Journal of Management Practices, Humanities and Social Sciences

Vol 9 Issue 4 pp. 244-255

https://doi.org/10.33152/jmphss-9.4.4



ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

Investigating Motivational Influences on Job Seeking Skills' Impact on Employability and Employee Performance: The Precursor Role of Entrepreneurial Attitude

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Abstract— This study aims to investigate the increasing importance of an entrepreneurial attitude in relation to employability and employee performance among graduate-level business students in Saudi Arabia. With an emphasis on job-seeking skills as the moderator and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as a mediator, it looks at how these variables interact to condition the employability outcomes of the business graduates. 320 graduate-level business students from various degrees, including finance, marketing, and entrepreneurship, participated in the study's cross-sectional survey. Self-administered questionnaires were used to collect data, and SmartPLS was used for analysis to take into account both direct and indirect associations. The positive direct relationship between entrepreneurial attitude and job-seeking skills. In terms of the mediation, job-seeking skills have a significant relationship with entrepreneurial attitude, employability, and employee performance. Specifically, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation have a positive and significant impact on job-seeking skills, employability, and employee performance. It contributes to the body of literature already published in relation to the comprehensive model of employability by highlighting motivation and entrepreneurial attitudes as significant factors that contribute to graduate employability. It is also providing policymakers, businesses, and educators with useful guidance on how to improve graduate programs and promote an all-encompassing approach to preparing students for the dynamic workforce.

Index Terms— Entrepreneurial attitude, Job-Seeking skills, Intrinsic motivation, Extrinsic motivation, Employability, Employee performance

Received: 28 February 2025 ; **Accepted:** 9 May 2025; **Published:** 27 July 2025



Introduction

In the rapidly changing global job market, employability skills have become essential for graduates to succeed (Cheng et al., 2025). These skills, which are defined as a blend of knowledge, qualities, and attitudes, enable people to effectively contribute to organisational goals and meet working needs (Opoku et al., 2024). In response to this demand, educational institutions have prioritized curricula and chances for experiential learning that assist students in being ready for problems in the workplace (Suprastayasa et al., 2024). Employability, which indicates an employee's capacity to effectively fulfil job requirements, is comparable. It connects academic preparation to the needs of the profession through social, mental, and physical aspects. Employability, according to Leong et al. (2024), is "each employee's ability to execute the physiological and mental requirements of the tasks at their best level." This dynamic idea reflects how a person's skill set aligns with the demands of the job market. Employee performance broadens the definition of career success to include actual on-the-job effectiveness in addition to the initial hiring

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period (Suyansah et al., 2023). The effectiveness, efficiency, and quality with which an employee completes their designated tasks and advances organisational objectives are used to gauge EP (Darvishmotevali et al., 2024).

Most economies have been forced to rethink their people management methods due to the dynamic character of today's socio-economic and techno-political transition (Yoon et al., 2024). The need for job content redesign and the need for workers with matching skills are two effects of this worldwide revolution on the labour market (Suprastayasa et al., 2024). Employees must either retrain or leave the company, and graduate students must either learn employable skills or stay unemployed after graduation (Opoku et al., 2024). The importance of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in providing graduates with employable skills has thus been emphasised in industry-academia dialogue (Dixon & Tiernan, 2024). According to Darvishmotevali et al. (2024), employers are looking for graduates who possess critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and ongoing learning. Accordingly, HEIs are in charge of creating graduate programs and graduates who are prepared for the workforce in order to fulfil the expectations of the modern workplace and enhance business performance (Adhikari et al., 2024). This has become essential since, according to the person-job fit theory, graduates' employability is largely dependent on how well their skill sets meet the expectations of the employer (Aljumah, 2023; Kim et al., 2022).

The increased focus on employability has also highlighted the entrepreneurial mindsets of business students, who frequently encounter possibilities and problems specific to the labour market (Taneja et al., 2024). By empowering people to handle uncertainty and seize chances, entrepreneurial attitudes, which are defined by a proactive and opportunity-driven mindset, can enhance the advantages of creativity and work capacity (Bhatti & Zakariya, 2024; Tareq et al., 2024). These are particularly crucial now since globalization, technological disruptions, and the need for innovation have a significant impact on the state of the economy (Rodrigues et al., 2023). Entrepreneurial attitude is an underlying psychological precursor to proactive career behavior in the modern, turbulent labor market (Valencia-Arias et al., 2022). Entrepreneurial attitude, defined as an individual's predisposition toward self-direction, innovation, risk-taking, and opportunity recognition, is no longer limited to business start-ups; organizational structures are now also very much valuing EA in the context of intrapreneurship (Kaur & Chawla, 2023). Therefore, understanding how EA functions may have an important direct and indirect influence, as it is a powerful starting motivation to take dormant drive into tangible, measurable steps and performance for success in a career (Setiawan et al., 2022).

