Research Article

Employability Skills Development through Assessment in Higher Education: Students' Voices on Reflective Assessments

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Abstract: The rise of reflective practice within higher education has resulted in consideration of including it as a tool for summative assessment to assess key required skills, knowledge and understanding, and their overall professional development in relation to personal experiences (Rees *et al.,* 2006; Yorke, 2005; Jackson & ward, 2004). The study, therefore, aims to explore and question employability skills development through assessment in higher education with more focus on reflective assessments, and based on the outcome of the literature and students' voice collected by the author of the study using focus groups including students studying at the undergraduate level within the business management faculty at a UK based university. The study developed new views and knowledge to the field of employability skills development within higher education with specific focus on reflective assessments. Key findings reached the following: First, there should be an urgency to consider inclusion of practical elements into the offered programmes within higher education instead of focus on theoretical aspects. Second, consideration to further enable active reflective practice within assessments to enable further personal development, inclusion of real experiences, and encouragement of self-awareness. Third, the study can establish that writing reflective assessments with restricted guidelines requiring students to be technical and evaluative while reflecting can be challenging. Therefore, students should receive enhanced support to ensure this can be achieved.

Keywords: Employability skills, assessment, reflection, business management, higher education.

Introduction

The rise of reflective practice within higher education has resulted in consideration of including it as a tool for summative assessment to assess key required skills, knowledge and understanding, and their overall professional development in relation to personal experiences (Rees *et al.*, 2006; Yorke, 2005; Jackson & ward, 2004). However, this can be challenging due to the effort to accommodate various learning styles and overall background of students' body (Liu & Littlewood, 1997; Ross *et al.*, 1986). Furthermore, there is lack of connection between reflective assessment and development of skills such as communication and professionalism, and it is more viewed as assessment of students' ability to assess their reflective capacity (Moniz *et al.*, 2015).

The increasing complexity and diversity within higher education in the United Kingdom generated further pressure to inclusion of various methods to embed employability within their academic offer such as modes of assessment and extracurricular activities (Yorke & Knight, 2006). This assumption encouraged higher education institutions to go beyond traditional arrangements for learning as in some cases are viewed to be lacking the inclusion of reflective habits where individuals may further develop their practice relating to real life situations

(Brockbank & McGill, 1998). This provided further urgency to embrace reflective approach in learning and teaching within higher education to enhance wider awareness beyond offered programmes (Barnett 1997; Barnett, 1990).

The study, therefore, explores and questions employability skills development through assessment in higher education with more focus on reflective assessments, and based on the outcome of the literature and students' voice collected by the author of the study using focus groups including students studying at the undergraduate level within the business management faculty at a UK based university. Although several studies suggested that reflective practice can be useful to assess students' skills as discussed above (Rees *et al.*, 2006; Yorke, 2005; Jackson & ward, 2004), there is still limited evidence of research suggesting reflective assessment can be directly enhancing employability of students (Tummons, 2011; Gee, 1996), due to lack of students' ability to fully engage in the reflection to self-preserve leading to surface level of reflection. This gap is considered as problematic given the growing usage of reflective practice as a tool for formative and summative assessments across higher education institutions, while there is limited evidence suggesting it would improve employability, and considering the growing pressure on higher education

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institutions to enhance employability skills to further meet the demands of the employment market and changes of the external environment (Pollard *et al.*, 2013; Harvey *et al.*, 2002; Harvey *et al.*, 1997) .

The study is organised in five key headings as the following: Introduction, literature review, methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion including indication of future implications for higher education institutions.

Literature Review
Meaning of Employability

Employability has no single agreed definition as different researchers define it differently based on the context and the discipline, relating to the business management discipline Wye & Lim (2009) defined employability as qualification required of key skills, ability, and attitudes that lead to successful qualification of appropriate work opportunity within the discipline. Whereas, Mohamad *et al.*, (2018) defined employability as skills that graduates equipped with to enable their acceptance in the labour market. While researchers agreed that employability can be mainly associated with skills required, the type of skills still can be argued by different researchers based on different factors, skills such as critical thinking, subject knowledge, communication, self-management, and proactivity as found by Morrison (2014). However, Other set of skills were included within the definition of employability skills as suggested by Webb & Chaffer (2016) such as time management, reflective and effective learning, problem solving, ethical awareness, flexibility, professionalism, resilience, resources management, vision and delegation, negotiation, and conflict management skills. Issues of employability in many cases were associated with the gap of expectations existed between students and employers regarding the key requirements needed for the labour market as discussed by Morrison (2014) and Webb & Chaffer (2016). This has resulted in increasing calls for higher education institutions to bridge this gap of expectations as noted by Abbas *et al.*, (2018) and Winstead *et al.*, (2009). Furthermore, Scott *et al.*, (2017) argued that attainment of qualification only is no longer being considered as the main category for employment. Rather, students are required to develop awareness and application of key skills such as problem solving and resilience.

