



Employability and its Influence on Higher Education Enrolment Decisions in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

Employability has arisen as an important consideration for prospective college students making enrolment decisions in Tamil Nadu. In a time when the job market is shifting and increasing competition, students and institutions want to ensure the academics are meaningful and linked to prospective employment. This study was conducted to examine how factors of employability influence decisions made by students when enrolling in higher education, including employment opportunities, industry linkages, internship availability, skills attributes, and alumni employment. The data sources employed were self-reported measures of employability factors from fifty quantitative sample students from ten districts in Tamil Nadu, India. The structured questionnaire collected numerical scores of satisfactions with employability factors; population statistic calculations were conformed including frequency, mean square, and correlation coefficients to explain the occupied role of those satisfied employability factors with students' enrolment decisions. The findings demonstrate employability narrows options for prospective students because students are likely to pursue a discipline that has job-related prospects. The article recommends that institutions of higher education develop employability driven decision-making processes that enhance student recruitment and ensure that student employability is satisfied.

Keywords: employability, higher education, enrolment decisions, Tamil Nadu, skill development, job opportunities, industry linkages, alumni placement

Introduction

Higher education is a crucial determinant of human capital and is a key influence in an area's economic development and productivity environment. Tamil Nadu is one of India's foremost States in higher education to date and the social-economic and institutional environmental influences have shaped the structure and patterns of enrolment in Tamil Nadu. The factor that seems to have the greatest influence is based on employability. Students are now human capital consumers using their own situational influences to consider a higher education program through employability merit where now they have to

determine not only the academic prestige of the program but how feasible it is to acquire an employable opportunity.

Employability additionally defined as the "ability to secure and maintain (substantively) employment" by UN agency the ILO means based on the skills and competencies the graduate has to secure and maintain employment in the competitive labour market. Tamil Nadu contains many forms of higher education programs not just academic prestige in the various discipline of study. Employability potential or opportunity potential, and contractual obligations with a government or industry, external internship



programs, employability skills program, and if alumni are actually landing jobs all entail how students perceive their enrolment choices.

While costs, location and institutional reputation remain important, rising costs and reduced job outcomes are changing what value students hone in on via a wide range of factors in higher education. Factors such as industry based curriculum programs which are, ultimately tied to guaranteed employment outcomes, which parents and students see as increasingly important. This illustration may well raise a series of weighty policy questions with regard to compliance by institutions in Tamil Nadu with labour market or employability agendas.

This study will examine the different levels of employability influence with regard to higher education decisions taken by students in the region of Tamil Nadu. The analysis in this study will also show enrolment program employability education rankings and proof of the differences between districts, and then further examine employability as a factor in decision-making in order of the students own perception of employability factors priorities. The study will provide more valuable information on the basis to measure and focus, as a state level, as well as an institutional level to inform the suitable possible academic state position based on employability engagement/educational outcome measures, and to evaluate and change the subjectively perceived institutional engagement, and state otherwise engage measures, with regard to employment related education.

Statement of the Problem

Despite Tamil Nadu's high Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education, the issue of graduate employability continues to challenge higher education stakeholders. Employers routinely report skills deficiencies in graduates, and many state graduates are under-prepared for a successful career, creating a legitimacy gap in the role of higher education in preparing graduates for the workforce. Students also face increasing indecision in selecting programs, as conventional degrees no longer provide a guarantee of employment stability.

In the context of employability as a critical factor in enrolling choices made by students in higher education, there has been limited research examining the nature of employability perceptions to impact directly on students' voluntary choice towards enrolling. It was vital to provide the sector with contemporary data on employability concerns directly related to the decision-making process of students, or more broadly, higher education institutions run the risk of developing programs that are in direct contrast to student expectation and market need.

This study provides that data, and provides a systematic investigation of the employability factors - job opportunities, industry, internships, skills practices and alumni placement - that contribute to the different student choice decision making process in relation to enrolment in higher education across Tamil Nadu districts.

Review of Literature

There is considerable literature exploring the relationships between employability and higher education at a local and national level. Yorke (2006) defines employability as a combination of achievements (skills, understandings and personal attributes) that make graduates more likely to gain employment in their selected occupation. Harvey (2001), on the other hand, points out that higher education institutions must go beyond simply transmitting knowledge and promote students' work-related skills.

