

Job risk and job-seeking in the service industry in Nepal: The role of self-efficacy

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Abstract

Purpose: The objective of this study is to examine the impact of self-efficacy on how young people in Nepal respond to employment risks, with a particular emphasis on their job-searching behavior in the service sector.

Design/methodology/approach: The study collected survey data from recent undergraduate and graduate students who were actively pursuing employment in 2024 using a quantitative approach. The study employs self-determination theory to examine the influence of personal ability beliefs on job search efforts and motivation. To explore the relationships between the study variables, it followed a systematic Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) approach.

Findings: The results indicate that job-search behavior is substantially influenced by perceived employment risk and that self-efficacy is a critical factor in strengthening this relationship. Even in the presence of uncertain job prospects, young job candidates who possess higher levels of self-efficacy are more likely to remain proactive and motivated in their search.

Research limitations/implications: Understanding the function of self-efficacy provides policymakers, educators, and individuals striving to enhance the employability of young people with beneficial insights. It is feasible to enhance the resilience and job search effectiveness of young individuals navigating a challenging job market by cultivating self-belief and confidence.

Originality/value: The study extends motivational frameworks by combining Self-Determination Theory with Social Cognitive Theory to study collectivist cultures while providing evidence-based strategies that policymakers and career counselors can use to improve youth employability through psychological empowerment and skill development.

Keywords: Attitude, Employment, Job search, Perception, Personality

Jel Codes: J24; J64

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1. Introduction

In developing countries like Nepal, where formal job opportunities are scarce and underemployment is prevalent, the service sector is a crucial engine of employment in both global and local economies. In Nepal, the service industry, which encompasses retail, hospitality, education, and information technology, is a substantial component of the urban job market and functions as a primary entry point for young people to enter the workforce. It is an essential domain for addressing youth employment challenges due to its relative accessibility, low barriers to entry, and ability to accommodate an expanding force. The significance of understanding how young individuals navigate employment opportunities in this sector cannot be overstated, given Nepal's demographic profile, which includes over 40% of the working-age population.

The service sector offers more than just entry-level positions; it also provides an experiential learning platform that enables young graduates to cultivate essential soft skills, including adaptability, communication, and collaboration. The sector is also becoming a location for the development of digital competencies and technological fluency as service roles increasingly incorporate digital tools and customer interface systems. Nevertheless, the sector is rife with risks for young people: the already unstable nature of employment in low- and middle-income countries is further exacerbated by job market instability, limited career guidance, low wage security, and increasing competition. In Nepal, these challenges are particularly severe due to structural issues, including poverty, as well as an informal transition from education to employment.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these vulnerabilities by causing unprecedented uncertainty, job losses, and psychological distress among young job seekers (Joshi, Dahal, Ghimire & Karki, 2023; Poudel & Subedi, 2020). Few empirical studies have examined how Nepalese youth perceive and respond to employment hazards in the service sector, despite these urgent concerns. The present study's originality is emphasized by this gap, which not only focuses on an industry that is under-researched in the context of Nepal but also incorporates psychological constructs, particularly self-efficacy, to elucidate job search behavior under conditions of economic precocity.

This study provides a unique analytical perspective on the impact of internal (e.g., aspirations, self-guidance) and external (e.g., job benefits, dissatisfaction) motivations on the employment-seeking behavior of young people, based on the push-pull motivational framework (Lee & Mitchell, 1994). Despite the fact that push-pull models have been implemented in the context of migration and career mobility research, their application to the job search behavior of young people in Nepal's service sector is both innovative and pertinent. In addition, this research offers a novel theoretical perspective on how psychological resources can mitigate adverse job market conditions by designating self-efficacy as a mediating variable between perceived employment risks and job-search intensity (van-Hooft, Wanberg & van-Hoye, 2013; Zikic & Saks, 2009). In Nepal's volatile economic environment, cultivating resilience and implementing proactive job-seeking techniques are essential for surmounting employment obstacles.

The study concentrates on the service sector, and its findings may not be directly relevant to other sectors with distinct risk profiles, such as manufacturing, technology, or basic industries. The distinctive characteristics of employment risks and job-seeking behaviors in these industries necessitate additional examination. Future studies should examine the functioning of the self-efficacy mechanism across different industries, taking into account the distinct risks and dynamics inherent to each. This will facilitate a comprehensive understanding of how psychological factors affect job-seeking behavior across various economic conditions. This research significantly enhances both regional employment studies and the worldwide discourse on youth employment, particularly in the context of the Nepalese service sector.

The factors that influence the career choices of young people are the subject of a systematic review by Akosah-Twumasi, Emeto, Lindsay, Tsey and Malau-Aduli (2018), which compares individualistic and collectivist cultural settings. Their research underscores the substantial influence of family expectations in collectivist cultures, where decisions are frequently influenced by the collective good, whereas personal interests are prioritized in individualistic cultures. This distinction underscores the significance of comprehending cultural norms when making career decisions. The review argues that tailoring practical career guidance to these cultural contexts is necessary to help young people make well-informed decisions. The findings' placement within a broader cross-cultural discourse encourages further investigation of the impact of cultural orientation on career pathways.

Consequently, the following is the structure of this research: The introduction offers a contextual justification for the investigation. The literature review results in testable hypotheses. A rigorous research design specifically tailored to the Nepalese context is outlined in the methodology, followed by a results section that presents the empirical findings. The results are contextualized within broader academic and policy debates in the discussion section, which interprets them. The conclusion substantiates the study's contributions and suggests potential areas for future research on job transitions, psychological capital, and adolescent employment in developing economies.

