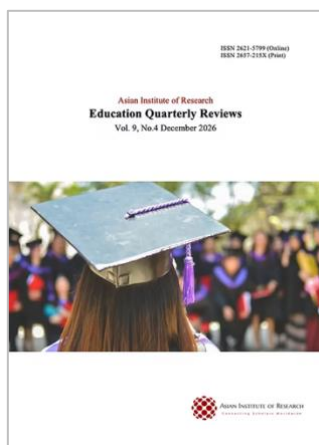




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Perceived Employability and Student Satisfaction in Greek Higher Education: Evidence from University Students in Northern Greece

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Abstract

Perceived employability has become increasingly relevant in higher education as students evaluate not only the quality of their academic experience but also the extent to which their studies prepare them for transition into the labour market. This study examines the relationship between perceived employability and student satisfaction among undergraduate students in Greek higher education. A quantitative cross-sectional design was employed, using a structured questionnaire administered to 210 students in their fourth year of study or beyond at public universities in Northern Greece. Perceived employability and student satisfaction were assessed using established self-report scales. The participants reported moderate levels of perceived employability ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.73$) and relatively high levels of student satisfaction ($M = 4.79$, $SD = 1.73$). Perceived employability was positively and significantly associated with student satisfaction ($r = .541$, $p < .001$) and significantly predicted satisfaction, explaining 29.3% of its variance. No statistically significant differences in perceived employability or student satisfaction were identified according to gender or previous work experience and/or internship participation. The findings suggest that students' perceptions of their future employment prospects are closely associated with their overall evaluation of the university experience, highlighting the relevance of employability-related development within higher education.

Keywords: Greek Higher Education, Labour Market, Northern Greece, Perceived Employability, Student Satisfaction, Work Experience

1. Introduction

The relationship between higher education and the labour market has become increasingly important in a context characterised by technological change, changing forms of work and growing demands for a highly skilled workforce. Governments, employers and policy makers increasingly associate graduate employment outcomes with the knowledge, skills and competences developed through higher education, while universities are expected to contribute more directly to economic competitiveness and social development (Frank & Meyer, 2007; European Commission, 2010). At the same time, traditional assumptions concerning stable and predictable career trajectories have gradually weakened. Graduates are increasingly required to adapt to changing occupational environments,

demonstrate both technical and interpersonal skills, and manage careers that may involve movement across different roles, organisations and employment contexts (Brown & Scase, 1997; Donald et al., 2018). Consequently, higher education is increasingly expected not only to provide disciplinary knowledge, but also to help students develop the skills and capabilities needed to enter and navigate the labour market.

This shift has contributed to the growing prominence of employability within higher education. A university degree can no longer be considered, by itself, a sufficient condition for successful labour-market entry, particularly in an environment in which graduates are expected to demonstrate a wider portfolio of skills, experiences and personal attributes (Higgs et al., 2019). Employability is therefore understood as a multidimensional concept rather than simply the ability to obtain a job. It includes the knowledge, skills, attitudes and personal characteristics that support the acquisition, maintenance and development of employment, while also being influenced by wider social and economic conditions (Hillage & Pollard, 1998; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Yorke, 2006). This broader perspective is especially relevant to higher education because universities increasingly seek to strengthen students' career development through curriculum design, work-integrated learning, internships, career services and other forms of engagement with the labour market (Boud, 2016; Scott, 2019).

Within this broader discussion, perceived employability provides a particularly useful perspective because it focuses on how individuals themselves assess their employment prospects. Rothwell et al. (2008), building on earlier work by Rothwell and Arnold (2007), conceptualized perceived employability among university students as their perceived ability to achieve sustainable employment appropriate to their level of qualification. Similarly, Vanhercke et al. (2014) described perceived employability as an individual's perception of the possibilities of obtaining and maintaining employment. The concept therefore differs from objective employment outcomes: it reflects students' subjective evaluation of their own capabilities and the opportunities available to them. For students who are approaching the completion of their studies, such perceptions may be especially important because they are increasingly required to evaluate their skills, qualifications and readiness for transition into the labour market (Sung et al., 2013; Pitan & Muller, 2020).