In India, Agarwal (2009) points out that the expansion of higher education and the needed absorption by the labour market, leads to many graduates being underemployed. According to FICCI and NASSCOM (2019), only 45% of Indian graduates are employable (employable in respect to industry specific occupations). There is an ever-increasing need for higher education institutions to start aligning curriculum and programs to educate for employability.

In Tamil Nadu in specific, Rajasekaran (2017) reports that students' choices in studying high vocations such as engineering are predominantly inspired by job opportunities. Similarly, Narayanan



(2020) suggests that institutions with connections to employment creation and established placement records promote an increase in enrolment.

However, the literature still lacks localised, district comparative studies, demonstrating empirical evidence, using quantitative enrolment data, to contextualise the relationship between employability and students' decision processes on enrolment. Those that do engage with location, primarily focus on institutional case studies or quantitative surveys at the national level and lose sight of real world localised engagement of higher education enrolment decisions.

This proposed work will explore employability perceptions and enrolment decision processes across pregnancies in Tamil Nadu thus contributing to the literature in the context of new regional evidence.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design to examine the influence of employability on higher education enrolment decisions in Tamil Nadu. The research population consisted of students enrolled in various undergraduate and postgraduate programs across ten selected districts: Chennai, Coimbatore, Madurai, Tiruchirappalli, Salem, Tirunelveli, Erode, Thanjavur, Virudhunagar, and Vellore.

A sample size of 500 students was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure proportional representation across districts and academic disciplines. The distribution was deliberately kept in odd numbers across districts to maintain sample balance, with Vellore contributing the largest share (115 students) and Virudhunagar the smallest (33 students).

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire that was designed to assess five employability factors: job opportunities, industry associations, internships, skills development, and alumni placements. All items were on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (very low influence) to 5 (very high influence).

The researchers used PR statistics that used descriptive statistics (i.e., frequency distributions and means), and inferential statistics (i.e., correlative analysis) to investigate how satisfaction with

employability factors acted as inductive and deductive influences of the enrolment decision (table and calculations were done using SPSS and Excel).

The methodology was broad and deep enough to include students' perspectives from districts, programs, and ethical protocols for voluntary participation and anonymity of responses.

Hypothesis of the Study

H₀: There is no association between students' satisfaction and employability factors and the influence of employability factors on their higher education enrolment decisions.

H₁: There is a significant difference between students' satisfaction with employability factors and the influence of employability factors on their higher education enrolment decisions.

H₀: There is no significant difference in enrolment influence across different academic programs.

H₁: There is a significant difference in enrolment influence across different academic programs.

H₀: Employability factors and program enrolment are independent.

H₁: Employability factors and program enrolment are not independent.

Analysis of Data and Interpretation

Table 1: District-wise Distribution of Respondents

District	Count	Percentage (%)
Vellore	115	23.0%
Chennai	51	10.2%
Coimbatore	49	9.8%
Madurai	47	9.4%
Tiruchirappalli	45	9.0%
Salem	43	8.6%
Tirunelveli	41	8.2%
Erode	39	7.8%
Thanjavur	37	7.4%
Virudhunagar	33	6.6%
Total	500	100%

Source: Primary Data

The distribution of students across districts indicates a heavier concentration from Vellore, with 23% of the total sample coming from that district. This is unsurprising given the number of higher education



institutions in that district, including a wealth of larger private universities with strong placement records. Similarly, Chennai, Coimbatore, and Madurai are well represented, underscoring their role as educational hubs. Some districts, such as Virudhunagar and Thanjavur, are significantly lower in representation, which is understandable given their smaller institutional presence. This distribution allows for a good mix of metropolitan and semi-urban areas, providing a more nuanced view of how employability affects the enrolment choices students make from varying socio-geographic contexts in Tamil Nadu.

Table 2: Program-wise Distribution of Respondents

Program	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Arts	115	23.0%
Engineering	104	20.8%
Science	100	20.0%
Management	94	18.8%
Commerce	87	17.4%
Total	500	100%

Source: Primary Data

The percentage distribution clearly shows that arts (23%) and engineering (21%) are ahead of student choices, with science (20%) in a close third. Management (19%) and commerce (17%) also have important enrolment numbers. This pattern captures the idea that although students tend to choose traditional programs, like arts and social sciences, simply because they are cheaper and/or accessible, the reason they tend to select professional programs (such as engineering and management) is because they see the opportunity for greater employability. When viewed as relative, it indicates an acceptable 'balance' between opportunities for higher education and opportunities for professional work, but employability is one factor that links both domains of enquiry in relation to factors when contemplating enrolment.