2. Literature Review

Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000), along with Social Cognitive Theory (SCT; Bandura, 1986), are two theories that address the same issue of job search motivation from different perspectives. The main idea of SDT is that the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are the active ingredients of intrinsic motivation and well-being. At the same time, SCT recognizes self-efficacy, the personal belief in one's skills to perform tasks, as the major cognitive factor that directs goal-oriented actions. The current research fuses both views by suggesting that self-efficacy is a prerequisite for satisfying the needs of SDT, namely: that of growing in skill and of being free. To be more specific, the fortifying belief that one can overcome any obstacle in the job search (high self-efficacy) leads to the strengthening of the feeling of competence, which in turn leads to more autonomy in the setting of employment goals. Thus, the combination of these two perspectives is very useful for figuring out how between personal agency and these processes of motivation, the influence goes in the case of job search behavior in the conditions of employment risk.

Vansteenkiste and van-den-Broeck (2018) argued that intrinsic motivation can be suppressed by perceived societal pressure to secure employment, leading to a decrease in both persistence and the quality of job-search strategies. Social pressure may initially bolster job-search efforts, but it diminishes the personal meaning and satisfaction that result from the process. In the same vein, financial constraints may result in compromised decisions and reduced job quality, although they exacerbate the urgency of the job search. van-Hooft (2014) emphasized the significance of emotional support and constructive feedback from social networks in sustaining motivation and promoting engagement in job search activities. Meta-analytic results indicate that social support enhances the intensity of job search efforts and improves training outcomes (Ghimire, Dahal, Gurung & Joshi, 2023; Saks & Ashforth, 2000). Nevertheless, prolonged job searches can have a demotivating effect. Wanberg, Basbug, van-Hooft and Samtani (2012) discovered that prolonged unemployment frequently leads to diminished motivation and reduced engagement in subsequent job-search behavior, which frequently leads to suboptimal employment outcomes. An individual's ability to effectively seek jobs can be further compromised by contextual constraints, such as inadequate financial resources, caregiving responsibilities, resettlement barriers, or limited access to transportation (Wanberg, Ali & Csillag, 2020).

Additionally, job-search behavior is significantly influenced by physical and mental health. Energy, availability, and motivation can be diminished as a result of poor health, which can impede the persistence of job search endeavors (van-Hooft, 2014). Therefore, improvements in well-being can serve as a motivator for increased participation in job-search activities and more favorable employment outcomes (Taris, 2002; van-Hooft, 2014). Job inquiry behavior is frequently regarded as a form of self-regulated action. As Kanfer, Wanberg and Kantrowitz (2001) observe, it necessitates that individuals independently establish their objectives, devise strategies, and persevere in the face of adversity. The procedure is competitive, emotionally strenuous, and

time-consuming. Financial stress, uncertainty, and repeated rejections are prevalent, which can lead to increased anxiety and decreased motivation (Ghimire, Dahal & Singh, 2024; Wanberg, Zhu & van-Hooft, 2010). Employability, which is defined as the ability to secure and sustain employment, is a reliable indicator of the success of a job search. Both self-perceptions and individual competencies influence it. Enhancing employability skills elevates an individual's perceived value in the job market, as per Vanhercke, De-Cuyper, Peeters & De-Witte (2014) and van-der-Heijden, De-Lange, Demerouti and van-der-Heijde (2009). Employability can serve as both a prerequisite and an outcome of job-searching behavior (Bhattarai, Pokharel, Dahal & Sharma, 2020). Input-based theories prioritize characteristics and dispositions (Dahal, Ghimire & Budathoki-Magar, 2024; Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth, 2004), whereas output-based models emphasize self-perceived employability—one's confidence in their ability to obtain and maintain employment (Berntson, Näswall & Sverke, 2008; Vanhercke et al., 2014).

Employment risk, defined as the uncertainty associated with obtaining and retaining suitable employment, encompasses precarious working conditions, underemployment, and job loss (Karki, Bhattarai & Dahal, 2023). Education, talents, prior experience, and access to professional networks are among the factors that influence these risks (Dahal, Ghimire, Karki & Joshi, 2023). The necessity of ongoing learning and skill development is underscored by the frequent occurrence of poor employment outcomes resulting from a disparity between the job market's demands and an individual's competencies. Core self-evaluations and private self-consciousness have a significant impact on an individual's job search self-efficacy, which, in turn, influences job search intentions and, ultimately, job achievement, according to Fort, Lheureux and Auzoult (2023). It implies that improving self-belief and self-awareness can enhance job-seeking behaviour and success, underscoring the significance of internal psychological qualities in determining work outcomes. Individuals may demonstrate more proactive job-search behavior in response to employment risk. Job-search motivation is influenced by both economic necessity and internal beliefs regarding the value of one's knowledge, skills, and abilities (Lippman & McCall, 1979). Furthermore, individuals frequently intensify their job search in response to uncertainty by evaluating the necessary effort, time, and resources to secure employment (Kormendi, 1979). From this perspective, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: An individual's job-search behavior is positively and significantly associated with employment risk.

Self-efficacy, which refers to belief in one's ability to complete specified tasks, is a critical construct in the analysis of job-search motivation. Lent, Brown and Hackett (1994) and Lent (2005) posited that self-efficacy is crucial for goal setting, persistence, and performance. It affects emotional resilience, the strategies employed, and the effort expended in response to obstacles. Guan, Zhou, Zheng, Wen, Fu, Hu et al. (2022) highlighted the influence of perceived job search events on graduates' job search self-efficacy and employment success. Encouraging early job search successes can significantly enhance university students' enthusiasm and outcomes. Positive experiences, such as callbacks or interviews, had a greater impact on perceived progress and the number of job offers. Career planning and job-search behavior are inextricably linked to self-efficacy in employment contexts (Zikic & Klehe, 2006). Although the robustness of the findings has varied, the majority of studies have reported a moderate positive correlation between self-efficacy and job-search intensity (Saks & Ashforth, 2000; Wanberg, Bunce & Gavin, 1999). As a coping mechanism, individuals exposed to increased employment risk may develop more robust self-efficacy beliefs, which they use to enhance their resilience and improve their job prospects.

H2: An individual's level of self-efficacy is strongly and positively correlated with their employment risk.

