

# Evaluating a job search strategy model of fit perceptions: a construct validation amongst unemployed job seekers

Job search  
strategy model  
of fit  
perceptions

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Emmanuel Affum-Osei and Henry Kofi Mensah

*Department of Human Resources and Organisational Development, School of Business, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana*

Eric Adom Asante

*Department of Management, Lingnan University, Tuen Mun, Hong Kong, and*

Solomon Kwarteng Forkuoh

*Department of Entrepreneurship and Finance Management,  
Kumasi Technical University, Kumasi, Ghana*

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this study is to examine the (1) psychometric properties of Crossley and Highhouse's job search strategy scale and (2) the predictive utility of the scale on fit perceptions.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Data were collected from unemployed job seekers in Ghana ( $n_{T1} = 720$ ;  $n_{T2} = 418$ ). Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were conducted to examine the data.

**Findings** – Exploratory factor analysis on the first random sub-sample ( $n = 362$ ) supported a three-factor model. Confirmatory factor analysis on the second random sub-sample ( $n = 358$ ) confirmed the three-factor structure and was invariant across job search contexts and genders. Moreover, structural path results showed that the use of focussed and exploratory job search strategies facilitated positive fit perceptions and the use of haphazard job search resulted in poor job fit perceptions.

**Originality/value** – This study is the first to examine the dimensionality of job search strategies based on different job search context by linking it to fit perceptions. Moreover, the authors provide evidence that the job search strategy scale has a valid psychometric property and a promising instrument to assess job search behaviour across job search contexts and genders in an understudied population.

**Keywords** Job search behaviour, Job search strategy, Fit perceptions, Measurement invariance

**Paper type** Research paper

Unemployment has undeniably become a major economic and societal issue in most countries around the world. It affects people's psychological well-being and reduces tax revenues (Paul and Moser, 2009; Virga and Rusu, 2018). For example, at individual level, career failures have been associated with career-related suicides (Duff and Chan, 2014). Given that recent job market is characterised by job insecurity (Cheng and Chan, 2008), more and more unemployed people want to end the unemployment phenomenon by seeking employment (Wanberg, 2012). This is because employability has been found to positively influence psychological well-being (Vanhercke *et al.*, 2014). Thus, finding suitable jobs is particularly important for both career practitioners and job seekers because incongruence between the found jobs and the job seekers' objectives may lead to negative consequences including low job satisfaction, decreased productivity and turnover intentions (Koen *et al.*, 2010). Consequently, job seekers are expected to target quality jobs, which could foster



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long-lasting employment. Research has consistently reported that the intensity at which people search for jobs contributes to their employment success (Amato *et al.*, 2016; Wanberg *et al.*, 1999). However, job search intensity has been found to contribute a small proportion to employment quality (Kanfer *et al.*, 2001).

Scholars have laid less emphasis on job search strategy as a measure of job search despite its impact on employment quality (Koen *et al.*, 2010; Taggar and Kuron, 2016). Therefore, the focus of job search activities should be on the quality of job search strategies, which could facilitate both employment success and quality (Van Hooff *et al.*, 2013). Crossley and Highhouse (2005) conceptualised three major types of job search strategies relevant to quality employment: focussed search, exploratory search and haphazard search strategies. With focussed search, individuals have clear employment goals and apply to their preferred jobs until they find what they are looking for. With exploratory search, individuals strive to gather job information from various sources and fully explore their options. With haphazard search, individuals have unclear employment goals and apply for jobs through trial and error approach.

Research shows that exploratory and focussed job search strategies are associated with finding jobs with a better fit, while a haphazard search strategy is related to poor job fits (Koen *et al.*, 2010, 2016). Although job seekers can use the three different job search strategies to a greater or lesser extent during the employment process (Koen *et al.*, 2016), the three search strategies are independent of each other (Stevens and Beach, 1996) and thus influence job search outcomes differently (De Battisti *et al.*, 2016; Koen *et al.*, 2016). Although previous studies have advanced the concept of job search strategy, there is still much to explore regarding the validity of the job search strategy measure. Evidence of the validity of the job search strategy scale is mostly based on exploratory and cross-sectional analyses (Crossley and Highhouse, 2005; Taggar and Kuron, 2016). Additionally, research has reported mixed findings on the reliability and validity of the job search strategy scale. While some scholars have reported high validity of the job search strategies (e.g. Konstam *et al.*, 2015; Taggar and Kuron, 2016), others have also reported some level of low reliability and validity. For example, the reliability of focussed job search strategy of Crossley and Highhouse's (2005) scale was low (<0.70) and about four items of the exploratory factor analysis showed low loadings (<0.50). Koen *et al.* (2010, 2016) had similar reliability issue with haphazard and focussed job search strategies.

Therefore, rigorous validity analyses could facilitate the extensive use of the measure in different cultures and job search contexts. Additionally, studies on job search behaviour and strategies have long been dominated with data from developed nations of the West (Wanberg *et al.*, 1999) bringing to question the universal application of measures developed to test it. Given that developing nations have peculiar cultural circumstance (Barnard, 2020; George *et al.*, 2016), the application of job search strategies may be affected by the existing socio-cultural circumstance. Concerns of psychological assessment have long history given its impact on socio-cultural factors (Hui and Triandis, 1985). It follows that the socio-economic environment is likely to impact the choice of people's job search behaviours (Van Hooff *et al.*, 2005). Consequently, the aim of this study is to validate the job search strategy measure in Ghana, a low-and-middle income country.

Research shows that the three types of job search strategies are related to different fit perceptions (e.g. need-supply fit) (Koen *et al.*, 2010). Additionally, job search strategies have been found to be related to self-regulation variables (Crossley and Highhouse, 2005; Taggar and Kuron, 2016). As such, this study also explores the relationships between job search strategies and fit perceptions as well as other criterion variables (e.g. strategy awareness) to ascertain the predictive utility and construct validity of the job search strategy scale.

Specifically, the aim of this study is to validate the job search strategy scale by Crossley and Highhouse (2005): (1) to ascertain excellent psychometric properties to facilitate its

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universal and wider applicability with other measures in different job search contexts and (2) for career counselling and practitioners to integrate the measure with other scales in their assessment of potential job seekers to facilitate practical work, for example, their fit-perceptions (Cable and DeRue, 2002).