The contemporary labour market has undergone extremely rapid and ongoing change, which has become a difficulty in and of itself, particularly with regard to work content, the capability of graduates to find suitable jobs, and the ability of organisations to locate good employees (Zhiguo, 2023). In this context, employability is a crucial factor for both individuals seeking employment (the supply side) and organisations seeking workers (the demand side), as well as for society at large in all job openings, because it is a reality that affects individuals, organisations, and society as a whole (Yue & Ahmad, 2025). JSS is the cognitive and behavioral competencies to successfully negotiate the recruitment process in areas such as writing a resume, developing networks, performing well in an interview, and utilizing job boards strategically (Dixon & Tiernan, 2024). It is how candidates will behaviorally take their entrepreneurially driven inward motivation and turn it into outward performance in the employment marketplace. Within this model, JSS is situated as a mediating mechanism, whereby the effect of the student's entrepreneurial attitude will influence the measure of career success, whether that is being employed or performing well once employed (Opoku et al., 2024; Yoon et al., 2024).

Moreover, Ridwan et al. (2025) suggested that educators have a positive influence on students because they are perceived as role models who increase students' motivation as well as their energy and engagement, and thereby their academic performance. Based on the concept of motivation, autonomous motivation is always the highest and consists of both intrinsically autonomous extrinsic motivation stemming from one's true identity or values and goals (Kotera et al., 2023) and intrinsic motivation (Nguyen & Vu, 2024). Self Determination Theory (SDT) posits that intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in an activity for the inherent satisfaction, interest, or enjoyment experienced from the action itself. Applying IM to job seeking refers to a candidate who enjoys spending time networking and exploring skills because they genuinely enjoy the self-improving process of exploration (Mansoor et al., 2025; Valencia-Arias et al., 2022). Conversely, extrinsic motivation refers to engaging in the behavior to get a separable outcome or reward, whether it is a reward, avoiding punishment, or gaining an observable reward (e.g., salary, promotion, status) (Morris et al., 2022; Rahmi & Neviyarni, 2022).

However, changes in the global economy, including rising self-employed workers and the economy, have prompted a revisionist perspective, promoting "entrepreneurial human capital" across all graduates, regardless of their post-graduation career (Ridwan et al., 2025). For students of business in Saudi Arabia, a country marked by high rates of graduate unemployment and a fast, rapidly evolving, but often insecure private sector, being able to exhibit self-starter mindsets and act in job-searching behaviors is critical. This study is important because it employs an inclusive, integrated model that tests the causal path from entrepreneurial intentions to job outcomes, yet such a relationship is still understudied. Testing the mediating effects of job-seeking skills and the moderating effects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to influence the overall career readiness of students of business in Saudi Arabia invites a more nuanced consideration of the experiences of Saudi Arabian business graduate students. The findings have considerable theoretical implications, allowing the appraisal of the transference of attitude to performance, and practical implications by providing evidence-based recommendations for Saudi universities to continue to enrich their program curriculum, career advisory services, and motivational programming for better prepared graduates, likely to succeed and last in their career paths. In order to achieve these goals, this study will expand theoretical knowledge of employability and provide useful information about preparing graduates for career advancement in a variety of professional settings.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Self-Determination theory

SDT gives a broad framework on the quality of motivation and asserts that behaviours which are regulated autonomously (intrinsic motivation) will benefit the actor in ways that are thought to be greater, such as persistence, engagement, and subjective happiness, than behaviours which are regulated in a controlled manner (extrinsic motivation) (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Applying SDT to this framework, it can be inferred that when JSS is done out of self-regulation and genuine interest (IM), the association between effortful engagement in JSS and successful career acquisition (Employability/EP) would be strengthened by SDT (Setiawan et al., 2022). Thus, SDT supports the inclusion of both IM and EM as moderators of the effort-EP association because it allows us to empirically test how the quality of a graduate's motivation fundamentally changes the outcome of their JSS efforts. According to the SDT, there are types of motivation: Extrinsic (driven by outside or instrumental forces) and intrinsic (driven by pleasure or satisfaction) (Kotera et al., 2023). These ideas are predicated on a self-determination continuum in which more independent, volitional motivation is related to intrinsic motivation. According to Dixon and Tiernan (2024), intrinsically motivated people finish tasks based solely on the satisfaction of the activity itself. Students who are intrinsically driven aggressively seek out learning options outside of required coursework and exams, and they find academic activities worthwhile. On the other hand, extrinsically motivated people are driven to finish activities by outside forces, and their enjoyment stems from extrinsic outcomes (such as getting prizes or avoiding punishment) rather than the activity itself (Taneja et al., 2024). As a result, extrinsically motivated students could be encouraged to finish assignments in order to avoid receiving low grades or because of impending deadlines. It is similarly crucial to remember that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are not mutually exclusive; a single student may exhibit both high and low levels of motivation (Kotera et al., 2023; Ridwan et al., 2025).