The job search is a multifaceted process that involves a variety of strategies and phases, rather than a single activity. Two primary stages were identified by Barber, Daly, Giannantonio and Phillips (1994): A preparatory phase that involves career exploration and information gathering, and an active phase that includes applying for employment and attending interviews. Further, Blau (1994) distinguished between goal-directed pursuits and exploratory behaviors. Additionally, search strategies can be classified as either formal or informal. Informal strategies rely on personal and professional networks, whereas formal methods include job portals, employment agencies, and institutional placements (Schwab, Rynes & Aldag, 1987). In general, employment outcomes are improved by increased job-search intensity, as it broadens access to opportunities and increases exposure to

quality job information (Dahal, 2018; Saks & Ashforth, 1997; Shahi, Dahal & Sharma, 2022). Economic hardship and financial distress frequently exacerbate the urgency of job searching, which is associated with increased job attainment (Wanberg, Hough & Song, 2002).

Self-efficacy and other psychological and motivational resources are essential for effectively managing the demands of job searching. Individuals who possess greater self-efficacy are more likely to endure adversity, manage their emotions effectively, and adjust their strategies accordingly (Saks & Ashforth, 2000; Wanberg et al., 1999). Emotional stability also enhances job-search efficacy by reducing the adverse effects of anxiety and self-doubt.

H3: Job-search behavior is significantly and positively correlated with one's level of self-efficacy.

Proactive and successful job search behavior has been consistently associated with personality traits such as extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness (Kanfer et al., 2001; Wanberg, Glomb, Song & Sorenson, 2005). Extraverted people are more likely to be socially engaged, while those who are conscientious are more persistent and organized. Those who are open are more innovative in their search strategies. Emotional regulation during the job search process is facilitated by low neuroticism. Although agreeableness has been less extensively investigated, it has demonstrated modest positive correlations with job-search activity (Judge, 2009; Lopez-Kidwell, Grosser, Dineen & Borgatti, 2013). Motivation and perseverance in the job search are also significantly predicted by core self-evaluations, which encompass self-esteem, locus of control, and emotional stability. Individuals' approaches to the process are influenced by their attitudes towards employment and unemployment, including optimism, anxiety, and job-search commitment. Greater effort and sustained motivation are frequently the result of positive expectations and strong employment values (Saks, 2005; van-Hooft, 2018).

Győri, Perpék and Ádám (2025) emphasized that emotional demands and interpersonal pressures pose a significant risk to mental health in the human services industry. Although further research is needed to identify job-specific risk factors, the authors emphasized the importance of psychosocial risk management in creating safer work environments, enhancing mental well-being, and reducing employee turnover. Critics have observed that the role of contextual variables was frequently underemphasized in the earlier job-search literature (Saks, 2005). External factors, including financial pressure, social support, and labour market dynamics, are incorporated into recent models, including those proposed by Kanfer et al. (2001) and van-Hooft (2018). For example, job candidates who face economic hardship may conduct hasty or reactive job searches, which can result in inferior job quality (van-Hooft et al., 2013). The cyclical relationship between self-efficacy, job performance, and career advancement was further emphasized by Alessandri, Borgogni and Latham (2025). Their results suggest that success reinforces self-efficacy, thereby establishing a feedback cycle that promotes long-term development and sustains motivation.

Motivation is not the only factor that influences self-efficacy; it also serves as a mediator between contextual challenges and behavioral outcomes. Recent research has underscored the mediating role of self-efficacy in the transition from employment risk to job search behavior, drawing on Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior and Feather's (1992) coping theory. Its predictive role in job-search intensity and employment success is supported by meta-analytical evidence (Kanfer et al., 2001). The centrality of self-efficacy was further underscored by Petruzzello, Mariani, Chiesa and Guglielmi (2021), who discovered that it mediates the relationship between work status and anxiety.

H4: The relationship between employment risk and job-search behavior is mediated by an individual's self-efficacy.

The conceptual framework, Figure 1, posits a hypothesized relationship between perceived employment risk and job search behavior, with self-efficacy theorized to mediate this association. Drawing on Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) and the Job Search Self-Regulation Framework (van-Hooft, 2018), the model suggests that employment risk perceptions may influence job search behaviors both directly and indirectly through their impact on individuals' self-efficacy beliefs.

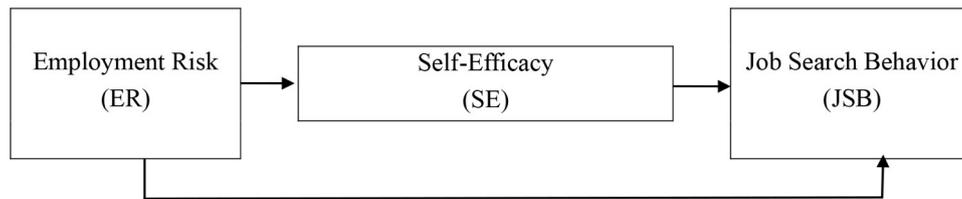


Figure 1. The conceptual framework

3. Materials and Procedures

This study observed the direct and mediated effects of employment risk on job-search behavior among service sector job seekers in Nepal, with self-efficacy examined as a key mediating variable. Adopting a quantitative research design, the study collected primary data through a structured questionnaire administered to recent graduates (aged 21-35 years) who completed their undergraduate or graduate studies in 2024 and were actively pursuing employment opportunities in Nepal's service industry. Given the challenges of obtaining a random sample from the specific, hard-to-reach population of recent graduates actively seeking jobs in Nepal's service sector, a purposive sampling approach was implemented to ensure participants met the study's inclusion criteria: (a) they should be within 21-35 years of age, (b) they should have either completed their undergraduate or graduate studies in 2024, and (c) they should be actively looking for jobs in Nepal's service industry. The method was seen as suitable considering the nature of the population and the study's focus on psychological and behavioral dynamics of recent graduates. To reduce the risk of selection bias and to increase diversity in the sample, recruitment was done through various means: online surveys shared through university networks, alumni associations, and job portals, as well as data collection carried out personally at the educational institutions that were involved. Even though purposive sampling does not allow for broad generalizations, it guarantees that the sample is of utmost relevance to the research questions and to the context of the Nepalese service sector.

