“Self-directed learning and job exploration among Nepalese youth: South Asian perspective”

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SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING AND JOB EXPLORATION AMONG NEPALESE YOUTH: SOUTH ASIAN PERSPECTIVE

Abstract

The study examined the Nepalese youth's self-directed learning and job-seeking characteristics. It collected primary data from fresh graduates of Nepal's leading universities to understand self-directed learning motivations and job search behavior. It focused on graduates enrolled in different job preparatory programs to improve their chances of securing employment in 2022. Using a five-point Likert scale, the survey covered general information, self-learning, and job-searching. The purposive sample field survey in Kathmandu Valley from July to December 2022 targeted 500 respondents and yielded 327 completed surveys for analysis. Data analysis shows a substantial correlation between self-directed learning and job-seeking among Nepalese young people ($\beta = 0.877$, CR = 18.203, $p < 0.01$). A substantial positive correlation was identified between self-monitoring, adaptability, and job-seeking activity ($\beta = 0.927$, $p = 0.000$). Likewise, this study found a substantial positive correlation between motivation and job-seeking activity ($\beta = 0.887$, $p < 0.00$), and goal setting and planning have a significant favorable effect on job-seeking behavior ($\beta = 0.445$, $p < 0.00$). Such findings contribute valuable insights into the interplay of self-learning elements and their implications for the job-seeking behavior of young individuals in the Nepalese context. The importance of promoting self-directed learning and emphasizing fundamental attributes has grown significantly as young individuals navigate the dynamic job marketplace and seek assistance in integrating into employment.

Keywords employability, goal setting, individual cognition, motivation, psychological influence

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INTRODUCTION

The Government of Nepal emphasizes the critical link between economic progress, education, and a highly skilled labor force. The existing educational system in Nepal fails to convert education into real career opportunities despite the Ministry of Education's best efforts and constitutional responsibilities. Employability, essential for economic progress, is not prioritized in policy considerations (Sharma et al., 2022). As a result, young people in Nepal have alarmingly high rates of underemployment and a significant skills-job market mismatch.

Considering South Asia's youth labor force – where 100,000 people join the workforce daily – this dilemma takes on greater significance. Tragically, it is anticipated that 54% of South Asian youngsters will graduate from high school without the necessary employment skills by 2030, underscoring the region's shortcomings in educating its youth for the modern workforce (UNICEF, 2023). In the Nepalese context, as per the Central Bureau of Statistics, the NLFS (2017–2018), Nepal's national unemployment rate of 11.4%, coupled with youth unemployment rates of 38.1% (15-24 age group) and 31.1% (25-34 age group),

intensify the urgency of addressing these disparities. The crux of the problem lies in the inadequate attention given to employability within the educational and policy frameworks.

The current issue centers on the lack of emphasis on employability within the educational system and policy framework, given the context of Nepal's youth population and the difficulties they encounter in securing gainful employment. Underemployment and a major mismatch between skills and employment prospects have resulted from the connection between the skills taught in the educational system and the labor market demands. The primary concern is the inadequate attention paid to employability in education and policy frameworks.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-learning has acquired prominence (Pratibha, 2017) as an essential aspect of employability in today's job market. The self-learning theory posits that people have an innate desire to pursue knowledge and develop skills independently (Boyce et al., 2010) outside formal educational settings. The view is consistent with perpetual learning, in which individuals continually acquire new knowledge and adapt to changing job requirements. Prior research has demonstrated that individuals who engage in self-learning activities are likelier to have a broader skill set, enhanced problem-solving skills, and greater adaptability to changing work environments (Ghimire et al., 2023; Shahi et al., 2022). This improves their employability and increases their possibilities of obtaining desirable employment opportunities. According to the theory of goal setting, setting specific and challenging objectives can boost an individual's motivation and performance (Vigod-Gadot & Angert, 2007). When applied to self-learning, individuals who establish clear learning objectives are more likely to direct their efforts toward pertinent skills (Corno, 2023; Ghimire et al., 2023) and knowledge acquisition.

