

Conceptualising, measuring, and supporting students' employability competences in higher education

Citation for published version (APA):

Scoupe, R. (2024). *Conceptualising, measuring, and supporting students' employability competences in higher education: the potential of portfolio practices*. [Doctoral Thesis, Maastricht University]. Maastricht University. <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20240523rs>

Document status and date:

Published: 01/01/2024

DOI:

[10.26481/dis.20240523rs](https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20240523rs)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Please check the document version of this publication:

- A submitted manuscript is the version of the article upon submission and before peer-review. There can be important differences between the submitted version and the official published version of record. People interested in the research are advised to contact the author for the final version of the publication, or visit the DOI to the publisher's website.
- The final author version and the galley proof are versions of the publication after peer review.
- The final published version features the final layout of the paper including the volume, issue and page numbers.

[Link to publication](#)

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

If the publication is distributed under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license above, please follow below link for the End User Agreement:

www.umlib.nl/taverne-license

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at:

repository@maastrichtuniversity.nl

providing details and we will investigate your claim.

Download date: 23 Mar. 2025

Summary

Once they graduate, students are faced with a complex and dynamic job market. The current environment is marked by globalisation, technological innovation and the knowledge economy. Academics also speak of “boundaryless careers”, in reference to the multiple movements that characterise employees' careers today. In this sense, the individual's career is increasingly marked by internal, external, psychological and physical mobility. In other words, employment is less stable than it used to be, and professional growth depends more on the adaptability of employees and their ability to learn and constantly evolve. This pushes individuals to be more flexible, more mobile and more creative. Today, when employees are faced with something new in their professional lives they need to be able to bounce back and turn the unexpected into opportunities. They need to call upon the competences that will enable them to shape their own careers. To encourage employees' professional development and ensure high-quality performance, it is suggested that career managers need to create conditions that make it easier for individuals to adapt.

A competence-based approach to employability, which views employability as a multidimensional construct that evolves over time, is a promising concept. This concept aims to reconnect what is taught in HE with the professional market towards which the student is heading. However, in the HE literature, employability competences are not always well defined and there are few validated psychometric tools that measure competence-based employability. Furthermore, very few studies taking a competence-based approach to employability in HE have been able to identify practices that are likely to foster the development of employability competences in students.

Through five studies, this dissertation researched students' competence-based employability and how HE can foster employability. In the first study, we conceptualised employability by taking into account two strands of research: research on learning and development in the workplace and in HE. In the second study, we validated a questionnaire to measure students' employability competences. The third study provided an overview of antecedents of students' employability competences in HE. The fourth study examined how the portfolio, as a reflective practice, supports students' employability competences. More specifically, it examined the types of portfolio support, the phases of reflective

practice and their relationship with employability. Finally, the fifth study explored the relationship between portfolio use and the development of students' employability skills, as well as the mediating role of reflection in the relationship between portfolio use and employability competences.

Taking together Studies 1, 2 and 3, our findings include a conceptual model of students' employability competences, articulated around 10 clusters of competences: social competences, problem solving, oral and written communication, e-literacy, efficacy beliefs, flexibility, lifelong learning, work organization, occupational expertise, and balance. Additionally, 29 antecedents were identified and classified into three clusters (Study 3): design of the learning interventions, learner characteristics and learning-transfer climate. The relation of these antecedents with employability competences was also discussed. The portfolio experience (Studies 4 and 5) appeared to foster employability competences except balance and e-literacy through reflection. In addition, the portfolio enabled students to explore their beliefs and knowledge and to validate their assumptions and beliefs. The support of peers, teachers and a tutor was crucial during this experience.

In conclusion, our results conceptualise the competence-based employability of students in HE. We have shown that portfolio use and reflective thinking can be useful in supporting employability competences - apart from balance and e-literacy. We identified and observed a variety of antecedents to developing students' employability in HE. Our findings indicate a range of practical implications for teachers, program coordinators and and policymakers in HE.