

EMPLOYABILITY OF PROSPECTIVE SPECIALISTS AS A SET OF INTERNAL RESOURCES AND READINESS TO ENSURE THEIR OWN EMPLOYMENT IN CHANGING LABOUR MARKET CONDITIONS

Marina Troškova ¹, Irēna Katane ²

^{1,2} Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies, Latvia

Abstract. *One of the key objectives of universities is to equip students as prospective specialists with the knowledge, skills, and competences required to secure employment in the future and to ensure that graduates continue to be employable throughout their lives, given that the conditions of modern living and the work environment are continuously changing. This study was carried out to analyse the complex nature of employability. The aim of the article is to substantiate the employability of university students as prospective specialists as a set of internal resources and their readiness to ensure their own employment in changing labour market conditions in order to set the foundation for the development of an assessment methodology to evaluate and develop the employability of students in the framework of university career guidance programmes. The authors attained the research findings presented in the article by applying the following research methods: theoretical research methods, which included desk study, review, analysis, and assessment of the scientific literature and various kinds of documents; and the empirical research method, which involved the reflection of the authors' personal experiences. The theoretical study took place in several directions to provide justification that: 1) employability is a set of various internal resources; 2) employability is viewed as readiness to ensure one's employment in changing labour market conditions; 3) readiness to ensure one's employment in changing labour market conditions is closely related to readiness for career self-management, as it is a component of readiness for career self-management; 4) readiness to ensure one's employment in changing labour market conditions, examining the structure and components (five sub-categories of readiness are identified); 5) the assessment methodology for assessing an individual's readiness to ensure their own employment in changing labour market conditions, including certain criteria and corresponding indicators. The research findings allowed several significant conclusions to be formed. The concept of employability is defined as a set of internal resources, and the ability to ensure employment in continuously changing labour market conditions. The readiness of university students as prospective specialists to ensure employment in changing labour market conditions can be analysed and evaluated from the perspective of readiness for career self-management. The readiness of university students as prospective specialists to ensure their employment in changing labour market conditions comprises five structural parts: 1) readiness for independent professional activities; 2) readiness for career self-development, including job search and integration in the labour market; 3) readiness for change in changeable conditions; 4) readiness for entrepreneurship; and 5) readiness for lifelong and lifewide education. Each of these structural parts can be used as an assessment criterion, enabling the formulation of a number of assessment indicators. Each readiness criterion includes both a psychological and a functional or competence-based component. The results of the study can serve as a basis for the further development of assessment methodology to assess the employability of university students as prospective specialists, which includes assessing their readiness to ensure employment in changing labour market conditions.*

Keywords: *assessment criteria and indicators, employability, prospective specialists, readiness structure.*

To cite this article:

Troškova, M. & Katane, I. (2024). Employability of Prospective Specialists as a Set of Internal Resources and Readiness to Ensure Their Own Employment in Changing Labour Market Conditions. *Education. Innovation. Diversity*, 1(8), 14 – 27. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17770/eid2024.1.7777>

Introduction

Nowadays, educational institutions are working on developing and investing in career guidance programmes to equip students as prospective specialists with the necessary knowledge, skills, and competences to meet the needs of employers and prepare them for the ever-changing labour market (Stewart, 2022; Troškova, 2023).

Employers expect university graduates to be work-ready individuals who are well-equipped to join the labour market and contribute positively to the new organisation, employer, and industry as a whole (Borg, Borg, Scott-Young, & Naderpajouh, 2020). After graduation, prospective specialists are expected to have certain kinds and levels of readiness to start and continue a career in the industry. Therefore, one of the objectives of the university's activity is to promote the development of students' employability so that graduates of the university can secure jobs for themselves.

Theoretical research results (Bridgstock, 2009; Peeters et al., 2017; Smaldone, Ippolito, Lager, & Pellicano, 2022) prove that the researchers' interest focus shifted from employment to employability.

Numerous researchers (CEDEFOP, 2023; Egbert, 2023; Hakim, Laelawati, & Mardiana, 2022; Katane & Katans, 2023; Rakićević, Rakićević, Anđelković, & Ljamić, 2022; Smaldone et al., 2022; Soika & Vronska, 2023; Stewart, 2022; Troshkova, 2023; Troshkova & Katane, 2023; World Economic Forum, 2023; Zachar et al., 2003) now view employability as a broad and complex concept.

Even though researchers are interested in analysing and defining employability, the concept itself lacks a clearly defined structure, criteria and indicators. The aim of the article is to substantiate the employability of university students as prospective specialists as a set of internal resources and their readiness to ensure their own employment in changing labour market conditions in order to set the foundation for the development of an assessment methodology to evaluate and develop the employability of students in the framework of university career guidance programmes.

Methodology

The authors attained the research findings presented in the article by applying the following research methods: theoretical research methods, which included desk study, review, analysis, and assessment of the scientific literature and various kinds of documents; and the empirical research method, which involved the reflection of the authors' personal experiences.

The theoretical study took place in several directions to provide justification that: 1) employability is a set of various internal resources; 2) employability is viewed as readiness to ensure one's employment in changing labour market conditions; 3) readiness to ensure one's employment in changing labour market conditions is closely related to readiness for career self-management, as it is a component of readiness for career self-management; 4) readiness to ensure one's employment in changing labour market conditions, examining its structure and five structural parts (five sub-categories of readiness are identified); 5) the assessment methodology for assessing an individual's readiness to ensure their own employment in changing labour market conditions, including certain criteria and corresponding indicators.

Research Results

Employability as a Set of Internal Resources

Even though the concept of employability has been of high interest among researchers in recent years (Bridgstock, 2009; Borg et al., 2020; Peeters et al., 2017), the researchers' views on its definition vary.

Two types of employability are discussed in Ruth Bridgstock's study (Bridgstock, 2009). The narrow definition is primarily aimed at short-term aims related to graduate employment after graduation and focuses on developing skills that are appealing to employers. The broader definition of employability, however, includes the ability to secure and retain employment, as well as being able to change and grow individually and together with the company. The authors (Peeters et al., 2017) use the term employability capital to describe a combination of personal

resources that enable individuals to obtain and retain employment, successfully change jobs, find new job opportunities, and importantly, maintain employment.