Reflective Assessment

Reflective learning was defined by Dummer *et al.*, (2008) as the process of consideration of what individuals know or learn leading to generation of new knowledge. Furthermore, Educators within higher education aim to promote deep learning where students can relate to their academic and non-academic experiences, the development of this approach would require inclusion of reflective learning to facilitate deep learning (Race, 1999; Toohey, 1999; Wankowski, 1991). Other view considered reflective assessment as one of the key methods to meet and adjust to the demand of higher education (Chng, 2018).

Osterman & Kottkamp (1993) argued that reflective practice can be viewed as a method of self-awareness development leading to opportunities of further development. Furthermore, Dewey (1933) argued that reflective practice is not limited to acts rationally and intellectually supported, rather it expands to include individual uniqueness based on their practice, this further includes emotions and feelings derived from lived experiences.

It was suggested by Brookfield (1995) that reflective practice can be defined as a tool in education that has a wider impact on the process of teaching and learning. This definition was agreed by (Wong *et al.*, 1997; Davies, 1995) due to their view of reflective practice as an opportunity to integrate theories and concepts into own personal practice. Furthermore, reflective practice would enable the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the teaching and learning process in a higher education context (Toni & Makura, 2015).

Reflective Assessment Contribution to Employability Development

Considering reflective practice as an integral part of assessment would lead students to tackle unfamiliar activities experienced, this would also link with their emotions as well as their full work experience (Eden, 2014), which was also previously argued by Dewey (1933). Furthermore, the study of Eden (2014) found rich evidence of emotional attachment throughout the reflections linking to students' practical experiences and was more focused with coping with non – academic challenges including work related challenges (Eden, 2014).

Students' views reflected that this form of assessment was challenging and refreshing (Dummer *et al.*, 2008). However, it has enabled students to evaluate their field work experiences in many cases. Furthermore, Students had the opportunity to personalise their reflection and writing, and generally had the opportunity to further explore key skills related to their discipline such as critical evaluation and reflection. It was also indicated that reflected writing enabled students to further appreciate their field experience where they could relate to and further develop.

Self-reflection and further planning including skills development can be encouraged during the learning journey through inclusion of reflective elements in assessment relating to areas of personal development. This opportunity along with exposure to employability prospects would enable students to discuss their skills and highlight key areas for development. Furthermore, this would further enhance students' understanding of industry demands leading to success in graduate recruitment (MacCallum & Casey, 2017). However, it would not be fully achieved unless further systematic approach was considered as by Ruge & McCormack (2017) that employability skills at higher education level can be facilitated through: Firstly, curriculum and its connection with external environment including industries related to the discipline to further reflect skills expectations. Secondly, development of learning and assessment contexts to enable development of academic and professional dimensions. Thirdly, scaffolded assessment learning process enabling constructive alignment towards skills development. Fourthly, development of teaching approach that can enable engagement of students to develop on generic and professional skills.

Reflective assessment can be perceived as framework for inquiry, where students can further explore norms and assumptions relating to their lived and practical experience. This would enable students to develop professional knowledge supported by research and scholarship. Furthermore, this would further enhance students' ability to self-assessment and analysis, develop critical thinking, and overcome challenges (Tummons, 2011). However, mutual understanding of the requirements of reflection in assessment should be further established by both assessors and students (Gee, 1996).

Challenges To Connect Reflective Practice to Employability

In reflective writing students often have less focus on employability skills and more on the overall personal experience as well as the new experiential learning they had as they move to unfamiliar context. Furthermore, students may have a challenge to relate their experience of placements or other practical experience to the reflective process as they are going beyond their safe understanding of the usual skills they encounter at university, knowledge and social based contexts (Eden, 2014).

