

EXPLORING THE EMPLOYABILITY LANDSCAPE THROUGH BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS (1980-2025)

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Abstract: *The concept of employability has evolved into a multifaceted and increasingly vital issue arising from the interplay between structural labour market changes, educational institutions, and individual skills. The subject remains divided, particularly in economics, where no thorough synthesis has been provided, and the topic is relatively neglected in scholarly debate.*

This study conducts a bibliometric analysis using the Biblioshiny interface in RStudio, focusing on articles indexed in the Web of Science database from 1980 to 2025. The aim is to map employability research's intellectual structure and thematic development within the economic journals.

The analysis reveals steady growth in scholarly output, an expanding thematic focus, and a noticeable shift toward interdisciplinary perspectives that connect economics with education, psychology, and public policy. The paper's primary contributions include identifying key sources and authors, developing core concepts, and recognising new underexplored themes such as digital skills and entrepreneurial readiness. This study provides a systematic overview, thus offering a valuable foundation for future research and contributing to a more integrated understanding of employability within and beyond economics.

The research provides a systematic overview that serves as a valuable starting point for further studies and deepens the overall understanding of employability in economics and other domains.

Key words: *employability, labour market, bibliometric analysis, Web of Science database*

JEL: J24, I26

1. Introduction

Over time, employability has developed into a key topic of interest, shaped by ongoing debates in academia, policy circles, and the labour market. The ability of individuals to find and maintain employment has become crucial as labour markets transform due to technological advancements and global economic changes. Historically, the concept of employability relied on individual skills; however, researchers now recognise that it results from personal characteristics, educational background, socio-economic conditions, and institutional frameworks (Tomlinson, 2012; McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). The shift from job security to career adaptability and lifelong learning has compelled institutions, employers, and policymakers to develop new strategies for labour market preparedness (Jackson and Tomlinson, 2020; Baruch and Rousseau, 2019). While numerous research studies on employability exist, there is a lack of thorough reviews summarising the academic literature. The systematic and quantitative research method of bibliometric analysis helps identify patterns in academic development.

This paper uses Biblioshiny in RStudio to analyse employability-related publications in economics included in the Web of Science (WoS) database between 1980 and 2025. It aims to identify key contributors, trace thematic patterns, and uncover underexplored areas. The guiding research question

is: *How has the academic literature on employability evolved within the context of economics-related research over the last four decades?* The study assumes an increasingly interdisciplinary and thematically diverse evolution of this field.

This paper is organised into five sections. The first section outlines the study's context and aims. The second engages with relevant literature. The third explains the methodological approach. The fourth section presents the results and their interpretation. Finally, the fifth offers concluding remarks and suggestions for further research.

2. Literature review

The concept of employability has evolved significantly, reflecting its interdisciplinary nature and growing relevance in academic and policy discussions. Early definitions centred on skills necessary for gaining and retaining employment (Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden, 2006; Hillage and Pollard, 1998). Gradually, employability became viewed as a dynamic psycho-social construct involving adaptability, identity, and human capital (Lo Presti and Pluviano, 2016; De Cuyper et al., 2012; Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth, 2004).

Much research has explored perceived employability as a mediating factor between individual characteristics and employment outcomes (Vanhercke et al., 2014; Rothwell and Arnold, 2007; De Witte and Näswall, 2003). In parallel, studies have highlighted the positive influence of proactive career behaviours—such as job crafting, adaptability, and career self-management—on job satisfaction and performance (Akkermans and Tims, 2017; Clarke, 2017; Shoss, 2017; Schaufeli, 2015).

From an organisational standpoint, employability is closely tied to supportive HRM practices, a culture of continuous learning, and a shared responsibility between individuals and institutions (De Vos et al., 2011; Wittekind, Raeder and Grote, 2010; Baruch and Rousseau, 2019; Thijssen, Van der Heijden and Rocco, 2008; McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005).

In the educational domain, research has examined how higher education contributes to employability by fostering transferable, entrepreneurial, and experiential skills (Donald et al., 2018; Tomlinson, 2012). However, enduring mismatches between educational outcomes and labour market demands have led some scholars to advocate using employability as a metric in educational performance assessment (Jackson and Tomlinson, 2020; Pitan, 2016; Brunello and Schlotter, 2007).