Employability encompasses acquiring job-specific information and skills relevant to the job market (Joshi et al., 2023; Misra & Mishra, 2011). It is the essential collection of competencies and aptitude for identifying employment opportunities, maintaining employment, or acquiring a new career (Chen & Lim, 2012; Crossman & Clarke, 2010). The factors influencing employment decisions include job-related qualities, the motivation to learn new skills, the inclination to change jobs, and awareness of the job market (Bhattarai et al., 2020; Wittekind et al., 2010). The increasing significance of job scarcity is becoming a prominent concern within contemporary society, particularly in light of the ongoing economic downturn, which has profoundly impacted recent graduates (Kim et al., 2022). The current state of affairs may impede youths' cognitive functions, precisely their capacity to concentrate, establish objectives, and strategize, thereby diminishing their level of motivation. The issue of employability stems from the disparity between the demand and supply of human resources in the job market (Marchang, 2021). Regarding self-control and self-learning, employees perceive employability more than pupils (Affum-Osei & Chan, 2023). Studies reveal that HR leaders now employ analytics professionals and data scientists to expand predictive analytics and artificial intelligence capabilities. Consequently, self-monitoring and adaptability to new technology determine a job seeker's placement. Some scholarly studies acknowledge that the utilization of innovative technologies presents a multitude of potential for the creation of intelligent and creative learning environments that effectively facilitate self-regulated and self-directed learning (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2014; Shiohira, 2021). In addition, an individual's learning patterns are both caused by and contribute to their intrinsic motivation (Drigas et al., 2023).

Proper planning complements goal setting by breaking the learning process into manageable stages and enhancing focus and productivity (Dahal, 2021). The combination of goal setting and planning is anticipated to positively affect self-learning activities among youth, resulting in improved job-seeking behaviors and enhanced employability (Crossman & Clarke, 2010). The higher motivation among those who remained jobless (Caplan et al., 1989). Studies show that several factors influence the attitude of unemployed individuals toward seeking employment and their subjective norms. These fac-

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tors include their perception of the effectiveness of job-seeking in securing reemployment, their perception of economic difficulties, the support they receive from their significant other (typically their spouse) in terms of acknowledging the importance of job-seeking activities, and the perception of the significance of different job-seeking behaviors and subjective norms associated with job seeking by essential individuals in their lives (Chawla et al., 2019; Creed et al., 2009; Ghanizadeh, 2017). Furthermore, the study by Wanberg et al. (1999) showed noteworthy associations among many factors, including employment assurance, financial distress, motivation control, job-search self-efficacy, and job-search intensity.

Taylor et al. (2017) noted that self-determination theory highlights the role of intrinsic motivation in driving behavior. Intrinsically motivated individuals engage in self-learning activities out of their particular interest and enjoyment. Intrinsic inspiration is associated with greater engagement, persistence, and comprehension of the subject matter. Moreover, emotional regulation is essential for self-learning (Kuo et al., 2021; K. Williams & C. Williams, 2011). Individuals with effective emotional regulation can better deal with obstacles and setbacks (Salovey et al., 1999), which fosters a positive learning experience. Thus, high motivation and emotional regulation levels are anticipated to positively influence adolescents' self-learning and job-seeking behaviors (Ghanizadeh, 2017). Self-monitoring refers to an individual's ability to assess and regulate learning progress. This concept strongly correlates with an individual's cognitive development, which states the conscious recognition and regulation of an individual's thinking processes. To enhance the employment performance of the youth employment academy, Li et al. (2015) found that the link between psychological empowerment and success in context and coming up with new ideas was tempered by where people felt they had control. Intrinsic work drive is a part of the link between psychological empowerment and success at work. The basis for intrinsic learning rather than motivation for extrinsic learning influences the trainees' employment activities.