### 1. Job search strategy, context and pandemic

Job search behaviour describes the amount of time and effort people expend to locate information about job opportunities and apply to them (Hoye and Saks, 2008; Wanberg, 2012). Job search activities may include contacting friends, family members and teachers or using the internet to locate job openings and sending out curriculum vitae to potential employers. Research indicates that job seekers increase their chances of employment when they expend more time and effort on job search activities (i.e. job search intensity: e.g. Amato *et al.*, 2016; Saks and Ashforth, 2000). However, the approach has been reported to explain a small proportion of the variance in quality employment (e.g. Kanfer *et al.*, 2001; Wanberg *et al.*, 1999). As a result, research studies have begun to explore the quality at which job seekers engage in job search activities (e.g. Crossley and Highhouse, 2005; Van Hoye, 2017; Koen *et al.*, 2016; Van Hooft *et al.*, 2013). Job search intensity and effort was found to be related to finding employment (Kanfer *et al.*, 2001) but was found to be unrelated to employment quality (Wanberg *et al.*, 1999). On the other hand, quality job search strategies such as focussed and exploratory have been found to predict employment success and employment quality (e.g. job satisfaction; Crossley and Highhouse, 2005; Koen *et al.*, 2010). Thus, successful job search is more likely with the use of quality job search strategies, which can elicit both employment and postemployment quality jobs (e.g. Koen *et al.*, 2010; Van Hooft *et al.*, 2013). Given that job search strategies seem to be important predictors of job search success, more research is needed in this area (Van Hoye, 2017).

Engaging in quality job search behaviour largely depends on the job search context (Boswell *et al.*, 2012). Unemployment in Ghana has assumed an alarming proportion and it is more pronounced amongst youth. The rates of unemployment continue to increase over the years in Ghana (i.e. 5.8%, 5.2% and 11.9% in 2012/2013, 2013/2014, 2015/2016, respectively: Affum-Osei *et al.*, 2019a). The age bracket of 15–40 years constitutes the largest portion of Ghana's population and the majority of the labour force needed for national development also falls within this age category (Ghana Statistical Service, 2018). Nonetheless, the absorption of this energetic youth into the labour market has been a major challenge (World Bank, 2016) partly because of inexperience in job-seeking amongst the youth (Nyarko *et al.*, 2014). The Ghanaian economy has a difficult labour market (World Bank, 2016) relative to most developed countries (e.g. USA). Job seekers in countries going through industrialisation (e.g. Ghana) largely rely on informal networks for jobs (Affum-Osei *et al.*, 2019a). Thus, the question remained unanswered as to which job search strategy is likely to be used at a greater or lesser extent in such restricted labour markets. The choice of job seekers in such situations has the potential to affect the factor structure of the job search strategy scale. It is therefore critical for individuals to be proactive in their career striving and orientation (Creed and Hennessy, 2016; Creed *et al.*, 2013). One way is to engage in effective job search strategies, which could generate employment success and quality. For these reasons, there is a critical need to validate the job search strategy scale for its use in LMICs (e.g. Ghana).

Job seekers engaging and sustaining high quality job search behaviour could face high level of strain and exhaustion (Lim *et al.*, 2016) especially during coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) era. Unemployed job seekers were already vulnerable prior to the COVID-19 crisis and the closure of businesses and mandatory lockdowns implemented to reduce the spread of the virus have worsened the already dire work and employability context (Kanfer *et al.*, 2020). Given that a lot of businesses closed down during the pandemic,

unemployment skyrocketed and majority of unemployed people were on the dole (Marinescu *et al.*, 2020). Research shows that perceived job insecurity as a result of COVID-19 and financial concerns have worsened mental health of individuals globally (Wilson *et al.*, 2020). With the growing precarity of work, the nature of job search behaviour has changed at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (McFarland *et al.*, 2020). Thus, research on job search behaviour has become more salient because of the impact of COVID-19. We believe that COVID-19 will impact the job search strategies utilised by individuals who are constructing their careers.

## 2. Job search strategy and fit perceptions

Stevens and Beach (1996) described three distinct strategies by which people use to gather information about potential jobs vacancies including focussed, exploratory and haphazard search strategies. People who use a focussed search strategy expend more effort screening potential employers to apply to a small number of job openings, which meet their search criteria. People who use an exploratory search strategy strive to examine several potential employment alternatives and gather employment openings fully. Finally, those who search haphazardly gather information passively including those inside and outside their areas of academic field or previous work experiences.

Research suggests that both focussed and exploratory job search strategies promote quality employment (Crossley and Highhouse, 2005). The quality of employment could be conceptualised as the extent to which job seekers fit into their organisations, jobs and the benefits they receive from their contributions to organisations (Cable and DeRue, 2002; Saks and Ashforth, 2002). Prior research proposes three distinct fit perceptions (Cable and DeRue, 2002). *Person-organisation fit (P-O fit)* indicates the extent to which an individual judge the congruence between his or her personal values and that of the organisation's culture. *Person-job fit (P-J fit)* reflects the judgement of congruence between the individual's skills and the demands of the assigned job. Finally, *needs-supply fit (N-S fit)* suggests an individual's evaluations of congruence between their needs and the rewards they receive in return for their contributions to the assigned job.

First, a focussed search strategy aims at screening a large number of job openings to obtain what one is looking for. Due to narrowing employment options to meet specific criteria (Koen *et al.*, 2010), those who engage in focussed strategy will have better P-O fit, P-J fit and N-S fit. Second, exploratory search strategy implies exploring many employment options, which are associated with more job applications (Taggar and Kuron, 2016). Thus, the exploratory job search strategy does not only influence a large number of job interviews and offers but also facilitates quality fit perceptions (Crossley and Highhouse, 2005; Koen *et al.*, 2010). Lastly, because haphazard job seekers have unclear goals and low standard of job seeking behaviour (Stevens and Beach, 1996; Stevens and Turban, 2001), they are likely to receive a few number of job interviews and offers and consequently lead to poor quality jobs. Taken together, focussed and exploratory search strategies are expected to positively influence fit perceptions (i.e. P-O fit, N-S fit and D-A fit) and haphazard search strategy is posited to be negatively related to fit perceptions (i.e. P-O fit, N-S fit and D-A fit).

## 3. The present study

Research has begun to interrogate the quality of job search activities because the intensity at which people search for jobs has played a slight role in explaining the variance of employment quality. Consequently, a validated instrument to measure job search strategies across different cultural settings is critical and relevant. The goal of the present study is to validate the job search strategy scale in order to facilitate its application in LMICs

(e.g. Ghana). To achieve this goal, the psychometric properties and the predictive utility of the job search strategy scale are explored amongst unemployed job seekers in Ghana. Specifically, reliabilities, convergent validity and discriminant validity of the job search strategy scale are explored. This study also tests for measurement invariance (Vandenberg and Lance, 2000) to examine the measurement equivalence of the scale (Milagre and Goncalves, 2013) across gender (males and females) and job search contexts (i.e. new entrants and job losers). The construct validity of the scale was evaluated with convergent validity and discriminant validity of the scale (Meehl and Cronbach, 1955) by examining its correlations with some criterion variables in the study.