In accordance with the researchers (Smaldone et al., 2022), the employability concept points out where the supply of employees meets the demand for them and it leads and results in employment which can be viewed from the perspective of individuals, organisations, and the labour market, where the responsibility shifts from one level to another, depending on the need.

Employability refers to an individual's ability to manage, direct and change their career by constantly making choices and decisions. This is particularly important in a fast-changing and dynamic labour market, where new jobs appear, requiring individuals to gain new information, skills, and competences. These changes are inevitable; however, in order to predict the exact moment what skills and competences will be most in demand and when is currently challenging. Hence, with regard to career self-management and employability, as well as personality and professional self-development, modern society requires individuals to possess the ability to adjust to changes, be flexible in their thinking and actions, analyse the ongoing processes and labour market, assess their internal resources, and draw conclusions. These skills and competences are now beginning to develop in relation to employability that can ensure employment. Thus, employability is understood as a set of abilities to find and keep a job in constantly changing and often unpredictable conditions (Aylott, 2018; Soika & Vronska, 2023).

The review of theoretical literature (Īriste, 2018; Katane & Troskova, 2020; Troshkova & Katane, 2023) reveals that some researchers use the term employability interchangeably with competitiveness, but others point out that employability is one of the manifestations of competitiveness. Since the researchers' opinions of the concept differ, it is essential to emphasise that the authors of the current study view employability as a manifestation of competitiveness. They define employability as a set, encompassing an individual's motives, goals, attitudes, values, competences, internal personal qualities, and accumulated experiences. Employability is considered an internal resource that ensures employment and serves as a reliable source of efficiency, innovation, and productivity for employers. (Katane & Troskova, 2020; Lowden, Hall, Elliot, & Lewin, 2011). This means that employability is a set of an individual's internal resources, which forms their readiness for career self-management and ensures employment in the changing conditions of the modern labour market.

Employability as Readiness Based on Internal Resources to Ensure an Individual's Employment in Changing Labour Market Conditions

The previously conducted studies show that the interpretation of employability in the broadest sense of this concept allows one to conclude that employability is an individual's readiness to ensure their employment in changing labour market conditions, finding a suitable job, starting and successfully continuing an independent professional activity, continuously learning and improving professionally. This finding is based not only on the justification of employability as a set of internal resources but also on the interpretation of the concept of readiness for action based on theoretical research (Baltušite, 2013; Katane & Baltušite, 2007; Katane & Kruglija, 2009; Sam, 2013), which shows that several authors offer different interpretations of the concept of readiness for action, which in some way complement each other: 1) readiness as an orientation; 2) readiness as a pre-start state of action; 3) readiness as a mental state of being prepared, open and willing to do certain activities, in this case, professional ones; 4) readiness as the mobilisation of internal resources for actions; 5) readiness as professional preparation; readiness as an expression of ability; 6) readiness as a synthesis of personal characteristics; 7) readiness for action as a set of personal characteristics that arise as a result of the pursued education (including professional education) and accumulated experience.

To fully understand the close relationship between the employability of individuals and readiness to ensure their employment in changing labour market conditions, it is necessary to provide an insight into the concept of employment. In accordance with the Labour Law of the Republic of Latvia (LR Saeima, 2001b), employment always has a legal nature, and the employment relationship is regulated by the constitution of the state and other binding normative acts, laws and regulations, the collective agreement, and working procedure regulations. An employee in this respect is a person who is fulfilling the specific duties indicated in the employment contract for the agreed remuneration. The employment has a legal basis, and both parties sign a legal agreement on certain conditions. This means that the individual, based on the internal resources that form their employability, has successfully secured a job that is suitable for them, and is legally allowed to carry out their job responsibilities within their professional sphere while receiving adequate remuneration for their work. Therefore, employment is the achieved outcome of the individual's employability, successfully realised in practice, and the external manifestation of their internal potential or resources, which proves that the individual's abilities: knowledge, skills, competences, abilities, and experience gained, are properly assessed by the employer. Employment is the external manifestation of employability as an internal resource of an individual and the result of readiness to ensure one's employment in changing labour market conditions; employability is a prerequisite and guarantee of employment. In addition to this, employment is one of the desired results of career self-management, flexible and continuously changing career (Katane & Katans, 2023).

Business university graduates are often engaged in entrepreneurial activities and become self-employed. As per the Labour Protection Law (LR Saeima, 2001a) and the Personal Income Tax Law (LR Saeima, 1993), a self-employed individual is an individual who works independently and is responsible for paying their own income taxes and making social insurance contributions. In this scenario, specialists not only have the ability to secure employment but also create employment possibilities for others, thus making a more effective contribution to economic development.

Therefore, employment refers to the act of obtaining a job that enables an individual to be active in the labour market. It is founded on legal reasons, including the terms outlined in the employment contract with the employer, and involves receiving fair remuneration for one's work.

The employability of university students as prospective specialists is viewed as readiness to ensure employment in changing labour market conditions, based on their internal resources; this includes finding a suitable job and continuously seeking opportunities for professional growth. Therefore, the concept of readiness to ensure one's own employment can be understood as part of a broader category called readiness for career self-management.

Career self-management encompasses career exploration, setting and achieving one's career goals, including actions that help an individual improve future career opportunities and career growth. Career self-management is increasingly important in today's world of education and work. Several researchers in the context of career self-management talk about personal independence and responsibility and the need to plan one's activities and monitor results, as well as about essential 21st century skills that are highly valued by employers – creativity, individual decision-making, as well as important issues in the career development of individuals, including the importance of career success and satisfaction with one's career, and professional identity. In the career self-management process, it is essential to realise one's own knowledge, skills, competences and abilities, including the ability to build relationships and accumulate different experiences, which can help them achieve their desired results, learn and understand themselves, as well as interact with the changing environment, including changeable work environments, encompassing the diverse possibilities of development and self-realisation (Katane & Korna-Opincāne, 2020). Readiness for career self-management ensures the determination and discovery of individual personal characteristics (interests, values, direction

etc.). Readiness for career self-management testifies that individuals have developed a specific attitude towards a particular professional working environment, indicating their readiness to pursue professional fulfilment in a particular sphere of life. If individuals are ready for career self-management, they are ready to take responsibility for their future, comprehend themselves, and possess the ability to progress, and are able to consider and make responsible decisions.