The study employed a structured questionnaire comprising 37 items divided into four distinct sections: (A) Demographic Information (4 items), (B) Employment Risk Perceptions (11 items), (C) Self-Efficacy (13 items), and (D) Job Search Behavior (9 items). The instrument utilized a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) for all 33 substantive items across sections B-D, ensuring standardized measurement of key constructs. To enhance validity, the questionnaire underwent rigorous development, including expert review by three organizational psychology specialists and pilot testing with 30 participants. The pilot study confirmed strong internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.70$ for all scales) and led to minor linguistic refinements. For comprehensive data collection, the survey was administered through multiple channels: online via Google Forms (distributed through university networks, alumni associations, and job portals) and in-person at participating educational institutions that facilitated access to their graduate databases. This multi-modal approach improved sample representativeness while accommodating diverse respondent preferences.

The data collection period spanned February to May 2024, during which 2,000 survey invitations were distributed to eligible participants using purposive sampling techniques. To optimize response rates, a multi-pronged recruitment strategy was implemented: (1) bi-weekly email and social media reminders with survey links, (2) in-person administration at university career centers, and (3) collaboration with academic institutions for targeted outreach. The study maintained strict ethical protocols, including obtaining informed consent prior to participation and ensuring complete anonymity by collecting no personally identifiable information. From the initial distribution, 234 complete responses were obtained (11.7% response rate), with partial responses excluded to ensure data quality. This sample size exceeds the threshold of 200 cases recommended by Kline (2016) and Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson (2018) for structural equation modeling in social science research, providing adequate statistical power for hypothesis testing. Respondent characteristics are summarized in Table 1, which presents key demographic variables including gender distribution (59% female, 41% male), age ranges (21-25 years: 47.9%; 26-30 years: 38%; 30-35 years: 14.1%), and educational attainment (48.7% undergraduates, 51.3% graduates).

To establish the internal consistency of the measurement instrument, the study conducted reliability analyses using Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all observed and latent variables, with results presented in Table 2. All

constructs showed strong reliability, with alpha values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2018): Employment Risk subscales ($\alpha = 0.812 - 0.826$), Self-Efficacy dimensions ($\alpha = 0.805 - 0.909$), and Job Search Behavior components ($\alpha = 0.703 - 0.783$). These results confirm that the measurement scales exhibited satisfactory internal consistency, with each item reliably contributing to its respective construct. The high reliability coefficients across all measured variables support the robustness of the instrument for examining the hypothesized relationships in the structural model.

	Nos	%		Nos	%
<i>Respondent's Sex:</i>			<i>Educational Status:</i>		
Female	138	59.0	Undergraduates	114	48.7
Male	96	41.0	Graduates	120	51.3
<i>Respondent's Age Group:</i>			<i>Experience in any Job:</i>		
21-25 Yrs.	112	47.9	No Experience Yet	142	60.7
26-30 Yrs.	89	38.0	Less than 1 Yr.	64	27.3
30-35 Yrs.	33	14.1	More than 1 Yr.	28	12.0
Total for each section	234	100.0	Total for each section	234	100.0

Table 1. The Respondents

	Observed Variables	Value of Cronbach's Alpha
<i>Employment Risk [ER]:</i>		
Boredom and Lack of Engagement [BLE]	3	0.812
Lack of Perseverance and Task Management [LPTM]	4	0.823
Perceived Insufficiency in Training and Experience [PITE]	4	0.826
<i>Self-Efficacy [SE]:</i>		
Achievement Orientation [AO]	6	0.909
Confidence in Own Opinions and Self-Approval [COOSA]	3	0.821
Planning, Responsibility, and Time Management [PRTM]	4	0.805
<i>Job Search Behavior [JSB]:</i>		
Personal Factors [PFs]	3	0.783
Skills and Competence [SC]	3	0.748
Behavioral Factors [BFs]	3	0.703
	33	

Table 2. Reliability Statistics

The study employed a comprehensive Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) framework to rigorously test the hypothesized relationships between employment risk, self-efficacy, and job-search behavior. The analytical procedure followed established best practices in multivariate analysis (Kline, 2016; Hair et al., 2018). First, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with principal axis factoring and Promax rotation was conducted to establish the underlying factor structure and eliminate cross-loading items, retaining only indicators with factor loadings > 0.50 on their respective constructs. Subsequently, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed to validate the measurement model, which indicated an excellent fit and met all recommended thresholds. The measurement model exhibited strong psychometric properties, with composite reliability (CR) scores exceeding 0.70 and average variance extracted (AVE) values above 0.50 for all constructs, establishing convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity was confirmed through the Fornell-Larcker criterion, where the square root of each construct's AVE exceeded its correlations with other constructs. Furthermore, Harman's single-factor test indicated that common method bias was not a significant concern, with the single factor explaining only 44.6% of the total variance, which falls below the recommended cut-off value of 50%, as advised by Cho and Lee (2012). Convergent validity was rigorously assessed through two established metrics, as presented in Table 3: (1) average variance extracted (AVE) and (2) construct reliability (CR).

	ER			SE			JSB			Major Constructs		
	BLE	LPTM	PITE	AO	COOSA	PRTM	PFs	SC	BFs	ER	SE	JSB
CR	0.844	0.829	0.828	0.910	0.831	0.801	0.820	0.752	0.702	0.821	0.923	0.865
AVE	0.656	0.558	0.551	0.629	0.624	0.518	0.612	0.503	0.424	0.633	0.799	0.686

Table 3. Convergent Validity Insights

The convergent validity analysis revealed robust psychometric properties for all constructs except Behavioral Factors (BFs), with both composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) meeting established thresholds ($CR \geq 0.70$; $AVE \geq 0.50$) as recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981). Specifically, the constructs demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Employment Risk: $CR = 0.821$, $AVE = 0.633$; Self-Efficacy: $CR = 0.923$, $AVE = 0.799$; Job Search Behavior: $CR = 0.865$, $AVE = 0.686$). While the BFs subscale showed a marginally lower AVE (0.424), this still meets the acceptability criterion ($AVE \geq 0.40$) for exploratory research contexts (Bagozzi & Baumgartner, 1994), permitting its inclusion in subsequent analyses.