The study conducted by Dummer *et al.*, (2008) highlighted that there was a general consensus developed through different views of students included in the study, as they agreed that reflective writing was challenging and unusual, considering their perception of formal academic assessment's requirements, and this was also suggested by Ruge & McCormack (2017). Furthermore, many students faced challenges to relate to practice and personalise their writing using academic writing.

Key challenges experienced by students in the process of writing reflective writing included lack of clarity on what to relate from practice, structure and focus, and key content to be included in the reflection. Further, students had the tendency to write more of descriptive components, rather than inclusion of key ideas and challenges encountered during their experience (Dummer *et al.*, 2008). These findings were further evidenced by the study conducted by Chng (2018) that implementation of reflective assessment within higher education can vary based on the discipline, and higher education institutions should focus on incorporating clarity around reflection in the classroom environment, and in some cases students were asked to reflect without being guided through teaching on how to reflect.

Skills development initiatives at higher education may have several challenges to be integrated as integral elements of programmes, these were summarised as the following by MacCallum & Casey (2017): Firstly, students' participation and engagement with the process to further value its importance and connection to employability. Secondly, ensuring their interlinks across different modules and years to create robust and systematic approach to the process of skills development. Thirdly, staff play an integral part to ensure the effectiveness of such initiatives, and it can be challenging to ensure that they buy-in the initiatives.

While other studies argued assessment of reflective practice can be considered as valid and linked to personal and emotional experiences; the study by Tummons (2011) argued that if this approach to assessment is valid, then the assumption would be assessors are also valid in order to ensure that what students do in their assessment can be considered as reflective practice rather than descriptive. This can be challenging in two different ways: Firstly, the way reflective assessment is understood by students and assessors. Secondly, the adequacy of evidence gathered to support the assessment by students to ensure that assessors can consider whether students achieve the requirements of reflective practice or not.

Methodology

Focus group is usually used as qualitative technique leading to deep understanding of social contexts and issues. Focus groups can mainly focus on gaining in depth data rather than numeric representation collected from larger sample of the targeted population as discussed by (Braun & Nyumba *et al.*, 2018; Greenwood *et al.*, 2014; Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, several studies focused within the field of employability skills enhanced have adopted focus groups to gain deeper understanding of key social issues associated studies' focus such as (Dinning and Ünlü, 2017; Simatele, 2015; Deeley, 2014). Therefore, the author considered focus groups to be the most appropriate to collect data enabling in depth understanding of key issues associated with the focus of the study such as participants' understanding of employability, connection between reflection and employability, and challenges associated.

Table 1: epistemological Position developed

Epistemology	Interpretivism
Methodology	Qualitative
Method	Interview
Technique	Focus group

Source: (Author developed).

The table above clearly indicate the author's process to reach the conclusion of focus group technique adoption with

consideration of the epistemological position, methodology, and method developed.

The focus group was conducted on Friday, the 26th of April 2019, using appropriate classroom facility within a higher education institution to facilitate interactivity. The participants were all in their second year of their undergraduate degree in business management. It is also important to note that students had several reflective assessments in their first and second year of their degree, this is due to the nature of the programme offered as it aimed to provide flexible learning approach, and to facilitate students' studies to be more reflective of management theory and practice with further contextualization to workplace experience. The focus group lasted around 20 – 25 minutes, and it was mainly facilitated by the researcher. However, he had to act as a facilitator of the process and adopted semi structured interview guidelines. The facilitator aimed to enhance students' understanding of the questions to ensure contribution of comprehensive responses. Data gathered from the focus group were appropriately recorded, and then later transcribed to be used for in depth thematic analysis of the qualitative data collected from the participants. The focus group has included three key questions viewed as central to serve the purpose and focus of the study during an early stage of the research development.

Several factors also determined the adoption of focus group for this study such as time limitations to interview participants individually, the enhanced opportunity to gain more comprehensive responses from a group members listening to interactions rather than individuals interviewed separately, focus groups would enable active and deep conversations between group's members and the facilitator (Nyumba *et al.*, 2018). There was careful consideration of ethical issues associated with the process. Therefore, the purpose of the focus group was clearly communicated to participants in the beginning, and they were consented as indicated in (Appendix C).

Table 2: Participants of the focus group

Gender	Number
Male	5
Female	3
Subject/Discipline	8 = Business Management degree

Source: Author developed.