Structure of Employability as Readiness to Secure One's Employment in Changing Labour Market Conditions

The research has led to the creation of a structure of readiness to ensure one's employment in changing labour market conditions. The structure comprises multiple parts, each representing various types of an individual's readiness as a substructural part (Figure 1).

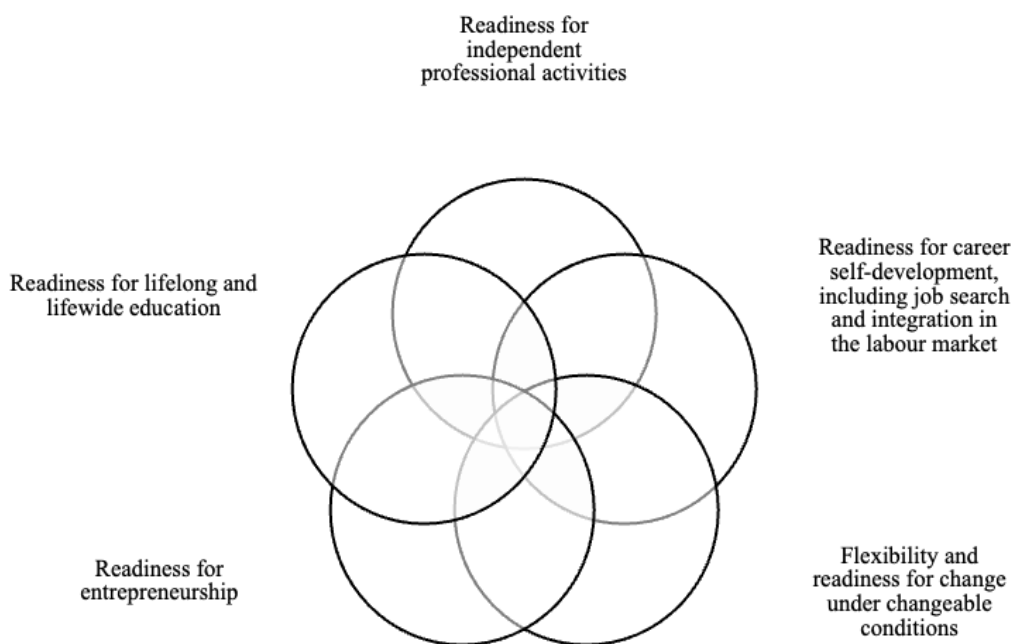


Figure 1 The structure of readiness of university students as prospective specialists to ensure their own employment in changing labour market conditions (Created by the authors).

The structure of university students' readiness to ensure their own employment can be divided into five structural parts (Figure 1): 1) readiness for independent professional activities; 2) readiness for career self-development, including job search and integration in the labour market; 3) readiness for change in changeable conditions; 4) readiness for entrepreneurship; 5) readiness for lifelong and lifewide education. Thus, the readiness of university students as prospective specialists to ensure their own employment under changeable labour market conditions is the result of several types of readiness. Given the interconnection and common features of each structural component, it is difficult to define their limits as they contribute to one another. As a result, the segments of the five structural components overlap (Figure 1).

• **Readiness for professional activities.** One of the main goals of university education is to prepare students to become competent professionals capable of working independently in their respective fields (Baltušīte, 2013). The development of hard and soft skills during university study time is one of the essential components for the employability of graduates (Low, Botes, Dela Rue, & Allen, 2016). Automation, robotisation, and artificial intelligence increase the need for digital competence in all professional fields and at all educational levels, demanding specific technical skills for each profession (Low et al., 2016; CEDEFOP, 2023).

Digital competences refer to typing, social media posting, software development, and cybersecurity, enabling individuals to understand, use, and create value with technology (Zini, 2023). In the Future of Jobs Report 2023 (World Economic Forum, 2023), digital competences are introduced with a focus on design and user experience. They are then followed by digital literacy, which encompasses critical thinking, responsible internet use, software selection, and the ability to search and evaluate digital information for research and job performance (Hakim et al., 2022).

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and big data (World Economic Forum, 2023) are becoming a third priority in company training strategies from now until 2027. In addition to this, in accordance with the Future of Jobs Report, the ability to use AI technologies effectively now exceeds human computer programming, networks and cybersecurity expertise, digital literacy, design, and user experience.

In addition to acquiring specific hard skills, it is crucial to develop certain attitudes for employability. According to the OECD research (OECD, 2020), due to the ever-changing circumstances of the modern world, individuals need to develop strong cognitive and social skills in addition to emotional skills and digital competences. Cognitive skills encompass the ability to analyse and reflect upon diverse situations and are essential for active engagement in economic and social activities. Social skills encompass the skills necessary for individuals to collaborate effectively to accomplish specific objectives. The ability to work with others involves applying empathy and active listening (World Economic Forum, 2023). Furthermore, the importance of ethics and self-efficacy is emphasised. Under ethics, it is important to embrace environmental responsibility, demonstrate global citizenship, have curiosity, and commit to lifelong learning. Self-efficacy involves displaying dependability and attention to detail, fostering motivation and self-awareness, raising resilience, and adopting flexibility and agility.

Psychological readiness is considered the long-term, holistic development of mental processes which include a certain mindset, motivation, experience, and professional aspects, ensuring the functioning of all mental areas and including professional and personal readiness for self-realisation (Baimenova, Bekova, & Saule, 2015; Chernyavska & Khokhlina, 2022). One of the crucial factors in this readiness is a conscious career choice. While making this choice, an individual's skills and qualities, awareness of the needs, demands of society, the ability to set goals, the ability to express intellectual processes, the connection with personal capabilities, the level of aspiration and necessary achievements must be considered (Bull, 2018; Uhryn, 2013). Values and family relationships have an impact on the development of readiness components in the chosen profession (Uhryn, 2013).