According to Chuang's (2010) findings, the prospect of securing employment was perceived as probable among fresh graduates, and it did not pose significant obstacles that would hinder the attainment of their professional objectives. Wang and Qu (2022) found a direct and positive association between social support and job-seeking activity, whereas work value moderated this relationship. Mattila et al. (2018) determined that using gamified job-hunting services can assist and engage unemployed young individuals in their job-search endeavors. These services effectively facilitate employment opportunities and address the specific requirements of young people. Therrien et al. (2020) identified four distinct patterns of self-directed learning among workers: preparation, active self-directed learning, post-crisis, and identity change. The facilitation of work-health balance was achieved through the implementation of five distinct tactics, namely: preparation for work, validation, reassurance, assertiveness, and work-rest transitions (Therrien et al., 2020). Earlier studies examined the relationship between workers' self-directed learning behavior and their interest in work preparation. Hammond et al. (2017) showed that the 'proactive self' theme encompasses the perception that individual effort and agency play a noteworthy role in achieving success in the workplace. This theme is characterized by the notion that one's proactive behavior and resilience are highly valued traits employers seek. Dahal (2022) posited that using learning and growth performance measures can facilitate the assessment of human resources in business organizations. The process of gaining knowledge and skills can enhance the determination of young individuals to select a profession from a similar vantage point.

Self-monitoring can be defined as a personality trait related to individual differences in how people look at, regulate, and manage their image and expressive behavior (Snyder, 1979). According to the theory of self-monitoring, this personality trait represents a univariate individual difference; it manifests itself in two classes of people: high and low self-monitoring (Snyder, 1974). Self-monitoring is assumed to be a fundamental construct for comprehending social behavior, whether in the social or organizational spheres (e.g., social integration (Guarino et al., 1998) or job selection (Evans, 2008)). Adaptability resources refer to inherent self-regulatory qualities such as care, command, inquisitiveness, and self-as-

surance that individuals can utilize to effectively deal with present and prospective job transitions. Adaptation outcomes are the positive outcomes of adaptation, typically measured by career fit, progress, and job satisfaction (Tolentino et al., 2019). Low self-monitors are motivated to be themselves, whereas high self-monitors are motivated to alter their self-presentation to the social context. Thus, individuals with high or low self-monitoring differ in how they present themselves to others, their ability to control their expressive behavior, their motivation, and their use of skills relevant to self-presentation, focusing their attention on various sources of information to create a standard of appropriate behavior (Snyder, 1979; Sommerfeld, 2007).

Self-regulation and learning goal orientation predicted job-seeking magnitude, and self-regulation mediated the association between learning goal alignment and job-seeking power. Creed et al. (2009) revealed no significant impact of job-seeking magnitude on the relationship between human capital, goal alignment, self-regulation variables, and reemployment outcomes. A preliminary investigation conducted by Creed et al. (2009) provided evidence for the distinction between emotional barriers (such as frustration and fatigue) and attentional barriers (such as schoolwork and social events) among young individual job seekers. Furthermore, the impact of these two types of barriers on job search intensity varied among a group of graduating job seekers over two weeks. The study directed by Urquijo et al. (2019) provided evidence supporting the notion that job search self-efficacy plays a role in mediating the association between emotion control and career consequences. Cognitive aspects of emotional adaptation, control, and youth adaptability play crucial roles in self-learning and job-seeking behavior. According to Chawla et al. (2019), receiving high-quality feedback significantly impacts the emotional responses associated with the job search. This influence extends to positive reactions, such as metacognitive skills, and adverse reactions, such as affective rumination. Metacognitive methods directly influence the number of resumes that individuals submit and the time they allocate to weekly job search endeavors. Mahajan et al. (2022) argued that fostering engagement between business stakeholders and Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) must cultivate a comprehensive skill set among recent graduates.

