



The limited value of ‘employability’ as an objective in the training of Psychologists: Evidence from Chile

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Abstract

This study, carried out in Chile, describes difficulties in the incorporation of employability as an objective in the training of psychologists. Prior research emphasized confusion of key actors about how to train and measure employability. To illustrate that confusion, we compared perspectives of university Psychology department heads and employers of their graduates. Semi-structured interviews revealed understandings of various elements in the employment process. The department heads began by describing the process and criteria they follow to design, operate and assess their programs. Employers described the skills they have looked for when hiring graduates. Where possible the study notes the match between university training objectives and employer preferences. The skills promoted by universities and employers match on only some dimensions. ‘Employability’ varies in meaning across actors, occupations, and contexts. At present, universities and employers have little understanding of what the other seeks to accomplish.

Keywords: employability, quality of training, Psychology, higher education, human capital, Chile

Introduction

This article illustrates several complexities that arise when assessing the employability of university graduates in Psychology. We compare how the construct is understood by those who organize and supervise training with how it is understood by employers. Differences in interpretation raise questions about employability as a measure of the quality of university training (Oraison, Konjarski, & Howe, 2019).

Psychology has a long history in Chile, beginning in 1885 when two German psychologists were hired to work in the national education system (Makrinov, Scharager, & Díaz, 2006; Salas, Scholten, Hernández-Ortiz, Rojas-Jara, & Ravelo-Contreras, 2019; Urzúa, Vera-Villaruel, Zúñiga, & Salas, 2015). Formal university training of Psychologists did not begin until 1946, but by 1968 the title of Psychologist was limited to graduates of universities accredited by a national council. The military government that seized power in 1973 limited training to only two universities, and many Psychologists left Chile. With the restoration of democracy in 1990, the field blossomed again. By

2018, 40 out of 64 universities offered degrees in Psychology, of which 28 are currently accredited (SIES - Mineduc, 2019). The majority of these universities are private and offer only classroom instruction. In 2018, 34,826 students were in Psychology degree programs in Chile. The country's largest program, Nursing, had 45,115 students. In that year, the Ministry of Education reported 4,319 new Psychologists of which 71% were employed within one year after graduation (Mi Futuro, 2019).

The National Accreditation Commission (CNA) established by law in 2006 is responsible to carry out the processes of institutional accreditation. In 2019, 81% of Chilean universities were accredited by CNA. (SIES - Mineduc, 2019). The CNA defines a Psychologist as *a generalist professional with competences in diagnosis, evaluation and intervention with individuals, groups or organisations* (Urzúa & Laborda, 2018, p. 125). The CNA does not directly certify individuals but does assess and accredit universities. Up until 2018, accreditation of Psychology programs was carried out by a group of private agencies, certified and supervised by the CNA. At present, only the CNA can accredit undergraduate programs.ⁱ

A national association of Psychologists has defined nine specialisations in the field and requirements for certification of individual Psychologists, but this certification is not obligatory. The areas of specialisation are: Clinical, Labour, Educational, Community, Sports, Health, Emergencies and Disasters, Law and Forensics, and Neuropsychology (Colegio Nacional de Psicólogos, 2019).

The Psychology program requires five years of study. The first two years cover the various theories or schools of Psychology (e.g., psychoanalytic, behaviourist, cognitive) from a general perspective as well as related subjects. The second two years provide a more detailed examination of applied fields of Psychology. In most programs, fifth year students specialize in a field of their choice (e.g., clinical, educational, organisational). Some universities offer a Master's degree requiring one or more additional years of study. About half of the five-year graduates work as Clinical Psychologists in public and private clinics. A third is hired to work in organisations, in Organisational or Personnel Psychology, and about 10 percent work as Educational Psychologists hired by schools (Urzúa & Laborda, 2018).

Review of previous research

The construct of employability has been discussed from three complementary perspectives, labelled as 'possessive', 'positional', and 'processing' (Holmes, 2013; Okay-Somerville & Scholarios, 2015). The 'possessive' approach argues that employers select personnel who will be highly productive. In economic terms, productivity is a function of possessing technical knowledge and skills, or 'human capital', initially defined as years of schooling (Sweetland, 1996).