Other researchers (Bandaranaike & Willison, 2015) call this component emotional and consider it to involve identifying work skills, the ability to reflect on them, and the use of reflective practice to understand cognitive and affective aspects.

In addition to the indicators mentioned before, the research highlights the significance of emotional intelligence on communication, decision-making and collaboration. Emotional intelligence, also referred to as emotional-social intelligence (Bar-On, 2006), covers multiple components including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Devi & Singh, 2023). It primarily focuses on the abilities to identify, understand, and express emotions, understand the emotions of others, control emotions, overcome changes, adapt and solve personal and interpersonal problems, as well as to develop positive emotions and self-motivation (Bar-On, 2006). It also includes the ability to stay and continue working in a certain position despite the challenges or issues present in the workplace.

● ***Readiness for career self-development.*** It is important that individuals in our society, especially young people, are ready to develop their careers in conditions of continuous change (Egbert, 2023). New labour relations expect that while an organisational role in an individual's career management is becoming less important, the individual is still responsible for managing

their own personal development (Jaunzeme, 2011). Researchers (Katane & Korna-Opincāne, 2020) discuss the career self-development process as one that begins with conducting research on career options, including available opportunities, job searches, and assessing personal resources, achievements, interests, and values to determine the career that fits and, finally, developing and implementing strategies to achieve one's career goals. It is necessary to understand where an individual is, acknowledge any fears or doubts, and seek support when needed. In terms of readiness for career self-development, the significance of reflective career competences (motivation and reflection), communicative career competences (networking and self-presentation), and behavioural career competences (work exploration and career control) are emphasised (Akkermans, Brenninkmeijer, Huibers, & Blonk, 2013).

● ***Flexibility and readiness for change in changeable conditions.*** Due to the introduction of different forms of work and changes in the modern world, more flexibility and readiness for change are required from a prospective employee (Jaunzeme, 2011). Developing an ability to be flexible in both thinking and acting is crucial in professional activities and communication with others. Flexibility is an essential indicator in determining an individual's competitiveness (Īriste, 2018; Katane, 2010). Flexibility in career development and self-management in response to current changing conditions, including labour market challenges, is currently of high significance. An individual's high level of readiness to self-manage a lifelong and diverse job (self-managed lifelong career) can be demonstrated by their willingness to adapt and their professional activities, potentially even changing their profession or career path throughout their life (Katane & Katans, 2023). It is crucial for an individual to be ready to adapt to changes and develop themselves during the process of learning and self-managing their career in accordance with the Transformative Theory of Learning, the author of which is Mezirow and his peers (Fleming, 2018; Mezirow, 1997). A person develops and changes because of changes in their beliefs, sets of perceptions about something, as well as changing attitudes and values. During the process of change, competences and self-confidence in new roles and relationships are developed and the process of reintegration into one's life occurs under conditions set by one's new perspectives (Mezirow, 1997). One scientist (Egbert, 2023) indicates six stages of change, from no intention of changing an individual's behaviour to when the change is fully integrated into an individual's identity and routine, and when it becomes an integral part of an individual. Flexibility is crucial as each individual interacts with as well as within a previously unexplored and unknown environment. U. Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner, 1996) proposes three types of interaction between the individual and the environment, which are applied to the current research. When a prospective specialist starts working in a new workplace, they should not expect to influence and change everything at their own initiative from the very beginning, demanding that the environment adapts and changes according to their requirements and wishes. This is never productive because there is a significant possibility of confrontation in numerous forms. The prospective specialist must become acquainted with the new workplace environment and adapt to it, as well as understand the company's culture as an organisation, the traditions that exist within it, the prevailing values, the main goals and priorities of the organisation's development, and the specifics of communication, etc. Only after successfully adapting to a new environment may individuals demonstrate initiatives for various forms of innovation that could improve the competitiveness, operation, or quality of the services or goods of the organisation in which they work (institution, corporation). According to US scientist U. Bronfenbrenner, the most beneficial kind of interaction is the specialist's development and change in response to the changing environment. It is vital for the young specialist to be able to flexibly coordinate their personal goals with those of the organisation for which they work. This will create ideal conditions for their career improvement at work, as their ego will be in balance with the company's or institution's eco-system.

● ***Readiness for entrepreneurship.*** In the case of business universities, in particular, if a graduate chooses an entrepreneurial career, readiness for entrepreneurship is especially

important. According to researchers (Coduras, Saiz-Alvarez, & Ruiz, 2016; Rakićević et al., 2022), personal characteristics such as country of birth, gender, age, educational level, specific education/training on entrepreneurship, employment experience, income level, work status, habitat, civil status – are important in measuring an individual's readiness for entrepreneurship. Being an entrepreneur means having a certain type of mindset that prioritises opportunities above risks (Krueger, 2000). Entrepreneurial readiness includes an individual's entrepreneurial intentions, which are influenced by self-efficacy and environmental support (Amofah, Saladrigues, & Akwaa-Sekyi, 2020). An individual's intentions are the most accurate indicator of any planned activity and can change depending on the circumstances. Intentional activities can be better understood if the causes of the intentions are known. In addition to the above-mentioned, entrepreneurial knowledge and experience are essential for business students, which include entrepreneurial education and an entrepreneurial environment (Rakićević et al., 2022).

A university plays a special role and is an excellent environment for recognising, encouraging, and fostering students' entrepreneurial interests and desires; in this way, it cultivates future and sustainable entrepreneurial initiatives, which play a crucial role in developing economic growth and national development (Amofah et al., 2020). In order to do this, universities organise talks, seminars, visits to companies, and competitions, arrange entrepreneurial training programmes for students, and offer free elective credit courses on business management training initiatives, as well as cross-disciplinary and specific training programmes (Barba-Sánchez, Mitre-Aranda, & Brío-González, 2022).