Self-learning is pursuing knowledge and skills outside formal educational institutions, motivated by personal motivation and curiosity (Yan, 2019). It includes online courses, seminars, reading, skill development programs, and other non-traditional avenues of learning. The study suggests that self-directed learning outside of formal education helps people develop a wider skill set and adapt to changing employment needs, improving employability. It shows that intrinsic motivation and emotional regulation affect self-learning, showing that excellent emotional regulation helps people endure failures and improve their learning experience. The research also shows that self-monitoring affects image and expressive behavior, with high and low self-monitoring affecting presentation

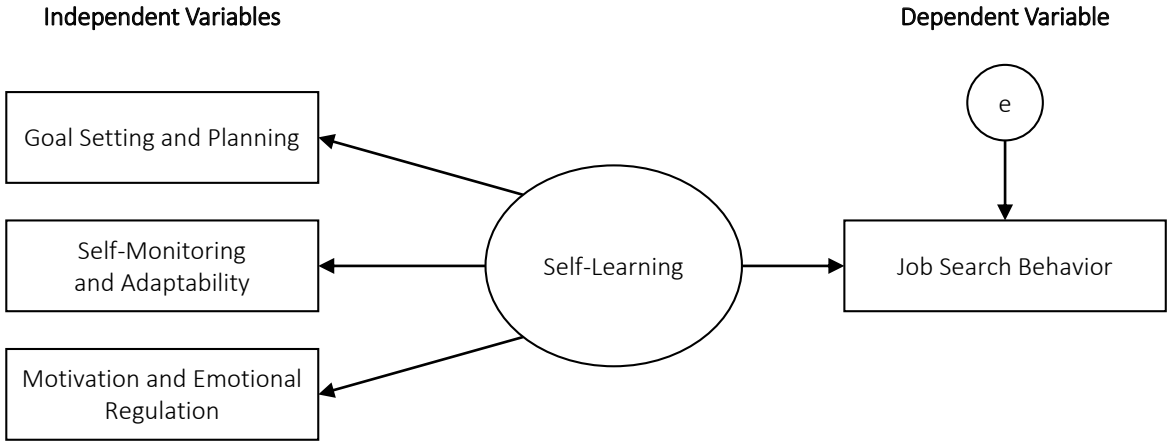

Figure 1. Conceptual framework

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and motivation. Therefore, self-directed learning outside formal education helps people develop a more comprehensive skill set and adapt to changing employment needs, improving employability.

The primary objective of this study is to examine the determinants that influence the endeavors of young individuals in Nepal concerning self-learning and job-search behaviors, as presented in Figure 1.

Study hypothesis:

H1: Individuals' self-learning activities positively and significantly affect job-seeking behavior.

Sub-hypotheses:

Ha: Individuals' goal setting and planning significantly and positively influence self-learning.

Hb: Individuals' self-monitoring and adaptability significantly and positively influence self-learning.

Hc: Individuals' motivation and emotional regulation significantly and positively influence self-learning.

2. METHODS

The study relied on primary data from fresh graduates of prominent Nepalese universities, including Kathmandu, Pokhara, Purbanchal and Tribhuvan University. It focused on individuals enrolled in various job preparatory courses and activities to enhance their employment opportunities in 2022. A structured survey instrument collected data about the participants' demographic characteristics, self-learning practices, and job-seeking behaviors. The study ensured the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. The survey instrument consisted of 23 questions, with two about general information about the respondents, ten about self-learning practices, and eleven about the individual's job-searching behavior. The self-learning practices and job-searching behavior questions were formulated using a five-point Likert-type scale. From July to December 2022, a field survey was directed in Kathmandu Valley, the capital city of Nepal, targeting a sample size of 500 respondents based on a purposive sampling approach. Three hundred twenty-seven survey instruments were appropriately completed, collected, and recorded for this study. In social science research, Hair et al. (2018) contended that 200 or more responses are necessary to test hypotheses using path analysis. Therefore, the study's data constituted the responses of 327 respondents, representing 33.0% of males and 67.0% of females between the ages of 21 to 30 years.