The 'positional' view of graduate employability argues that the likelihood of employment of a given individual or category of people depends on attributes and actions of other people (Tholen, 2013). Competition for jobs increases when the expansion of higher education creates credential inflation (Brown & Hesketh, 2004). Social elites make use of their resources to acquire more prestigious credentials, to position themselves better in the queue for limited high-skilled (and more highly rewarded) vacancies, and therefore, to secure an advantage in the competition (Brown, Hesketh, & Williams, 2003). Graduates from working-class backgrounds who, because of their position in society, have less cultural and social capital, are less employable. They are more likely to find employment in non-graduate occupations and to earn significantly less money than their middle-class counterparts (Kalfa & Taksa, 2015).

From this perspective, position in a social network or relationship may contribute more to employability than does a job applicant's skill (Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011). Instead of hiring based on tangible evidence of competency, employers are said to look for indications that, in a future situation, candidates will respond effectively. This approach is called 'signaling theory' (Humburg, Van der Velden, & Verhagen, 2013). Both the institutional background of the job seeker and their

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appearance, speech, or behaviour can be interpreted by employers as information about likely future performance (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2011).

The signals can include behavioural attributes associated with family or social group membership, sometimes referred to as 'cultural capital' (Cai, 2013; Tholen, 2013). In that sense, attendance at a prestigious university could be considered to grant a form of cultural capital (Benbow & Hor, 2018).

Social relations provide access to information about opportunities, and to influential persons. The relationships also help in the development of communication skills. These attributes are known as 'social capital' (Clarke, 2017; Lenton, 2015; Otto, Sobiraj, & Schladitz, 2019). In periods of economic expansion, possession and positional factors are better predictors of employment (Kalfa & Taksa, 2015). As the supply of labour begins to exceed job openings, however, employment outcomes depend more on the job-seeking skills of candidates (Okay-Somerville & Scholarios, 2015).

The 'processing' perspective defines employment as a series of stages through which an individual can move, improving status, income and satisfaction. The likelihood of employment depends not just on the quality of the university's training program but on the efforts of the student or graduate to 'manage' their career trajectory (Llanes, Figuera, & Torrado 2017; McGrath, Madziva, & Thondhlana, 2017). For example, in some countries employment opportunities are greater for students attending prestigious universities (Ciriaci & Muscio, 2014; Drydakis, 2016). Once enrolled, students can begin to make themselves look like successful occupants of their profession. The development of a professional 'identity' can be recognized (and appreciated) by future employers who see the candidate as capable of contributing to the organisation (Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011; Jackson, 2014, 2016).

In the process perspective, employability is a function of the graduate's 'career management' or career building skills (Evans, 2008; Gill, 2018). Researchers have developed an instrument that measures job applicants' self-confidence, curiosity, self-control and concern for performance, producing an 'Adapt-Ability' scale (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). These characteristics have been shown to contribute to the employability of a job candidate. Universities can foster 'career management' and the building of a professional identity in the degree program curriculum, as part of subject courses, as a separate course, and through practicum and work placement experiences (Bennett, Eagle, Mousley, & Ali-Choudhury, 2008; Boahin & Hofman, 2013).

To date only a relatively small number of studies have evaluated university efforts to improve the employability of their graduates. A sophisticated study involving universities and employers in Portugal points to a major obstacle: the major actors in the process, universities and employers, define employability in different ways (Sin & Amaral, 2017). An Australian research study found that various stakeholders—students, alumni, educators and employers—differ in how they relate student assessment to employability, with only educators emphasising the importance of assessment (Kinash, McGillivray, & Crane, 2013).