Entrepreneurial attitudes lead to solving serious problems and the smoother functioning of organisations and societies. Entrepreneurial skills refer to the skills that enable individuals to accomplish entrepreneurial duties effectively and efficiently with success (Ćočkaló, Đorđević, Bogetić, & Bakator, 2020). Entrepreneurial skills encompass a sense of initiative, devising solutions to emerging problems, and effective communication (Jardim, 2021). In addition to creativity and innovation, initiative, self-efficacy and resilience, strategic planning and evaluation, problem-solving, transformational leadership, clear and visual communication, teamwork and networking, and digital communication comprise entrepreneurial skills.

Employability skills include green skills, which are the skills required for a resource-efficient and sustainable economy and society (CEDEFOP, 2012; CEDEFOP, 2023). These skills can be divided into technical skills and transversal skills. Technical skills enable individuals to adapt to ESG standards and processes, implementing them in the work environment, while transversal skills are linked to sustainable thinking and acting, and are relevant to work. In accordance with the study by C.T. Kwauk, and O.M. Casey (Kwauk & Casey, 2022), these skills empower individuals to engage in greener behaviours and make greener decisions in a variety of contexts.

● ***Readiness for lifelong and lifewide education.*** Continuous change requires being ready to learn for all of one's life and career. For business students aspiring to become entrepreneurs, it is essential to have a solid understanding of entrepreneurship. Besides having knowledge in entrepreneurship, they must also continuously learn about the specific field or sector in which they plan to start their business, such as IT or education (including the establishment, management, accreditation of private educational institutions, and the development of educational programmes), trade (including opening shopping centres, shops, and e-shops), tourism and/or hospitality (including catering restaurants and hotel businesses), organisation and management of cultural events, languages (including opening and managing translation offices), and more. In accordance with Guglielmino (Guglielmino, 1977), the key concepts for self-directed learning readiness are openness, self-concept, initiative and independence in learning, responsibility, love of learning, creativity, positive orientation, and the ability to use basic study and problem-solving skills. Responding to the need for lifelong and lifewide learning, the EU establishes lifetime guiding systems that systematically create actions to foster efficient cooperation and coordination between service providers at the national, regional, and

local levels (CEDEFOP, 2008). The authors (Zachar et al., 2003) argue that guidance plays a crucial role in supporting personal development and enhancing employability.

It is also essential to highlight an individual's self-control and self-regulation mechanisms, in which determination plays a crucial role, as well as decisiveness, responsibility, and the ability to appropriately manage oneself and one's professional activities, thus encouraging creativity in the workplace (Baltušīte, 2013).

Assessment Criteria and Indicators to Assess One's Readiness Based on Their Internal Resources to Ensure Employment in Changing Labour Market Conditions

To create an effective career guidance environment for students, the university is required to develop a theoretical framework to measure their readiness to ensure employment in changing labour market conditions. This framework will consider various internal factors that contribute to students' general employability. The assessment methodology enables students to evaluate areas for further development and identify areas that require improvement. This allows them to secure a suitable job, engage in independent professional work, or potentially establish their own business and become employers.

The development of this methodology was based on the previously described structure of readiness. All five sub-readiness structural parts (Figure 1) were used as the main criteria for assessing one's readiness for work in changing labour market conditions (Table 1). Thus, a number of assessment indicators were identified as well, based on these five criteria. The formulations of the indicators were based on the results of theoretical studies (references to the resources used can be found in Table 1) and the reflection of personal experience. Each criterion contains two separate categories of indicators, each of them with its own justification. According to the study (Katane & Korna-Opincāne, 2020), scientists discuss different aspects of readiness for action, including psychological readiness, functional readiness, and integrative readiness. Psychological readiness refers to the mental readiness to initiate or carry out an action. Functional readiness relates to practical skills and competences required for the action. Integrative readiness combines both psychological and functional components into a single unit. The authors of the article agree with the notion of integrative readiness and propose that readiness to ensure employment in changing labour market conditions is an integrative unit and that each sub-readiness structural part and at the same time the assessment criterion consist of two components (Baltušīte, 2013; Baltusite & Katane, 2014; Katane & Korna-Opincāne, 2020): 1) *the functional or competence-based component* (the individual's knowledge, skills, and ability to perform the task) and 2) *the psychological component* (personal and professional inner direction, including the individual's desire, motivation, and willingness to do something).

Table 1 Assessment criteria and indicators for evaluating the readiness of university students as prospective specialists to ensure their own employment (Created by the authors)

Criteria	Indicators based on the two main readiness components	References
Readiness for independent professional activities	1. <i>Functional or competence-based component</i> : (▪) professional and technical knowledge, skills, competences for each profession; (•) digital competences; (▪) cognitive skills; (•) social skills; (•) ethics; (▪) self-efficacy.	Baltušīte, 2013; CEDEFOP, 2023; Hakim et al., 2022; Low et al., 2016; OECD, 2020; World Economic Forum, 2023; Zini, 2023.
	2. <i>Psychological component</i> :	Baimenova et al., 2015; Baltušīte, 2013; Bandaranaike &

