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Exploring Self-Perceived Employability and Its Determinants Among International Students in The United States

Yuanlu Niu[a*], Xu Xu[b], Yidan Zhu[c], Yvonne Hunter-Johnson[d]

[a] *University of Arkansas, USA*

[b] *Henderson State University, USA*

[c] *Lingnan University, Hong Kong*

[d] *Southern Illinois University, USA*

*Corresponding author: Email: yn005@uark.edu

Address: University of Arkansas, Arkansas, USA

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceived employability and its factors (e.g. demographic factors, educational factors, work-related factors, language and U.S. experience factors, and family factors) among international students in the U.S. Also, the study examines how gender moderates the relationships between perceived employability and other factors. A survey was conducted among international students at a midwestern public university in the U.S. and 138 participants' responses were included in the data analysis. The result shows that international students are confident in their employability. Interestingly, compared to female international students, the advantages brought by being in the field of engineering or having more work experiences are mainly for males. The present study may attract more scholars' attention to research the education outcomes for international students and explore the strategies that improve the outcomes.

Keywords: Self-perceived employability, employment, international students, higher education, United States

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INTRODUCTION

International students refer to foreign students who undertake their studies in a country other than their home country (Shapiro, et al., 2014). In the United States, the top one destination for international students, international students are defined as "anyone who is enrolled at an institution of higher education in the United States who is not a U.S. citizen, an immigrant (permanent resident) or a refugee" by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (para 2, 2015). During the 2018/2019 academic year, there were 872,214 international students studying in the higher education sector in the United States, including 431,930 undergraduate students, 377,943 graduate students, 62,341 non-degree students, and 223,085 students undertaking Optional Practical Training (OPT) (Open Doors, 2019). In 2018, international students made up 5.5 percent of the total of U.S. university students and contributed $44.7 billion to the United States economy (Institute of International Education, 2019). Asian countries remained the largest source of international students in the United States in 2018/2019 (Institute of International Education, 2019). With 21.1 percent of all international students, and Engineering remained the largest academic field of study for international students (Institute of International Education, 2019).

One of the most important motivations for international students' pursuit of higher education is to promote future career and professional opportunities (Huang, 2013; Nilsson & Ripmesster, 2016; Zhou, 2015). The outcome of international education attracts increasing interests among scholars in the perceived employability and education-to-work transition (Huang, 2013; Nilsson & Ripmesster, 2016). Yet, there is still a lack of empirical studies focusing on understanding international students' perceptions of employability and the strategies to improve their employability. It is important to explore the perceived employability among international students and examine its factors for higher education institutions to make sure that international students have a satisfactory experience abroad and to prepare them for the workplace. According to Sitarz (2022), the number of female international students on campus has increased from 62,000 in 2004 to 156,000 in 2016, based on full-time students on F-1 student visas. Gender plays an important role in term of shaping employability perceptions of employed and unemployed individuals in workplaces (Jackson & Wilton, 2017; Cifre et. al., 2018). Although employability is widely studied, there is not so much attention given to gender perspectives.

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceived employability and its factors (e.g., demographic factors, educational factors, work-related factors, language and U.S. experience factors, and family factors) among international students in the U.S. Also, the study examines how gender as a moderator impacts the relationships between perceived employability and other factors. The following research questions guide the present study:

1. To what extent do international students perceive their employability?
2. What factors impact the perceived employability of international students?
3. To what extent do the relationships between perceived employability and other factors differ by gender among international students?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The employability framework and scale developed by Rothwell et al. (2008, 2009) were used to guide the study design and measure variables as they have been used to perform exploratory validation among university students. For example, Niu et al. (2022) used the perceived employability from Rothwell et al. (2008, 2009) to assess the employability of university students in human resource development

programs. Perceived employability, closely relating to individuals' capacity for obtaining and retaining a job, becomes an important predictor of an individual's ability to find employment (Rothwell, et al, 2008; 2009). According to Rothwell et al. (2008, 2009), the perceived employability is measured by four dimensions including the self-beliefs, the state of the external labor market, the field of study, and the university's reputation. The self-beliefs reflect students' perceptions of their skills and behaviors (Rothwell, et al, 2009). The state of the external labor indicates the impacts of the external labor market on employability (Bowers-Brown & Harvey, 2004; Brown & Hesketh, 2004). The field of the study refers to the status and credibility of the study field (Mason, et al., 2003). The university reputation relates to university rankings and brand image (Fearn, 2008), as well as the reputation with employers (Murray & Robinson, 2001).