A comprehensive review of studies on employability concludes that it is not possible (at this time) to isolate a definitive set of requisite skills (Small, Shacklock, & Marchant, 2018; Suleman & Costa, 2018). Employers are not able to define a clear list of abilities especially in segmented markets some with rapidly changing technologies, and vary in their ability to assess candidates' qualities. Universities differ in their prestige. They also differ in the cultural and social capital of their students. Training emphasises changes in individuals' attributes and skills, but employability depends on social processes. Some research suggests that only direct work experience has a major impact on employment (Jackson, 2016; Mason, Williams, & Crammer, 2009).

Some research on employability has been done in Chile. Widespread use of the term 'employability' began in Chile in the 1990s, stimulated by the Bologna Process in Europe (Leoni, 2014; Sin & Neave, 2014). One study compiled a list of 10 generic competencies based on the Tuning Report (González & Wagenaar, 2008) and other sources. Students in seven programs (not including Psychology) in two universities were asked to assess the importance given to each of 10 competencies (Thieme, 2007). Students in University 1 gave significantly higher ratings than those in University 2. Differences in

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ratings were explained by characteristics of students, especially previous work experience, rather than by university courses.

A second study included a representative sample of 2003-2004 graduates from 40 universities and eight fields, including Psychology (Centro de Medicion MIDE, 2008). Replying to a self-administered questionnaire, students assessed their university training in terms of the 27 Tuning competencies. An intentional sample of 66 employers was asked to rate the overall extent to which graduates demonstrated competency in the 27 skill areas. The overall results of the study are positive in their evaluation of university training. On the other hand, the study makes clear that graduates lack information about the occupations or careers they are seeking, and employers know little about what graduates learn in university.

The most recent publications on employability assess employability effectiveness of programs that train secondary school teachers (Cifuentes, Villarroel, & Geeregat, 2018). Based on focus groups and interviews with graduates, the study concludes that employability outcomes depend on more than the quality of the degree program. Outcomes also are based on personal qualities of the graduate, social and cultural capital, and the prestige of the university. Other studies have found a relationship between university selectivity and employability of graduates (Espinoza & McGinn, 2018; Espinoza, González, McGinn, Castillo, & Sandoval, 2019; Espinoza, González, McGinn, Sandoval, & Castillo, 2020).

Research questions

The research reviewed above suggests that universities and employers hold different perceptions of the definition and measurement of employability. This study poses these comparative questions (suggested by Benbow & Hor, 2018) designed to provide concrete examples of differences in understanding:

1. How do program directors define and assess cognitive- and non-cognitive knowledge and skills?
2. How do employers define and assess knowledge and skills?
3. What methods are used to determine that graduates/employees possess the appropriate knowledge and skills?
4. How do valued knowledge and skills differ as a function of contextual variation?

Methods

Employability is a subjective concept. In the absence of established theory as to why employers and educators should have different definitions, we used elements of the Grounded Theory approach. Grounded Theory, as a qualitative research approach, has been shown to be effective in providing descriptive information and understanding, as well as contributing to interpretation (El Hussein, Hirst, Salyers, & Osuji, 2014). We hoped that by eliciting the perceptions of university educators and employers of their graduates, we could explain their differences (Glaser, 2001; Pandit, 1966).

Sources of data

At the end of 2017, semi-structured interviews were carried out with three university program directorsⁱⁱ responsible for the organisation and implementation of professional degree programs in Psychology; and interviews with nine employers of graduates from these programs. In the course of the interview we adjusted our questions in order to fill out information suggested by their responses. This approach is described in Alonso (1998) and Taylor and Bogdan (1998).

The first objective of the interview was to identify the theoretical and practical orientation of the Psychology curriculum in the university, and its specific content and objectives.ⁱⁱⁱ The second

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objective was to assess implementation of the curriculum and realisation of its objectives. Our concern was to distinguish between the direct impact of the curriculum, as graduates of the university as an institution, and of the Psychology program. A third objective was to obtain directors' understanding of how employers assess the program's graduates. Interviews with the program directors covered the following areas:

- a. the underlying conceptual model of the degree program for which they were responsible;
- b. objectives and contents of the study plans;
- c. the relationship between the university's public image and the program;
- d. how 2012-2014 graduates were received by the labor market.

Employers were asked about the requirements of the positions for which they hired the graduates, and their opinion of how they performed once employed.