Research has shown that perceived employability is shaped by both personal and contextual factors. Rothwell et al. (2008) proposed that students' employability perceptions emerge from the interaction between self-belief, the reputation of their university, the demand associated with their field of study and perceptions of the external labour market. Subsequent research has reinforced this multidimensional understanding. Álvarez-González et al. (2017), for example, identified self-confidence as a particularly important component of perceived employability and showed that skills, academic performance, personal circumstances and social networks can contribute to students' perceptions of their career prospects. Ergün and Şeşen (2021) similarly found that both personal and contextual factors were relevant, although perceptions of external labour-market conditions appeared particularly influential. These findings suggest that students' perceptions of employability cannot be reduced solely to academic achievement or individual skills; they are also shaped by the institutional and labour-market environments in which students expect to pursue employment.

Work experience and internship participation are also relevant within this framework because they provide students with opportunities to encounter professional environments before graduation. Previous studies indicate that work experience may contribute to the development of transferable skills, professional awareness and confidence, thereby strengthening perceptions of employment readiness (Andrews & Higson, 2008; Bennett et al., 2023). Internships may similarly help students connect academic knowledge with workplace practice and develop a clearer understanding of professional expectations (Gault et al., 2000; Zopiatis, 2007). However, findings are not entirely uniform. While some research reports positive associations between employment-related experience and perceived employability, Ergün and Şeşen (2021), for example, did not identify pre-graduation work experience as a significant determinant of perceived employability in their sample. Such differences suggest that the contribution of work-related experience may depend on the nature of the experience and the wider educational and labour-market context.

Alongside employability, student satisfaction has become an important construct in the evaluation of higher education. Student satisfaction is generally regarded as a subjective and multidimensional assessment of the

university experience rather than a response to a single academic or administrative feature (Woodall et al., 2014). It reflects the extent to which students evaluate their experiences and outcomes positively in relation to their expectations (Elliott & Shin, 2002). Previous research has identified a wide range of factors associated with satisfaction, including teaching quality, relationships with academic staff, interaction with peers, access to support services, the development of skills and the perceived value of the educational experience (Dragan & Ivana, 2015; Elliott & Shin, 2002; Letcher & Neves, 2010). Student satisfaction is important not only as an indicator of students' immediate academic experience, but also because it has been associated with engagement, persistence, study completion and students' willingness to recommend their institution to others (DeShields et al., 2005; Helgesen & Nasset, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

The increasing importance placed on graduate employability raises the question of whether students' perceptions of their career prospects also form part of the way they evaluate their university experience. There are theoretical and empirical reasons to expect such a relationship. Students may assess the value of higher education not only in terms of teaching and academic development but also in terms of how effectively their studies prepare them for future employment. Støren and Aamodt (2010) reported that students who perceived stronger preparation for the labour market tended to evaluate their studies more positively. Similarly, Tessema et al. (2012), using data from 5,223 final-year students, found that satisfaction with preparation for employment or further study was closely related to overall satisfaction with the academic programme and emerged as one of its strongest components.

More direct evidence concerning perceived employability and student satisfaction nevertheless remains mixed. James and Yun (2018) examined how students' perceptions of employability related to their evaluation of the university experience among final-year undergraduates in Canada. Their findings suggested that students could report high satisfaction and feel relatively well prepared for employment, but that satisfaction was not determined exclusively by expectations of future employment; teaching quality, academic development and personal growth remained central elements of the student experience. In contrast, recent studies by Ghazi et al. (2025a, 2025b), conducted among final-year students in public polytechnic institutions in Indonesia, provide further evidence of a positive relationship between perceived employability and student satisfaction. Their findings suggest that students who perceive stronger employment prospects also tend to evaluate their higher education experience more positively, with perceived employability being closely associated with perceptions of institutional quality, service quality, and value. Taken together, these studies indicate that students' assessments of their university experience are shaped not only by academic factors, but also by the extent to which they perceive their studies as supporting their future employment prospects.