Entrepreneurial attitude and job seeking skills

The effectiveness of creativity in the workplace was found to be facilitated by an attitude towards entrepreneurship. For example, Ridwan et al. (2025) and Rubbani et al. (2024) proposed that proactive orientations are encouraged by entrepreneurially orientated thinking, which reinforces the advantages of creative thinking. According to a study on business education, students who have a positive outlook on entrepreneurship are also more likely to use their creative abilities to spot possibilities and come up with original solutions (Setiawan et al., 2022). The idea that entrepreneurial mindsets encourage risk-taking and problem-solving, both of which are seen to be critical for employability, is also supported by evidence-based studies (Conz et al., 2023; Taneja et al., 2024). Additionally, research in business and psychology has shown that entrepreneurial attitudes encourage the use of creative skills in the workplace, which enhances employability success (Rodrigues et al., 2023). An entrepreneurial attitude can predispose a person to engage actively in goal-directed behavior (Kaur & Chawla, 2023). Job Seeking Skills (JSS) are a specimen of goal-directed behavior that has a complex set of instrumental and strategic behaviors, such as networking, purposeful enough focused resume writing, and continued engagement in job searching (Çalışkan & Köroğlu, 2022). Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior, EA is a powerful predictor of an individual's intention and therefore readiness to resonate an intention into a career or career-related behaviors. Accordingly, Dixon and Tiernan (2024) offered through EA is aligned conceptually to help incite the vigorous pursuit and application of JSS, since the understanding of an entrepreneurial mindset is to view the job market itself as an opportunity a situation to be seizing opportunities within rather than fences within which to navigate or traverse around (Huynh et al., 2024; Opoku et al., 2024).

Empirical investigations have persistently indicated a robust relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and proactive labor market behavior (Rodrigues et al., 2023). For example, research on engaging in career self-management has revealed that individuals high in entrepreneurial characteristics, even those not specifically pursuing a new venture, are more successful in their job search process and utilize a broader array of high-intensity job search strategies (Bhatti & Zakariya, 2024). This occurs because individuals with an entrepreneurial mindset are able to be more tolerant of the rejections and uncertainty often faced when job searching, considering job search barriers or rejections as mistakes or areas to improve on rather than a failure in and of itself (Huynh et al., 2024). Therefore, a strong EA promotes the initial motivational design for the application of JSS and also provides the sustained effort for high-intensity engagement in the job search process, as an individual engages in rich application strategies resulting in breadth and depth of search outcomes (Suprastayasa et al., 2024). For Saudi Arabia business graduates in particular, with limited formal sector jobs and strong competition for positions, we propose that this entrepreneurial orientation and resilience is a key underpinning of selective persistence. This means that these self-starters are defining or separating themselves from their inactive, not-directed peers (Casanova & Paguia Jr, 2022; Opoku et al., 2024).

H1: There is a significant relationship between entrepreneurial attitude and job-seeking skills.

Mediating role of job-seeking skills

Zhiguo (2023) described job searching as a self-regulated, goal-directed process in which the focus of cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes is on preparing for, identifying, and pursuing employment opportunities. Job searches typically involve working alone and often extend over long periods of time and involve competing with others, so job seekers need to be able to self-regulate (Darvishmotevali et al., 2024). As a result, job

searching is viewed as a pattern of action that reflects the self-regulatory process. For example, job seekers have to determine their job goals and plans, and then organize, manage, and implement search and job applications based on these goals and plans (Opoku et al., 2024). However, many people find job searching to be stressful because of the uncertainty of employment, financial conditions, and other setbacks. Since some job search strategies are much more effective than others at helping individuals become employed, the job search is also dependent on the individual's ability to self-regulate and organize the job search process (Adhikari et al., 2024). Job seeking skills are described as consisting of the following components; a) effective use and evaluation of job search information sources, b) participation in selection processes, c) knowledge of steps of evaluation processes, such as exams and interviews, and d) knowledge of job markets and job opportunities (Suprastayasa et al., 2024; Yoon et al., 2024).

Employability can be defined as an individual's likelihood of obtaining and maintaining employment and is grounded in observable job search behaviors and effective engagement with recruitment (Opoku et al., 2024). Higher EA generates the motivation and intention to be successful, while JSS, as a practical implementation, generates a process of turning potential into observable success (e.g., being invited to interviews, being offered a job) (Cheng et al., 2025). In this way, the latent psychological benefit of an entrepreneurial mindset is only observable to potential employers when it is effectively employed through sophisticated JSS, for example, establishing a strong value proposition in an interview, or using professional networks to leverage opportunities (Leong et al., 2024). The phenomenon of career success, identified in empirical results, lends support to this mediation, whereby self-efficacy (a primary aspect of EA) exhibited an effect on job attainment through intensity of search (Suyansah et al., 2023). A student with high levels of EA has a self-belief and proactive disposition to persist in job seeking activities and it is through persistence, manifest by using high quality JSS, that employers observe this would, and provides rewards (Chouhan, 2023). The literature examining graduate employment has found quite consistently, beyond academic performance, that the quality and scope of job search behaviors (the essence of JSS) is the strongest leading predictor of obtaining a job, and within a vocation aligned to career aspirations (Leong et al., 2024; Suprastayasa et al., 2024).