Specifically, for convergent validity, it is expected that job search strategy scale will be significantly related to cognitive self-regulation variables of employment commitment, strategy awareness and learning from failure. This is because job search behaviour has been conceptualised as self-regulation (Kanfer *et al.*, 2001) and has been found to be related to employment commitment (Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2005), feedback seeking (Yamkovenko and Hatala, 2014), career adaptability (Guan *et al.*, 2013) and strategy awareness (Noordzij *et al.*, 2013). Research has shown that job search strategies were not related to demographic variables including age, gender, work experience and educational background (Priyadarshini *et al.*, 2018). Consequently, for discriminant validity, it is expected that job search strategy will not be significantly related to educational level, unemployment duration and job search contexts. Furthermore, a structural equation model is conducted to ascertain the predictive utility of the job search strategies on fit perceptions in the Ghanaian job search context. This is because research has consistently conceptualised employment quality on the notion of fit perceptions (Astakhova, 2016; Astakhova *et al.*, 2017). The study provides evidence of the cross-cultural generalisability of the job search strategy scale. It will also open opportunity for other job seekers and researchers in African countries to utilise the measures in myriad career development purposes.

## 4. Method

### 4.1 Participants and procedures

This study forms part of larger research, which examines motivational determinants of job search strategies in Ghana. Data were collected between October 2017 and August 2018 prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The choice of Ghana is particularly significant due to a number of reasons. Firstly, Ghana has witnessed a relatively stable but progressive socio-political environment in the last couple of decades. Touted as a beacon of democracy and the gateway to Africa (Amankwah-Amoah and Sarpong, 2016), Ghana has made some impressive stride towards economic development. Again, in the past decade Ghana's economy has experienced significant growth, which has translated into a gross domestic product growth rate of 8.5% in 2017 (World Bank, 2018). In 2018, the economy of Ghana was listed as second largest destination of foreign direct investment in West Africa, the seventh in the whole of sub-Saharan Africa (Ernst and Young, 2019). Although Ghana's economy was considered as one of the fastest growing economies in the world between 2017 and 2019 (World Bank 2018; Musah *et al.*, 2019; Azungah *et al.*, 2020), less progress has been made in terms of creation of jobs for the citizenry (World Bank, 2016). Given that the Ghanaian government does not provide unemployment benefits, finding employment has become more critical, especially for young adults who are starting their careers. Consequently, young adults require effective job search strategies and self-regulation capabilities to navigate the employment process to obtain work successfully. Given that the Ghanaian society is considered as a collectivistic culture (Amoako-Agyei, 2009), the type of job search strategies employed during job search may be impacted by cultural orientation (Affum-Osei *et al.*, 2019b). Thus, the current participants will



provide a relevant case study for examining job search strategies in an understudied population.

The employment agencies were contacted to assist in order to gain access to job seekers. These agencies conduct periodic training sections to job seekers. Upon visiting the employment agencies, the purpose of the study was explained, and the research team gained permission to administer the questionnaires. Participation in the survey was voluntary and participants were assured anonymity of their responses. The first survey which was launch in mid-November 2017 consisted of 720 unemployed job seekers (71% males). Their mean age was 27 years (SD = 3.9) and 48% held bachelor's degrees. Their average length of unemployment [1] was eight months. Time 1 data were used to test the psychometric properties of the job search strategy scale. The second wave was conducted six months later and resulted in 440 questionnaires. After removing missing data and incomplete records, we were left with 418 respondents (Response rate = 58%). Their mean age was 27 years (SD = 3.6) and 50% held bachelor's degrees. Their average length of unemployment was seven months. The second wave data were used to test the relationship between job search strategies and fit perceptions. In particular, 137 job seekers obtained employment at Time 2.

#### 4.2 Measures

As discussed above, to examine the predictive utility, convergent and discriminant validity, variables including fit perceptions (i.e. P-O fit, N-S fit and D-A fit), employment commitment, strategy awareness, learning from failure, educational level, unemployment duration and job search contexts [2] were measured. The measures used for the study are described below.

#### 4.3 Job search strategy (Time1)

Job search strategy was assessed with the 16-item scale by Crossley and Highhouse (2005). The 16-item measure assesses the degree to which job seekers sought job information by engaging in (1) focussed search (6 items; e.g. "My information gathering efforts were focused on specific jobs"), (2) exploratory search (6 items; e.g. "I gather information about all possible job opportunities, rather than setting out for something specific") and (3) haphazard search (4 items; e.g. "My job search has been more or less haphazard"). Responses of the scales were on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Crossley and Highhouse (2005) reported alpha reliability of  $\alpha = 0.64$  (for focussed strategy),  $\alpha = 0.70$  (for exploratory strategy) and  $\alpha = 0.77$  (for haphazard strategy). For this study, the reliabilities were 0.78, 0.81 and 0.78, respectively.

*Employment commitment (Time 1)*. The importance or value people attach to work was assessed with a six-item scale (Rowley and Feather, 1987) adopted from Creed *et al.* (2009). Two items "If the unemployment benefit was very high I would still prefer to work" and "I hate being on the dole." were dropped from the original eight-item scale because unemployed people in Ghana do not receive unemployment benefits. An example is "Having a job is very important to me". Responses were made on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). In the present study, we obtained a reliability coefficient of 0.80.

*Strategy awareness (Time 1)*. Three items were used to measure strategy awareness (e.g. "I think there are more ways to find a job than I have tried till now") (Noordzij *et al.*, 2013). Responses were made on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The reliability of the scale for the present study was 0.88.

*Learning from failure (Time 1)*. Learning from failure was measured with three items adopted from Noordzij *et al.* (2013). The scale is appropriate because it has been applied in similar job search context (Noordzij *et al.*, 2013). An example of the item is "When something does not work out in my job search, I will do it differently next time." Responses were made on

a 5-Likert point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The alpha coefficient obtained was 0.83.