LITERATUR REVIEW

Perceived Employability

Employability has been widely studied in different areas, including business and management, educational studies, economics, and psychology. Employability is defined as "having the capability to gain initial employment, maintain employment, and obtain new employment if required" (Hillage & Pollard, 1998, p.1). Based on this concept, scholars explored the notion of perceived employability by focusing on "the perceived ability to attain sustainable employment appropriate to one's qualification level" (Rothwell, et al., 2008, p. 2).

Perceived employability comprises different elements, including an individual's assets, personal circumstances, and the labor market context (Alvarez, et. al, 2017; Hillage & Pollard, 1998; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Individuals' assets include the knowledge, skills, and attitudes for employment as well as the way they present these assets to their employers. Personal circumstances refer to the context relating to individuals' employment and career choice. The labor market context is formed by the labor market environment, local and global circumstances.

Factors of Perceived Employability

Previous studies regarding international students focus on their second language learning and education (Herold, 2012; Sudhershan, 2012); their cultural adjustment into higher education and local society (Zhang & Zhu, 2014; Lu, et al., 2019); identity construction and formation (Batterton & Horner, 2016; Arias-Valenzuela et. al., 2016); and career choice (McFadden & Seedorff, 2017; Amuedo-Dorantes & Furtado, 2019). However, international students' employability is still understudied, and few studies explore how different variables impact international students' employability. Previous studies have examined several factors influencing the perceived employability among university students and graduates, and the results are not consistent.

Demographic Factors

Cifre et. al. (2018) explored the relationship between gender and employability. For the scholars, the concept of gender refers to "the socially constructed characteristics of women and men such as: norms, roles, and relationships of and between groups of women and men" (p. 2). According to their study, they found that women are more confident about their employment chances when unemployed, while men feel more confident about their employment chances when employed. They further pointed out that sex-gender identity interaction reveals that "being feminine associates with the highest level of perceived employability for an unemployed man and the lowest for an unemployed woman" (p. 1). Johnson (2018) studied the

impact of gender differences on the employability among male and female African American engineering students. Literature showed that 50% of females considered themselves less employable than males (Jognson, 2018). However, many scholars did not find perceived employability influenced by gender (Jackson & Wilton, 2016; Niu, et al., 2019; Rothwell, et al., 2009).

Researchers used age as control variables and found that it was negatively related to perceived employability among students and graduates (Jackson & Wilton, 2016; Purcell, et al., 2007; Rothwell et al., 2008). However, Niu, et al. (2019) conducted a study among graduates of a workforce education and development program in the U.S. and found there was no relationship between age and the perceived employability.

Educational Factors

Grade Pont Average (GPA) plays a significant role in predicting students' employability. Research shows GPA predicts a significantly higher level of confidence in individuals' perceived employability (Qenani, et al., 2014). For example, a job applicant's résumé with higher GPAs may get better evaluations and raise the chances of getting job interviews (Pinto & Ramalheira, 2017). This will further affect students'/international students' employability, motivation for learning, and desire for obtaining a good job. However, several scholars have not found a significant difference in the perceived employability based on GPA (Greer & Waight, 2017; Ng & Feldman, 2014).

