
Navigating the Education-to-Employment Gap in Morocco: A Qualitative Exploration of Graduate Trajectories and Insertion Processes.

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Abstract

The study explores how Moroccan graduates move from university into work in a setting marked by rising graduate unemployment and a persistent gap between academic training and employers' needs. Although public initiatives exist to support insertion, many graduates still face unstable and irregular career paths, shaped both by structural barriers and by growing expectations that individuals should manage their own employability. Using an exploratory qualitative design, the research is based on 15 semi-structured interviews that examine how institutional arrangements, personal tactics, and social networks influence access to employment. The interviews were coded in NVivo to identify recurring patterns related to coping practices, logics of action, and the mobilization of social capital. The results show that post-graduation pathways are often discontinuous, with periods of unemployment, precarious work, or shifts in career direction. They also underline the limited impact of institutional support schemes and the continued misalignment between university curricula and labor market requirements. Most importantly, successful entry into work depends heavily on the ability to activate social networks and adopt adaptive strategies, which in turn contributes to reproducing inequalities. Overall, the study brings together transition theory, employability, and social capital to shed light on labor market integration in Morocco. It highlights the need for more coherent public policies that strengthen skills development and reduce unequal access to employment opportunities.

Keywords: School-to-work transition, professional trajectories, employability, social capital

Introduction

In the sociology of work and the economics of education, the transition from schooling to employment has become a central concern, particularly in contexts where higher education is expanding rapidly while the labor market's capacity to absorb new entrants remains limited. Far from a linear sequence, this passage is now understood as a complex, nonlinear trajectory shaped by institutional arrangements, economic conditions, and the resources individuals can mobilize. This tension is particularly salient in Morocco, over the past two decades, the number of degree holders has risen sharply, yet job creation has not kept pace, making it difficult for many graduates to secure stable positions.

According to the High Commission for Planning (HCP), unemployment is projected to reach approximately 13% in 2025, climbing to roughly 19% among university graduates. These figures underscore a structural misalignment between education and employment. While existing research has documented graduate unemployment and mismatches between training and labor demand, fewer studies examine how young graduates actually construct their careers. In the Moroccan context, the interplay between institutional support, individual strategies, and social capital remains insufficiently explored.

This study addresses this gap using a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews with young Moroccan graduates. It explores how institutional mechanisms, relational resources, and individual strategies interact in shaping career paths. Drawing on career transition theory, social capital theory, and the employability approach, the study proposes an integrated framework for understanding graduate insertion beyond purely descriptive explanations.

The findings highlight three main contributions: the non-linear and uncertain nature of insertion trajectories, the central role of social capital in access to employment opportunities, and the risk that increasing individual responsibility for employability may reinforce inequalities among graduates. Overall, the study underscores a persistent tension between formal public policies aimed at facilitating integration and the reality of unequal access to employment, strongly influenced by relational resources and informal networks.

Therefore, the central question guiding this research can be formulated as follows:

How do institutional arrangements and individual strategies interact in the construction of the integration trajectories of young Moroccan graduates, and to what extent does this interaction contribute to reproducing or reducing inequalities in access to employment?

To operationalize this issue, the study is organized around the following sub-questions:

- ✚ **How do young graduates mobilize their social capital in their professional integration process?**

✚ **To what extent do public and institutional support mechanisms actually contribute to reducing inequalities in access to employment?**

✚ **Are there different profiles of integration trajectories?**

This research accordingly examines the processes involved with moving from post-graduate education to finding or making use of suitable employment for young Moroccans who have recently graduated from higher education institutions, as well as how different forms of individual resources, social capital, and institutional support systems all play a role in this transition.

More specifically, the intent is to generate a variety of examples or types of integration trajectories in relation to career paths; thus, illustrating not only how one makes a successful transition to employment but also the various ways in which graduates pursue various types of employment opportunities following their completion of their education. In addition, the research will assess how the presence of social capital influences the effectiveness of institutional mechanisms for the purpose of determining if relational networks either supplement, replace, or affect the utility of formal support systems.

The study will evaluate the coping strategies that graduates engage in to increase their chance of gainful employment; developing employability enhancement activities; diversifying professional experiences; and coping with changes in the labour market.