The analysis further confirmed the absence of multicollinearity concerns, as evidenced by inter-construct correlations below the 0.70 threshold ($r = 0.669$ between ER and SE) (Meyers, Gamst & Guarino, 2006). Discriminant validity was established through the Fornell-Larcker criterion, where the square roots of AVEs for each construct ($\sqrt{AVEER} = 0.796$; $\sqrt{AVESE} = 0.894$) exceeded their corresponding inter-construct correlations, confirming that the measures capture distinct phenomena (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). These comprehensive validity tests support the appropriateness of proceeding with structural model estimation since all items revealed significant factor loadings (> 0.50) on their intended constructs in the Confirmatory Factor Analysis, and satisfactory item-total correlations.

The mediation analysis in this study followed the established methodological framework outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986) and further refined by Hayes (2018). First, the study established a significant direct effect between the independent variable (employment risk) and the dependent variable (job search behavior). Next, it examined the relationship between the independent variable (employment risk) and the mediator (self-efficacy), followed by testing the mediator's effect on the dependent variable while controlling for the independent variable. Finally, it assessed whether the inclusion of the mediator reduced or eliminated the direct effect, indicating full or partial mediation. To statistically validate the indirect effect, the study employed bootstrapping with 2,000 resamples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008), which provides more reliable confidence intervals, particularly with smaller sample sizes. The analysis was conducted using structural equation modeling (SEM) to account for measurement error in latent constructs, following recommendations by Iacobucci (2008) for mediation testing in SEM frameworks.

4. Outcomes

While analyzing and interpreting the data, the study utilized SEM (Structural Equation Modeling). Figure 2 illustrates the conventional estimations of the impact of the employment risk model on job-searching behavior, specifically excluding the mediation role of self-efficacy.

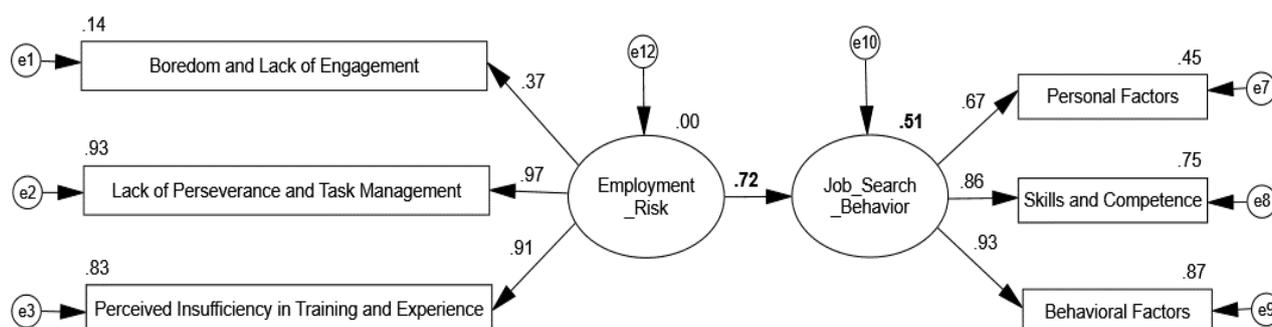


Figure 2. The study model without mediating the role of self-efficacy on job-searching behavior

The structural equation modeling results reveal several key findings (see Figures 2 and 3). First, the direct effects model (Figure 2) reveals a strong, statistically significant relationship between perceived employment risk and job-search behavior among Nepalese graduates ($\beta = 0.716$, $CR = 8.646$, $p < .01$), with employment risk accounting for 51% of the variance in job-search activity ($R^2 = 0.510$). This substantial effect size suggests that heightened perceptions of job market uncertainty significantly motivate active job-seeking behaviors.

The mediated model (Figure 3) presents a more nuanced understanding of this relationship. When incorporating self-efficacy as a mediator, the model explains 86% of the variance in job-search behavior ($R^2 = 0.860$), representing a 35% improvement in explanatory power. This substantial increase in explanatory power underscores the critical mediating role of self-efficacy, which accounted for a significant additional variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.350$) beyond that explained by employment risk alone.