Table 3: Employability Factor Distribution

Employability Factor	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Alumni Placement	108	21.6%
Job Opportunities	105	21.0%
Skill Development	98	19.6%
Industry Linkages	97	19.4%
Internship Availability	92	18.4%
Total	500	100%

Source: Primary Data

Placement opportunity (22%) and jobs offered (21%) were the two main influences on students' decisions about their enrolment choice - students were looking for colleges that had placed graduates in the past and future job opportunities. Skills development, industry connection, and opportunities for internships was also articulated by students' as important in their decision but not as influential. The results hint that while employability has many facets, immediate assurance of job placement is the greatest motivator of students' decisions. The results point to the need for colleges to build their placement cells and alumni networks while ensuring they have meaningful engagement with industry and are providing opportunities for skill differentiation.

Table 4: Mean Scores of Satisfaction and Influence by Employability Factor

Employability Factor	Mean Satisfaction Score	Mean Enrolment Influence
Alumni Placement	2.87	3.06
Industry Linkages	3.02	2.89
Internship Availability	3.04	3.04
Job Opportunities	3.25	3.02
Skill Development	2.89	3.06

Source: Computed Data



The analysis of the mean scores indicates that job opportunities reflect the most satisfaction (3.25) and represents the belief that students have about obtaining employment from many of the programs. Alumni placements and skill development received moderate ratings in satisfaction, but have a slightly higher influence on students' decision to enrol (3.06). Internship opportunities and connections with industry drew equal scores for satisfaction and influence. This indicates that students consider both the immediate, tangible outcomes of employment and opportunities for skill development in their decisions to enrol. However, a slight gap exists between satisfaction and influence on enrolment, indicating that institutions must improve the actual outcome to meet student expectation.

Table 5: Correlation between Satisfaction and Enrolment Influence

Variable	Satisfaction Score	Enrolment Influence
Satisfaction Score	1.000	-0.059
Enrolment Influence	-0.059	1.000

Source: Computed Data

Table 6: Paired Sample t-Test Results for Satisfaction vs Enrolment Influence

Variable Pair	Mean of Satisfaction Score	Mean of Enrolment Influence	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value	Decision
Satisfaction Score vs Enrolment Influence	3.014	3.014	0.000	0.000	1.000	Accept H_0

Source: Computed Data

The paired sample t-test result indicated a t-value = 0.000 and a p-value = 1.000 and was well above the .05 significance level. This denotes there was no significant difference in satisfaction of the employability factors and their influence on enrolment decisions. In other words, regardless of whether a student was fully satisfied or not satisfied with actual employability outcomes, their perceived sense of employability influenced their choices related to

The correlation analysis suggests a weak negative correlation (-0.059) between the satisfaction scores (given by participants) and the enrolment influence. That means employment factors do have a significant and positive influence on students' enrolment but students' satisfaction with these employment factors does not strongly influence students' enrolment decisions. In other words, students may choose to enrol in a program even if their satisfaction with employability outcomes is relatively low (i.e. they may simply be pressured into this choice based on parents, financial concerns, or a lack of options). This is a major distinction of expectations versus reality. Higher education programs in Tamil Nadu especially need to bridge this gap. Gap between actual impact on employability versus what was actually promised by the students' enrolment.

Hypothesis Testing

A paired sample t-test was applied to compare the mean scores of students' satisfaction with employability factors and their perceived influence on enrolment decisions.

enrolment. Thus, it was clear the employability factor as previously identified indicates a very weak correlation but still represents a strong motivator for enrolment decision, even when satisfaction with employability outcomes is lower.

Table 7: One-Way ANOVA Results

Source	F-value	p-value	Decision
Enrolment Influence by Program	0.404	0.806	Accept H_0

Source: Computed Data



The results of the ANOVA test produced an F-value of 0.404 ($p = 0.806$), which is significantly higher than the $p < 0.05$ level of significance. Thus, the evidence does not support stating that the effects of enrolment influences do differ significantly between the various programs of Arts, Science, Commerce, Engineering, and Management. In other words, students were being influenced by employability factors when deciding to enrol in a degree offering across all programs in similar fashions. Employability was a consistent motive whether the student was pursuing a traditional or professional degree. This finding speaks to the broad relevance of employability for students across all disciplines in Tamil Nadu's higher education sector.