*Fit perception (Time 2)*. The 9-item measure presented and validated by Cable and DeRue (2002) was used in this study. This scale served to assess the degree to which individuals view value congruence with organisations as a specific form of (1) P–O fit (3 items; e.g. “My personal values match my current organisation’s values and culture”), (2) D–A fit (3 items; e.g. “The match is very good between the demands of my job and my personal skills”) and N–S fit (3 items, e.g. “There is a good fit between what my current job offers me and what I am looking for in a job”). Responses were made on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Cable and DeRue (2002) found internal consistencies of  $\alpha = 0.92$ , for P–O fit,  $\alpha = 0.84$  for D–A fit and  $\alpha = 0.93$  for N–S fit. For the current study, we obtained alpha reliabilities of 0.88, 0.88 and 0.89, respectively.

All participants provided informed consent and all items were administered in the English language. The study protocol was approved by the Survey and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC) of The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

## 5. Analyses

The Time 1 data were randomly split into two subsamples (respectively,  $n = 362$  and  $n = 358$ ) for cross-validation of the job search strategy scale. The data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 21 (IBM Corp. SPSS Version, 2016) and AMOS statistical package version 21 (Arbuckle, 2012). First, exploratory factor analyses (EFAs) with a varimax rotation based on the first random subsample was conducted. The 16 items composing the job search strategy scale were considered to verify that each item loaded on the respective factor. Second, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with maximum likelihood estimation was performed based on the second random subsample to ascertain the factor structure and validity of the 16-item solution, which emerged from the earlier EFA. Additionally, multigroup CFA was performed to test the measurement equivalence of the job search scale across gender and job search contexts.

Multiple goodness-of-fit indices were considered to assess model fit. These indices include the chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ), degree of freedom (df), the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) (see Hu and Bentler, 1999). In general, combined cut-off fit criteria were used such that models with CFI < 0.90, TLI < 0.90, RMSEA > 0.08, SRMR > 0.10 were considered deficient, those with CFI  $\geq 0.90$  to < 0.95, TLI  $\geq 0.90$  to < 0.95, RMSEA > 0.06 to  $\leq 0.08$ , SRMR > 0.08 to  $\leq 0.10$ , were acceptable while models with CFI  $\geq 0.95$ , TLI  $\geq 0.95$ , RMSEA  $\leq 0.06$  and SRMR  $\leq 0.06$  were excellent fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999; Mathieu and Taylor, 2006).

Third, Cronbach’s alpha, average variance explained, and descriptive statistics and correlations were computed to assess the internal reliability of the three dimensions base on the total sample. To assess convergent and discriminant validity, correlation analyses were performed between the dimensions of the job search strategy scale and some criterion variables. Lastly, a structural equation model is performed by including the three dimensions of the job search scale as predictors of fit perceptions to test the predictive utility of the job search strategy scale.

## 6. Results

### 6.1 Exploratory factor analysis

EFA was performed on a random split-half sample ( $n = 362$ ) to examine the structure of the questionnaire. The initial scatter-plot revealed a three factor-solution, which accounted for

54.75% of the total variance. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value was 0.77 and Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant ( $\chi^2(120) = 1862.02, p < 0.001$ ), fulfilling the criteria for conducting EFA. The results revealed that the items loaded on their respective factors. More specifically, six-items loaded on the focussed search strategy, six items loaded on the exploratory search strategy and four items loaded on the haphazard search strategy. The three-factor solution accountant for 20.18%, 18.17 and 16.40% of the variance, respectively. All items loadings are greater than 0.30 (see Table 1).

6.2 Common method variance

Research suggests that common method bias is problematic because it threatens the overall validity of behavioural research (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986). Therefore, common method variance test was conducted to ascertain whether the majority of the variance accounted for is as a result of a single factor. Consequently, Harman’s single factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003) was conducted to identify the presence of common method bias.

The procedure which allows researchers to load all the items into a factor through exploratory factor analysis to assess how much variance the factor would explain is recommended as a widely used technique to detect common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003, 2012). The results of the single factor non-rotated solution show that the single factor accounted for only 24.81%, which is less than 50% of the variance explained. Based on prior research suggestions (Podsakoff et al., 2003, 2012), this result decreases the presence of common method variance in the current study. We can, therefore, conclude that common method bias is not a significant challenge in this study.

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
<i>Focussed search</i>			
(1) I gather information only for job openings that look like what I want	0.77		
(2) I gather information only for jobs that I am really interested in	0.72		
(3) My information gathering efforts are focussed on specific jobs	0.76		
(4) I gather information only for jobs that I know I qualify for	0.64		
(5) I target my job search towards a small number of employers	0.74		
(6) I have a clear idea of what qualities I want in a job	0.39		
<i>Exploratory search</i>			
(1) I follow up on every lead to make sure I did not miss any golden opportunities		0.73	
(2) I try to get my resume out to as many organisations as possible		0.70	
(3) I follow up on most leads, even long shots		0.77	
(4) I gather as much information about all the companies that I could		0.76	
(5) I examine all available sources of job information (e.g. employment centres, friends, Internet sites, etc.)		0.71	
(6) I gather information about all possible job opportunities, rather than setting out for something specific		0.63	
<i>Haphazard search</i>			
(1) My job search has been more or less haphazard			0.72
(2) My approach to gathering job-related information can be described as random			0.81
(3) I use a “hit or miss” approach when gathering information about my job			0.85
(4) I do not really have a plan when searching for my job			0.81
<b>Note(s):</b> $n = 362$ , (first random subsample); loadings above 0.30 are reported			

**Table 1.** Factor loadings of the exploratory factor analysis



6.3 Confirming the structure of the job search strategy scale

Based on the second random subsample ( $n = 358$ ), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed with maximum likelihood estimation. The three-factor model showed acceptable fit to the data ( $\chi^2(101, n = 358) = 229.00, \chi^2/df = 2.27, CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.06$ ). To ascertain the distinctiveness of the three-factor model, the default model was compared with alternative models (see Table 2). The three-factor model showed a better fit compared to all other models. The loadings from the items to the corresponding factor varied between 0.42 and 0.82 (see Table 3). The results suggest an acceptable fit of the model to the data, confirming the validity of the three-factor structure of the job search strategy scale.

6.4 Measurement invariance of the job search strategy scale across gender and job search contexts

Measurement invariance of the three-factor model was tested across gender (male and female) and job search contexts (new entrants and job losers) (see Table 4). With reference to gender, the model was allowed to run freely (i.e. the configural invariance), which showed satisfactory fit indices, confirming that the factor structure was similar across gender. Comparative results were obtained when constraints were added to the factor loadings to compute the metric invariance. The results showed that the configural and the metric invariance models did not differ in terms of fit ( $\Delta\chi^2(16) = 22.02, p > 0.05$ ) across gender. The results of the scalar invariance test also revealed comparable fit indices to the configural invariance. However, the  $\Delta\chi^2$  was significant. Since chi-square test is sensitive to large sample size, approximate fit indices (i.e.  $\Delta CFI, \Delta RMSEA$  and  $\Delta SRMR$ ) which are recommended criteria because they adjust for this potential challenge (Sass, 2011) were used to ascertain the differences in model fit. Consistently, the approximate fit indices,  $\Delta CFI = 0.003, \Delta RMSEA = 0.001$  and  $\Delta SRMR = 0.002$  were below the threshold (0.01) suggesting that the imposition of additional constraints did not change the model fit across the groups.