Finally, it is hoped that this research will make a theoretical contribution to the literature on the career transition process by proposing a more integrated theoretical framework that combines theories of career transition, social capital, and employability; in order to provide greater insight into the concept of individual agency and its implications for the unequal opportunities for accessing employment.

The structure of this article comprises of three principal parts. The first part, which is the Literature Review, covers the international background of education to employment transition, as well as Moroccan-based research in addition to its unique characteristics; and presents the key comparisons and contradictions within the existing literature. The second part, Methodology, will outline the qualitative methodology implemented, describe how the data was collected, and describe the participants' demographics. Finally, Part Three, Results and Discussion, presents the different integration trajectories and how each of them relates to institutional structures, social capital, and an individual's strategy. At the conclusion of the dissertation will be a summary of the research's main findings, a discussion of its theoretical and practical implications, an overview of the study's limitations, and a consideration for future research directions.

1. Literature Review

1.1. International trends in the education-employment transition

Rapidly changing skills requirements and increased competition in labor market are changing the pathway from school to work for young graduates into a very long, complex and uncertain process; both high-income and emerging economies are documenting through an increasing number of international studies similar trends: longer lengths of time between jobs, more insecure first jobs, a greater need for transferable and adaptable skills; and an increasingly important role of social networks in accessing employment opportunities. This means that the process of moving from school to work has become more than just a transitional phase but has become a space for active negotiation or bargaining between the individual and the changing economic conditions of the community.

The transition to employment also varies significantly across countries due to the presence of institutional frameworks and mechanisms in place to support graduates throughout their transition. In some number of Northern European countries, for example, well-designed and integrated apprenticeship systems create opportunities for graduates to meet employers' needs and thereby help to shorten the duration of job searching, improve initial employment outcomes for graduates and help to mitigate the impact of job insecurity.

In these Northern European settings, the public sector intervenes through established systems and processes to align graduates' skill levels to job opportunities and to assist graduates to mitigate the risks associated with job insecurity. In contrast, in countries with more flexible and less regulated labour markets, the transition to employment is often longer and often entails many fragmented career experiences, including multiple periods of time where graduates are not working

1.2. Moroccan research: observations and specificities

The graduate transition pattern in Morocco current practice shows contradictions in each case. The quantitative studies conducted on graduates' labour market leave employment levels open to measure and duration of unemployment but provide an incomplete understanding of mechanisms shaping quantitative graduate transitions developing a deeper understanding of the actions shaping individual graduate career patterns. We now turn to the explanation of graduates' transition and identify additional structural constraints identified through research conducted nationally by national authors.

First, ongoing education provided by universities does not meet the needs of the Moroccan labour market; therefore, graduates who have completed university studies are disproportionately unemployed. This is particularly true for the vast number of graduates who completed their studies at general universities with limited options for vocational training. Second, informal networks

continue to be a critical component of access to employment, where the employment opportunities available to graduates are assigned based on person-to-person relational connections.

As a result, the distribution of opportunities within network environments is formed on relational bases, not just economic bases. Third, there is limited effectiveness of public policies to support unemployed graduates through career guidance and employment programmes. However, the impact of these supports on individual strategies for transitions is also an area for continued research.

1.3. Comparisons and contradictions in literature

International comparisons illustrate there are significant methodological differences, with some of the literature focusing on the macroeconomic forces that influence the transition into employment through effective institutional arrangements and active labour market policies (e.g., Estevão, 2007; OECD, 2018).

Conversely, some researchers concentrate on how individuals employ their personal and relational resources to develop their capacity to adapt in order to successfully enter the labour market. These opposing views of the transition reflect the more general literature's limitations: the tendency to focus on macroeconomic drivers of the transition into employment can result in a failure to understand the strategies used by individuals to navigate the transition process (Ball & Pike, 2017; while an exclusively micro-economic perspective fails to adequately account for the structural constraints many individuals face when attempting to establish themselves in an employment position (Holm et al., 2013).