Before evaluating the hypothesized model, the study assessed the variables' internal reliability, validity, and the extent of their common method bias. Table 1 demonstrates the data screening outcomes with suggested cut-off values.

The data screening results in Table 1 indicate that the suggested threshold values for all measures were satisfied. Consequently, the observed and latent variables exhibited high reliability and validity, thus minimizing the potential influence of com-

Table 1. Data screening insights

Variable	Latent variables	Observed variables	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Self-Learning: (Independent variable)	Goal Setting and Planning	3	0.822	0.858	0.682
	Self-Monitoring and Adaptability	3	0.840	0.752	0.508
	Motivation and Emotional Regulation	4	0.754	0.769	0.461
Job-Searching Behavior: (Dependent variable)	Personal Factors	4	0.793	0.813	0.526
	Skills and Competence	3	0.759	0.767	0.523
	Behavioral Factors	4	0.703	0.721	0.405
Cut-off values			≥ 0.70	≥ 0.70	≥ 0.40
Suggested by			Taber (2018)	Fornell and Larcker (1981)	Bagozzi and Baumgartner (1994)
Common method bias-variance = 44.23% (less than the cut-off value of 50.00% suggested by Cho and Lee (2012)					

mon method bias and enabling further examination. Similarly, the latent variables demonstrated convergent validity, as evidenced by the computed values surpassing the threshold values recommended by scholars. In addition, the absolute values of skewness (–0.523 to +0.621) and kurtosis (–1.035 to +0.874) of the studied variables were within the recommended range of ±2, as outlined by George and Mallery (2010), suggesting normality of the data.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

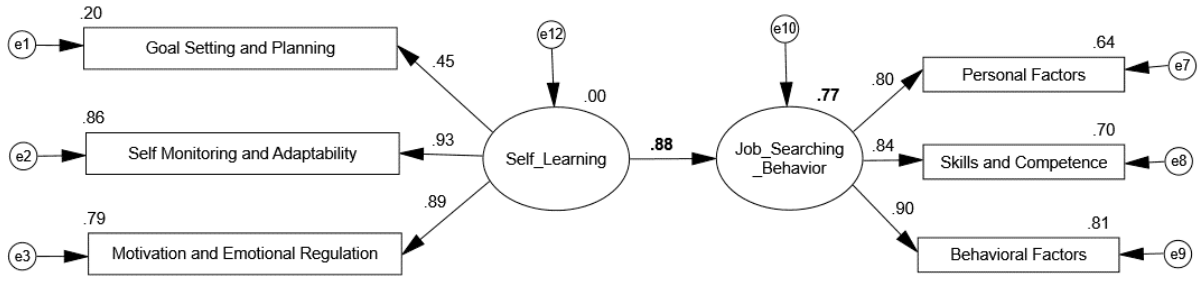
The study employed path analysis to facilitate examining and comprehending the data, utilizing the imputed data obtained from the AMOS (Analysis of Moment Structures) software program. Figure 2 presents the standardized estimates depicting the influence of self-learning activities on the job-searching behavior of young individuals in Nepal.

Based on the results in Figure 2, a statistically substantial relationship was observed between the propensity for self-directed learning and the job-seeking behavior of young individuals in Nepal (β = 0.877, CR = 18.203, $p < 0.01$). The association between the variables explained approximately 77.0% of the variability observed in the data. Furthermore, the model utilized in the study exhibited satisfactory and acceptable fitness indices, as all metrics met the recommended threshold level.

The parameter estimates for the hypothesized paths are displayed in Table 2, as derived from the path analysis.

The path coefficients of the model offered valuable insights into the extent of self-directed learning and job-searching behavior. The study's outcomes offer a valuable understanding of the correlation between self-directed learning and job-seeking behavior among young individuals in Nepal. Examining path coefficients inside the model has shed light on the significant influence of self-directed learning endeavors on individuals' approach to their job-seeking endeavors. The research highlights the significant impact of participating in self- learning activities on the job-seeking behavior of young individuals. Furthermore, the findings offer empirical support for a statistically significant association between the inclination toward self-directed learning and the job-seeking behavior of young individuals in Nepal (β = 0.877, CR = 18.203, $p < 0.01$). Based on empirical evidence, it has been shown that self-monitoring, adaptability, motivation, emotional regulation, goal setting, and planning have a positive and substantial influence on job-seeking behavior.