These differences are important because they indicate that the relationship between perceived employability and student satisfaction cannot be assumed to operate identically across educational systems and institutional contexts. The literature included in the present study covers several national settings, including the United Kingdom, Spain, Canada, South Africa, Turkey, Indonesia and other higher education environments, whereas the relationship between the two constructs has received comparatively limited attention within the Greek higher education context addressed in this study. The Greek case is particularly relevant because the role of universities has increasingly been discussed in relation to graduate skills, career preparation and connections with the labour market (Prokou, 2008). Within this context, examining how students approaching graduation perceive both their future employability and their overall university experience may provide useful evidence for understanding how professional expectations are incorporated into students' evaluation of higher education.

The practical relevance of this issue is also substantial. If students who perceive themselves as better prepared for employment also evaluate their university experience more positively, employability-related provision may have implications beyond graduate labour-market outcomes. Curriculum design, career development learning, opportunities for work-related experience and institutional support may contribute not only to students' preparation for employment but also to the perceived value of their studies (Boud, 2016; Scott, 2019). Conversely, if demographic characteristics or previous employment-related experience are associated with different levels of perceived employability or satisfaction, universities may need to consider whether different groups of students encounter the transition from education to employment in different ways. These considerations provide the basis

for examining both the central relationship between perceived employability and student satisfaction and possible differences associated with gender and previous work experience or internship participation.

Accordingly, the present study investigates perceived employability and student satisfaction among students in their fourth year of study or beyond at public universities in Northern Greece. The primary objectives are to determine whether perceived employability is significantly associated with student satisfaction and whether perceived employability can statistically predict student satisfaction. As secondary objectives, the study examines whether perceived employability and student satisfaction differ according to gender and according to the presence of previous work experience and/or internship participation. The study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design and uses established self-report measures to examine these relationships and group differences within the target population.

The following research questions guide the study:

1. Is there a statistically significant relationship between perceived employability and student satisfaction?
2. Can perceived employability statistically predict student satisfaction?
3. Are there statistically significant differences in perceived employability and/or student satisfaction according to students' gender?
4. Are there statistically significant differences in perceived employability and/or student satisfaction according to previous work experience and/or internship participation?

2. Method

2.1 Research Design and Participants

A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was employed to examine the relationship between perceived employability and student satisfaction. Data were collected through a structured self-report questionnaire administered to undergraduate students in their fourth year of study or beyond at public higher education institutions in Northern Greece. No restriction was applied with regard to academic discipline or field of study. Students at this stage of their studies were specifically targeted because they are closer to the transition from higher education to the labour market and are therefore expected to have a more developed awareness of their future career prospects and a more consolidated view of their university experience (Pitan & Muller, 2020). The final sample consisted of 210 students who participated voluntarily in the study.

2.2 Sampling and Data Collection Procedure

A non-probability purposive convenience sampling strategy was used to recruit participants who met the study eligibility criteria. Students below the fourth year of undergraduate study were not eligible to participate. Data collection took place between June 2025 and February 2026.

The questionnaire was developed in Google Forms and distributed electronically through social media platforms, including Viber and Facebook, as well as by email. In-person recruitment was also used to reach additional eligible students and increase participation within the target population. Before completing the questionnaire, participants were provided with information regarding the purpose and significance of the research. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and no personally identifying information was collected. The research instrument comprised an introductory information section, two established measurement scales, and a section collecting selected background characteristics relevant to the analyses.

2.3 Measures

Perceived employability was measured using the Perceived Employability Scale of Rothwell et al. (2008), as adapted for undergraduate students. The instrument consists of 16 items assessing students' perceptions of their ability to enter the labour market and maintain an appropriate and sustainable professional trajectory. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 =

Strongly Agree. Higher scores represented higher levels of perceived employability. Student satisfaction was assessed using a seven-item Student Satisfaction Scale previously employed and empirically validated in higher education research (Bwachele et al., 2023). The measure captures students' overall evaluation of their university experience, including satisfaction with their decision to enrol, their general experience at the institution, and their willingness to recommend or select the institution again.