Concerning job search contexts, the configural invariance model showed an acceptable fit to the data ( $CFI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.05, SRMR = 0.06$ ). The indices of the metric invariance also demonstrated a satisfactory fit. Comparison between the configural and the metric models showed that imposing additional constraints to the models did not significantly

Models	$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/df$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR	$\Delta\chi^2$	Comparison
Three-factor model	229.00	101	2.27	0.92	0.91	0.06	0.06		
Two-factor model (Focussed and Exploratory)	621.00	103	6.03	0.69	0.63	0.12	0.11	392.00***	vs Three-factor model
Two-factor models (Exploratory and Haphazard)	606.21	103	5.89	0.70	0.64	0.12	0.12	377.21***	vs Three-factor model
Two-factor model (Focussed and Haphazard)	602.18	103	5.85	0.70	0.65	0.12	0.11	373.18***	vs Three-factor model
One-factor model	993.40	104	9.55	0.47	0.38	0.16	0.15	764.40***	vs Three-factor model

**Note(s):**  $n = 358$  (Second random subsample), \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ . TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; CFI = Comparative fit index

RMSEA = Root mean square error approximation; SRMR = Standardized root mean square residual

**Table 2.**  
Fit indices of the confirmatory factor analysis and model comparison

Items	Cross-validation sample		
	Mean/SD	Factor loadings	$\alpha$ /AVE
<i>Focussed search</i>			0.78/0.40
(1) I gather information only for job openings that look like what I want	3.11/1.32	0.76	
(2) I gather information only for jobs that I am really interested in	4.00/1.39	0.64	
(3) My information gathering efforts are focussed on specific jobs	3.27 /1.26	0.57	
(4) I gather information only for jobs that I know I qualify for	3.45/1.23	0.56	
(5) I target my job search towards a small number of employers	3.38/1.35	0.76	
(6) I have a clear idea of what qualities I want in a job	3.54/1.45	0.42	
<i>Exploratory search</i>			0.81/0.43
(1) I follow up on every lead to make sure I did not miss any golden opportunities	3.61/1.15	0.60	
(2) I try to get my resume out to as many organisations as possible	3.61/1.17	0.58	
(3) I follow up on most leads, even long shots	3.63/1.13	0.70	
(4) I gather as much information about all the companies that I could	3.56/1.08	0.76	
(5) I examine all available sources of job information (e.g. employment centres, friends, Internet sites, etc.)	3.46/1.14	0.67	
(6) I gather information about all possible job opportunities, rather than setting out for something specific	3.48/1.21	0.60	
<i>Haphazard search</i>			0.78/0.46
(1) My job search has been more or less haphazard	2.71/1.30	0.54	
(2) My approach to gathering job-related information can be described as random	2.75/1.35	0.67	
(3) I use a "hit or miss" approach when gathering information about my job	2.43/1.39	0.82	
(4) I do not really have a plan when searching for my job	2.50/1.39	0.69	

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics, CFA factor loadings, reliability and validity of the job search strategy scale

**Note(s):**  $n = 358$ , SD = Standard deviation,  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's alpha, AVE = Average variance explained

worsen the goodness-of-fit of the model ( $\Delta \chi^2 (16) = 10.59, p > 0.05$ ) confirming metric invariance. Finally, the scalar invariance model showed comparable fit indices and provides a reasonable fit to the data. The RMSEA was below 0.05, the TLI, and the CFI were above 0.90. Regarding the differences between the metric and the scalar invariance models, results revealed that adding extra constraints to the model did not significantly affect the goodness-of-fit of the model ( $\Delta \chi^2 (16) = 25.22, p > 0.05$ ). Overall, the results support the measurement equivalence of the job search strategy scale across gender and job search contexts.

### 6.5 Internal consistency

To ascertain construct validity and reliability of the scale, Cronbach's alpha reliabilities and, average variance explained (AVE), were computed (Hair *et al.*, 2010). The validity and internal consistency of the job search strategy scale were acceptable. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the subscales were 0.78 for focussed search, 0.81 for exploratory search and 0.78 for haphazard search. Although in some cases the AVE which is the average variance shared between a construct and its measures are moderate but are comparable to results reported in prior research (Priyadarshini *et al.*, 2018) (see Table 3).

### 6.6 Convergent and discriminant validity

Results of the correlation analysis amongst the job search strategy measures, employment commitment, strategy awareness, learning from failure, educational level, unemployment length and job search contexts are presented in Table 5. Some significant intercorrelations

Model	$\chi^2$	df	p-value	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	SRMR	TLI	CFI	$\Delta \chi^2$	p-value	$\Delta RMSEA$	$\Delta SRMR$	$\Delta CFI$	Comparison
<i>Gender</i>														
Configural	430.248	202	0.000	2.130	0.056	0.060	0.847	0.871	–	–	–	–	–	–
Metric	452.267	218	0.000	2.075	0.055	0.062	0.854	0.868	22.019	0.143	0.001	0.001	0.003	Metric vs Configural
Scalar	498.348	234	0.000	2.130	0.056	0.062	0.851	0.847	46.081**	0.000	0.001	0.002	0.003	Scalar vs Metric
<i>Context</i>														
Configural	354.394	202	0.000	1.754	0.046	0.062	0.892	0.909	–	–	–	–	–	–
Metric	364.979	218	0.000	1.674	0.044	0.063	0.904	0.913	10.585	0.834	0.002	0.001	0.004	Metric vs Configural
Scalar	390.199	234	0.000	1.668	0.043	0.063	0.905	0.907	25.220	0.104	0.001	0.001	0.008	Scalar vs Metric

**Note(s):** \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; CFI = Comparative fit index; RMSEA = Root mean square error; SRMR = Standardized root mean square residual approximation; Context (1 = New entrants, 2 = Job losers), Gender (1 = Female, 2 = Male)