Criteria	Indicators based on the two main readiness components	References
	(▪) certain mindset; (▪) motivation, (▪) experience, (▪) professional aspects, (▪) ensuring functioning; (▪) emotional intelligence.	Willison, 2015; Bar-On, 2006; Bull, 2018; Chernyavska & Khokhlina, 2022; Devi & Singh, 2023; Uhryn, 2013.
Readiness for career self-development, including job search and integration in the labour market	1. <i>Functional or competence-based component</i> : (▪) reflective competences; (▪) communicative competences; (▪) behavioural career competences; (▪) the ability to search and find the necessary information; (▪) the ability to analyse the labour market; (▪) the ability to set aims and strategies for career self-development.	Akkermans et al., 2013; Aylott, 2018; Katane & Korna-Opincāne, 2020; Soika & Vronska, 2023.
	2. <i>Psychological component</i> : (▪) Motivation and responsibility for managing one's own personal and career development.	Jaunzeme, 2011; Katane & Korna-Opincāne, 2020
Flexibility and readiness for change in changeable conditions	1. <i>Functional or competence-based component</i> : (▪) the ability to think flexibly; (▪) the ability to act flexibly in various fields, including professional; (▪) the ability to communicate with different people; (▪) the ability to flexibly adapt and fit into a new, unknown environment – a new workplace, incl. in the cultural environment of the organisation (institution, company), in a new, unknown social group (work team), etc.; (▪) the ability to flexibly self-manage one's career; (▪) the ability to flexibly align the individual's goals with the goals of the workplace as an organisation; (▪) the ability to be open to changes, perceiving them as a source of new opportunities rather than as potential hazards; (▪) the ability to learn new social roles by gaining new experiences; (▪) the ability to change in interaction with the changing environment of professional activity (changes in the industry, workplace); (▪) the ability to change while learning, to transform into a new quality or level of development; (▪) as a result of new knowledge and experience, the ability to change one's thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, to re-evaluate one's values, life goals and priorities; (▪) the ability to change career direction; (▪) ability to learn new professions; (▪) ability to change workplace on more favourable terms, opening a new perspective for career growth.	Aylott, 2018; Bronfenbrenner, 1996; Jaunzeme, 2011; Katane, 2010; Katane & Katans, 2023; Katans, 2019; Soika & Vronska, 2023.
	2. <i>Psychological component</i> : (▪) the ability to reflect on the situation; (▪) the motivation and internal necessity to change oneself, if necessary to change one's career, one's profession in accordance with changes, to ensure employment in a changing labour market.	Egbert, 2023; Fleming, 2018; Katane & Katans, 2023; Mezirow, 1997.
Readiness for entrepreneurship	1. <i>Functional or competence-based component</i> : (▪) entrepreneurial mindset; (▪) critical thinking; (▪) personal characteristics: country of birth, gender, age, educational level), specific education/training on entrepreneurship, employment experience; income level, work status, habitat, civil status; (▪) entrepreneurial knowledge and experience; (▪) a sense of initiative;	CEDEFOP, 2012; CEDEFOP, 2023; Coduras et al., 2016; Čočkalo et al., 2020; Kwauk & Casey, 2022; Jardim, 2021; Krueger, 2000; Rakićević et al., 2022.

Criteria	Indicators based on the two main readiness components	References
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (•) creating solutions to emerging problems; (•) effective communication; (•) creativity and openness to innovation; (•) self-efficacy and resilience, (•) strategic planning and evaluation; (▪) problem-solving, (▪) transformational leadership; (▪) clear and visual communication; (▪) teamwork and networking; (▪) digital communication; (•) the ability to effectively and efficiently accomplish entrepreneurial duties; (•) green skills (to adapt to ESG standards and processes and implement them, and transversal, linked to sustainable thinking and acting. 	
	<p><i>2. Psychological component:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (▪) entrepreneurial intentions; (▪) goals; (▪) motives; (▪) expectations; (▪) desire to start a business; (▪) the ability to dare and take conscious risks. 	Amofah et al., 2020; Īriste, 2018; Katane, 2010
Readiness for lifelong and lifewide education	<p><i>1. Functional or competence-based component:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (•) openness; (•) self-concept; (▪) initiative; (•) independence in learning; (•) responsibility; (•) love of learning; (•) creativity; (▪) positive orientation; (▪) the ability to use basic study skills; (▪) problem-solving skills; (▪) problem-based learning experience; (▪) ability to simultaneously combine formal education with non-formal education; (▪) ability to combine studies with work; (▪) the ability to flexibly use the knowledge, skills and competences acquired in informal education, as well as the experience accumulated during life, in professional activities; (▪) in the context of knowledge management, the ability to share knowledge and experience in the workplace with colleagues; (▪) readiness for continuous self-directed lifelong and life-wide learning. 	Guglielmino, 1977; Katane & Katans, 2023; Katans, 2019; Zachar et al., 2003
	<p><i>2. Psychological component:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (▪) willingness to learn and develop within one's lifetime; (▪) motivation to continuously develop and improve professionally by attending various training courses, seminars, conferences; (•) having curiosity; (•) commitment to lifelong learning; (▪) self-control; (▪) self-regulation. 	Baltušite, 2013; CEDEFOP, 2008; Katane & Katans, 2023; Katans, 2019; World Economic Forum, 2023.

The developed substantiation of employability as a set of internal resources and, at the same time, readiness to ensure one's employment in changing labour market conditions, including the structure of this readiness, as well as the formulated assessing criteria and indicators, can serve as a theoretical foundation for the development of assessment methodology.

Conclusions

The topic of employability has attracted significant interest from researchers in recent years. The importance of this concept increases by the constantly changing and dynamic nature of employment settings, where new positions appear and require individuals to constantly

acquire new knowledge, skills and competences and while also adapting to the changing employment conditions.

In the current study, the concept of employability is defined as a set of internal resources and the readiness to ensure employment in changing labour market conditions.

The readiness of university students as prospective specialists to ensure employment in changing labour market conditions was analysed and evaluated from the perspective of readiness for career self-management.

The readiness of university students as prospective specialists to ensure their employment in changing labour market conditions comprises five structural parts: 1) readiness for independent professional activities; 2) readiness for career self-development, including the job search and integration in the labour market; 3) readiness for change in changeable conditions; 4) readiness for entrepreneurship; and 5) readiness for lifelong education.

Each of these structural parts was used as an assessment criterion, enabling the formulation of a number of assessment indicators. Each readiness criterion includes both a psychological and a functional or competence-based component.

The results of the study can serve as a basis for the development of assessment methodology to evaluate the employability of university students as prospective specialists, which includes assessing their readiness to ensure employment in changing labour market conditions. In the framework of university career guidance programmes, including programmes for developing students' employability, the use of the assessment methodology can help students evaluate areas for further development and identify areas that require improvement. This, consequently, can contribute to their future possibilities of securing suitable employment, engaging in independent professional activities, and/or potentially establishing their own businesses and becoming employers.