Respondents

We interviewed the Psychology program directors in three universities that differ significantly in the stringency of their admission of applicants. Students entering the most selective university (HSU) must score 600 points or above on the national University Selection Test (PSU). Average scores are above 650. As a public, and 'traditional'^{iv} university, applicants who score highly on the PSU receive tuition waivers. It was recently accredited by the National Accreditation Commission for six years (the maximum is seven). More than 100 years old, this university ranks among the 20 best universities in the QS World University list for Latin America.^v

The second university was established less than 40 years ago. It is private and receives no direct financial subsidies from the government. A minimum of 475 points on the PSU is required for admission. Students entering this university had average scores of 550. Its most recent accreditation was for three years. We refer to it as the Moderately Selective university (MSU). The third university also is private and more recently established. Applicants are required to take an admission examination but all are admitted. We refer to it as the Low Selective university (LSU). It is not accredited.

Sample of employers

The universities provided lists of employers of the graduates from Psychology programs for the years 2012-2016, a total of 31. We then randomly chose three employers for each university, for a total of nine, combining purposive and volunteer sampling to select interviewees (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). We have masked their identity with a code that indicates the selectivity of the university (L: Low; M: Medium; and H: High), and their gender. Interviews were carried out in places of employment and lasted about one hour. Evidence indicates that, in a study of decision processes, six to 12 interviews are sufficient to identify the important elements involved (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Results

The material below is a selection of the comments made by program directors and employers. The material is arranged to permit comparisons of what directors and employers think is important in selection among job candidates from the three universities.

Perspectives of program directors

The three directors varied in their capacity to describe the basic orientation and content of their programs. None of them could express clearly their philosophical paradigm, or the theoretical idea

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or principles behind their programs. They explained this was in part, because their Psychology degree program trains three kinds of professionals.

There is no one...prevailing paradigm. What we have that distinguishes us (from other universities) and sustains us is a well-integrated approach. Other universities are very much psychoanalytic, or into cognitive behaviorism, others more humanist...One of our principles is that we go beyond the traditional training of Clinical Psychologists, Educational Psychologists, or organisational and Labor Psychologists...The school has never married any one theoretical model (HSU)

Similar ideas are expressed by the other two directors. The MSU Director said that they could not be boxed in by a paradigm. *The ideal of our model is transformative, as we have 'declared'*. The LSU Director said: *I suppose it is a generalist curriculum, with a systemic-humanist focus.*

Both the MSU and LSU Directors noted that changes in their study plans reflected the demands of accreditation rather than conformity to a given conceptual orientation. The HSU director described that program in terms of subject content:

Our integrative focus contemplates formation based on three pillars: research in psychosocial phenomena; assessment of psychological and psychosocial processes; and implementation of actions based on that assessment.... It is a psychological model and theory sustained not just in one psychological current, but all, psychoanalysis, cognitive behaviorism, neuroscience, and humanism. (HSU)

On the other hand, all three Directors put great emphasis on the importance of their institutional identity. The LSU Director proposed that versatility and flexibility are defining characteristics of their graduates.

...they have flexibility, the capacity to assume different roles. Although what is now a strength was once seen as a kind of weakness, an "excessive humility", now it is a positive aspect of our core values. What the employers noted was that our graduates had a good predisposition to assume different tasks. (LSU)

The MSU Director noted that the university seeks to produce graduates who will do research and practice their profession. Increased emphasis on the MSU graduates doing research came as a result of the accreditation process. Emphasis on research is even stronger in the institutional stamp (or public identity or image, 'sello' in Spanish) that the HSU seeks to place on each graduate.