**Table 4.**  
Fit indices for  
measurement  
invariance test across  
groups

**Table 5.**  
Correlations of job  
search strategies and  
other criterion  
variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Focussed search	<i>0.78</i>								
2 Exploratory search	0.30**	<i>0.81</i>							
3 Haphazard search	-0.12**	0.04	<i>0.78</i>						
4 Employment commitment	0.30**	0.14**	-0.20**	<i>0.80</i>					
5 Strategy awareness	-0.17**	0.01	0.13**	0.01	<i>0.88</i>				
6 Learning from failure	0.32**	0.29**	-0.13**	0.22**	0.23**	<i>0.83</i>			
7 Educational level <sup>a</sup>	-0.07	0.02	-0.01	-0.05	0.11**	0.05	-		
8 Unemployment duration	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.06	0.07	-0.02	-0.12**	-	
9 Job search context <sup>a</sup>	-0.01	0.02	-0.02	-0.02	-0.11**	0.05	0.02	0.02	-

**Note(s):** \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; Alpha coefficients are in italics; Education<sup>a</sup> (1 = Diploma, 2 = HND, 3 = Bachelor, 4 = Master, PhD, 5 = Other), Job search context<sup>b</sup> (1 = New entrants, 2 = Job losers)

were found amongst the three dimensions of job search strategy scale ( $r_{\text{focussed and exploratory}} = 0.30$ ;  $r_{\text{focussed and haphazard}} = -0.12$ ). As shown in Table 5, the three factors of the job search strategies correlated significantly with employment commitment ( $r$  ranged from  $-0.20$  to  $0.30$ ), learning from failure ( $r$  ranged from  $-0.13$  to  $0.32$ ) and strategy awareness (ranged from  $-0.17$  to  $0.13$ ) as evidence for convergent validity of the scale.

With regards to discriminant validity, as expected the three dimensions of the job search strategy did not significantly relate to educational level, unemployment duration and job search context (see Table 5). Additionally, a series of analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test the influence of gender, age, educational level, length of unemployment and job search contexts on the three dimensions of the job search strategy scale. The ANOVA results showed no differences between the demographic variables (see Table 6). In other words, job seekers with different demographic characteristics showed similar mean values on the dimensions of the job search strategy scale. Taken together, these results support the construct validity of the job search strategy scale.

### 6.7 Structural model

Structural equation modelling (SEM) procedure with maximum likelihood estimation was conducted based on the participants who found a job ( $n = 137$ ). As depicted in Figure 1, job search strategies were proposed to influence fit perceptions (i.e. P-O fit, N-S fit and D-A fit) based on previous literature (e.g. Crossley and Highhouse, 2005; Koen et al., 2010, 2016). SEM results showed goodness fit-of-indices of: ( $\chi^2(263), n = 137 = 484.44, \chi^2/df = 1.84, CFI = 0.87, TLI = 0.85, RMSEA = 0.08, SRMR = 0.08$ ). The low CFI and TLI values may be due to the small sample size of individuals who obtained employment. The results show that focussed job search strategy was positively related to P-O fit ( $\beta = 0.27, p < 0.05$ ), N-S fit ( $\beta = 0.50, p < 0.01$ ) and D-A fit ( $\beta = 0.32, p < 0.05$ ). Exploratory search was positively related to P-O fit ( $\beta = 0.40, p < 0.01$ ), D-A fit ( $\beta = 0.16, p < 0.10$ ) and unrelated to N-S fit ( $\beta = 0.12, p = 0.15$ ). Additionally, haphazard search significantly and negatively related to P-O fit ( $\beta = -0.20, p < 0.05$ ), D-A fit ( $\beta = -0.42, p < 0.01$ ) and unrelated to N-S fit ( $\beta = 0.12, p = 0.25$ ). In combination, these results support the predictive validity of the job search strategy scale.

## 7. Discussion

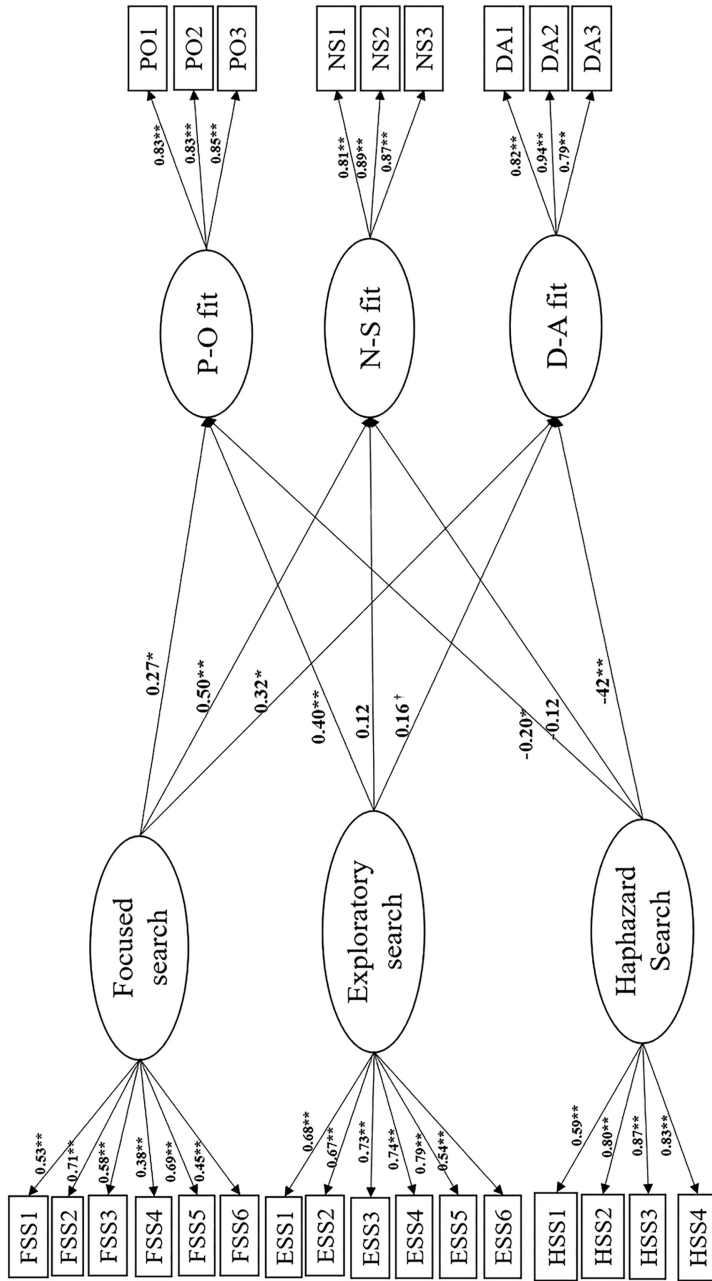
With the growing precarity of work and job insecurity (Wong and Au-Yeung, 2019), job search and career construction have become more challenging with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic (Rudolph and Zacher, 2020). The aim of this study was to validate the