Utilising Morocco as an example, a significant gap exists between the limited amount of quantitative analysis that has categorised trends in labour market participation for young graduates and the qualitative analyses that would allow us to capture the experiences of young graduates in the process of entering, re-entering, or establishing themselves in the labour market. Further, the majority of current studies that have investigated the experiential perspectives of young graduates lack in-depth qualitative research. Thus far, researchers have primarily focused on establishing trends in young graduates' labour market participation by using quantitative measures such as unemployment rates, length of job search, and level of qualification (Daoudi, Alami, 2021); but the majority of the literature fails to examine the social, psychological, and strategic processes involved in creating a career out of employment (Brooks, 2018). As illustrated by the literature on mixed-methods research conducted in a variety of settings, simply measuring the duration of the transition is insufficient for illustrating how young people deal with uncertainty, utilize social resources, and develop adaptive strategies to navigate the dynamic labour market.

In addition to the increasing number of studies examining graduate transitions, there is a lack of thorough investigation into the career trajectories of graduates; how these trajectories are influenced

by the interplay of an individual's own resources, social resources, and institutional resources (Berntson et al., 2021). As such, there is a need for this study, which takes an exploratory qualitative approach to investigate the life experiences of young Moroccan graduates and how they mobilise their resources in their professional integration processes.

1. Research Methodology

An interpretivist epistemological approach underlines this study; thus, it is postulated that the transition from higher education to the labour market cannot be understood purely in terms of objective statistical indicators but, instead, reflects the meanings attributed to this transition as well as the perceptions and experiences developed by the graduates themselves. Therefore, professional integration is a social construction which is created via institutional contexts, individual strategies, and relational resources. In view of these characteristics of professional integration, this research is conducted in an inductive and exploratory mode of reasoning, and consequently, the goal is not to test pre-defined causal relationships, but rather to understand the complexity and diversity present in this process.

This study takes an exploratory qualitative approach in order to explore graduate transitions from education to work amongst young Moroccan graduates through examining the individual, social, and institutional contexts of their respective experiences. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of 15 individual's representative of a variety of backgrounds (ethnicity, gender, area of study), occupations, and types of employment. The rationale for using this qualitative exploratory approach lies in its ability to provide an in-depth contextual understanding of the graduate's transition from the educational system into the labour market, especially in an informal and highly networked labour market.

This approach is rationalized through its presenting an extensive and contextual representation of an individual career path in a labour market defined by the informality and a heavy reliance on social networking means. Additionally, it provides insight to address the mechanisms/causes of obstacles typically missed through quantitative methods.

Limitations to this approach involve a small size of participants limiting generalisability and use of self-reported data creates potential bias. Thematic analysis was performed using both and a combination of both Inductive and Deductive Coding Systems applied in conjunction with the NVivo Data Analysis Application with a supporting theoretical framework of Career Transition Theory, Social Capital Theory and Employability Perspectives.

To enhance the credibility, reliability and rigour of the findings; the following methods were used: Data Triangulation, Theoretical Saturation and Researcher Reflexivity to reduce bias and enhance the robustness of the analysis.

2. Results and Discussion

Table 1. Characteristics of participants

Participant	Sex	Sector	Duration of unemployment	Current situation
P1	F	Management	3 months	Permanent position
P2	M	Engineering	6 months	In search
P3	F	Letters	12 months	Internship
P4	M	Science (informatique)	2 months	Fixed-term contract
P5	F	Economy	8 months	In search
P6	M	Computer science	1 month	Fixed-term contract
P7	F	Right	10 months	In search
P8	M	Management	4 months	Permanent position
P9	F	Engineering	5 months	Internship
P10	M	Science	7 months	In search
P11	F	Letters	2 months	Fixed-term contract
P12	M	Economy	9 months	In search
P13	F	Computer science	6 months	Internship
P14	M	Right	3 months	Permanent position
P15	F	Management	12 months	In search

Source: NVIVO 12

The table offers a sampling of characteristics of the participants; therefore, it expresses an analytically reasonable method for depicting the sample population. The sample consists of fifteen graduates from various education levels, so the participant gender, educational backgrounds, durations of unemployed status, and current employment will add to the difficulty of obtaining multiple insertion trajectory experiences within Morocco.