The stamp points toward a professional whose attitude and formation prepare him/her for research. [The power of the stamp is such that] By the second year, students can identify problems and carry out important analysis in research projects...I can tell you that a guarantee that we are training well is the stamp with which our students leave, in direct response to social demands... .(MSU)

The directors also differ in the importance they assign to their graduates' competencies, as opposed to external factors. For example, the LSU has had a difficult time in placing its graduates with employers. The Program Director attributed this difficulty to:

...the quantity of Psychologists graduating each year and the higher priority given to graduates from the traditional universities. Add to this that the university has not acquired much prestige, or accreditation. This taints how employers see us and translates into a low early hiring rate for our graduates. (LSU)

The MSU director explained problems of placement in terms of the absence of concrete and specific mechanisms to insure the fit between the Graduate Profile and labor demands. Intents and efforts there are, but these are sporadic and short.

To state something about the coherence of the Profile with what the job requires would be a shot in the dark at this time. I think that is the task facing the next accreditation: linkage with employers, linkage with graduates, is the first priority for next year. We are well connected with the environment, but we don't have a means to measure the fit of our Profile in that environment. (MSU)

In contrast, the HSU appears to have a clear set of strategies for measuring the fit between its Profile and the labor environment. This set includes an agreement with other traditional universities who share experiences and have identified seven competencies that every professional Psychologist should manage. The director stated that students and graduates are encouraged to participate in research projects, and to attend national and international professional conferences. Constant promotion of the University's stamp within the institution and in the labor market also contributes.

Employers' perspectives

Graduate Psychologists are placed in a variety of positions, which require distinct sets of knowledge and skills to perform well. In this study, some worked in private counselling settings, others in schools, others in outpatient mental health clinics, some working with adults, others with children. While overlapping in some dimensions, the employer-determined profiles for each position as a Psychologist varied significantly in others. The employability criteria important for one position were not significant for others.

Employers who hired graduates from the LSU were generally positive in their evaluations of their performance. Their comments, however, suggested that non-technical skills were more important in their hiring. One referred to psychological factors as important in the exercise of the profession.

I can find many good professionals, both technically and theoretically. But the professional, besides being good, theoretically or technically, also should be persistent. It is this professional I value, more than one who can recite all the theory. (LSU-M)^{vi}

This same employer also said that graduates from the LSU were less skillful in teamwork when they first came, but improved with time. The other employers of LSU graduates, on the other hand, thought they had better social skills than graduates from other, more selective, universities. Graduates in Psychology from the LSU were highly rated (by most of the employers) for their understanding of family issues and group work in schools. They were poorly prepared, however, in the application of psychometric tools and interpretation of results. For the position in question, non-technical skills were considered more important than technical skills.

We have chosen to hire more professionals from the LSU. Of course, we will be delayed a bit in teaching them how to use tests but feel that this will be of benefit to students because test administration is a technique that can be learned, but empathy, connecting oneself with students, can't be learned. (LSU-F)

This employer (in a school) went on to say that previously employed Psychologists from a highly selective university were much more rigorous, but less empathetic than those from the LSU. The HSU graduates were viewed as careful in their relationships with the teachers, more clinical than educational.

Most of the graduates in Psychology from the MSU work in community settings, others do Organisational Psychology (principally personnel services), and others work in youth services. Employers' assessment of the Psychologists' performance preparation varies widely as a function of the position. Most criticism was directed toward the personnel Psychologists, seen as lacking both theoretical knowledge and technical skills.

A critic stated that while MSU graduates want to get ahead, their general knowledge is low, and they lack certain technical and theoretical skills. He offered this general advice to universities.

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You can't get anywhere teaching them technical skills if they don't know how to get along. (The university) should teach them practical skills for their work. If you know that your students' profile lacks certain things, because for example, you are recruiting people with low (test) scores, that come from a low economic sector, that you know in terms of education will be on another scale, take time to teach them and make up for their deficiencies. (MSU-M)

In other words, employability criteria vary according to the position for which a person is being hired. The same background features criticized by the organisational employer are seen as positive attributes by employers in community and youth service organisations.

The employability criteria considered important may also differ according to the location of the particular job. Cultural attributes seen as a handicap in one setting can be regarded as capital in another. As one employer said:

Look, what we are looking for in candidates from the MSU is the stamp of the community. The professionals bring experiences from community practices, things that you observe are infrequent in the profile of other universities, things that fit one to what we are doing here. (MSU-F)

Other employers take the point further, asserting that Psychologists trained at the MSU have formative strengths not found in graduates from other universities, making explicit reference to more selective universities.