Variables	Focussed search strategy		Exploratory search strategy		Haphazard search strategy		Job search strategy model of fit perceptions
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
<i>Gender</i>	$F(1, 718) = 0.42, p = 0.52$		$F(1, 718) = 0.16, p = 0.69$		$F(1, 718) = 0.04, p = 0.85$		<b>281</b>
Male	3.39	0.90	3.57	0.80	2.59	1.06	
Female	3.44	0.90	3.60	0.85	2.58	1.07	
<i>Age</i>	$F(2, 717) = 2.13, p = 0.120$		$F(2, 717) = 0.35, p = 0.70$		$F(2, 717) = 0.77, p = 0.46$		
25 years and below	3.38	0.89	3.58	0.83	2.52	1.11	
26–30 years	3.37	0.90	3.57	0.76	2.62	1.03	
31 years and above	3.56	0.92	3.64	0.90	2.65	1.05	
<i>Educational level</i>	$F(3, 716) = 0.20, p = 0.90$		$F(3, 716) = 0.43, p = 0.73$		$F(3, 716) = 1.81, p = 0.14$		
HND and below	3.43	0.93	3.59	0.84	2.77	1.02	
Bachelor's degree	3.39	0.90	3.51	0.80	2.54	0.97	
Master and PhD	3.51	0.99	3.63	0.90	2.75	1.28	
Others	3.39	0.89	3.60	0.80	2.54	1.08	
<i>Unemployment length</i>	$F(3, 716) = 1.74, p = 0.16$		$F(3, 716) = 1.91, p = 0.13$		$F(3, 716) = 0.73, p = 0.54$		
6 months and below	3.39	0.90	3.55	0.82	2.54	1.06	
7 months–1 year	3.38	0.92	3.62	0.80	2.64	1.02	
13 months–2 years	3.62	0.90	3.76	0.73	2.71	1.26	
25 months and above	3.15	0.80	3.35	0.98	2.57	0.94	
<i>Job search context</i>	$F(1, 718) = 0.04, p = 0.85$		$F(1, 718) = 0.31, p = 0.58$		$F(1, 718) = 0.41, p = 0.52$		
New entrants	3.41	0.89	3.57	0.80	2.60	1.07	
Job losers	3.39	0.93	3.61	0.85	2.55	1.05	

**Table 6.** Descriptive statistics and ANOVA of gender, age, educational level, unemployment length and job search context

job search strategy scale and also examine its predictive utility in explaining fit perceptions amongst job seekers. The results demonstrate that job search strategy can be represented by three-dimensions (i.e. focussed search, exploratory search and haphazard search strategies). Generally, support was found for the psychometric properties of the job search strategy scale. Specifically, the CFA, reliabilities, correlations and validity provided satisfactory results. Consistent with prior studies (Crossley and Highhouse, 2005; Koen *et al.*, 2010; Priyadarshini *et al.*, 2018), this study provides support for the internal consistency and construct validity of the job search strategy measure. In addition, job search strategies predicted the extent to which people perceived whether or not they fit in their work and organisations (Koen *et al.*, 2010). Hence, the study conducted amongst unemployed job seekers in Ghana contributes to the cross-cultural validity of the job search strategy scale.

Scholars have consistently argued that parameter estimates cannot be reasonably compared across different groups when measures are noninvariant (Dimitrov, 2010; Sass, 2011). For this reason, we conducted multigroup CFA comparing the two job search contexts and gender. Overall, the results demonstrated structural invariance (i.e. configural, metric, and scalar invariance) across gender (i.e. male and females) and job search contexts (i.e. NEs and JLs). We can, therefore, surmise that the three-factor job search strategy measure has achieved measurement equivalence across the new entrants' job seekers and job losers, and between



Note(s): \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , † $p < 0.10$

Figure 1.  
Structural path  
analyses



men and women job seekers. This result is consistent with prior studies (De Battisti *et al.*, 2016; Taggar and Kuron, 2016), which have utilised the job search measure amongst new entrants (Priyadarshini *et al.*, 2018) and job losers or unemployed job seekers (Koen *et al.*, 2016).

With regard to Cronbach's alpha and AVE, the dimensions of the job search strategy scale yielded satisfactory levels of internal consistency and construct validity, which were comparable to the reliabilities of similar studies (De Battisti *et al.*, 2016; Koen *et al.*, 2016; Priyadarshini *et al.*, 2018; Taggar and Kuron, 2016). Moreover, the dimensions of the job search strategy were correlated, and showed moderate-to-strong associations with self-regulation variables of employment commitment, learning from failure and strategy awareness. These results were expected because job search strategies have been conceptualised as self-regulation activities (Kanfer *et al.*, 2001; Stevens and Beach, 1996) and have been found to be related to self-regulation criterion variables including employment commitment (Creed *et al.*, 2009), self-efficacy (Taggar and Kuron, 2016), self-control (Baay *et al.*, 2014) and career adaptability (Koen *et al.*, 2010). Consistent with our expectations, job search strategy was not significantly correlated with educational level, job search contexts and length of unemployment. This result suggests that the type of job search strategy individuals employed in relatively restricted labour markets is not contingent on the level of education, the type of job search contexts or the duration of unemployment. These results were also confirmed with the ANOVAs where no significant differences were recorded in job search strategies across all the biographic variables in this study.

As suggested by Koen *et al.* (2010), job seekers make use of all the three types of search strategies during the reemployment process. The high unemployment situation in Ghana (Ghana Statistical Service, 2015) bespeaks why job seekers in Ghana may use all the three types of search strategy regardless of their demographic characteristics. Since these individuals have to make a living, they are obliged to use various search strategies to secure employment (Nyarko *et al.*, 2014). Because they cannot rely on their families or the state to provide them with their daily needs (World Bank, 2016). Overall, the results provided evidence of construct validity of the job search strategy measure, which can be used as a reliable measure to assess job search behaviour across cultures, job search contexts and gender.