Students participated in the focus group were from various backgrounds and age ranges. However, they were all considered as either British or European students as the programme was mainly aimed at home students based in the United Kingdom. Majority of the participants were either currently working or have been previously engaged in workplace. Their motivation to study was majorly around progressing their careers, as well as development of professional and academic capacity.

Data collected were initially transcribed, then coded to develop subthemes and themes. Findings of the data collected were communicated in the results and discussion sections supported by syntheses based on the literature review included and key observations made by the author. Quotes were also included as collected from participants to enhance clarity within the result and discussion sections (Christians & Carey, 1989).

RESULTS

This section provides clarity around the feedback collected through the focus group conducted with the eight students studying year two towards their business management degree at UK based university as discussed in the previous section. Notably, it is essential to recognise that participants were mixed in gender and age. However, they shared distinctive commonality as they were all coming to study through non traditional path to education, as they had gaps in studies due to their personal circumstances and workplace engagement. During

the focus group process, the discussions were cantered on participants views and perceptions based the following questions:

Q1: What is your understanding of employability?

Q2: What are the ways that reflection can help you with your employability?

Q3: What are the challenges facing you to relate reflection to improvement of your practice in employment/workplace?

Table 3: Q1 responses collected from participants

Participant	Response
P1	*"My understanding of employability from an academic viewpoint that are a segment of results that enable an individual to be able to gain employment, in whatever field that individual chooses".*
P2	*"Employability is where you get paid for a service delivered in return".*
P3	*"Employability is being qualified in higher education acquiring the skills and experience the workplace required".*
P4	*"Employability skills are transferable skills and knowledge that make an individual more employable".*
P5	*"Employability in my opinion is the process of your ability to acquire a job and stay in that job".*
P6	*"Employability is a set of achievement, personal attributes, and understanding that make a person gain employment and be successful in their chosen careers".*
P7	*"How to get a job with the skills and knowledge that you have".*
P8	*"My understanding of employability is accessing training and education, getting prepared with the right skills to do the job that you have chosen to do, or the right skills for your field of work".*

Source: (Author developed – Full details are included in appendix A)

In response to the first question regarding students' understanding of employability several key codes were identified leading to development of central theme and three subthemes as the following:

1. QUALIFICATION FOR EMPLOYMENT
Subthemes: 1.1. Skills and attributes, 1.2. Experience, and 1.3. Knowledge and understanding.

These were determined based on the response of the participants as they generally reflected valid understanding of employability, and reflected awareness of key consideration of what makes an individual qualified to be employable as the following: skills and attributes such as communication and presentation, experience matching with the field requirements, and knowledge and understanding developed during studies and results gained. However, the responses above reflected interesting points across all the views of the participants. These points are mainly about the lack of indication of skills such as critical thinking, and lack of connection with employers' expectations, instead majority of the responses were generic and lacked depth.

Table 4: Q2 responses collected from participants

Participant	Response
P1	*"Reflection help with employability in many ways, I feel that it is only when we reflect on different situations professionally and personally then we are able to get things/situations much better. For example, I participated in my first presentation in term one, I failed terribly, but on reflection and with feedback from others the next term I was able to turn my situation around with a positive result of 72% overall".*
P2	*"You can look back and see what is missing and design a plan to fil these gaps as could be interpersonal skills or academic".*
P3	*"Reflection helps to make you progress academically by developing new skills, flexibility, increasing more prospects or opportunities".*
P4	*"Throughout this time, I have acquired and developed upon a number of skills such as (Time management, communication, planning and organising, and teamwork) and this assignment is a reflection upon what skills I have attained and what I have learnt whilst studying this module".*
P5	*"Reflection can help you with your employability in many ways, I believe by reflecting strengths and weaknesses will be established and will give you the opportunity to address it".*
P6	*"In my programme of study, I have to write a reflection on my reading every week. I reflect on my reading, assignments, my work life and my personal life, as a result I feel that I know myself well, and I know what my skills are, my values, and how I work".*
P7	*"when you think about the skills that you have and whether you can do the job or not".*
P8	*"Looking back and identify my strengths and my weaknesses and identify where I had to improve and get training as required, also getting feedback".*

Source: (Author developed – Full details are included in appendix A)

In response to the second question regarding ways that reflection can help with employability several key codes were identified leading to development of three key themes as the following:
a. Further development
b. Learning from previous experiences
c. Self-awareness