Job Seeking Skills are designed to help you gain a job, but the essential competencies associated with JSS, such as proactivity, goal orientation, and networking, are not lost in the workplace (Casanova & Paguia Jr, 2022). The process of searching for job opportunities, adapting one's approach, and managing the job search process each applies a level of self-management and intrapreneurship that organizations value. Therefore, a student who executes JSS with a strong EA is simply pre-trained in the necessary proactive work behaviors necessary for high task performance and contextual performance on the job (Darvishmotevali et al., 2024). Research supports the assumption that proactive personality does relate to organizational success (Opoku et al., 2024). Proactive individuals, who are closely identified with high EA individuals, are actively engaged in role experimentation, searching out problems, and initiating roles as hired employees. Additionally, the overall effort invested in a job search is often a predictor of future work effort (Suyansah et al., 2023). A person invested in their JSS is most likely to take on the approach of a high-investment work approach. By consolidating a pattern of goal-directed, proactive behaviour created during the intensive job-seeking skills, this persistent effort and increased level of self-management enable the initial psychological advantage (EA) to indirectly improve long-term employee performance (Darvishmotevali et al., 2024; Leong et al., 2024; Opoku et al., 2024).

H2: There is a significant mediating relationship of job-seeking skills between entrepreneurial attitude and employability.

H3: There is a significant mediating relationship of job-seeking skills between entrepreneurial attitude and employee performance.

Moderating role of intrinsic motivation

Deci and Ryan (2012) examined the Self-Determination Theory, which argues that a person's behaviours are influenced by internal motivation. Intrinsic or internal motivation encompasses things like challenge and enjoyment. Challenge motivation in entrepreneurial attitude is the extent to which a person deliberately pursues complexity and difficulty in his or her digital entrepreneurial activities (Morris et al., 2022). Enjoyment motivation in entrepreneurial attitude relates to the extent to which a person experiences satisfaction, interest, and enjoyment when the person undertakes entrepreneurial activities.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) suggests that behaviors are most effective and lead to the best outcomes when they are autonomously controlled; i.e., their regulated process is a result of interest, challenge, and inherent satisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 2012) . Thus, when a student engages in effective JSS but is intrinsically motivated to use them, i.e., they enjoy learning about the market, networking, and self-presentation, the usefulness is of better quality, deeper cognitive engagement, and greater emotional resilience (Fishbach & Woolley, 2022). This IM prevents the job search stress and numerous rejections from leading to decreased effort, or burnout, and guarantees that JSS is of consistently higher quality, resulting in a higher correlation between using JSS and increasing the probability of employment; employability (Ridwan et al., 2025). Therefore, JSS do not exist by themselves; there must be additionally corresponding IM motivations. Support for this synergistic effect comes from empirical evidence demonstrating that IM is an amplifier of skills-based performance in goal-oriented situations. For example, learning and effort research supports that self-determined students are better at applying their learned skills in novel and complex contexts (Cheng et al., 2025). In practice, from a job market context, this means a university graduate who is intrinsically motivated and employs a productive JSS will have a degree of flexibility when the interview collaborator asks a question that forces them to go 'off-script,' allowing her to shift her conversational approach and pursue an authentic follow-up conversation (Morris et al., 2022). Therefore, this graduate is likely to be a far more attractive,

employable candidate than their peer, who may be equipped with the same skills but who is reacting out of a driven necessity for employment. Hence, IM is a critical augmentation and creates a higher gradient in the positive association between the intensity of JSS and the successful transition to employment (Rahmi & Neviyarni, 2022; Valencia-Arias et al., 2022).

The proactive actions developed during job search behaviors, such as self-regulation, taking initiative, and improving from feedback, will remain in the workplace and will be enhanced by a positively internally motivated employee (Aljumah, 2023). IM motivates the employee to experience their job as more than a set of prescribed job tasks, where a high job satisfaction rating results in low acceptable performance, but as an area of personal development and challenge, effectively activating the self-starter transferable skills developed during successful JSS interactions (Kotera et al., 2023). Research has shown that IM is a strong predictor of Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCB) and adaptability, two essential pillars of high contextual performance (Cheng et al., 2025; Nguyen & Vu, 2024). An employee who is intrinsically motivated and uses the self-starter mentality from employing JSS is more likely to engage with extra role behaviors, be willing to volunteer for challenging tasks, and persist where the problems are complex, all of which result in significantly higher ratings of EP (Cheng et al., 2025; Kotera et al., 2022). As such, the employee's high JSS promotes their abilities to perform; the IM promotes their power and will in sustaining EP over the long term.

H4: There is a significant moderating relationship of intrinsic motivation on job-seeking skills and employability.

H5: There is a significant moderating relationship of intrinsic motivation on job seeking skills and employee performance.

Moderating role of extrinsic motivation

External or external motivation consists of two sub-categories: compensation and external. Compensation motivation in entrepreneurial attitude relates to the extent to which a person values explicit or financial rewards when carrying out entrepreneurial activities (Kotera et al., 2023). External motivation in entrepreneurial attitude relates to the extent to which a person values praise and recognition from others when undertaking entrepreneurial activities. Ridwan et al. (2025) contend that a person's entrepreneurial intention will most likely be strengthened by being willing to engage in challenges and believing that entrepreneurship will yield satisfaction, financial benefit, and recognition from others.