References

- Akkermans, J., Brenninkmeijer, V., Huibers, M., & Blonk, R.W.B. (2013). Competencies for the Contemporary Career: Development and Preliminary Validation of the Career Competencies Questionnaire. *Journal of Career Development, 40*, 245-267. DOI: 10.1177/0894845312467501.
- Aylott, E. (2018). *Employee Relations: A Practical Introduction*. London: Kogan Page.
- Amofah, K., Saladríguez, R., & Akwaa-Sekyi, E. (2020). Entrepreneurial intentions among MBA students. *Cogent Business & Management, 7*(1), 1-23. DOI: 10.1080/23311975.2020.1832401.
- Baimenova, B., Bekova, Z., & Saule, Z. (2015). Psychological Readiness of Future Educational Psychologists for the Work with Children in the Conditions of Inclusive Education. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 205*, 577-583. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.09.082>.
- Baltušiņa, R. (2013). *The Pedagogy Students' Readiness for Professional Activities in the School Environment*. Summary of the Doctoral Thesis. Jelgava: LLU.
- Baltušiņa, R., & Katane, I., (2014). The structural model of the pedagogy students' readiness for professional activities in the educational environment. In V. Dislere (Ed.), *Rural environment. Education. Personality (REEP2013)*. 7, pp. 29 – 41. Jelgava: Latvia University of Agriculture. Retrieved from <https://llufb.llu.lv/conference/REEP/2014/Latvia-Univ-Agricult-REEP-2014proceedings-29-41.pdf>
- Bar-On, R. (2006). The Bar-On model of emotional-social intelligence (ESI). *Psicothema, 18*, 13–25.
- Barba-Sánchez, V., Mitre-Aranda, M., & Brío-González, J. (2022). The entrepreneurial intention of university students: An environmental perspective. *European Research on Management and Business Economics, 28*(2), 100184. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iedeen.2021.100184>
- Bandaranaike, S. & Willison, J. (2015). Building capacity for work-readiness: Bridging the cognitive and affective domains. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education, 16*, 223-233. Retrieved from <https://digital.library.adelaide.edu.au/dspace/handle/2440/97926>
- Borg, J., Borg, N., Scott-Young, C., & Naderpajouh, N. (2020). The work readiness–career resilience linkage: implications for project talent management. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business, 14*(4), 917-935. DOI: 10.1108/IJMPB-04-2020-0129.
- Bridgstock, R. (2009). The graduate attributes we've overlooked: Enhancing graduate employability through career management skills. *Higher Education Research and Development, 28*, 31-44. DOI: 10.1080/07294360802444347.

- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1996). *The Ecology of Human Development. Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bull, D.A. (2018). Employee Readiness and Turnover Intent: A Critical Examination of Hospital. *International Journal of Healthcare Sciences*, 6(1), 261-271. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.21140.19846
- CEDEFOP. (2008). *From policy to practice. A systemic change to lifelong guidance in Europe*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. Retrieved from https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/etv/Upload/Information_resources/Bookshop/505/5182_en.pdf.
- CEDEFOP. (2012). *Green skills and environmental awareness in vocational education and training: Synthesis report*. European Commission. Retrieved from https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/5524_en.pdf
- CEDEFOP. (2023). *Skills in transition: the way to 2035*. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Retrieved from <http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/438491>
- Chernyavska, S., & Khokhlina, O. (2022). Psychological readiness of civil aviation student pilots for professional activity: theoretical aspect of the problem. *Scientific innovations and advanced technologies*, 1(3), 432-447. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.52058/2786-5274-2022-1\(3\)-432-447](https://doi.org/10.52058/2786-5274-2022-1(3)-432-447)
- Ćočkalo, D., Đorđević, D., Bogetić, S., & Bakator, M. (2020). Youth entrepreneurship development: A review of literature and ten-year research results. *Journal of Engineering Management and Competitiveness*, 10, 151-161. DOI: 10.5937/jemc2002151Q.
- Coduras, A., Saiz-Alvarez, J. M., & Ruiz, J. (2016). Measuring readiness for entrepreneurship: An information tool proposal. *Journal of Innovation & Knowledge*, 1(2), 99-108. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jik.2016.02.003>
- Devi, K.A., & Singh, S.K. (2023). Emotional intelligence in the workplace understanding measuring and enhancing your emotional quotient. *Indian Journal of Applied Research*. 13(5), 1. DOI: 10.36106/ijar.
- Egbert, S. (2023). *Readiness for Change: Navigating Your Path to Transformation*. Retrieved from <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/readiness-change-navigating-your-path-transformation-scott-egbert/>
- Hakim, S., Laelawati, L., & Mardiana, R. (2022). The Role of Digital Skills and Technological Innovation in Improving the Performance of Small and Medium Industries. *Systematic Literature Review*, 230, 74-102. DOI: 10.2991/978-94-6463-068-8_7.
- Guglielmino, L. M. (1977). *Development of the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale*. Dissertation. University of Georgia, GA.
- Fleming, T. (2018). Mezirow and the Theory of Transformative Learning. In V. Wang (Ed.). *Critical Theory and Transformative Learning* (pp.120-136). Hershey: IGI Global. DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-6086-9.ch009
- Īriste, S. (2018). *Prospective Managers' of Hospitality Business Competitiveness Evaluation and Development promotion in the Dual Study Environment of Higher Education Institution*. Summary of the Doctoral Thesis. Jelgava: LLU.
- Jardim, J. (2021). Entrepreneurial Skills to Be Successful in the Global and Digital World: Proposal for a Frame of Reference for Entrepreneurial Education. *Education Sciences*, 11(7), 356. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11070356>
- Jaunzeme, I. (2011). *Karjeras vadības un atbalsta sistēmas pilnveidošanas problēmas augstākajā izglītībā Latvijā* (Problems of improving the career management and support system in higher education in Latvia). Promocijas darbs. Rīga: Latvijas Universitāte. (in Latvian).
- Katane, I. (2010). Competitiveness of Personality as a New Concept in Modern Education and Pedagogy Science. In L. Malinovska, & V. Osadcuks (Eds.), *Engineering for Rural Development*. 9, pp. 327 – 334. Jelgava: LLU.
- Katane, I., & Baltušiņa, R. (2007). Ecological Approach for the Formation and Development of Prospective Teachers' Readiness for the Professional activities at Latvian Schools. *Transformations in Business & Economics*, 6(2), 114 – 132. Retrieved from <http://www.transformations.knf.vu.lt/12/article/ecol>
- Katane, I., & Katans, E. (2023). Lifelong Guidance as a Topicality for the Promotion of the Lifelong and Lifewide Multidimensional Career Development Nowadays. *Education. Innovation. Diversity*, 2(7), 83-95. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17770/eid2023.2.7354>
- Katane, I., & Korna-Opincāne, E. (2020). The Readiness of Students for Career Self-management. In V. Ļubkina, & G. Mazano (Eds.), *Society. Intagration. Education*. 3, pp. 286-301. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17770/sie2020vol3.5169>
- Katane I., & Kruglīja S. (2009). Pedagogical Students' Readiness to Professional Activity in Ecological Aspect. *Society. Integration. Education*. 1, pp. 80. – 89. Rezekne: Rezekne Higher Education Institution.
- Katane, I., & Troskova, M. (2020). Theoretical Substantiation of The Competitiveness of Academic Staff from The Perspective of Educational Sciences. In Z. Gaile (Ed.), *Research for Rural Development 2020*. 35, pp. 274-281. Jelgava: Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies. DOI: 10.22616/rrd.26.2020.040.
- Katans, E. (2019). *Programmētāju profesionālās attīstības veicināšana mācīties spējīgā IT uzņēmumā zināšanu pārvaldības skatījumā* (Promoting the Professional Development of Programmers in a Learning IT