Recent scholarship has also adopted intersectional and longitudinal lenses, analysing how variables such as gender, social class, and cultural background influence both employability perceptions and labour market access (Lo Presti and Pluviano, 2016; Dacre Pool and Qualter, 2013; Berntson, Sverke and Marklund, 2006). At the same time, entrepreneurship has gained traction as an alternative employability pathway, particularly amid youth unemployment and volatile labour conditions (Nabi et al., 2017; McKeever, Jack and Anderson, 2015).

Emerging bibliometric studies provide meta-level insights into the structure and trajectory of employability research. For example, Jackson and Bridgstock (2021) and Roslan et al. (2022) identify a growing scholarly interest in the field but highlight its theoretical fragmentation. Varghese and Senthil (2023) underscore the thematic dispersion across education, psychology, and policy domains. Similarly, Zamberi Ahmad and Rashid (2024) stress the increasing importance of entrepreneurial and digital competencies, while Sanni and Ekundayo (2023) call for more longitudinal and interdisciplinary bibliometric methodologies.

These findings reveal several dominant research orientations: individual-level investigations focus on personal agency, adaptability, and career self-management; organisational studies examine workplace learning and HRM; educational research explores the role of institutions in skill development; and economic approaches assess structural mismatches and policy responses. Despite its richness, the literature lacks a holistic synthesis which justifies applying a bibliometric approach to map conceptual developments, bridge thematic divides, and inform future research priorities.

3. Methodology

This study employs a quantitative approach through bibliometric analysis to investigate the evolution and characteristics of scientific production on employability within economics-related academic literature. The analysis was conducted using RStudio and the Biblioshiny package for statistical and visual exploration of bibliometric data. The dataset from the WoS includes 1,932 articles published between 1980 and 2025, selected in April 2025 using the keyword "employability." A subject-area filter was applied to focus on journals in the Business, Economics, Management, and Business Finance categories. The study is limited to WoS-indexed, English-language publications. Initially, the search returned 11,740 documents, which were then refined using classification filters to focus on economics-related content. The analysis focused on several bibliometric indicators, including general dataset information, most relevant sources, influential authors, highly cited documents, word frequency (word cloud), co-occurrence networks, and historiographic mapping. Bibliometric analysis, a well-established quantitative method, enables the evaluation of research structure, dynamics, and impact by identifying key contributors, conceptual trends, and academic collaboration networks. This methodological approach is aligned with the study's aim to map the conceptual structure and thematic evolution of the employability discourse in economics over the past 45 years.

4. Results and discussions

This section presents the dataset retrieved from the WoS database and the analysis results for the research period from 1980 to 2025. Using RStudio's Biblioshiny, a dataset of articles on employability published in Business, Economics, Management, and Business and Finance journals has been extracted and is summarised below.

Figure 1 presents the main descriptive insights for the analysed dataset. The sample comprises 788 sources, exhibiting an annual publication growth rate of 7.37%. On average, each document received 15.53 citations and has an age of approximately 7.71 years. A total of 75142 references were identified across the dataset. Furthermore, the corpus includes 4568 distinct author keywords and contributions from 4317 unique authors, all addressing employability-related themes. Of the 1932 documents analysed, 348 were single-authored, while the remainder were co-authored, with 22.98% reflecting instances of international collaboration.



Figure 1. Main information

Source: Author's creation

The analysis of the most relevant sources (Figure 2) highlights a multidimensional approach to employability. *Career Development International* (74 articles) is the primary source, focusing on professional mobility, career transitions, and the competencies required for workforce integration. The *International Journal of Management Education* is the second most relevant source, with 61 articles. It explores the role of managerial education in preparing professionals for the challenges of the labour market. Sources from the field of human resources, such as *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* (45 articles) and *Personnel Review* (43 articles), analyse organisational policies and their impact on employability. The *International Journal of Manpower* (37

articles) adds an economic dimension by discussing the economic influences on the labour market. Other relevant sources, such as *Accounting Education* (32 articles), *International Journal of Training and Development* (29 articles), *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* (24 articles), *Work Employment and Society* (21 articles), and *Employee Relations* (17 articles), address continuing education skill development, and psychological and organisational factors.