Researchers found a negative relationship between the length of time in university and perceived employability. Qenani, et al. (2014) pointed out that the odds of perceived employability decreased by 36% for the fourth-year students in comparison with second-year students. Drange, et al. (2018) found that the educational level had a positive impact on employability, while Niu reported that graduates with a doctoral degree had a lower level of confidence in their employability compared to the ones with a bachelor's degree. However, Rothwell and Arnold (2007) did not find a significant relationship between educational attainment level and perceived employability. Farčnik and Domadenik (2012) conducted a study to examine the effect of the field of study on the probability of employment among university graduates in Slovenia. The results showed that graduates from engineering had a higher probability of employment than most other study fields. However, there was still a lack of studies that focused on investigating the perceived employability of students and graduates across different fields of study.

Work-Related Factors

Work experience including internships and placement was considered positively to enhance perceived employability (Jackson & Wilton, 2017; Qenani, et al., 2014). Qenani, et al. (2014) indicated that students who had internship experience felt significantly confident in terms of their employability. Jackson & Wilton (2017) indicated that having work experience was positively related to perceived employability among undergraduate students.

Family Factors

Family responsibilities have an important impact on study and work. For example, employees, who need to take care of their children, are more likely to have family-work conflicts (Behson, 2002; Carlson, 1999). Also, family responsibilities are reported as the main reason for reducing actual working hours (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2003). However, no research has investigated the impact of family responsibility on perceived employability.

Language and International Experience Factors

Language has been identified as a challenge faced by international students in previous literature (Hunter-Johnson, & Niu, 2019; Kuo, 2011; Khoshlessan & Das, 2017), most often it has been from the perception of English as a second language while pursuing higher education in the U.S. However, no research has explored the impact of language barriers on the perceived employability of international students. Previous studies show that studying abroad can improve students' career opportunities. For example, Bracht et al. (2006) conducted a comprehensive study in Europe and found that former Erasmus students were more often internationally employed than their immobile peers. However, there is a lack of studies that investigate how the length of international experience influences the perceived employability.

RESEARCH METHOD

To address the research questions, a quantitative study was conducted through the administration of an online survey to international students within a public university in the US. The survey included background questions and a Liker-scale questionnaire consisting of 14 items from Rothwell et al.'s (2008, 2009) employability scale.

Participants and Sampling

A convenience sampling was conducted for recruiting participants through the Listserv of international students at a midwestern public university in the US in 2018. We sent out around 1,500 emails and received 159 responses. The response rate was 10.6%. Table 1 shows the background information of participants based on demographic information, educational information, work-related information, family information, language and international experience information.

Data Collection

We utilized Rothwell et al.'s (2008, 2009) employability scale to measure the perceived employability of international students. Rothwell et al.'s (2008, 2009) employability scale includes four dimensions: the self-beliefs, the state of the external labor market, the field of study, and the university's reputation. According to Rothwell et al. (2008), the alpha internal reliability coefficients were 0.75 for self-perceived employability items among undergraduate students in the UK. The alpha internal reliability coefficients were 0.84 for self-perceived employability items among graduate students in the UK (Rothwell et al., 2009). Since all the participants were from the same university, we excluded the items in the dimensions of the university's reputation. Participants responded to the employability scale on a Likert scale from strongly disagree =1 to strongly agree =5. Also, participants were required to complete an informed consent form and a questionnaire on their background information. Finally, 138 participants' responses were included in the data analysis because 21 participants skipped several scale items.

Data Analysis

We conducted a descriptive analysis to address the first research question, which explores the perceived employability of international students. Then, we conducted Welch's t-test, one-way ANOVA, and hierarchical regressions to examine the factors that influence the perceived employability and the moderating effect of gender.