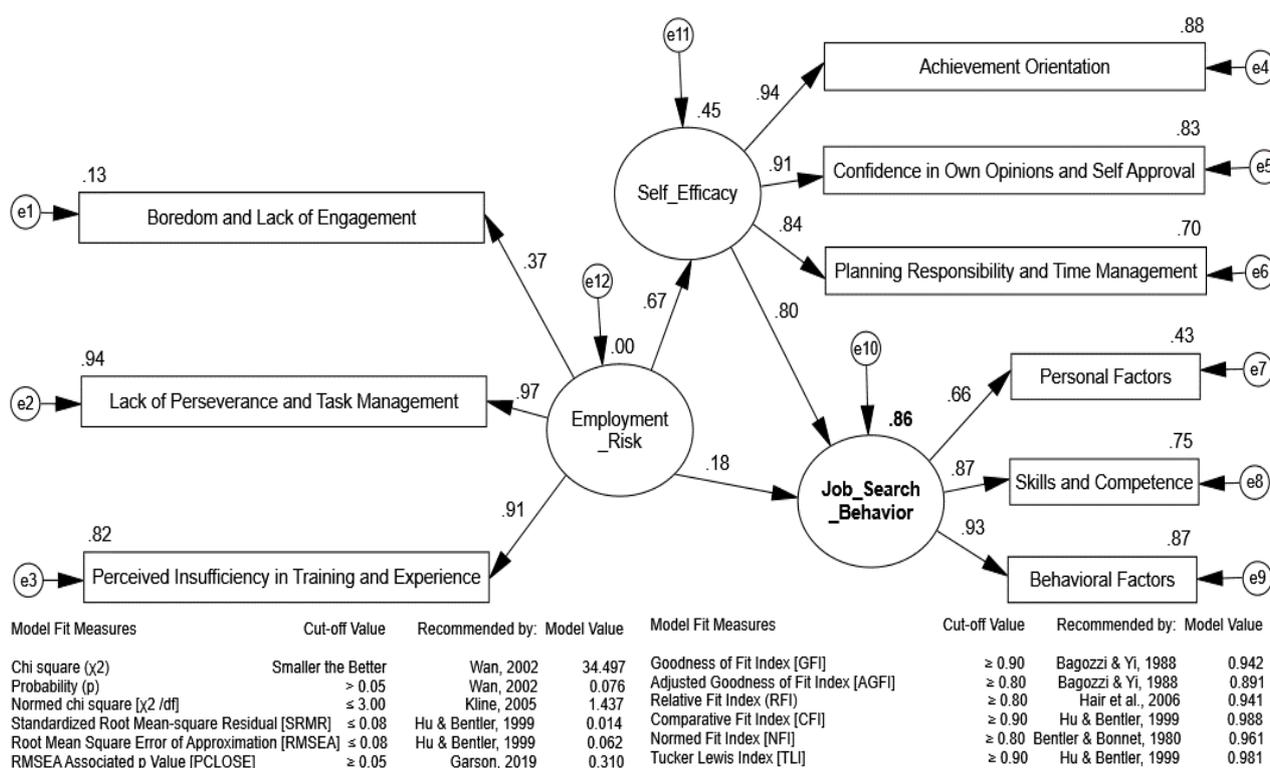


Figure 3. The study model mediating the role of self-efficacy on job-searching behavior

The structural equation model (Figure 3) exhibits an excellent fit to the empirical data, with all fit indices exceeding the recommended thresholds (for example, $\chi^2/df = 1.437$, $CFI = 0.988$, $RMSEA = 0.062$), indicating a strong correspondence between the hypothesized relationships and the observed patterns (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The model specification followed established guidelines for SEM applications in social science research (Hair et al., 2018), incorporating appropriate modifications based on modification indices while maintaining theoretical coherence. All parameter estimates were examined for statistical significance using critical ratios ($CR > 1.96$) and bootstrap confidence intervals (2000 samples), ensuring robust inference about the structural relationships. Table 4 presents detailed regression path estimates, revealing the direct, indirect, and total effects of the study variables. The findings collectively support the hypothesized model while demonstrating superior predictive power compared to alternative specifications.

The model's path coefficients (Table 4) yielded several key insights into the hypothesized relationships. First, employment risk (ER) demonstrated a strong direct effect on job search behavior (JSB) ($\beta = 0.716$, $p < .05$), supporting Hypothesis 1. This suggests that heightened perceptions of job market uncertainty significantly motivate active job-seeking activities among Nepalese graduates. Furthermore, the finding aligns with the push-pull motivational framework (Lee & Mitchell, 1994), suggesting that perceived job insecurity acts as a

“push” factor, driving individuals to intensify their job-search efforts. Second, the analysis revealed that ER positively influences self-efficacy (SE) ($\beta = 0.669$, $p < .05$), confirming Hypothesis 2, while SE itself showed a robust effect on JSB ($\beta = 0.800$, $p < .05$), supporting Hypothesis 3. These findings align with Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), demonstrating how environmental factors (employment risk) and personal factors (self-efficacy) jointly shape job-search behaviors. Furthermore, the employment risk perceptions primarily influence job-search behaviors through their impact on individuals’ confidence in their job-search capabilities.

Regression-Path	Regression Estimates		Standard Error	Critical Ratio	p-value	Remarks
	Unstandardized	Standardized				
<i>Direct Influence:</i>						
H1: ER → JSB	0.489	0.716	0.057	8.464	***	Accepted
H2: ER → SE	0.334	0.669	0.045	7.385	***	Accepted
H3: SE → JSB	1.104	0.800	0.123	8.999	***	Accepted
<i>Indirect Influence:</i>						
H4: ER → SE → JSB	0.122	0.176	0.050	2.433	0.015	Accepted
	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect		Remarks	
H4: Employment Risk → Self-Efficacy → Job Search Behavior	0.122 (NS) ($p = 0.106$)	0.369 (***) ($p = 0.001$)	0.491 (***) ($p = 0.002$)		Full Mediation	

Table 4. Regression-Path Estimates and the Model’s Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects

Most importantly, the mediation posited in Hypothesis 4, the study employed a bootstrapping procedure with 2,000 resamples to generate a 95 % confidence interval for the indirect effects. This analysis confirmed a statistically significant indirect effect of ER on job-search behavior through self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.176$, $p < .05$). Crucially, the bootstrap confidence interval for this indirect effect did not include zero. Furthermore, the direct ER-JSB relationship became non-significant when SE was included in the model ($\beta = 0.122$, $p = .106$). This pattern of results – a significant indirect effect alongside a non-significant direct effect - meets the criteria for full mediation, indicating that self-efficacy fully explains the relationship between employment risk and job-search behavior. The mediation effect accounts for 35% of the total variance in job-search outcomes, highlighting SE’s crucial role in translating employment risk perceptions into proactive job-search behaviors. This finding aligns with Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1997), which posits that environmental factors (like job market risks) primarily influence behavior through cognitive mechanisms (like self-efficacy judgments). The results support Rucker, Preacher, Tormala and Petty (2011) distinction between indirect-only mediation (where only the indirect path is significant) and full mediation, confirming that self-efficacy serves as the exclusive mechanism through which employment risk affects job-search behaviors in this context.