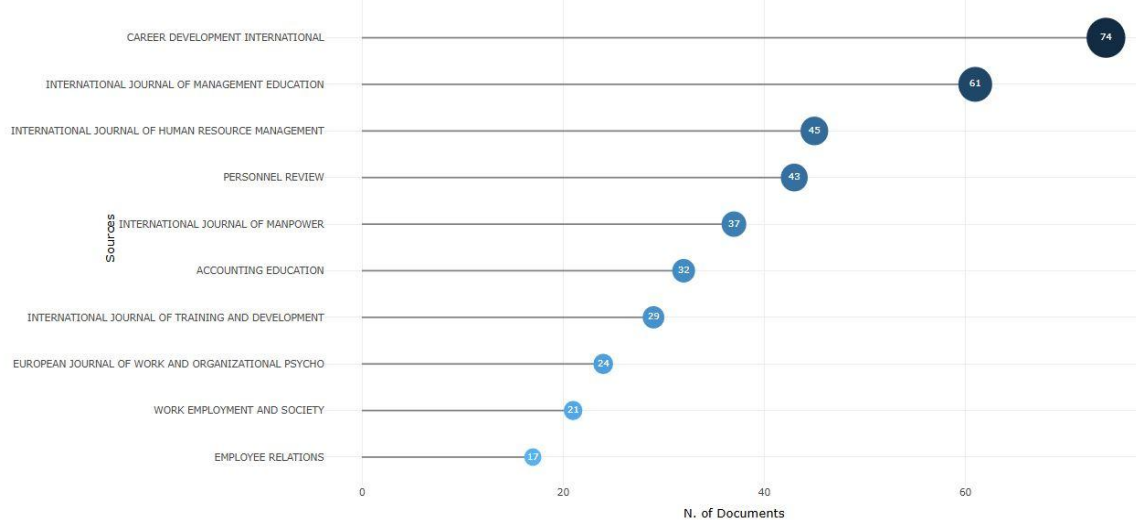


Figure 2. Top 10 Most Relevant Sources

Source: Author's creation

Figure 3 displays the top 10 influential authors with at least nine publications. Van der Heijden BIJM stands out as the most prolific contributor, with 27 articles, closely followed by De Cuyper N (26 articles) and Van der Heijden B (22 articles). This sustained involvement reflects a significant and continuous contribution to employability research, essential for strengthening the academic literature in this field. Noteworthy authors include De Witte H, with 17 articles, followed by Forrier A (15) and Akkermans J (14). Additionally, Donald WE and Jackson D have each published 11 articles, while Lo Presti A and Baruch Y have contributed 10 and 9 articles, respectively.

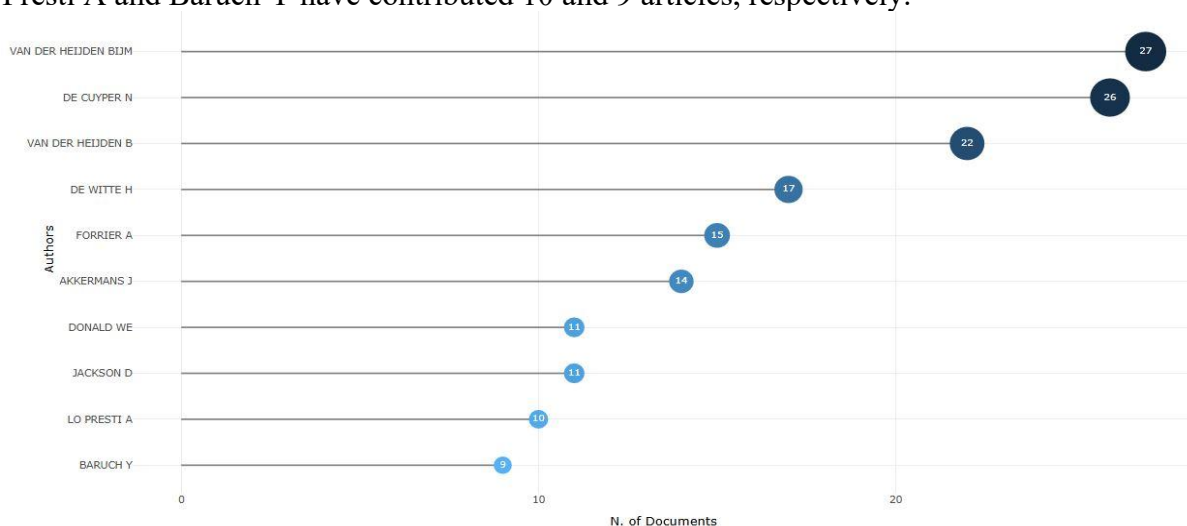


Figure 3. Top 10 Most Relevant Authors

Source: Author's creation

Table 1 ranks documents in the field of employability published in journals classified under management, business, business finance, and economics. The selected documents demonstrate the