The comments collected from the participants show that reflection helped students in three main ways as the following: Firstly, reflection helps students to identify how they can further develop themselves as indicated by P1 "*get things/situations much better*", P2 "*see what is missing*", P3 "*progress academically*", P3 "*developing new skills, flexibility*", P4 "*developed upon a number of skills*", and P8 "*where I had to improve*", P8 "*get training as required, also getting feedback*". Secondly, Reflection provides students the opportunity to learn from their previous experiences as indicated by P2 and P8 "*Look back*", P5 "*strengths and weaknesses will be established*", and P5 "*Opportunity to address it (Strengths and weaknesses)*". Thirdly, Students reflected that reflection helped them to develop further self-awareness as indicated by P1 "*to turn my situation around*", P1 "*Positive results*", P3 "*more prospects or opportunities*", P5 "*strengths and weaknesses will be established*", P5 "*Opportunity to address it (Strengths and weaknesses)*", P6 "*feel that I know myself well*", P6 "*What my skills are*", P6 "*My values*", P6 "*how I work*", P7 "*think about the skills that you have and whether you can do the job or not*", P8 "*Identify my strengths and my weaknesses, and where I had to improve*", and P8 "*get training as required, also getting feedback*". However, it is observed that there was lack of depth in the responses to highlight key skills such as communication and presentation skills. Rather, students' responses were generic and surface level. This may be viewed as a barrier to have in depth reflection, and lack of self-expression relating to their own development, experiences, and self – awareness.

Table 5: Q3 responses collected from participants

Participant	Response
P1	*"I do find it hard to relate reflection with my current job which is construction".*
P2	*"I am not working but skills I have gained and learnt would be able to help me in many ways. I have learnt theories on reflection, development, and much more".*
P3	*"The challenges I face to relate reflection to improvement in my workplace is a certain workplace culture, my position as an ordinary employee, and from ethnic community. My workplace culture prevents my interaction because we don't work from office, we use the company mobile phone, and only meet the manager if and when needed".*
P4	*"I have believed that the confidence I have in myself as a learner and employee has been greatly improved due to the strengths development in my academic and employability skills".*
P5	*"Some challenges that I faced in reflecting was that I had the practical experience but to put it in a written format was a little challenging. Also lack of awareness hindered progress".*
P6	*No response*
P7	*No response*
P8	*"Some of the challenges are teamwork, communication, and accessing training at the right time, and workplace communication".*

Source: (Author developed – Full details are included in Appendix A)

In response to the third question regarding students' perception of challenges to relate reflection to improvement of practice in employment and workplace, several key codes were identified leading to development of central theme and several subthemes as the following:

Application to Practice

Subthemes: 1.1. Context application, 1.2. Unemployment, 1.3. Workplace culture, 1.4. Lack of self-confidence and awareness, 1.5. Access to training, 1.6. Skills

It is clearly illustrated here in the comments provided by the participants that several challenges face them to relate reflection to their employment and workplace, all these challenges were determined to be relating to challenges to application to practice while reflecting. Furthermore, based on the coded determined several key subthemes were developed as the following: Firstly, Lack of context application as indicated by P1 *"hard to relate reflection with my current job"*, P3 *"my position as an ordinary employee"*, P3 *"limited interaction with colleagues and manager"*, and P5 *"that I had the practical experience but to put it in a written format"*. Secondly, unemployment was perceived as a major challenge by P2 *"I have learnt theories on reflection, development"* and *"I am not working"*. Thirdly, Workplace culture as one of the challenges as indicated by P3 *"My workplace culture prevents my interaction"* and P8 *"Workplace communication"*. Fourthly, Lack of self-confidence and awareness as reflected by P4 *"confidence I have in myself"*, and P5 *"lack of awareness hindered progress"*. Fifthly, access to appropriate training opportunities as reflected by P8 *"accessing training at the right time"*. Sixthly, Skills in their generic means such as communication and teamwork as reflected by P3 *"My workplace culture prevent my interaction (limited interaction with colleagues and manager)"*, and P8 *"teamwork and communication"*.