While Intrinsic Motivation (IM) is centered on an innate sense of satisfaction, Extrinsic Motivation (EM) is instrumental; the job search becomes a strong motivator for engaged participation to obtain a valued external consequence (Nguyen & Vu, 2024). Strong extrinsic motivation can provide enough activation energy to overcome inertia and produce high JSS intensity levels, compelling the graduate to invest considerable time and effort into a tiresome job search process (Cheng et al., 2025). Therefore, with increased EM, the relationship between JSS and Employability is more pronounced because the value placed on the extrinsic outcome (i.e., finding a good job) justifies sustained and skilled effort. In empirical studies examining motivation in achievement contexts, EM tends to emerge as a significant initial facilitator of persistence in competitive contexts where immediate resource acquisition is demanded (Rahmi & Neviyarni, 2022). While extrinsic goals are sometimes criticized for supporting shallow engagement, they can effectively regulate the volume and consistency of JSS involvement. In the Saudi Arabia context, where there is extreme competition for limited formal sector jobs, the prospect of career security or promotion (extrinsic variables) could prompt a graduate to apply themselves to JSS across a high volume of opportunities, which could enhance the total quantity of quality contacts and interviews (Valencia-Arias et al., 2022).

Once an employee is appointed, extrinsic motivation shifts to three alternatives that are exclusively organizational rewards: bonuses, promotions, and public recognition from management, and positive performance evaluations (Çalışkan & Köroğlu, 2022). The JSS core competencies of goal-setting, preparation, and self-promotion will only give rise to high employee performance to the extent that the reward system within the organization contains significant recognition and rewards for those behaviors (Casanova & Paguia Jr, 2022). High EM is the instrumental mechanism that provides validation and rewards for retaining the proactive behavior established in JSS, especially for transactional work that is fundamental to the organization's goal (Suyansah et al., 2023). The moderation from performance management systems and performance research provides a fairly convincing case for support. When a formal performance management system (an extrinsic structure) is aligned with the proactive behavior (from JSS) to seek feedback or start projects or engage in office politics, the proactive behavior is then rewarded through compensation and promotion, enhancing the JSS-EP link (Darvishmotevali et al., 2024; Leong et al., 2024). Without strong EM, some of the proactive habits developed during the job search will likely decline, as the extra effort is no longer warranted. On the flip side, high EM maintains the link with high JSS-derived effort, keeping self-management competencies (such as persistence and goal focus) moving toward organizational dilemmas, thereby creating sustained high-level employee performance (Chouhan, 2023; Opoku et al., 2024).

H6: There is a significant moderating relationship of extrinsic motivation on job-seeking skills and employability.

H7: There is a significant moderating relationship of extrinsic motivation on job seeking skills and employee performance.

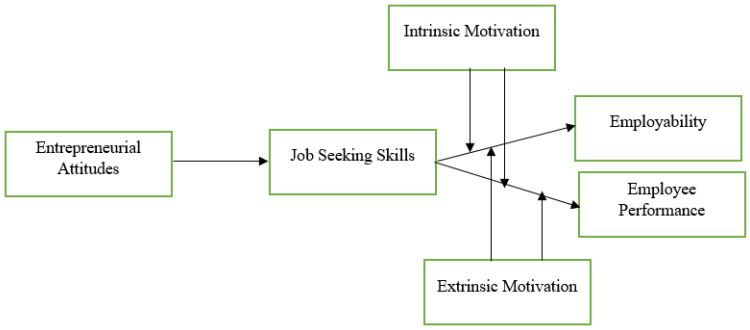


Fig. 1 *Conceptual model*

Research Methodology

Research design and participants

This study used a cross-sectional research design to explore the complex interrelationships between entrepreneurial attitude, job-seeking skills, motivation, employability, and employee performance. A cross-sectional design is appropriate for assessing relationships and potential causal relationships between variables that may be assessed at a single point in time, thereby providing an opportunity to test the hypothesized mediation and moderation effects. The study participants were graduate-level students in business programs at multiple public and private universities in Saudi Arabia, focusing specifically on graduate-level disciplines of study, such as finance, marketing, human resources, and Entrepreneurship. A total of 320 business graduate students participated in the final sample of the study. This large public-private representation across multiple disciplines of study ensures a rigorous exploration of the proposed model with the target population of future Saudi Arabian professionals.

Sampling and data collection

Due to ease of access and willingness, most of the target population of students were selected using convenience sampling methods from a number of graduate institutions. Even though convenience sampling is generally criticized for a lack of external generalizability, it is appropriate for this exploratory study, designed to test a model in a specific context (namely, Saudi Arabian graduate education). Data were gathered using an online survey administered from May through August 2025. The online format allowed researchers to rapidly distribute and collect responses from a widely diverse student population across universities in Saudi Arabia. Participants gave informed consent prior to beginning the survey and were assured anonymity and confidentiality. Data quality considerations included a screening question to affirm that participants were currently enrolled in a related graduate business course.

Measures

This research employed existing and validated research instruments to operationalize all variables (entrepreneurial attitude, job-search skills, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and employability and employee performance). All instruments were originally developed in English. All latent constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Entrepreneurial Attitude (EA) using an adapted scale from (Bhatti & Zakariya, 2024) (four items). Job-Seeking Skills (JSS) measured using a derived and adapted instrument that captures strategic job search behavior based on (Suprastayasa et al., 2024) (four items). Intrinsic Motivation (IM) and Extrinsic Motivation (EM) using the Work Preference Inventory (WPI) scales adapted for the academic setting, based on the work of Ridwan et al. (2025) (seven items each). Employability (Emo) using a scale based on perceived marketability and ease of securing new employment (Bhatti & Zakariya, 2024) (nine items). Employee Performance (EP) is measured as self-rated task performance and contextual performance based on instruments from (Çalışkan & Köroğlu, 2022) (six items).