multifaceted nature of employability, shaped by individual capabilities, institutional practices, and structural economic factors. The document at the top, by Van Der Heijde C.M. (2006) in *Human Resource Management: Published in Cooperation with the School of Business Administration*, holds a significant lead with 623 total citations and an annual citation rate 31.15. This paper has a normalised citation score of 8.20, indicating substantial influence and broad recognition in the field. Following this, Shoss MK's (2017) work in the *Journal of Management* has 516 citations and an exceptional annual citation rate of 57.33. This indicates the paper's recent popularity and significant impact on current employability and human resources research. Its normalised citation score of 31.7—the highest among all analysed works—reflects outstanding scholarly influence.

Rothwell A. (2007), with the paper published in *Personnel Review*, ranks third with 503 citations and an annual citation rate of 26.47. The normalised citation score of 11.13 suggests a consistent and relevant influence in the field.

McKeever's (2015) and Vanhercke's (2014) works exhibit high normalised citation scores, reflecting their growing impact in the past decade. Other contributions, such as those by Schaufeli (2015), Fugate (2008), Wittekind (2010), and De Cuyper (2012), demonstrate sustained relevance in organisational and psychological perspectives on employability. Additionally, Brunello's (2007) study introduces a distinct economic viewpoint, further underscoring the multidisciplinary character of the core literature.

McKeever's (2015) and Vanhercke's (2014) works stand out with high normalised citation scores (13.70 and 19.69, respectively) and annual citation rates of 29.45 and 25.58, reflecting a growing impact over the past decade. Other contributions, such as those by Schaufeli (2015) – 24.27 citations per year, normalised score 11.29; Fugate (2008) – 14.78 citations per year, score 8.89; Wittekind (2010) – 14.81 citations per year, score 9.12; and De Cuyper (2012) – 16.71 citations per year, score 8.85, demonstrate sustained relevance within organisational and psychological perspectives on employability. Additionally, Brunello's (2007) study, with 13.32 citations per year and a normalised score of 5.60, offers a distinct economic viewpoint, underscoring the multidisciplinary nature of the core literature.

Table 1. Top 10 Most Impactful Documents

Paper	Total Citations	TC per Year	Normalised TC
Van Der Heijde CM, 2006, <i>Hum Resour Manage-US</i>	623	31.15	8.20
Shoss MK, 2017, <i>J Manage</i>	516	57.33	31.74
Rothwell A, 2007, <i>Pers Rev</i>	503	26.47	11.13
McKeever, E. (2015). <i>J Bus Venturing</i>	324	29.45	13.70
Vanhercke D, 2014, <i>Pers Rev</i>	307	25.58	19.69
Schaufeli WB, 2015, <i>Career Dev Int</i>	267	24.27	11.29
Fugate M, (2008). <i>J Occup Organ Psych</i>	266	14.78	8.89
Brunello G, 2007, <i>Econ Policy</i>	253	13.32	5.60
Wittekind A, 2010, <i>J Organ Behav</i>	237	14.81	9.12
De Cuyper N (2012). <i>J Organ Behav</i>	234	16.71	8.85

Source: Author's creation

The word cloud (Figure 4) analysis highlights employability as the central concept, with the highest frequency (f=276), indicating its dominant presence in the literature. Closely associated terms such as performance (f=172), work (f=169), and employment (f=133) suggest a strong link between employability and workplace outcomes. The prominence of impact, education, and perceived employability reflects the importance of external factors and individual perceptions in shaping

Figure 6 emphasises fundamental aspects of employability, such as competence development, self-assessment of employability, and the relationship between career success and employability. For example, the works of Van der Heijden (2009, 2002) and De Cuyper (2012) have significantly influenced the definition and refinement of employability theory.