Table 8: Chi-Square Test Results

Test Type	Chi-square Value	df	P-value	Decision
Program × Employability Factor	19.194	16	0.259	Accept H_0

Source: Computed Data

The Chi-square test produced a Chi-square statistic of 19.194 with 16 degrees of freedom, and a p-value of 0.259. The p-value is above the 0.05 significance level which indicates there is no significant association between the type of program and factors affecting employability. Students seem to value employability factors—such as employment rates, industry connections, and placement with alumni—in similar ways across various programs including Arts, Science, Commerce, Engineering, and Management. It is reasonable to conclude students generally consider employability factors and that the factors they use to assess employability are not limited to their program, but encompass their experiences as students regardless of their program. Therefore, post-secondary institutions in all programs must equally recognize employability, and associated factors, when developing their curricula and assisting students with employability concerns.

Findings of the Study

1. Regional Concentration of Enrolment

The majority of respondents were from Vellore, Chennai, and Coimbatore, indicating that these districts act as educational hubs with higher institutional density and stronger employability-driven infrastructures. Smaller districts like Virudhunagar and Thanjavur had fewer respondents, reflecting regional disparities in access to employability-focused higher education.

2. Balanced Program Preferences

Students enrolled in both traditional and professional courses. Arts accounted for the largest share of enrolment (23%), followed by engineering (21%) and science (20%). This indicates that while traditional disciplines continue to attract students due to affordability and cultural factors, employability-oriented programs like engineering and management are also in high demand.

3. Alumni Placement and Job Opportunities as Key Drivers

Among employability factors, alumni placement (22%) and job opportunities (21%) were most influential in shaping enrolment decisions. Students rely heavily on institutional placement records and alumni success as signals of employability.

4. Skill Development as an Emerging Priority

Though satisfaction with skill development scored moderately, its influence on enrolment decisions was significant. This suggests students are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of employability skills beyond academic learning.

5. Internships and Industry Linkages Support Employability

While not the most dominant, internships and industry linkages were also influential. Students recognize the value of practical exposure and industry collaboration in enhancing their employability.



6. Weak Correlation between Satisfaction and Influence

The paired t-test confirmed that there is no significant difference between satisfaction with employability factors and their influence on enrolment. Students enrol based on employability expectations even if satisfaction remains low. This highlights a gap between institutional promises and student experiences.

7. No Significant Differences Across Programs

ANOVA results indicated that enrolment influence did not vary significantly across programs ($p = 0.806$). Employability influences enrolment uniformly across both traditional and professional disciplines.

8. Employability Factors Independent of Program Choice

Chi-square test results showed no significant association ($p = 0.259$) between program type and employability factors. This means students across all disciplines value employability similarly, suggesting employability is a universal concern rather than program-specific.

9. Employability as a Universal Enrolment Driver

Overall, employability remains a critical determinant of enrolment decisions across districts and programs. Students prioritize employability despite varying levels of satisfaction, underlining the urgent need for institutions to strengthen employability outcomes to meet expectations.

Conclusion

This study explored the potential for employability to influence student decisions to enrol in higher education, across Tamil Nadu. Using information obtained from 500 students from ten districts, it can be said that employability can be seen as an important but nuanced reason for student enrolment decisions. Alumni placements and jobs were rated the highest on employability commitments for student enrolment decisions that included, skills, industry, connections

and internships. There is an inherent contradiction which is concerning; despite giving employability an important reason for enrolment, students indicated moderate levels of satisfaction toward employability, with only weak associations to employability. This does suggest that many students made enrolment decisions based on a promising employability outcome, but in almost all cases, students feel limited actualisation of these outcomes.

There are clear implications of these findings, with a strong message for educational institutions to work-in the alienation of original employability outcomes in their delivery. Employability practices including develop stronger placement cells, more internships, improve skills, review curriculum, require urgent actions. In the Indian context, educational policymakers must also implement policies that acknowledge and address geographical differences so that all students, irrespective of district are able to engage in employment-focused educational practices.

We should be able to make academic programs more relevant to labour market needs in Tamil Nadu so that we can maintain high participation rates in education and help students be successful in a changing world of work.

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