Data analysis

The data that was received was analyzed in accordance with the Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach. The analytical technique SmartPLS 3.0 (or similar software) was used because it is appropriate for complex models with multiple mediation and moderation effects and is less dependent on restrictive distributional assumptions (Hair et al., 2024).

Results

Measurement model assessment

This phase consisted of an assessment of the validity and reliability of the instruments. Reliability is confirmed when the Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR) values exceed the rigorous cutoff of 0.7. Convergent validity is evaluated when the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) captured by each construct is greater than 0.5. Item quality is supported when all indicator Outer Loadings (OL) are above the cutoff of 0.5. Within the same measure of validity approach, we judged internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha (α) and Composite Reliability (CR). All values from 0.789 to 0.926 in Table 1 exceeded the acceptable level of >0.70 recommended by Hair et al. (2024) for levels of internal consistency. Likewise, all CR values greater than 0.938, and the lowest CR value being 0.864, all suggested good internal consistency reliability.

Table I
results of validity, reliability, and AVE

Variables	Items	Loadings	VIF	α	CR	AVE
Entrepreneurial Attitude	EA1	0.816	1.854	0.789	0.864	0.614
	EA2	0.794	1.534			
	EA3	0.775	1.806			
	EA4	0.842	1.863			
Job-Seeking Skills	JSS1	0.863	2.448	0.872	0.913	0.724
	JSS2	0.869	2.280			
	JSS3	0.895	2.774			
	JSS4	0.773	1.777			
Intrinsic Motivation	IM1	0.705	1.648	0.849	0.887	0.533
	IM2	0.789	2.767			
	IM3	0.843	3.239			
	IM4	0.760	1.927			
	IM5	0.806	2.138			
	IM6	0.778	1.501			
	IM7	0.780	1.506			
Extrinsic Motivation	EM1	0.793	1.741	0.867	0.898	0.558
	EM2	0.793	2.152			
	EM3	0.772	2.474			
	EM4	0.804	2.393			
	EM5	0.765	1.963			
	EM6	0.764	3.095			
	EM7	0.721	2.311			
Employability	Emo1	0.815	2.966	0.926	0.938	0.629
	Emo2	0.792	2.552			
	Emo3	0.743	2.009			
	Emo4	0.780	2.379			
	Emo5	0.783	2.670			
	Emo6	0.807	2.882			
	Emo7	0.831	2.883			
	Emo8	0.719	1.866			
	Emo9	0.858	3.435			
Employee Performance	EP1	0.730	2.049	0.912	0.932	0.696
	EP2	0.828	2.754			
	EP3	0.865	3.714			
	EP4	0.848	2.856			
	EP5	0.865	2.057			
	EP6	0.861	3.034			

Discriminant validity was evaluated through cross-loadings, the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), and the Fornell–Larcker criterion. To examine cross-loadings, research showed that each indicator loaded higher on its intended construct than on the other constructs. Table 2 illustrates that all HTMT values for higher-order constructions were between 0.581 and 0.832, considerably below the conservative cut-off of 0.85 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table II
HTMT

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Entrepreneurial Attitude						
Extrinsic Motivation	0.765					
Employee Performance	0.629	0.734				
Employability	0.581	0.676	0.832			
Intrinsic Motivation	0.757	0.666	0.792	0.730		
Job-Seeking Skills	0.671	0.720	0.540	0.744	0.824	

Structural model assessment

This study's bootstrapping strategy, which uses the original sample, *t*-statistics, and *p*-value as key criteria for hypothesis validation, is a reliable way to examine the significance of different evaluations. A thorough grasp of the connections between the variables under investigation is made possible by the complexities of these criteria taken together (Hair et al., 2024). A positive value within the original sample framework denotes a positive influence on the relationship between variables, showing the hypothesis's affirmative validation. When the study moves from exogenous to endogenous variables, the *t*-statistic criterion, which is greater than 1.96, indicates the expected significance level. Additionally, according to the traditional criterion, a hypothesis must have a *p*-value of less than 0.05 in order to be accepted. The base assumption of the model (H1) was upheld, as there was a significant, positive direct relationship between entrepreneurial attitude and job-seeking skills ($p<0.001$). In terms of the mediation, job-seeking skills significantly mediated the relationship between entrepreneurial attitude and employability ($p<0.001$) and employee performance ($p<0.001$), providing support for H2 and H3. The moderation hypotheses revealed a number of effects that were significant and conditional in nature. Specifically, extrinsic motivation was measured as a positive, significant moderation, meaning extrinsic motivation positively and significantly strengthened the impact of job-seeking skills on employability ($p=0.001$), therefore supporting H6. However, intrinsic motivation measured as a negative, significant moderation with job seeking skills and employability ($p=0.015$) and employee performance ($p=0.012$) supported H4 and H5. Lastly, extrinsic motivation was measured as a significant moderation as well, with a negative effect in the relationship of job-seeking skills and employee performance ($p=0.016$), supporting H7.