Research in this area shows that employability depends not just on a person's skills, but also on how these fit within the workplace context. Factors such as changes in professional careers, self-assessments, and job satisfaction are crucial in defining employability. Additionally, articles examining the self-assessment of employability and proactive employee behaviours (such as those by Fugate, 2008, and Rothwell, 2007) contribute to understanding how individuals perceive their employability and how this perception influences their performance in the labour market.

Most of these works are highly cited, suggesting they have significantly impacted academic research and practical applications. Moreover, the growing trend of citations reflects their ongoing integration into academic discussions and policies regarding the labour market and professional careers, underscoring the relevance of this research area.

In conclusion, these works significantly impact the theoretical and practical development of the employability concept, influencing academic research and human resources' organisational and strategic policies.

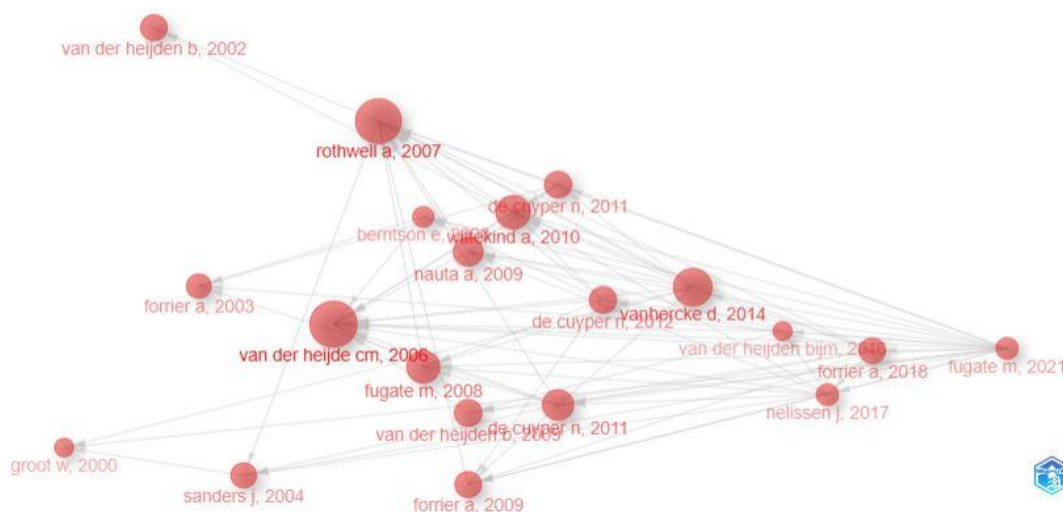


Figure 6. Histogram

Source: Author's creation

The bibliometric analysis indicates a significant increase in academic interest in employability within the economic context, especially post-2000. The literature primarily focuses on skills, higher education, and career adaptability. However, theoretical fragmentation persists, with few studies integrating economic, educational, and organisational perspectives. Most contributions originate from developed countries while emerging regions remain underrepresented. International collaborations are growing, yet they are still confined to regional networks. Employability's digital and entrepreneurial aspects are expanding, offering new research opportunities. The field is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary; however, the lack of unified conceptual frameworks affects coherence. These findings highlight the need for integrated approaches and more longitudinal methods in future studies.

5. Conclusions

This paper presents a bibliometric analysis of employability-related literature in economics, highlighting the field's growth and diversification from 1980 to 2025. It identifies key themes, influential authors, major journals, and evolving research interests. One significant contribution demonstrates how employability has increasingly become interdisciplinary, bridging economics with education, psychology, and policy studies.

The findings highlight less-explored areas, such as longitudinal approaches and integrating digital and entrepreneurial skills. These results help researchers, educators, and policymakers better understand the structure of the field and more effectively focus future work. However, the study is limited by its reliance on a single database (WoS) and its focus on economics, which might not fully capture other relevant perspectives.

The study effectively addresses the research question by offering an overview of how employability research has evolved within economics. It highlights shifts in focus over time, the emergence of interdisciplinary studies, and areas where further research is needed. In conclusion, this bibliometric approach provides valuable insights into studying employability in economic contexts. It establishes a foundation for deeper research, improved academic collaboration, and informed educational and labour market policy decision-making.

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