The scale reflects overall satisfaction, understood as a global evaluation that integrates both cognitive and affective aspects of the educational experience rather than satisfaction with isolated institutional attributes (Oliver, 1989, 1997). Responses were recorded on a seven-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat Disagree, 4 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 5 = Somewhat Agree, 6 = Agree, and 7 = Strongly Agree. Higher scores indicated greater student satisfaction.

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to assess the internal consistency of both instruments. Reliability coefficients of $\alpha = .907$ for perceived employability and $\alpha = .972$ for student satisfaction were obtained, indicating high internal consistency for both scales. Composite mean scores were subsequently calculated for each construct and used in the inferential analyses.

The questionnaire also collected information on gender, age, year of study, academic affiliation, and previous work experience and/or internship participation. Gender and previous work experience and/or internship participation were retained as additional variables for examining possible differences in perceived employability and student satisfaction.

2.4 Data Analysis

Responses collected through Google Forms were initially recorded in Google Sheets and subsequently transferred to Microsoft Excel for preliminary organization and coding. The final dataset was then imported into Jamovi, version 2.6.44, where all statistical analyses were conducted.

Descriptive statistics were first calculated to summarize the sample and the principal study variables. Frequencies and percentages were used for categorical variables, while means and standard deviations were calculated for perceived employability and student satisfaction. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha before the composite mean scores for the two principal constructs were used in subsequent analyses.

Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationship between perceived employability and student satisfaction. A simple linear regression analysis was then conducted to determine whether perceived employability statistically predicted student satisfaction, with student satisfaction entered as the dependent variable and perceived employability as the predictor.

A multiple linear regression analysis was additionally conducted with student satisfaction as the dependent variable and perceived employability, gender, and previous work experience and/or internship participation included in the model. This analysis was used to examine the predictive contribution of perceived employability while simultaneously accounting for the two additional participant characteristics.

For comparisons between independent groups, the normality of perceived employability and student satisfaction was assessed using the Shapiro–Wilk test separately within the gender groups and within the groups defined by previous work experience and/or internship participation. Because the normality assumption was not satisfied, non-parametric Mann–Whitney U tests were used to examine differences in perceived employability and student satisfaction according to gender and previous work experience and/or internship participation. Effect-size estimates were also calculated to evaluate the magnitude of the observed group differences.

3. Results

3.1 Participant Characteristics

A total of 210 undergraduate students in their fourth year of study or beyond participated in the study. The main characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1 and include gender, age group, year of study, and previous work experience and/or internship participation. Women represented the majority of the sample, accounting for 72.9% of participants, while men represented 27.1%. Most participants were aged 18–24 years (81.9%), followed by those aged 25–34 years (14.3%), whereas only 3.8% were aged 35–44 years.

With regard to year of study, 69.5% of participants were in their fourth year, 15.7% were in their fifth year, and 14.8% were in their sixth year or beyond. This distribution indicates that the sample was predominantly composed of students approaching the completion of their undergraduate studies. Previous work experience and/or internship participation was reported by 66.7% of the participants, while 33.3% reported no such experience. This variable was subsequently examined in relation to perceived employability and student satisfaction.

Table 1: Participant Characteristics

Variable	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	57	27.1
	Female	153	72.9
Age group	18-24 years	172	81.9
	25-34 years	30	14.3
	35-44 years	8	3.8
Year of study	4 th year	146	69.5
	5 th year	33	15.7
	6 th year or above	31	14.8
Previous work experience/internship	yes	140	66.7
	no	70	33.3

3.2 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Descriptive statistics and internal consistency estimates for the two main study variables are presented in Table 2. Perceived employability showed a mean score of 3.20 (SD = 0.726), indicating a moderate level on the five-point response scale. Student satisfaction yielded a mean score of 4.79 (SD = 1.73), reflecting a relatively high level of satisfaction on the seven-point scale.

The internal consistency of both measures was high. Cronbach's alpha was .907 for perceived employability and .972 for student satisfaction, indicating strong reliability for both scales and supporting the use of composite mean scores in the subsequent analyses.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability of the Main Study Variables

Variable	N	M (SD)	α
Perceived Employability	210	3.20 (0.726)	.907
Student Satisfaction	210	4.79 (1.73)	.972

Note. N = sample size; M = mean; SD = standard deviation; α = Cronbach's alpha.