Table 1: Background Information of Participants (N=138)

Variables	Gender			
	Male (n=86)		Female (n=52)	
	n	%	n	%
Demographic Factors				
Age: Younger than 35	76	88.4%	38	73.1%
Age: 35+	10	11.6%	14	26.9%
Ethnicity: Non-Asian	28	32.6%	15	28.8%
Ethnicity: Asian	58	67.4%	37	71.2%
Educational Factors				
Degree level: Undergraduate	13	15.1%	9	17.3%
Degree level: Graduate	73	84.9%	43	82.7%
Academic field: Non-Engineering	46	53.5%	43	82.7%
Academic field: Engineering	40	46.5%	9	17.3%
Academic standing: 4th or less years	75	87.2%	46	88.5%
Academic standing: 5th or more years	11	12.8%	6	11.5%
GPA: 2.5 to 2.9	4	4.7%	2	3.8%
GPA: 3.0 to 3.4	11	12.8%	6	11.5%
GPA: 3.5 to 3.9	47	54.7%	27	51.9%
GPA: 4.0	24	27.9%	17	32.7%
Assistantship/Fellowship/Scholarship: No	22	25.6%	13	25%
Assistantship/Fellowship/Scholarship: Yes	64	74.4%	39	75%
Work-Related Factors				
Work experience: Less than 1 year	25	29.1%	18	34.6%
Work experience: More than 1 year	61	70.9%	34	65.4%
Plan: Other	22	25.6%	13	25%
Plan: Work in the U.S.	64	74.4%	39	75%
Family Factors				
Take care children: Yes	13	15.1%	10	19.2%
Take care children: No	73	84.9%	42	80.8%
Marital status: Married	26	30.2%	16	30.8%
Marital status: Single	60	69.8%	36	69.2%
Language and International Experience Factors				
English as the first language: Yes	10	11.6%	5	9.6%
English as the first language: No	76	88.4%	47	90.4%
U.S. experience: Less than 3 years	46	53.5%	23	44.2%
U.S. experience: 3+ years	40	46.5%	29	55.8%

RESULTS

According to the descriptive analysis, the mean score of overall perceived employability items is 3.5 (*SD*=0.62), which suggests international students are confident in their employability. Table 2 shows the results of Welch's *t*-test, which compares the two levels of variables on the perceived employability

among international students. The results indicate that the perceived employability mean score of males is significantly higher than the mean score of females at $p<0.05$ level. International students within the engineering field have a significantly higher mean score of perceived employability than ones in other fields at $p<0.01$ level. International students with assistantship/fellowship/scholarship have a significantly higher mean score of perceived employability than the ones without at $p<0.1$ level. International students with more than 1-year's work experience have a significantly higher mean score of perceived employability than the one with less than 1-year's work experience at $p<0.01$ level. International students, who plan to work in the U.S. after graduation, have a significantly higher mean score of perceived employability than the ones with other plans at $p<0.1$ level. We did not find any significant differences between the two levels of other variables on perceived employability. Since GPA has more than two levels, we performed one-way ANOVA to detect the potential difference in means of perceived employability among the groups. There is no significant difference in the mean of perceived employability among different GPAs ($F(3,134)=1.139$, $p=0.336$).

Table 2: Welch's t-test Results Comparing Different Level of Variables on Perceived Employability of International Students (N=138)

Variables	*n*	Perceived Employability (*mean*)	*df*	*t*
Demographic Factors				
Gender: Male	86	3.59	134.83	2.35**
Gender: Female	52	3.36		
Age: Younger than 35	114	3.51	37.63	0.49
Age: 35+	24	3.45		
Ethnicity: Non-Asian	43	3.47	65.55	-0.29
Ethnicity: Asian	95	3.51		
Educational Factors				
Degree level: Undergraduate	22	3.52	34.38	0.87
Degree level: Graduate	116	3.50		
Academic field: Non-Engineering	89	3.39	122.05	-3.02***
Academic field: Engineering	49	3.69		
Academic standing: 4^{th} or less years	121	3.53	17.61	0.99
Academic standing: 5^{th} or more years	17	3.29		
Assistantship/Fellowship/Scholarship: No	35	3.37	78.51	-1.67*
Assistantship/Fellowship/Scholarship: Yes	103	3.54		
Work-Related Factors				
Work experience: Less than 1 year	43	3.25	65.53	-2.94***
Work experience: More than 1 year	95	3.61		
Plan: Other	35	3.37	78.51	-1.67*
Plan: Work in the U.S.	103	3.54		
Family Factors				
Take care children: Yes	23	3.51	35.00	0.11
Take care children: No	115	3.50		
Marital status: Married	42	3.58	74.24	1.03
Marital status: Single	96	3.46		
Language and International Experience Factors				
English as the first language: Yes	15	3.46	17.74	-0.27
English as the first language: No	123	3.50		
U.S. experience: Less than 3 years	69	3.53	133.85	0.53
U.S. experience: 3+ years	69	3.47		