5. Discussions

The outcomes of this research offered strong empirical backing for the presumed connections between employment risk, self-efficacy, and job search behavior of Nepalese graduates working in the service industry. The service sector, which is one of the biggest global employers, opens up easy access through jobs that need little or no previous experience, and at the same time, it imparts soft skills that are the basis of professional growth, like teamwork, communication, and problem-solving. This allows job seekers to build employability and self-confidence, thereby strengthening the power of self-efficacy in urging and holding up job search activities. The dynamic nature of the sector offers a realistic setting for the improvement of flexibility and strength, thus making the job profiles more attractive. Working in the services industry might bring about a change in the job seekers’ self-esteem, which in turn would make them more persistent and effective in their search for a job. This is in line with the self-determination theory, which stresses the role of perceived competence as a major factor in motivating behavior.

Individuals who consider their employment to be at risk might be under greater pressure to look for jobs. On the other hand, the same perception could diminish their self-confidence, make their search less effective. Job

seekers' attitudes, mainly their feelings towards unemployment, employment, and the job search process, are the main factors influencing their behavior. This study points out the significance of key psychological factors, like self-efficacy and anxiety, affecting the job search. As per motivation and self-regulation theories, the greater the commitment to a job, the more the dissatisfaction with current conditions, the better the job search attitudes, and the more the favorable self-assessments, the more and better both engagement and results in the job search process are likely to be.

Enthusiasm and self-regulation theories (Ajzen, 1991; Feather, 1992) suggest that increased commitment to employment, dissatisfaction with current conditions, positive job search attitudes (accompanied by reduced anxiety), and favorable self-evaluations are likely to improve job search engagement and results. Additionally, self-determination theory posits that self-efficacy is a crucial predictor of motivation and competence (Liu, Wang, Liao & Shi, 2014). Motivation and self-regulation theories underscore the importance of self-efficacy in influencing an individual's job search endeavors. The literature review identified 33 observable variables within three primary constructs – ER, SE, and JSB. The first construct ER was further analyzed with 11 observed variables within three sub-constructs: BLE [3 Vs], LPTM [4 Vs], and PITTE [4 Vs]. Each of the 11 observed variables measures the probability of someone losing their work or having trouble finding new employment. Similarly, we analyzed the second construct, SE, using 13 observed variables divided into three sub-constructs: AO (6 Vs), COOSA (3 Vs), and PRTM (4 Vs). These 13 factors indicate a person's confidence in their ability to complete activities or achieve specific objectives.

In the past, researchers have considered self-efficacy as the internal psychological mechanism through which individuals cope with risk and uncertainty. Foundations such as Bandura's (1991) Social Cognitive Theory, Feather's (1992) Expectancy-Value Model, Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior, and Self-Determination Theory have all pointed to the importance of the internal psychological mechanism in dealing with external uncertainties. Nevertheless, self-efficacy as a dynamic mediator has not been properly tested in the service sectors with high risk. This study's results show that individuals with high self-efficacy trait not only tolerate job uncertainty better than others but are also able to employ different strategies such as being more fluent, more involved, and even using a combination of these strategies. Thus, through empirical evidence, the gap between risk perception and proactive job search has become shorter. Liu et al. (2014) have certainly laid the groundwork that self-efficacy is both the predictor in SDT and the motivational resource when it comes to the area of employment stability but our research goes one step further and not only provides evidence for but also extends the theorization of the motivating and self-regulation schemes (Ajzen, 1991; Feather, 1992) to the contexts of unemployed instability.

Furthermore, by adapting Bandura's (1991) social cognitive theory to a high-risk work environment, the current study theoretically refines it. It shows that self-efficacy is a motivating factor that boosts job-search efforts, in addition to acting as a protective barrier against psychological stressors such as anxiety and fear of failure. Research by Rusu, Chiriac, Sălăgean and Hojbotă (2013) and Petruzzello et al. (2021) also supports this, demonstrating that the effects of employment status on psychological well-being are mediated by job-search self-efficacy. Nevertheless, the majority of this research has concentrated on general employment contexts, paying little attention to industries that are unstable and undergo rapid change, like the service sector. By placing these dynamics into a sector that is marked by high turnover, low job security, and seasonal employment trends—all of which naturally increase employment risk—the current study closes this gap.

The cultural context of Nepal, characterized by collective values and strong family influence on career decisions, may shape how employment risk is perceived and navigated. In such settings, social pressure and familial obligations might amplify the perceived stakes of job seeking, potentially intensifying the relationship between risk and self-efficacy. Consequently, the strong mediating role of self-efficacy explored in the study might be even more crucial in collectivist cultures as a personal resource to counteract external pressures. Future cross-cultural study comparing individualistic and collective societies could valuably examine the boundary conditions and cultural moderators of the study's proposed model.

The work has various practical ramifications in addition to its theoretical contributions. To increase job seekers' resilience and motivation, career counselors, vocational training programs, and employment assistance agencies

can incorporate self-efficacy-enhancing techniques like goal-setting, feedback, peer modeling, and practical experience in their curricula. Employers and human resources departments can also establish work cultures that support self-efficacy by encouraging employee participation in decision-making, providing skills training, and fostering autonomy. These tactics not only boost workers' self-esteem but also help them be more flexible and retain staff during unpredictable economic times.

Notwithstanding these advances, several drawbacks suggest possible avenues for further study. Firstly, although the mediating function of self-efficacy is the primary focus of this study, other psychological concepts, such as optimism, locus of control, or psychological capital, may potentially interact with job risk and require additional research. Second, the cross-sectional nature of the study limits the ability to infer causal relationships. A more dynamic understanding of how self-efficacy changes over time in response to continuous job search experiences and changes in the job market may be possible with a longitudinal study. Thirdly, future research could compare various industry contexts (such as manufacturing, technology, and education) to see if the mediating role of self-efficacy is consistent across domains, even though this study focuses on the service sector, which is especially pertinent given its economic volatility.

Additionally, an intriguing research path is the association between job-search behavior, employment quality, and financial strain, which was stated but not empirically investigated in this study. According to van-Hooft et al. (2013), individuals under financial stress may feel more pressure to find employment, which could lead them to accept jobs that are not a good fit for their goals and abilities. Understanding how self-efficacy mediates or moderates this trade-off is crucial for effective practice and policy. This study provides a theoretically sound and empirically substantiated contribution to our understanding of how self-efficacy mediates the impact of employment risk on job search behavior. It provides a strong model of individual agency for overcoming job market obstacles by combining ideas from social cognitive frameworks, motivational theory, and self-regulation. It establishes the foundation for future studies and focused interventions that aim to improve employability and resilience in the face of economic volatility.