3.3 Correlation Analysis

Table 3: Correlation Between Perceived Employability and Student Satisfaction

Variable	1	2
Perceived Employability	-	-
Student Satisfaction	.541***	-

Note. $N = 210$. *** Correlation is significant at the .001 level (two-tailed)

A Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between perceived employability and student satisfaction. The analysis identified a statistically significant positive correlation between the two variables, $r(208) = .54, p < .001$. The positive direction of the coefficient indicates that higher perceived employability scores were associated with higher student satisfaction scores.

The magnitude of the correlation was moderate, indicating a substantive linear association between the two constructs. The result therefore provides evidence of a statistically significant relationship between perceived employability and student satisfaction in the study sample. The correlation coefficient and corresponding significance level are presented in Table 3.

3.4 Regression Analysis

Regression analyses were conducted to examine whether perceived employability statistically predicted student satisfaction. Two models were estimated. Model 1 consisted of a simple linear regression in which perceived employability was entered as the sole predictor of student satisfaction. Model 2 extended this analysis by simultaneously including perceived employability, gender, and previous work experience and/or internship participation as predictors. The results of both models are presented in Table 4.

In Model 1, perceived employability was a statistically significant positive predictor of student satisfaction, $B = 1.310, \beta = .541, t = 9.28, p < .001$. The model explained 29.3% of the variance in student satisfaction ($R^2 = .293$). Thus, differences in perceived employability scores accounted for a substantial proportion of the observed variability in student satisfaction within the sample. The positive unstandardized coefficient indicates that a one-unit increase in perceived employability was associated with an estimated 1.31-unit increase in student satisfaction. Model 2 examined whether perceived employability remained a significant predictor when gender and previous work experience and/or internship participation were included in the regression model. Perceived employability continued to demonstrate a statistically significant positive association with student satisfaction, $B = 1.327, \beta = .548, t = 9.316, p < .001$. In contrast, neither gender, $B = 0.095, \beta = .024, t = 0.418, p = .677$, nor previous work experience and/or internship participation, $B = -0.218, \beta = -.060, t = -1.013, p = .312$, emerged as statistically significant predictors.

The multiple regression model accounted for 29.7% of the variance in student satisfaction ($R^2 = .297$). Compared with Model 1, the inclusion of gender and previous work experience and/or internship participation increased the proportion of explained variance from 29.3% to 29.7%, corresponding to an increase of 0.4 percentage points. Perceived employability therefore remained the only statistically significant predictor among the variables included in Model 2.

Table 4: Regression Analyses Predicting Student Satisfaction

Model and predictor	B	β	t	p
<i>Model 1</i>				
Constant	.587		1.27	0.207
Perceived Employability	1.310	.541	9.28	<.001
<i>Model 2</i>				
Constant	0.660		1.019	.309
Perceived Employability	1.327	.548	9.316	<.001
Gender	0.095	.024	0.418	.677
Previous work experience/internship	-0.218	-0.0596	-1.013	.312

Note. B = unstandardized regression coefficient; β = standardized regression coefficient. Model 1: $R^2 = .293$. Model 2: $R^2 = .297$. Dependent variable = Student Satisfaction.

3.5 Comparative Analysis of Perceived Employability and Student Satisfaction

Mann–Whitney U tests were conducted to examine whether perceived employability and student satisfaction differed according to gender and previous work experience and/or internship participation. The analyses showed no statistically significant gender differences in perceived employability, $U = 4245$, $p = .769$, rank-biserial $r = -.027$, or in student satisfaction, $U = 3973$, $p = .322$, rank-biserial $r = .089$.