Note. *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

The impact of individual factors on perceived employability is presented in Table 3 using a hierarchical multiple regression model. We grouped factors into five categories and built five regression models by adding one category to the previous model. In the first model (Table 3, Column (1)), when we

controlled only demographic factors, the results showed that female international students were significantly less confident in the perceived employability than their male peers at $p<0.05$ level. However, age and ethnicity did not have any significant impact on perceived employability. In the second model (Table 3, Column (2)), when we added the educational factors, the results showed that gender did not significantly influence the perceived employability. Also, the results showed assistantship/ fellowship/ scholarship experience and academic field had significant impacts on the perceived employability. International students with assistantship/fellowship/scholarship experience or studying in the engineering field had a higher level of perceived employability. In the third model (Table 3, Column (3)), we added work-related factors, and only academic field and work experience showed significant impacts on the perceived employability.

International students, who study in the engineering field or have more than 1-year of work experience, are more confident in the perceived employability. In the fourth and fifth model (Table 3, Column (4) and Column (5)), we added family factors and language and international experience factors, respectively. Academic field and work experience still show significant impacts, but none of the other factors showed significant impacts on the perceived employability. We also conducted a power analysis to confirm the range of the sample size to be able to identify such an impact with 90% confidence at a significance level of 0.05. In a novel situation like this, we followed Cohen's effect size benchmarks when conducting power analysis. For a linear model, the suggested guidelines (Cohen, 1988) for effect size are the following: Small- 0.02, Medium - 0.15, Large - 0.35. To detect a medium effect size of gender in our Model 5 (the model with the largest number of predictors), a required sample size was 166. To detect a large effect size, we only needed 79 observations. Therefore, our sample size (obs = 138) was sufficient to detect effect size ranges from medium to large.

Table 3: Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Predictors of Perceived Employability

Variables	Perceived Employability				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Demographic Factors					
Gender: Female	-0.23**	-0.14	-0.12	-0.11	-0.10
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Age: 35+	-0.00	0.04	-0.06	-0.03	-0.03
	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.16)
Ethnicity: Asian	0.05	-0.02	0.03	0.01	0.02
	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Educational Factors					
GPA: 3.0 to 3.4		0.28	0.20	0.196	0.18
		(0.30)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.30)
GPA: 3.5 to 3.9		0.40	0.29	0.26	0.25
		(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.2)
GPA: 4.0		0.18	0.10	0.08	0.08
		(0.27)	(0.26)	(0.27)	(0.27)
Degree level: Graduate		-0.06	-0.13	-0.14	-0.13
		(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)

Assistantship/Fellowship/ Scholarship: Yes		0.23*	0.16	0.13	0.13
		(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.14)
Academic field: Engineering		0.31**	0.29**	0.31**	0.32**
		(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.13)
Academic standing: 5th or more years		-0.16	-0.14	-0.15	-0.12
		(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.17)
Work-Related Factors					
Work experience: More than 1 year			0.34***	0.34***	0.36***
			(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.13)
Plan: Work in the U.S.					
Family Factors					
Marital status: Single				-0.19	-0.20
				(0.15)	(0.15)
Take care children: No				0.19	0.17
				(0.19)	(0.19)
Language and International Experience Factors					
English as first language: No					-0.07
					(0.18)
U.S. experience: 3+ years					-0.08
					-0.08
Constant	3.56***	3.04***	3.00***	3.02***	3.12***
	(0.10)	(0.30)	(0.30)	(0.34)	(0.38)
Observations	138	138	138	138	138
R^2	0.03	0.13	0.18	0.19	0.20
Adjust R^2	0.01	0.06	0.11	0.11	0.10
Residual Std. Error	0.62(df = 134)	0.60 (df = 127)	0.59 (df = 126)	0.59 (df = 124)	0.59 (df = 122)
F Statistic	1.55 (df = 3; 134)	1.94** (df = 10; 127)	2.56*** (df = 11; 126)	2.29*** (df = 13; 124)	2.00** (df = 15; 122)