[Referring to MSU graduates] These are people who know the idea of community work, have more time and experience with clinical practice from a community perspective (MSU-F).

I think that (the fact that they do well in this job) is because of their (university) formation. Because when one has an education oriented more toward the community you aren't afraid to work in [names a rough neighbourhood]. The perspective of the MSU allows you to face these challenges head on. This perspective is much more community-oriented than [that of other universities which train in traditional psychotherapy]. (MSU-M)

The graduate Psychologists from the HSU also work in various settings. Their employers agree that they are well-trained in generic competencies, but not as well in skills required in their particular jobs. For example, Psychologists prepared for work in clinical settings had to be re-trained to meet the demands of working in organisational settings. The employers did not see this as major deficiency, however, commenting that the training of graduates from the HSU was more complete than that of Psychologists from other universities.

(These professionals) have a more comprehensive technical training. There are universities with gaps in the numerical part, in research statistics...there are others that are strong in theory while in other areas their students are less well prepared. The HSU is a bit more comprehensive, as you can see that they had a more complete education in everything. (HSU-M)

I believe that their stamp [identity] is that critical sense that differentiates one person from another of his colleagues in a team; that you get from where you study. I think that the training programs differ in how they ask (their students) to think. I think that what universities do is prepare us in a general way, but we are not so prepared for the world of work that seeks us. If you are pointing toward the organisational (workplace) in your training program, it could be that you will see more of what is found in a business. The social environment is different, as is the community environment or the education environment. These differences tend to change the expectations one has. (HSU-F)

In summary, HSU graduates are considered adequately trained and quick to learn on the job. MSU graduates perform best in community service positions, primarily because their family backgrounds have made them more familiar with the social culture in which they work. LSU graduates are viewed

in the same way. Employers appear to use different profiles or sets of competencies chosen as a combined function of the university in which the candidate was trained and the particular position for which they are being considered.

Discussion

The Psychology directors as a group have not yet selected or produced a conceptual framework to structure the curriculum that would be acceptable to most scholars and practitioners. Instead, each must reconcile the sometimes sharply differing perspectives of different theories or paradigms. This situation is not unique to Chile. In Mexico, for example, most programs attempt to cover all perspectives, but behaviourist and psychoanalytic perspectives dominate (Carlos & Núñez, 2008). In Cuba, Psychology is described as a 'divided' science or, better, yet, as a science that has not yet found a stable body of knowledge respected by all professionals and admirers, in short, 'the paradigm' (Corral, 2018); Psychology is not a unified discipline and, some researchers say, never will be (Green, 2015).

Employers distinguished between graduates from the three universities on two dimensions. First, those from the non- and moderately selective universities generally were characterised as having had an incomplete training in theory and technical skills. That is, candidates from these two universities did not meet all the requirements in the job profile. Some Psychologists, for example, had not been trained in the application of the latest version of a children's intelligence test. Others were not familiar with a statistical test. Lack of specific conceptual or practical knowledge and skills were attributed to their training program (or university), and not described as reflecting the graduates' level of intellectual ability.

Second, satisfaction with the performance of graduates varied significantly across the work setting. Graduates from the non- and moderately selective universities performed much better in situations with which they were familiar by virtue of their own socio-economic background. Psychologists from these universities were more likely to be employed in municipal (public) and lower cost, subsidised private schools. They were effective in their position because of their origin (cultural capital), and not their training (human capital). This is consistent with findings described in studies carried out by Okay-Somerville and Scholarios (2015) and Rothwell, Herbert and Rothwell (2008).

The employers varied in terms of the relative importance given to cognitive formation in the discipline, or to non-cognitive (soft) skills demonstrated in application of knowledge. Overall, the graduates of the HSU were more highly evaluated in terms of their disciplinary formation as compared to the other two sets of graduates. Even so, the employers were more critical of graduates trained in the less selective universities, in both discipline-based knowledge and non-cognitive skills.

