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PhD Dissertation Defense

Entitled

*THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT
LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL AND SELF-PERCEIVED EMPLOYABILITY AND THE MODERATING ROLE
OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT*

by

Aizhan Shomotova

Faculty Advisor

Prof. Ali Ibrahim

Foundations of Education Department

College of Education

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Abstract

The employability of university graduates is increasingly crucial for economic development, particularly in the Arab region, where youth unemployment is escalating. This thesis examines the self-perceived employability (SPE) among undergraduate students in the UAE, exploring its relationship with leadership potential (LP) and higher education student engagement (HESE). Previous studies underscore the importance of aligning higher education outcomes with labour market demands. Research in student leadership and student engagement emphasizes that proactive engagement and leadership development are pivotal in enhancing employability. This thesis builds on these findings, focusing on the unique context of the UAE. A quantitative methodology was used to answer three research questions that validated three scales of SPE, LP, and HESE in the context of one public university in the UAE. Statistical analyses, including structural-equation modelling (SEM), were conducted to explore the relationships between these constructs. The results indicate strong positive and significant associations between SPE and LP ($b=0.555$) and HESE ($b=0.463$). Therefore, validated scales confirm that leadership potential and student engagement significantly influence perceptions of employability among UAE undergraduates. The findings highlight the critical role of higher education institutions in fostering university environments that enhance student engagement and leadership development. The study recommends that educators and policymakers enhance co-curricular and extracurricular offerings to include more leadership development opportunities and enhanced student engagement activities, ensuring students are equipped with the multifaceted skills necessary to navigate the challenges of the labour market effectively.

Keywords: leadership potential, self-perceived employability, student engagement, higher education, undergraduate students, university education, UAE