Note. *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01. The variable "Plan" was dropped due to collinearity.

We also interacted gender with other explanatory variables to see if gender played a moderating role. Table 4 shows the results. The interaction terms are significant for academic field and work experience. Negative estimated coefficients of interaction terms show that the advantages brought by being in the field of engineering or having more work experiences are mainly for males.

Table 4: Moderating Effect of Gender

Variables	Perceived Employability	
	(1)	(2)
Demographic Factors		
Gender: Female	0.02	0.19
	(0.13)	(0.19)
Age: 35+	-0.02	-0.0004
	(0.16)	(0.16)
Ethnicity: Asian	-0.01	0.05
	(0.12)	(0.12)
Educational Factors		
GPA: 3.0 to 3.4	0.13	0.13
	(0.29)	(0.29)
GPA: 3.5 to 3.9	0.16	0.22
	(0.27)	(0.26)
GPA: 4.0	-0.01	0.06
	(0.27)	(0.27)
Degree level: Graduate	-0.19	-0.11
	(0.17)	(0.17)
Assistantship/Fellowship/ Scholarship: Yes	0.16	0.15
	(0.14)	(0.14)
Academic field: Engineering	0.44***	0.32**
	(0.14)	(0.13)
Academic standing: 5th or more years	-0.10	-0.16
	(0.17)	(0.17)
Work-Related Factors		
Work experience: More than 1 year	0.38***	0.52***
	(0.13)	(0.15)
Family Factors		
Marital status: Single	-0.23	-0.16
	(0.15)	(0.15)
Take care children: No	0.20	0.13
	(0.19)	(0.19)
Language and International Experience Factors		
English as first language: No	-0.05	-0.06
	(0.17)	(0.17)
U.S. experience: 3+ years	-0.09	-0.05
	(0.11)	(0.11)
Moderating Effect		
Gender: Female × Academic field: Engineering	-0.48*	
	(0.27)	
Gender: Female × Work experience: More than 1 year		-0.44*

		(0.23)
Constant	3.15***	2.96***
	(0.38)	(0.39)
Observations	138	138
R^2	0.22	0.22
Adjust R^2	0.11	0.12
Residual Std. Error (df = 121)	0.59	0.58
F Statistic (df = 16; 121)	2.11**	2.14**

Note. *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01.

DISCUSSION

The result of descriptive analysis shows that international students are confident in their employability, which is consistent with previous studies that international students believe that to pursue higher education could promote career opportunities (Bracht et al., 2006; Huang, 2013; Hunter-Johnson, & Niu, 2019; Nilsson & Ripmesster, 2016; Zhou, 2015). Compared to male international students, female international students have lower perceived employability in the results of Welch's t-test and Model 1 of hierarchical regression. This result supports Johnson's (2018) study conducted among African American engineering students. Also, our results show that male students being in the field of engineering or having more work experiences are more likely to have higher level of perceived employability, but female students do not. Therefore, gender inequality still exists in both education and workplaces.

While the amount of female international students is less than male international students' in the US, women also experience lower rates of workforce participation and a gender-based wage gap. For example, female workers constituted only 46.9% of all workers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018), and women are only paid 80 cents for every dollar paid to their male peers in the US (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). To reduce gender inequality in education and workplace and prepare female international students for the workplace, higher education institutions should create a women-friendly environment and provide support based on their needs. For example, higher education institutions may build an all-for-women mentorship program for female international students. In addition, higher education institutions and workplaces should provide diversity training to increase the awareness of gender issues and increase the representation of women in STEM fields and leadership positions as well as implement family-friendly policies and supports.