The study's results revealed that self-monitoring and adaptability significantly impacted an individual's JSB (β = 0.927, $p = 0.000$). Self-monitoring is considered to be a highly significant construct in comprehending social conduct, both within the social realm (e.g., social integration (Guarino et al., 1998) and within the organizational realm (e.g., job selection (Evans, 2008). Adaptation outcomes are often measured by indicators such as career goodness of fit, promotion, and satisfaction (Saviskas & Porfeli, 2012). Individuals with high levels of self-monitoring exhibit a solid inclination to adapt their self-presentation according to the prevailing social environment, whereas indi-



Model Fit Measures	Cut-off Value	Recommended by:	Model Value
Chi square (χ2)	Smaller the Better	Wan, 2002	24.504
Probability (p)	> 0.05	Wan, 2002	0.000
Normed chi square [χ2 /df]	≤ 3.00	Kline, 2005	3.063
Standardized Root Mean-square Residual [SRMR]	≤ 0.08	Hu & Bentler, 1999	0.013
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation [RMSEA]	≤ 0.08	Hu & Bentler, 1999	0.794
RMSEA Associated p Value [PCLOSE]	≥ 0.05	Garson, 2019	0.112

Model Fit Measures	Cut-off Value	Recommended by:	Model Value
Goodness of Fit Index [GFI]	≥ 0.90	Bagozzi & Yi, 1988	0.960
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index [AGFI]	≥ 0.80	Bagozzi & Yi, 1988	0.894
Relative Fit Index (RFI)	≥ 0.80	Hair et al., 2006	0.942
Comparative Fit Index [CFI]	≥ 0.90	Hu & Bentler, 1999	0.974
Normed Fit Index [NFI]	≥ 0.80	Bentler & Bonnet, 1980	0.968
Tucker Lewis Index [TLI]	≥ 0.90	Hu & Bentler, 1999	0.952

Figure 2. The study model of self-learning on job-searching behavior

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Table 2. Testing hypotheses

	Regression-path	Regression estimates		Standard error	Critical ratio	p-value	Remarks
		Unstandardized	Standardized				
Study Hypothesis							
H1	Self-Learning (SL) → → Job-Searching Behavior	0.944	0.877	0.052	18.203	***	Accepted
Sub-Hypotheses							
Ha	*Goal Setting & Planning* ← SL	0.542	0.445	0.065	8.309	***	Accepted
Hb	Self-monitoring & Adaptability ← SL	2.428	0.927	0.105	23.057	***	Accepted
Hc	Motivation & Emotional Regulation ← SL	1.00	0.887	–	–	***	Accepted

Note: ***. Significant at the 0.01 level.

viduals with low levels of self-monitoring are inclined to prioritize authenticity and remain true to themselves. Consequently, there exist variations between individuals with high and low levels of self-monitoring in terms of their outward presentation to others, their capacity to regulate their expressive conduct, their drive, and their utilization of skills related to self-presentation. These differences manifest in their distinct approaches to gathering information and establishing a benchmark for socially acceptable behavior (Snyder, 1979; Sommerfeld, 2007).

This study demonstrates a positive and significant association between motivation and JSB ($\beta = 0.887$, $p < 0.00$). In accordance with these findings, this study supports the idea that motivation plays a vital role in motivating individuals to engage in educational endeavors, while self-regulation equips them with the necessary skills to successfully navigate obstacles and setbacks while achieving academic success. The optimal enhancement of the educational experience necessitates prioritizing compelling motivation and regulating emotions. The maintenance of cognitive clarity and concentration can be achieved by properly managing emotional fluctuations, reducing the potential impact of emotional disturbances on the learning process. According to Salovey et al. (1999), individuals with robust emotional regulation skills demonstrate enhanced capacity in effectively managing challenges and setbacks, fostering a conducive environment for acquiring knowledge. According to Ghanizadeh's (2017) study, it can be inferred that heightened motivation and improved emotional regulation are potentially advantageous factors that enhance self-directed learning and job-specific behavior among young persons.