Table III
Hypothesis testing results

Paths	*β*	*t* Values	*p* Values	Results
Entrepreneurial attitude -> Job-Seeking Skills	0.561	12.593	0.000	Accepted
Entrepreneurial attitude -> Job-Seeking Skills -> Employability	-0.252	5.350	0.000	Accepted
Entrepreneurial attitude -> Job-Seeking Skills -> Employee Performance	0.410	9.262	0.000	Accepted
Intrinsic motivation * Job-Seeking Skills -> Employability	-0.182	2.126	0.015	Accepted
Intrinsic motivation * Job-Seeking Skills -> Employee Performance	-0.154	2.518	0.012	Accepted
Extrinsic motivation * Job-Seeking Skills -> Employability	0.273	3.329	0.001	Accepted
Extrinsic motivation * Job-Seeking Skills -> Employee Performance	-0.108	2.416	0.016	Accepted

Discussion and Conclusion

Because all of these factors are closely related to one another and help graduates succeed in their careers, the results of this study open the door to deeper relationships between entrepreneurial attitude, job-search skills, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, employability, and employee performance. Therefore, the link becomes increasingly important in terms of developing employability outcomes among graduates at this time, when both education and industry aim to better equip students for a constantly changing labour market. The acceptance of all four hypotheses is examined in this discussion chapter, which also offers a thorough analysis of how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, both individually and collectively, affect employability and how entrepreneurial attitudes play a major moderating and mediating role in these dynamics. The acceptance of these theories emphasises the necessity of encouraging a comprehensive approach to skill development that incorporates proactive entrepreneurial mindsets, practical job-seeking skills, and motivation in order to equip graduates for success in the contemporary workforce.

The evidence supports the first hypothesis, revealing a significant, positive connection between entrepreneurial attitude and job-seeking skills. This reinforces the understanding that an entrepreneurial attitude characterized by a proactive, opportunistic mind serves as a precursor to effectively engaging in strategic job search behaviors. Students who conceptualize their careers from an entrepreneurial attitude are more likely to demonstrate essential career planning initiatives, such as identifying gaps (job opportunities) in the market, utilizing resourcefulness (networking and CV development), and demonstrating risk-taking (applying for uncomfortable job roles). This is consistent with the literature suggesting that entrepreneurial attitude generates a proactive personality that is necessary for successful career management (Bhatti & Zakariya, 2024; Rodrigues et al., 2023). The second hypothesis related to a significant mediated effect of job-seeking skills between entrepreneurial attitude

and employability was also supported. This support reinforces the notion that entrepreneurial attitude does not enhance marketability, but rather mediates through the observable and measurable application of job-seeking skills. Although the signs related to the indirect effect are notable, the mediation of effect is significant, ensuring that the proactive cognitive attitude is translated to value (e.g., job-interview skills and targeted CVs) to the employer, and ultimately heightens perceived employability (Conz et al., 2023; Kaur & Chawla, 2023). Job-seeking skills establish the bridge to convert the abstract positive mindset into friendly, practical career capital.

Likewise, support was provided for H3, confirming that job-seeking skills significantly mediate the relationship between entrepreneurial attitude and employee performance. This is a vital finding suggesting that the skills used to obtain a job (e.g., self-presentation, confidence, information gathering) are highly transferable to skills needed to perform a job (e.g., self-management, communication, strategic planning). The proactive attitude gained during the advice-seeking experience translates to the new employee who tackles their tasks and challenges with the same approach, leading to the higher self-reported performance (Suprastayasa et al., 2024; Yoon et al., 2024).

Evidence for H4 suggested significant negative moderation from intrinsic motivation on the relationship between job-seeking skills and employability. Within the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) framework, this is a counterintuitive finding based on a potential over-justification effect (Adhikari et al., 2024). For students who are intrinsically motivated (doing something because it is fun and challenging), highly structured, instrumental, and often repetitive job-seeking skills (such as filling out forms or preparing for interviews) can be controlling and undermine autonomy, slightly reducing the positive instrumental outcome.

H5 did provide evidence of a significant negative moderating effect of intrinsic motivation on the relationship between job-seeking skills and employee performance. The principles of self-determination theory explain that intrinsically motivated individuals are maximally productive when the work itself satisfies the fundamental psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2012) . Simply, if job performance is tied to a skills-based learning that is inherently extrinsically motivated (as with JSS), rupturing intrinsic enjoyment of the work should weaken an organization's actual work performance outcome, not enhance it.

H6, however, provided evidence of a significant, positive moderating effect of extrinsic motivation on the nature of the relationship between job-seeking skills and employability. This conclusion is agreeable with the principles of controlled regulation in self-determination theory. An employability opportunity for these students, who are fundamentally motivated by intrinsic reward (salary, status, job security), would provide the skills necessary as the direct, instrumental value in acquiring those rewards (Deci & Ryan, 2012). For this group of students, extrinsic motivation created a heightened awareness of the effectiveness of JSS because it was understood as highly competence-enhancing and instrumental towards a desirable separable outcome, thus strengthening their market preparedness.