Chakravarty, Lundberg, Nikolov and Zenker (2019) examined a vocational training program in Nepal, yielding significant increases in non-farm employment and earnings, especially among women who shifted to self-employment. The authors attribute these outcomes to the program's ability to challenge the country's low education levels and restrictive gender norms. Their results indicate that vocational training can have varying effects, particularly in developing countries such as Nepal, depending on the cultural and labor-market context. These findings emphasized the necessity of conducting future cross-national comparisons to determine whether comparable mechanisms are operational in distinct cultural or labor-market environments, particularly in environments with varying degrees of labor-market formalization and contrasting individualism–collectivism orientations.

Uwakwe, Okolie, Ehiobuche, Ochinawata and Idike (2023) explored the impact of psychological capital: hope, self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience on the job search behaviors of Nigerian graduates. The research revealed that graduates who had completed work placements exhibited more robust job search behaviors, particularly in the areas of optimism and self-efficacy. These resources highlighted the importance of psychological capital in improving job search outcomes, enhancing both preparatory and active job search activities. To expand the motivational landscape and evaluate multi-mediator or moderation models, future longitudinal research should incorporate these constructs.

6. Conclusion

Due to its diverse range of job options and opportunities for experiential learning, the service industry offers a vibrant and valuable setting for job seekers to develop self-efficacy. People can gain confidence in their skills through practical experiences and ongoing skill development, which is essential for navigating today's unpredictable job market. This study provides important insights into the motivational processes that affect people's reactions to employment uncertainty by highlighting the mediating role of self-efficacy in the link between employment risk and job-seeking behavior.

The study theoretically adds to the body of literature by incorporating Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to clarify how self-efficacy serves as a crucial psychological mechanism that connects internal motivation and behavior (such as job-searching effort) to external problems (such as employment risk). The results highlight the significance of intrinsic motivational resources, especially perceived competence, in influencing how people approach work-related obstacles. The study enhances current theoretical frameworks in motivational research and employment psychology by emphasizing self-efficacy as a mediating variable, which promotes further research into the dynamic interaction of environmental circumstances and individual beliefs.

The outcome of this study provides clear indications for career counselors, vocational training programs, and policymakers. The interventions should not only focus on basic skills training but also include some advanced components for building self-efficacy. In high-risk occupations, people having more self-efficacy are the ones who show even more perseverance, motivation, and even engage on a strategic level in job searching. Therefore, career support services can carry out the targeted mentoring initiatives, skill-development workshops, and empowerment-focused counseling to make the job seekers more assertive and robust. It is especially the service sector organizations that can reap the benefits when they develop the workplace to be of free choice, creative, and engaging. Putting in place the structured training, mentorship programs, and recognition systems can then turn employees' confidence and sense of control over their roles to higher levels. The above-mentioned activities would not only be responsible for self-efficacy but also for job satisfaction, retention, and productivity improvement.

Organizations, especially within the service sector, can gain advantages by cultivating work environments that promote autonomy, problem-solving skills, and active consumer interaction. Such cultures not only foster self-efficacy but also enhance employee retention and job satisfaction. Structured training programs, mentorship initiatives, and recognition mechanisms that enhance employees' confidence and sense of control over their roles are essential to attaining this. By fostering an environment in which employees are encouraged to assume responsibility for their work, organizations can enhance both employee well-being and productivity.

Policymakers may also utilize these findings to inform employment and labor market policies. Recognizing the significance of self-efficacy in facilitating successful job-seeking behavior, particularly among vulnerable populations experiencing employment insecurity, can inform the development of more comprehensive policies. To effectively help people who are looking for work, these policies should focus on both psychological empowerment and skill development. Comprehending the role of self-efficacy as a mediator can further deepen our understanding of individuals' responses to occupational risks, providing a crucial basis for designing interventions that enhance employment outcomes, motivation, and resilience.

To enhance the employability of youth in Nepal, it is crucial to synchronize the efforts of primary stakeholders. Employers can support this effort by providing well-organized mentorship programs and internship opportunities, thereby fostering workforce preparedness. Universities can assist students by offering self-efficacy development programs and facilitating mock interviews to enhance their confidence in the job-search process. Government initiatives such as job fairs and training subsidies can diminish uncertainty and broaden employment opportunities. Furthermore, non-governmental organizations can provide essential psychological support, including peer programs and counseling services, which assist youthful job seekers in sustaining motivation, resilience, and a constructive outlook throughout their employment search.

7. Limitations and Future Scope

The employment of purposive sampling in this study, although essential for focusing on a particular population, constrains the extent to which the findings can be generalized. Future research should consider employing stratified or probability sampling methods to enhance representativeness across various occupational and demographic populations. Furthermore, although self-efficacy is the primary focus of the present study, other psychological factors such as optimism, locus of control, and resilience may also significantly influence job-seeking behavior. Future research ought to examine these factors in order to develop a more comprehensive model.

The cross-sectional design employed in this study limits the capacity to draw causal inferences. Because the study obtained the data at a single moment, it cannot determine the directional correlations among the variables. To address this, future research should employ longitudinal designs to more effectively examine how employment hazards, self-efficacy, and job-seeking behaviors interact over time. Furthermore, dependence on self-reported data may lead to biases, including social desirability bias or recall bias. Future research ought to utilize validated measurement instruments and contemplate implementing more rigorous sampling techniques to enhance data integrity.

Finally, although the study concentrated on the service sector, future research could profitably explore the impact of self-efficacy and other psychological variables on job-seeking behavior across diverse industries with varying employment hazards, such as manufacturing or technology. Examining these contextual factors will offer a more comprehensive understanding of how industry-specific characteristics influence the job-search process.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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