Furthermore, the study demonstrates a significant positive impact of goal setting and planning on JSB ($\beta = 0.445$, $p < 0.00$), aligning with previous research findings. The current examination integrated the theoretical constructs of goal setting and planning, self-monitoring and adaptation, as well as motivation and emotional regulation within the overarching framework of self-learning theory. The research findings offer empirical data that substantiate the beneficial impact of goal setting and planning on JSB. Based on the study by Vigod-Gadot and Angert (2007), it becomes apparent that establishing specific and difficult objectives can significantly enhance an individual's level of motivation and subsequent performance. Engaging in self-directed learning endeavors can exert a noteworthy influence on individuals' job-seeking conduct. Through self-directed learning, young individuals can acquire additional skills and knowledge, enhancing their competitiveness within the job market. This behavior demonstrates to employers that individuals are proactive and motivated to acquire new knowledge and effectively respond to unfamiliar circumstances. In addition, individuals may also contemplate engaging in volunteer work or pursuing internships within organizations that align with their professional aspirations. This enables individuals to acquire hands-on experience, facilitates access to prospective employment prospects, and broadens their professional connections.

CONCLUSION

The study offers insightful information about the psychological dynamics influencing job-seeking behaviors, highlighting the significance of self-monitoring, adaptability, motivation, goal setting, and planning in determining effective results in the competitive job market. The study sheds light on the intricate connections that exist between important psychological traits and finding employment, with a particular emphasis on self-monitoring and adaptability. The results highlight the fact that people with higher degrees of self-monitoring – that is, the capacity to evaluate and control their behavior in social situations – have a greater likelihood of succeeding in their job search. This implies that increased self-awareness benefits how people negotiate their jobs, highlighting the significance of comprehending and adjusting to interpersonal signals and expectations while looking for a job.

The study also emphasizes a strong and favorable relationship between motivation and job-seeking behavior. People with higher motivation levels also tend to be more proactive and persistent in their job search. This is consistent with the notion that intrinsic drive is a powerful motivator that propels people toward their professional objectives by impacting the level and efficacy of their job search activities. The study also emphasizes how goal setting and planning have a major positive impact on job-seeking behavior. People who strategically organize their job search efforts and have well-defined goals are more likely to succeed in securing a job. This emphasizes the importance of pursuing career prospects with a meaningful direction, well-defined goals, and an organized approach. The study acknowledges sample size and diversity limits that may limit generalizability. It acknowledges the cross-sectional design's limitations in establishing causation and self-report bias, emphasizing the need for intervention studies and longitudinal analyses to inform education and employment strategies across industries and cultures.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Rewan Kumar Dahal, Binod Ghimire, Rajesh Gurung, Surendra Prasad Joshi.
Data curation: Binod Ghimire.
Formal analysis: Rewan Kumar Dahal.
Funding acquisition: Binod Ghimire.
Investigation: Rewan Kumar Dahal.
Methodology: Binod Ghimire, Rajesh Gurung, Surendra Prasad Joshi.
Project administration: Rewan Kumar Dahal.
Software: Rewan Kumar Dahal.
Supervision: Rewan Kumar Dahal, Rajesh Gurung.
Validation: Binod Ghimire, Surendra Prasad Joshi.
Writing – original draft: Binod Ghimire, Rajesh Gurung, Surendra Prasad Joshi.
Writing – review & editing: Rewan Kumar Dahal, Binod Ghimire, Rajesh Gurung, Surendra Prasad Joshi.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicting interest in this research work.

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