Ultimately, H7 was supported, showing a statistically significant but negative moderating effect of extrinsic motivation on the relationship between job-seeking skills and employee performance. Figuring into the fact that extrinsic motivation, along with JSS, is highly effective for securing a job (H6), but would result in poor long-term performance. An extrinsically controlled motivation - one that operates from within and is not integrated into the individual for the benefit of that originally designed motivation and activity is not consistent in its quality (Deci & Ryan, 2012) . When the person is attempting to build on that initial competence from the JSS, and it is only extrinsic outcomes that govern their activities in circumstances requiring the sustained application of effort and complex problem-solving, the performance will continually decrease in effectiveness and efficiency, or be at least unimproved when external outcomes are the only motivation regulating the pursuit.

Implications

Implications for theory

This study enhances the body of work by offering a new and all-encompassing mediation-moderation model, which theoretically suggests that job-seeking skills are the functional mechanism that translates the ambiguous entrepreneurial attitude into an observable career outcome (employability and employee performance) and establishes a route through career theory. This work importantly provides a nuanced empirical extension of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by showing that motivation not only enhances outcomes but also conditions the effectiveness of a salient behavioral construct (job-seeking skills). Moreover, while the findings that high intrinsic motivation can negatively moderate the effect of structured job-search skills on employability (H4) and employee performance (H5) are counter-intuitive, they suggest a potential over-justification effect in behavioural training situations. While extrinsic motivation amplifies job-seeking skills for employability (H6) but has a negative effect on employee performance (H7), this conclusion advances SDT's principle that controlled regulation is effective for instrumental, short-term objectives (utilizing job-seeking skills for getting a job) but is negative for sustained high-quality effort (utilizing job-seeking skills when successfully employed) (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Taken together, this holistic rationale departs from simple linear models associated with career outcomes.

Educational and curricular implications

The findings will have major implications for Saudi Arabia's business schools. Entrepreneurial attitude is defined here as the fundamental antecedent to developing effective job-seeking skills; therefore, educational institutions need to ensure a focus on instilling that attitude with opportunities to experience a customized, opportunity-seeking mindset through curriculum, case study approaches, and mentoring. Importantly,

and in line with SDT, the manner of the JSS training must be carefully considered based on the participants' intrinsic or extrinsic motivation levels. For students who are primarily intrinsically motivated, the JSS training and content should enhance autonomy and competence (e.g., through personalized career coaching, allowing students to customize their skill development path). This will prevent students' minimization or dismantling of internal drivers. For students who are primarily extrinsically motivated, the delivery of any JSS training should be more practical and instrumental, more straightforwardly linking specific skills (e.g., networking and advanced interviewing) to tangible career rewards such as high entry salaries or higher status jobs, optimizing the positive moderation of employability even further.

Organizational and policy insights

For organizations and policymakers, our findings provide a dual reality: although the motivational system that gets the candidate the job is different from the one that assures retention and performance over time. Given that extrinsic motivation has a strong, positive connection to initial employability, we shall reward with market-rate pay. The finding related to extrinsic motivation having a negative moderating effect on performance at work suggests organizations should not rely on a purely transactional reward system that motivates initially to maintain performance. Organizations should explore performance management policies based on the principles of autonomy-supportive environments, by actively sustaining the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness to cultivate greater intrinsic motivation and internalization of the JSS into sustained superior performance (Casanova & Paguia Jr, 2022). Policymakers need to deliberately design initiatives that develop not just technical skills, but more importantly, an entrepreneurial attitude early in university-to-work transition programs, as it is an essential psychological engine that creates good career outcomes.

Limitations and future research

Limitations of the study

Although there were substantial theoretical and practical contributions, the study nonetheless had limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the use of a cross-sectional research design precludes us from drawing causal directionality among the variables, meaning that we cannot concretely determine if the PLS-SEM approach suggests strong relations if entrepreneurial attitude preceded and influenced the long-term job-seeking skills development, or how the moderating effects of motivation change over time. Second, the use of self-report measures may contribute to common method bias and subjective perceptual distortion, especially in assessing constructs like employee performance and job-seeking skills. Respondents may misjudge their skills and performance due to social desirability. Third, the sample was limited to business graduate students in Saudi Arabia, limiting the generalizability of the findings. The challenges with career transitions and motivational structures identified may not be directly comparable across contexts that differ in culture, education, and economy.

Future research directions

These limitations provide ample scope for future research. In order to deal with the causal and temporal issues, going forward, research could adopt a longitudinal research design, which would allow research on business graduates to track their job-seeking skills from their final year of school to the early career stage to understand the development in their job-seeking skills and the changing role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in employability and work performance. To counter the contamination effects of measuring motivations, future research should consider mixed-method methodologies as well as employing multi-source data, such as objective measures of performance in organizations, or supervisor ratings, to triangulate the self-reported measures. In addition, similar studies could expand and establish the robustness of this mediation moderation model across different cultures, such as European, Asian, or other African cultures, and possibly academic disciplines. Finally, future studies could examine aspects of the SDT framework by using other variables of motivation and examine if psychological need satisfaction (autonomy, competence, relatedness) mediates the entrepreneurial attitude to the career success relationship, or if organizational support structures serve as contextual moderators.

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