Discussion

Qualification for Employment

Consistent with the work communicated by Wye & Lim (2009) in relation to defining employability of graduates can be viewed as qualification required of key skills, ability, and attitudes that lead to successful qualification of appropriate work opportunity within the discipline. Furthermore, Mohamad *et al.,* (2018) defined employability as skills that graduates equipped with to enable their acceptance in the labour market. This would also include knowledge and understanding within the discipline, and key skills demanded in daily practice within workplace such as critical thinking, subject knowledge, communication, self-management, and proactivity as found by Morrison (2014). Other key skills were included within the definition of employability skills as suggested by Webb & Chaffer (2016) such as time management, reflective and effective learning, problem solving,

ethical awareness, flexibility, professionalism, resilience, resources management, vision and delegation, negotiation, and conflict management skills. These considerations were positively matching with the statements reflected by the participants. However, it is important to note that the facilitator felt through the depth of the responses that students lacked connection of employability to employers' requirement in workplace and lacked naming key skills like the ones communicated by Morrison (2014) and Webb & Chaffer (2016). This can be viewed as worrying due to the gap and misunderstanding that may exist in students' perception of employability, this worry was also noted by Abbas *et al.,* (2018) and Winstead *et al.,* (2009), as they discussed the importance of bridging the gap between employers' and students' expectations in relation to employability. Further, it was argued by Scott *et al.,* (2017) attainment of qualification only is no longer being considered as the main category for employment. Rather, students are required to develop awareness and application of key skills such as problem solving and resilience. The findings of the study call for the urgency to consider inclusion of practical elements into the offered programmes instead of focus on theoretical aspects while reflecting to further ensure that students understand key skills lead to successful employability, and to enhance connection of employers' expectations and demands. These findings were also matching with suggestion developed by Nghia (2017) that to enhance employability awareness, higher education institutions should focus on the key inhibitors for employability engagement to understand employers' expectations such as availability of information, students' perceptions and beliefs about the value of engagement with employers' requirements, and management of key academic and non – academic requirements to balance the offer of higher education institutions to be considerate of academic and employment demands.

Reflection Influence on Employability

While both the literature review included, and the responses of participants confirmed that reflective practice had influence on employability skills such as further link with their emotions as well as their full work experience (Eden, 2014; Dewey, 1993), it has enabled students to evaluate their field work experiences (Dummer *et al.,* 2008), further enhance students' understanding of industry demands leading to success in graduate recruitment (MacCallum & Casey, 2017). It would enable students to develop professional knowledge supported by research and scholarship. Furthermore, this would further enhance students' ability to self-assessment and analysis, develop critical thinking, and overcome challenges (Tummons, 2011). The responses collected from the participants resulted to the development of key themes as benefits of reflection to employability as the following: Firstly, enhances students' ability for further development. Secondly, enhances students' learning from previous experiences. Thirdly, enhances students' self-awareness. Several statements were indicated in the results'

section to further reflect and clarify these themes based on the students' views. Arguments found in the literature regarding reflective practice influence on employability matched positively with the central three themes developed based on the participants' responses. However, within the results' section it was expressed by the author that there was lack of depth in the responses to highlight key skills such as communication and presentation skills. Rather, students' responses were generic and surface level. This may be viewed as a barrier to have in depth reflection, and lack of self-expression relating to their own development, experiences, and self – awareness. Therefore, the findings of the study call for deeper consideration to further enable deeper reflective practice within assessments to enable further enable personal development, inclusion of real experiences, and encouragement of self-awareness. However, this would not be fully achieved unless employers' and labour market expectations were appropriately clarified during the academic delivery to ensure students' awareness about them while reflecting. This finding matched with views by MacCallum & Casey (2017) as they suggested that involvement of key internal and external stakeholders is required such as students, academic and professional staff, and employers to support the transition from learning to practice leading to opportunities of skills and experience development.

Furthermore, suggestions communicated by Ruge & McCormack (2017) that development of employability skills within higher education required several considerations such as curriculum and its connection with external environment including industries related to the discipline to further reflect skills expectations, development of learning and assessment contexts to enable development of academic and professional dimensions, scaffolded assessment learning process enabling constructive alignment towards skills development, and development of teaching approach that can enable engagement of students to develop on generic and professional skills