Our results show that international students who received assistantship/fellowship/scholarship had higher perceived employability. Teaching or research assistantship provided international students with an opportunity to work in their field during their course of study. Fellowship and scholarship are considered academic achievements for students. All these programs could enhance the confidence of international students in their career development and reduce their final stress. Therefore, higher education institutions should provide more opportunities for international students to receive an assistantship, fellowship, or scholarship. International students could be considered as a potential international workforce, so employers could also provide funding for the programs of assistantship/fellowship/scholarship in higher education institutions.

Our study also indicates that international students, who plan to work in the US after graduation, believe they are more employable. Previous studies have focused on examining the decision among international students to stay or leave the US upon graduation. For example, Ruiz and Budiman (2018)

indicated that about 1.5 million international graduates of US colleges and universities obtained authorization to remain and work in the US through the federal government's Optional Practical Training program during 2004 to 2016, and more than half of the foreign graduates approved for employment specialized in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. The promotion of advanced education in STEM has become a key strategy for ensuring the US` advantageous position as an innovative economic leader (Han, et al., 2015). However, Han, et al. (2015) reported that the increasing global competitiveness in STEM education and the complex restrictive nature of American immigration policies are creating an environment where the US STEM system may no longer be able to comfortably remain the premier destination for the world's top international students.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The present study has explored the perceived employability and its factors among international students in the US. Many previous works of literature focused on international student experiences of transition to higher education abroad. However, very few studies examined the transition from education to workplaces among international students. Based on our findings we call for scholars to address the education outcomes for international students and explore strategies that improve international students transition from education to workplaces.

For future research, gender deserves the attention of scholars of higher education. We need more empirical studies to explore the needs of female international students and improve the strategies for promoting gender equality. Thus far studies have not explored the impact of assistantship/ fellowship/ scholarship on perceived employability. Higher education scholars should conduct more empirical studies to understand the impact of assistantship/fellowship/scholarship on international students' employability and explore the international students' needs in the US. More empirical studies are needed to explore the impact of international students' decisions on their employability. Higher education institutions may provide career consulting specific to international students to help them make decisions and improve their competitiveness in the global labor markets

Our study has several limitations. First, all the participants are from one university, so the results are not generalizable to international students in other universities. Future studies should include more universities across nations so that the results will have a larger impact. Second, future research could enlarge the sample size to detect more factors that influence the perceived employability. Third, the perceived employability scale is mindset measurement, so it might not indicate the reality of employability. In the future, longitudinal studies should be conducted after students' graduation, which would enable researchers to examine whether international students who were more confident in their employability were able to find a job in keeping with their qualification level after graduation.

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YUANLU NIU, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Human Resource and Workforce Development at the University of Arkansas in the United States. Her research focuses on lookism in the workplace, career development, human resource development, women's studies, and workforce diversity. Email: yn005@uark.edu

XU XU, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Economics and Data Analytics at the School of Business at Henderson State University in the United States. Her research examines the flow of people, which includes international migration as well as international tourism, and specifically, her work empirically measures the determinants of such cross-border movement; studies how factors such as the exchange of information affecting the flow. Email: xux@hsu.edu

YIDAN ZHU, PhD, is a Research Assistant Professor at Lingnan University in Hong Kong. Her research addresses three focal areas: 1) adult learning in multicultural contexts; 2) professional learning and health professions education; and 3) ageing adult education. Email: yidanzhu@LN.edu.hk

YVONNE HUNTER-JOHNSON, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Workforce Education and Development at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Her major research interests lie in the area of transfer of training, learning organizations, training and development (law enforcement and military), and motivation of adults to learn. Email: Yvonne.hunter-johnson@siu.edu