In the case of hiring from the other two universities, the study supports 'signaling theory'; employers acknowledged looking for graduates from particular universities because of the socio-economic and community origins of those students, rather than for information about their knowledge and skills. By virtue of their backgrounds they were better positioned to serve their clients. The interviews showed that employers hiring Psychologists to work in office settings value skill in application and interpretation of specific measurement tools. They prefer to hire graduates from universities that provide that kind of training. Employers in community health or welfare organisations, on the other hand, prefer to hire people familiar with the problems and habits of clients. They look for cultural and social capital.

In summary, the employers view these graduate Psychologists as varying in their level of competence as well as institutional identity. Each one of them may find employment, but they are not equally well-prepared for their fields and are not equally employable for all jobs. In terms of quality, however, each program has produced graduates who have been effective in the jobs they

have taken. In principle, the programs are of the right quality for the publics they seek to serve. On the other hand, this reality preserves the social inequalities of the labour market for Psychologists.

Conclusion

This qualitative study provides valuable information about the perspectives of Psychology program directors and employers of their graduates with respect to employability. The data provides hints rather than definitive proofs.

The three Psychology programs vary in the human capital of their graduates. This difference is partly a result of the population of students who consider application, and the selection/admission policies of the university. It is also a result of differences in the content of the training program and the intensity and quality of instruction.

The Psychology programs provide some content and skill training specific to different types of professional practice, but not in great depth. The HSU places heavy emphasis on academic knowledge and skills (human capital), and the professional identity of its graduates. Much less attention is given to cultural and social capital. The LSU graduates, in contrast, are known for their social skills and psychological persistence on the job. The public image of the HSU, heavily promoted by the Psychology program director, is that its graduates are knowledgeable and skilled professionals. Graduates of the LSU, on the other hand, are assumed by their director to be able to relate effectively to clients from low-income neighbourhoods.

Each of the programs studied is strongly oriented toward employment of its graduates. Employment rate could be considered therefore as the measure of their success. Universities that seek to improve their own status may seek to place graduates in those positions to which employers attach greater value (and for which pay higher salaries). This can be accomplished by recruiting students who already have those attributes the employers believe are important, rather than by improving the quality of degree programs. Alternatively, it can be accomplished by, once having chosen certain employers, designing degree programs matched to the demands of their industry. Placement of students in these firms prior to graduation will increase the likelihood that graduates have the professional identity the employers' desire. These strategies will benefit the university, and employers, but not necessarily reduce economic inequalities. The ambition to reduce social and economic inequality through improved 'employability', is a chimera, something to be desired but not likely to be achieved.

In fact, the risk is that efforts to improve graduates' ability in order to increase their employability could end up training graduates to fit into fixed socio-economic categories, replicating universities' inequality in the labour market.

Given the limitations of data and sampling, the study sought primarily to map the boundaries of the problem rather than provide generalisable conclusions. The findings apply only to one field, Psychology, and may not describe the full range of universities at various levels of selectivity. For that reason, the conclusions drawn should be treated as hypotheses to be tested in future research.

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ⁱ In 2015 the National Accreditation Commission listed the following elements included in certification of professional degree programs, including Psychology: a) Objectives; b) Completeness; c) Graduate Profile; d) Study Plan; e) Relation to field; f) Organisation and administration; g) Teaching staff; h) Infrastructure and Instructional Resources; i) Participation and student welfare; j) Research by Teaching Staff; k) Effectiveness and results of formative process; l) Self-regulation and continuous improvement (CNA, 2015).

ⁱⁱ In Spanish, “jefes de carrera”. Program Directors are qualified professionals in their field, with rank of Professor, appointed by the Dean of the Faculty, who supervise the implementation of the curriculum.

ⁱⁱⁱ Universities in Chile offer a professional degree in Psychology after five years of study.

^{iv} The 8 traditional universities were established before 1981.

^v See <http://www.topuniversities.com/universityrankings>.

^{vi} L-M = LSU graduates, male employer.