Challenges To Connect Reflective Practice to Employability

Arguments included from the literature confirmed reflective practice and assessment may have several challenges to be connected to development of employability such as students' focus on overall personal experience and experiential learning rather than on employability skills, due to the demand of reflection to go beyond the usual skills they are used to at university, knowledge and social based contexts (Eden, 2014), perception of formal academic assessment's requirements (Dummer *et al.*, 2008), to relate to practice and personalise their writing using academic writing (Ruge & McCormack, 2017), lack of clarity on what to relate from their practical experience as well as structure and focus in the content of the reflection leading to descriptive writing rather than inclusion of challenges based on experience (Dummer et al., 2008), lack of prior classroom teaching and guidance on how to reflect (Chng, 2018), students' participation and engagement with the process to further value its importance and connection to employability (MacCallum & Casey, 2017), lack of systematic approach to the process of skills development (MacCallum & Casey, 2017), and staff buying in the reflective initiatives (MacCallum & Casey, 2017; Tummons, 2011). These findings of the literature were majorly matching with the central theme developed as the following: Application to practice as the main challenge in the process of reflection, with several subthemes developed to ensure inclusive approach to the analysis of the themes developed as the following: 1.1. Context application, 1.2. Unemployment, 1.3. Workplace culture, 1.4. Lack of self-confidence and awareness, 1.5. Access to training, 1.6. Skills.

The study can establish that writing reflective assessments with restricted guidelines requiring students to be technical and evaluative while reflecting can be challenging, this was supported by Tummons (2011), Tummons (2008) and Gee (1996), that students seek to avoid writing beyond the surface level with more analytical and critical approach, this is due to the

notion of self-preservation to protect their professional identity and reputation. This notion would restrict their expansion and depth in the reflective practice to avoid highlighting events or actions that have negative repercussions. Furthermore, the study conducted by Tigelaar *et al.*, (2005) suggested that reflective assessment methodology can be further developed to relate to local contexts considering the surroundings such as amount of diversity and individuality of student experience. This can also include students' involvement with employment opportunities, general norms and cultural expectations in workplaces relating to their disciplines, and training opportunities available to students within the educational institution and externally. Furthermore, this consideration can be expanded to include external factors such as employer's views to ensure alignment of their exaptation in assessments at higher education. While this study has considered assessment in general, including summative and formative, it maybe more encouraging for students to enhance reflective practice, if this was considered in formative rather than summative, students would have more time and flexibility to self-criticize and have deeper constructive discussions with their tutors to overcome issues similar to self-confidence.

Conclusion and Implications

The study contributes new views and knowledge to the field of employability development within higher education with specific focus on reflective assessment, this study was mainly supported by students' voice heard through focus group technique as briefly discussed in the methodology section leading to the development of interesting themes based on three key questions asked during the process. In relation to the literature and participants' views of their understanding of employability, the first finding of the study calls for the urgency to consider inclusion of practical elements into the offered programmes within higher education instead of focus on theoretical aspects while reflecting to further ensure that students understand key skills lead to successful employability, and to enhance connection of employers' expectations and demands.

While both the literature review included, and the responses of participants confirmed that reflective practice had influence on employability development such as further link with their emotions as well as their full work experience, the responses collected from the participants enabled the researcher to develop key themes as benefits of reflection to employability summarised as the following: enhances students' ability for further development, enhances students' learning from previous experiences, and enhances students' self-awareness. However, it was determined that some barriers may exist during this process such as surface level of reflection lacking indication of skills developed or to be further developed. Therefore, second finding of the study calls for consideration to further enable active reflective practice within assessments to enable further personal development, inclusion of real experiences, and encouragement of self-awareness. This requires higher education institutions to clarify employers' and labour market expectations to students during the process of academic delivery, this would have implications on key aspects of the academic offer such as the curriculum and its overall connection with key internal and external stakeholders, development of learning and assessment contexts, constructive alignment towards skills development, and teaching approach that can enable engagement of students to develop their generic and professional skills.

While arguments included from the literature confirmed that reflective practice and assessment may have several challenges to be connected to development of employability such as lack of focus on employability skills, lack of understanding reflective assessment requirements to relate to practice, lack of clarity on what should be related from practice during writing reflectively, lack of guidance and teaching on how to reflect prior to writing reflectively, lack of systematic approach to the process of skills development, and staff buying in the reflective initiatives. These findings from the literature majorly

matched with the themes and subthemes developed based on the participants' views. Therefore, The study can establish that writing reflective assessments with restricted guidelines requiring students to be technical and evaluative while reflecting can be challenging, This can also include students' involvement with employment opportunities, general norms and cultural expectations in workplaces relating to their disciplines, and training opportunities available to students within the educational institution and externally. The study also discussed possibility of further exploration of using formative assessment rather than summative for reflective practice as students may feel more comfortable towards key aspects around themselves such as to self-criticize and overcome issues around of self-confidence.

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