Similarly, no statistically significant differences were identified between students with and without previous work experience and/or internship participation. For perceived employability, the difference between the two groups did not reach statistical significance, $U = 4153$, $p = .072$, rank-biserial $r = .152$. Student satisfaction also did not differ significantly between the groups, $U = 4760$, $p = .737$, rank-biserial $r = .029$. Overall, the effect-size estimates were small across all comparisons, indicating limited differences between the groups examined. The full results of the comparative analyses are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Mann–Whitney U Tests for Differences in Perceived Employability and Student Satisfaction

Grouping Variable	Outcome Variable	U	p	Rank-Biserial r
Gender	Perceived Employability	4245	.769	-0.0265
	Student Satisfaction	3973	.322	.0890
Previous work experience/internship	Perceived Employability	4153	.072	.1524
	Student Satisfaction	4760	.737	.0286

Note. U = Mann–Whitney U statistic; rank-biserial r = effect size.

4. Discussion

The findings provide evidence that perceived employability is closely associated with students' evaluation of their higher education experience. Perceived employability showed a statistically significant positive relationship with student satisfaction and remained a significant predictor when gender and previous work experience and/or internship participation were included in the regression model. By contrast, neither of these additional characteristics was associated with significant differences in perceived employability or satisfaction. Overall, the results indicate that students' perceptions of their future employment prospects are meaningfully connected with their assessment of university study, whereas the demographic and experiential characteristics examined appear to play a more limited role.

The positive association between perceived employability and student satisfaction is consistent with research suggesting that students increasingly evaluate higher education partly in relation to its perceived relevance to their transition into employment. Støren and Aamodt (2010) found that students who perceived stronger preparation for working life tended to evaluate their studies more favorably, while Tessema et al. (2012) identified preparation for employment or further study as one of the dimensions most strongly associated with overall satisfaction with an academic programme. Martin et al. (2000) likewise linked satisfaction with curriculum, academic resources and skills development to graduates' perceptions of preparation for employment. More recent evidence from Ghazi et al. (2025a, 2025b) further supports a positive connection between perceived employability and student satisfaction, suggesting that students' assessment of their future employment prospects forms part of their broader evaluation of institutional quality and value.

The regression findings strengthen this interpretation. Perceived employability alone accounted for 29.3% of the variance in student satisfaction, while the inclusion of gender and previous work experience and/or internship participation increased the explained variance only marginally to 29.7%. Perceived employability remained the only statistically significant predictor in the extended model. Considering that student satisfaction is shaped by multiple academic, institutional and social dimensions, explaining almost one third of its variance represents a meaningful contribution. Teaching quality, relationships with academic staff and peers, access to support and the perceived value of the educational experience have all been associated with satisfaction (Elliott & Shin, 2002; Letcher & Neves, 2010). The present findings therefore do not suggest that employability replaces these dimensions, but rather that perceptions of professional prospects constitute an important component of students' overall evaluation of higher education.

This relationship is also consistent with the conceptual nature of perceived employability. Rather than referring simply to the likelihood of obtaining a job, the construct incorporates students' perceptions of their capabilities, their university, their field of study and conditions in the external labour market (Rothwell et al., 2008, Rothwell et al., 2009). Vanhercke et al. (2014) similarly emphasise its subjective character, defining employability in terms of perceived possibilities for obtaining and maintaining employment. Students who believe that their studies have provided skills and capabilities that can be translated into future opportunities may consequently attach greater value to their university experience. At the same time, this interpretation should not reduce higher education to labour-market preparation alone. James and Yun (2018) showed that teaching quality, academic development and personal growth remain central to students' evaluations even when career preparation is considered important.

Employability can therefore be understood as one dimension of a broader assessment of educational value. The absence of statistically significant gender differences provides additional insight. Men and women did not differ significantly in either perceived employability or student satisfaction, and the observed effect sizes were very small. This finding is compatible with Caricati et al. (2016), who reported broadly similar patterns of perceived employability among male and female students. However, the literature is not entirely consistent. Pitan and Muller (2020), for example, identified higher perceived employability among male students. Such variation suggests that gender differences may depend on the institutional, disciplinary and labour-market context in which students form their perceptions. The current results therefore indicate that gender was not a meaningful differentiating factor within this sample, rather than suggesting that gender is universally unrelated to graduate employability.