Job search strategies have been found to predict job search outcomes including number of job applications, interviews, offers, employment status and employment quality (e.g. fit perceptions). Because job search intensity has explained a small proportion of variance in employment quality, scholars have advocated for examining how job search strategy influence quality of employment. To ascertain the predictive utility of job search strategies on employment quality, we hypothesised that the three types of job search strategy will predict participants' fit perceptions (i.e. P-O fit, N-S fit and D-A fit). Consistent with our expectations focussed and exploratory search strategies were positively related to fit perceptions. On the contrary, haphazard search strategy was negatively associated with fit perceptions. These results corroborate previous findings (Crossley and Highhouse, 2005; Koen *et al.*, 2010), which suggest that the use of more focussed and exploratory job search strategies facilitate the chance of securing high-quality jobs and the use of more haphazard job search strategies lead to poor employment outcomes. For instance, Crossley and Highhouse (2005) found a positive relationship between focussed and exploratory job search strategies with job satisfaction. Job search strategies have also been found to be related to fit perceptions amongst new entrant's university graduates (Saks and Ashforth, 2002).

### 7.1 Implications for practice

Undoubtedly, this study has several implications for practice. Due to the lack of a validated measure for assessing job search strategies in LMICs, validating the job search strategy measure in Ghana is relevant and urgent. A reliable and valid job search measure will not

only help scholars to conduct research using the scales but also assist career counsellors and practitioners to assess job search strategies applied by job seekers across job search contexts and genders. For instance, information on the type of job search strategies could help practitioners to determine which of the search strategy may elicit specific outcomes. This is particularly important because research shows that job search outcomes are contingent on the application of specific job search strategies (Hoye and Saks, 2008). Career development practitioners may focus on understanding job seekers' perception of their unemployment and the COVID-19 situations and assist them to approach the new labour market with the appropriate job search strategies. As such, being aware of the scale will help career development practitioners to assist job seekers to use those strategies, which can assist them in achieving their job search objectives. For example, COVID-19 has further taught job seekers about the importance of online-job search. Thus, career development practitioners could assist, job seekers to utilise online platforms to locate employment opportunities.

Furthermore, the data were collected in a relatively difficult labour market. Hence, it is unclear regarding the type of job search strategies, which may be appropriate in restricted labour markets. Some evidence suggests that exploratory job search strategies may be beneficial for job seekers in restricted labour markets (Koen *et al.*, 2016). In this study, it appears that the labour market conditions influenced the relationships between job search strategies and fit perceptions. For example, we found no relationship between exploratory search strategy and N-S fit. Conceptually, exploratory search strategy should positively influence N-S fit (Koen *et al.*, 2010), however, it may, therefore, be the case that, because jobs are scarce in such a restricted labour market, job seekers are flexible in their job search and are open to receive job offers with low pay. It must be emphasised also that in most cases, jobs in Ghana are in low-productivity, which generate limited earnings and poor pay (World Bank, 2016). It follows that the effectiveness of the job search strategies may have been affected by the labour market conditions.

Quality job search behaviour may also be relevant for employers and recruiters. For instance, recruiters may base on the types of job search strategies to development assessment tools for recruitment and selections purposes. This assessment tools could provide knowledge on the job seekers' job and organisational fits, thus assisting management to ascertain information on applicants' turnover intentions.

### *7.2 Limitations and direction for future research*

While the current study provides strong evidence of the psychometric properties and predictive power of the job search strategy scale in an understudied population, the limitations associated with the study are worth discussing. The study recruited unemployed job seekers in only two regions in Ghana, which is relatively small for a country with 16 regions. Although internal immigration has resulted in a huge inflow of job seekers from the villages to these major cities, caution must be taken in terms of generalising the findings to all job seekers. For this reason, future validation studies should consider larger sample including all the 16 regions in Ghana, and other LMICs as well as different job search contexts (e.g. employed job seekers), so that the findings of the study can be extended to a larger population.

Furthermore, the study measured fit perceptions as criteria for employment quality, which limits the broader employment quality success criteria. Future studies should consider including more job search (e.g. employment status, number of job applications, interviews and offers) and quality employment (e.g. job satisfaction, employment commitment, turnover intentions) success criteria. Such studies will broaden our understanding and answer the calls from previous studies (Brasher and Chen, 1999; Wanberg, 2012) to broaden job search success criteria to include both proximal and distal outcomes.

Research on non-economic factors in explaining job search behaviour are limited in Ghana, as such more studies are needed on how cognitive motivational factors and self-regulation

variables influence job search strategies. In this study, we found strong-to-moderate correlations between the dimensions of job search strategy and self-regulation variables. For example, focussed job search strategy correlated negatively with strategy awareness. Thus, it will be interesting for future research to examine the influence of these self-regulation variables on job search strategies and subsequent outcomes. Given that online recruitment has proved to be effective in recent times (Brandão *et al.*, 2019), researchers could also consider how job seekers use job search strategies in e-search. This will broaden our understanding on how, for instance, the ease of sending curriculum vitae via online can impact the various job search strategies. Although, we collected our data before the COVID-19 era, research is needed to examine how young adults who are constructing their careers (e.g. searching for jobs) in this novel COVID-19 era cope with the reality and their relationship with others in the society and how this affect their career priorities and the meaning of work. Additionally, research on job search and career adaptability (Koen *et al.*, 2010) could be revisited in this COVID-19 era. Such investigations could enrich the current research when the studies include job seekers from different job search contexts such as new entrants, job losers, gig-workers and employed job seekers in a longitudinal design. Furthermore, the COVID-19 situation has the potential to increase young adults who are Not in Education, Employment or Training. Research on job search training amongst this category of youth is relevant and urgent.

## 8. Conclusion

Given that job search has become an integral part of modern life, the strategies used during job search has become a relevant interest for scholars and career development practitioners. As a consequent, efforts to develop a robust and valid scale to be used across a variety of cultures and job search contexts are relevant and urgent. The present study demonstrated that job search strategy scale is a reliable and valid instrument to assess job search behaviour. By conducting this study in Ghana, we provide evidence to strengthen the cross-culture use of the instrument to a wider population, especially in non-Western job search contexts. Additionally, following the assumption that different job search strategies elicit diverse job search quality (Stevens and Beach, 1996), we assess the predictive utility of the job search strategy scale by examining its influence on fit perceptions. Taken together, the study provides information for scholars and career development practitioners in LMICs to use the job search strategy scale as an important instrument for research and career assessment purposes.

## Notes

1. Unemployment duration was measured in months (i.e. length of unemployment) (Time 1).
2. Job search context (Time 1) consists of job seekers who were searching for their first jobs (new entrants) and those seeking reemployment (job losers).

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### Corresponding author

Emmanuel Affum-Osei can be contacted at: [eaffum-osei@knust.edu.gh](mailto:eaffum-osei@knust.edu.gh)

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