- Company from the Perspective of Knowledge Management). Master's Thesis. Jelgava: Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies. (in Latvian)
- Krueger, N., & Reilly, M., & Carsrud, A. (2000). Competing Models of Entrepreneurial Intention. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 15, 411-432. DOI: 10.1016/S0883-9026(98)00033-0.
- Kwauk, C. T., & Casey, O. M. (2022). A green skills framework for climate action, climate empowerment, and climate justice. *Development Policy Review*, 40(S1), e12624. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12624>
- Low, M., Botes, V., Dela Rue, D., & Allen, J. (2016). Accounting employers' expectations - the ideal accounting graduates. *e-Journal of Business Education and Scholarship of Teaching*, 10(1), 36–57. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1167364.pdf>
- Lowden, K., Hall, S., Elliot, D., & Lewin, J. (2011). *Employers' Perceptions of the Employability Skills of New Graduates*. London: Edge Foundation. Retrieved from https://www.educationandemployers.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/employability_skills_as_pdf_-_final_online_version.pdf
- LR Saeima. (2001a). *Darba aizsardzības likums*. Retrieved from <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/26020> (in Latvian).
- LR Saeima. (2001b). *Darba likums*. Retrieved from <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/26019> (in Latvian).
- LR Saeima. (1993). *Likums "Par iedzīvotāju ienākuma nodokli"*. Retrieved from <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/56880> (in Latvian).
- Mezirow, J. (1997) Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*. 74, (pp. 5-12). DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/ace.7401>
- OECD. (2020). *OECD Skills Strategy Implementation Guidance for Latvia: Developing Latvia's Education Development Guidelines 2021-2027*. Paris: OECD Publishing. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/ebc98a53-en>
- Peeters, E., Nelissen, J., De Cuyper, N., Forrier, A., Verbruggen, M., & De Witte, H. (2017). Employability Capital: A Conceptual Framework Tested Through Expert Analysis. *Journal of Career Development*, 46(2), 79-93. DOI: 10.1177/0894845317731865.
- Rakićević, Z., Rakićević, J., Anđelković, L.J., & Ljamić, B. (2022). How Entrepreneurial Education and Environment Affect Entrepreneurial Readiness of STEM and Business Students? A Longitudinal Study. *Engineering Economics*, 33, 414-432. DOI: 10.5755/j01.ee.33.4.30244.
- Sam, M.S. (2013). *Readiness*. Retrieved from Psychology Dictionary.org: <https://psychologydictionary.org/readiness/>
- Smaldone, F., Ippolito, A., Lagger, J., & Pellicano, M. (2022). Employability skills: Profiling data scientists in the digital labour market. *European Management Journal*, 40(5), 671-684. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2022.05.005>
- Soika, I., & Vronska, N. (2023). Career Counselling in Human Resource Management. In N. Vronska (Ed.), *Rural Environment. Education. Personality (REEP2023)*. 16, pp. 20 – 28. Jelgava: Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies. DOI: 10.22616/REEP.2023.16.002.
- Stewart, B. (2022). *Career Readiness of Recent Graduates*. Dissertation. Murray: Murray State University. Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.murraystate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1300&context=etd>
- Troshkova, M. (2023). Career development for enhancing employability of students as prospective specialists in the university educational environment. In Z. Gaile (Ed.), *Research for Rural Development 2023*. 38, pp. 284 – 290. Jelgava: Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies. DOI: 10.22616/RRD.29.2023.040
- Troshkova, M., & Katane, I. (2023). Employability of University Students as Prospective Specialists in the Context of Their Competitiveness. In N. Vronska (Ed.), *Rural Environment. Education. Personality (REEP2023)*. 16, pp. 87 – 94. Jelgava: Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies. DOI: 10.22616/REEP.2023.16.010
- Uhryn, O. (2013). Psychological readiness of students for professional life. *Journal of Education Culture and Society*, 4(2), 97-107. DOI: 10.15503/jecs20132-97-107.
- Zachar, L., Kiszter, I., Vladiszavljev, A., Kreft, W., Trzeciak, W., Jigāu, M., Grajcar, S., Fondova, I., Detko, J., Niklanovic, S., & Sultana, R. (2003). *Review of Career Guidance Policies in 11 Acceding and Candidate Countries Synthesis Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/review-career-guidance-policies-11-acceding-and-candidate>
- Zini, A. (2023). *Coursera Digital Skills Report 2023*. Retrieved from <https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en/inspiration/research/coursera-digital-skills-report-2023>
- World Economic Forum. (2023). *Future of Jobs Report 2023*. Retrieved from <https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2023/>