Similarly, previous work experience and/or internship participation was not associated with significant differences in either outcome. This result is noteworthy because professional experience is frequently presented as an important mechanism for strengthening employment readiness. Andrews and Higson (2008) emphasised the contribution of work experience to transferable skills and professional preparation, while Gault et al. (2000) and Zopiatis (2007) highlighted the role of internships in connecting academic learning with professional practice. Bennett et al. (2023) also found that students with employment experience reported greater confidence across several employability-related dimensions.

Nevertheless, the present finding is not inconsistent with all previous research. Ergün and Şeşen (2021) did not identify pre-graduation work experience as a significant determinant of perceived employability, indicating that exposure to employment does not automatically translate into stronger employability perceptions. A possible explanation lies in the heterogeneity of work-related experiences. Employment and internships can vary substantially in duration, relevance to the field of study, responsibility, supervision and opportunities for meaningful skills development. Consequently, the quality and relevance of professional exposure may be more important than its mere presence. Because work experience and internship participation were examined as a single dichotomous variable, the current analysis could not distinguish between these different forms of experience.

This interpretation is consistent with a broader understanding of employability as the product of interacting personal and contextual factors. Álvarez-González et al. (2017) identified contributions from skills, academic performance, personal circumstances, social networks and self-confidence, while Ergün and Şeşen (2021) emphasised the importance of contextual conditions, particularly perceptions of the external labour market. McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) similarly argue that employability cannot be explained solely through individual attributes because access to employment is also shaped by wider social and economic circumstances. Professional experience should therefore be considered one potential contributor within a considerably more complex process.

The findings have practical implications for higher education institutions. The relationship between perceived employability and satisfaction suggests that employability development can contribute not only to students' preparation for employment but also to the perceived relevance of their studies. This supports approaches that embed career development and work-related learning within the wider curriculum rather than treating them solely as activities undertaken immediately before graduation. Career development learning and work-integrated learning can provide opportunities to connect disciplinary knowledge with professional contexts and to help students recognise how their academic capabilities may be transferred beyond university (Boud, 2016; Scott, 2019).

The absence of significant differences according to previous work experience also suggests that simply increasing the number of internship or employment opportunities may not be sufficient. Greater attention may be needed to the educational quality of these experiences and to the mechanisms through which students reflect on, recognize and communicate the competencies developed through them. In this respect, universities can contribute to perceived employability through curriculum design, career services, employer engagement and structured opportunities for professional development, while recognising that external labour-market conditions remain outside their direct control.

The findings are particularly relevant within the Greek higher education context, where the role of universities has increasingly been discussed in relation to skills development and connections with the labour market (Prokou, 2008). Evidence concerning the relationship between perceived employability and student satisfaction in Greece remains comparatively limited. The present results therefore add context-specific evidence suggesting that, among students approaching graduation, perceptions of future employment opportunities are closely integrated into evaluations of the university experience.

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. The use of non-probability sampling and the concentration on students from public higher education institutions in Northern Greece limit generalization to the wider Greek student population. The sample was also predominantly female. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design allows conclusions regarding association and statistical prediction but not causal direction.

Finally, the combined measurement of previous work experience and internship participation did not capture differences in type, duration, relevance or quality of professional experience.

Future research could address these issues by distinguishing different forms of work-related experience and examining whether their relevance to students' fields of study influences perceived employability. Disciplinary differences also warrant attention, since perceptions of employment opportunities may vary according to labour-market demand for particular fields (Rothwell et al., 2008; Caricati et al., 2016). Longitudinal research following students from university into employment would be particularly valuable for examining how perceived employability changes during the transition to work and whether perceptions formed before graduation correspond with subsequent employment outcomes.

Overall, the findings position perceived employability as an important component of students' evaluation of higher education. Students who perceived stronger employment prospects also reported greater satisfaction, and perceived employability remained the principal statistical predictor when gender and previous employment-related experience were considered simultaneously. The results therefore support a view of employability as part of the broader value students attach to their university experience. For higher education institutions, strengthening meaningful connections between academic learning, capability development and professional transition may contribute both to students' preparation for the labour market and to their overall evaluation of their studies.

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