.77$, $p = .031$). However, the ω^2 value obtained is .04, indicating a small effect size (Cohen, 1977).

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and digital skills and the perceived employability of young graduates or those nearing the end of their university

education.

Based on empirical evidence, it can be anticipated that, if young students and graduates possess emotional intelligence, digital knowledge and a good perception of employability, performance and success in a job position may be higher and they will have more skills to perform professionally, as indicated by the data presented and similar to the results obtained in other research (García Tartera, 2017; Yorke, 2006; Zeidner et al., 2004).

Based on the above, on the one hand, it can be said that the emotional intelligence variable has been shown to exert more influence than digital competencies in explaining its relationship with perceived employability, but only in the dimension of clarity and repair. Specifically, the clarity dimension of emotional intelligence has more power to predict perceived employability, by effect size, by ANOVA measures, and by correlation analysis. These data suggest that those people who know what their feelings are will offer a higher performance in their functions and, even if there is any problem or mismatch, they will be able to solve it because of their optimism and the security and confidence they have in the jobs they perform. However, the data obtained indicate that the attention dimension does not influence the perception of employability. This fact may be due to the fact that this dimension reflects the need to observe one's own feelings and does not affect their behavior in the work environment.

On the other hand, the digital skills variable turned out to be less relevant in terms of its relationship with perceived employability, partly because the data available were not entirely useful in the statistical analyses. In this sense, it would have been very favorable to have a part of the sample that scored low on the digital skills variable. However, this fact may be due to the fact that more and more young people have more and more digital skills and have more integrated the use of these skills in their daily lives. However, it is a fact that digitalization has been imposed in the world of work (Azpiazu Arrieta & Bayón Pérez, 2022), so that those who are familiar with digital competencies acquire a competitive advantage over those who are more rigid in their use and learning.

The analysis of these three variables has led to the conclusion that fostering emotional intelligence and training in digital skills in young people can improve their perception of employability and, consequently, be reflected in their performance and success in the professional field in which they carry out their functions. Therefore, it would be interesting to carry out programs that encourage these skills.

Currently, there is a wide range of intervention programs on education and emotional intelligence in adolescents, highlighting among them the "Intemo Program" by Ruiz-Aranda et al. (2013) of the University of Malaga, which has managed to show great effectiveness, as well as a practical utility for the development of emotional skills among the youngest.

Many of the intervention programs on emotional intelligence have been oriented to seek a particular purpose, beyond the mere fact of promoting personal development based on empathy and different emotional skills, as is the case of the "Dulcinea" program by Pérez-González et al. (2014).

On the other hand, based on the results obtained for the digital competencies variable in relation to the perception of employability, it would be interesting for universities to promote, for example, networking strategies through social networks, since this group makes great use of them. In addition, it would be advisable to include material related to legal and ethical issues

on the use of technology and the Internet, as well as training in data collection.

In future lines of research it would also be interesting to analyze whether those people who have the opportunity to use computer programs in universities related to the subject they are teaching and that are necessary in the working world to perform their duties, have a greater perception of employability than those in which teaching is taught in a theoretical way and without access to programs that can help their professional performance. All this in order to introduce in the classroom more mastery of computer programs and their dual use while training is being provided, to make it more practical, and stop looking so abstract the subject being taught with the reality of today's companies.

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