The reason for closing off at (15) participants is because of the principle of "theoretical saturation." Theoretical saturation occurs in qualitative research when additional interviews continue to produce no new themes, categories, or concepts. In these research study, after the participant interviews conducted past participant number 15, the interviewee narratives all reflected similar patterns, experiences, and ontological discourses, in terms of transitioning from education to employment. These themes included, for example, lack of experience, importance of networks, internships, and

difficulty obtaining stable employment; each of the identified did not change and could be identified to repeat numerous times among the entire sample population of participants.

Methodologically speaking, this sampling decision is consistent with the recommendations made for qualitative research studies, which support that qualitative research studies are expected to produce a sufficient depth and richness of data relative to the participants, and therefore do not require a significant number of participants to individually compose an overall data representation through quantitative sampling methods (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Saunders et al 2018).

The data collected from this study allows for comparison between genders based on their professional integration pathways. Furthermore, this data is comprised of many different areas of study, including: management, engineering, science, humanities, economics, information technology, and law, indicating a variety of educational backgrounds and allowing for an examination of how a specific area of study will affect one's chances of finding work. The time frame that elapsed before the individuals found work is documented as ranging from one month to twelve months. The disparity in time between those who found work relatively quickly (one to three months) and those who found themselves looking for work for extended periods (one year) illustrates the difficulties inherent in transitioning from school to work.

In terms of current professional status, respondents reported having the following types of employment: 1. Permanent employment 2. Fixed-term contract 3. Internship 4. Seeking employment Most of the individuals surveyed are still seeking employment and so cannot be considered successfully integrated into the workplace. Additionally, these individuals also reported having had interim experiences as interns or as having held fixed-term contracts prior to obtaining a permanent position.

These different types of employment indicate that the process of obtaining a professional position is a dynamic process that is progressive and differentiated in nature and generally is characterized by instability; additionally, the paths taken to reach an endpoint will differ based on individual profiles and skills, and the types of opportunities available in the labour market.

graduates at times a means to compensate for any limitations in their formal education related to the labour market.

In conclusion, academic training serves as one part of the equation for preparing young graduates for employment; additionally, the successful professional integration of young graduates into the workforce is dependent upon their ability to demonstrate transferable skills, adaptability and leveraging the social networks within their use; therefore, it can be confirmed that the transition from studies to employment is a dynamic and complex process.

2.2. Experiences of the transition from studies to employment

The Results of this research indicates that recent graduates in Morocco tend to experience non-linear career paths with considerable uncertainty. Most survey respondents report delays in obtaining jobs, having temporary or precarious employment, and moving into positions significantly different from those for which they were trained to do. One respondent in management describes:

"...After graduating I couldn't find an internship for over 6-months and my first job wasn't related to my field so I had to take a temporary position just to gain experience."
“(Participant 7)

Therefore, there are many barriers involved with entering the workforce and there are many instances where the skills acquired by a graduate do not match what the employer requires. In response to these issues, graduates demonstrate different strategies; diversifying their applications, accepting temporary positions, and pursuing online training. A respondent in computer science shares an example of this by stating:

"...I apply to many different types of jobs and take online courses to develop skills that were not included as part of my formal education." (Participant 4)

When examining the various paths of careers for graduates, we will categorize them into distinct trajectories.

- **Strategic trajectory:** These are graduates who expect to face difficulties throughout their professional careers and take the necessary steps to better prepare themselves by completing internships, furthering their education through training, or obtaining certificates in fields relevant to their career goals.
- **Constrained trajectory:** graduates obtaining temporary or precarious jobs due to lack of immediate opportunity;
- **Trajectory dependent on social capital:** graduates find employment primarily through family or professional networks;

Institutional trajectories: graduates participating heavily in formal professional integration programs (ANAPEC, workshops, incubators).

For example, testimony from Participant 7 exemplifies a constrained trajectory; testimony from Participant Number Four reflects strategic trajectory, indicating individual initiative/skill development is significant.

The Mechanisms of integration analysis shows that graduates' ability to achieve successful integration depends on three primary dimensions:

1. **Individual adaptation:** graduate's ability to be self-directed learners and to diversify their job applications, and willingness to accept a temporary position for the experience;
2. **Social capital:** graduate mobilizes their personal/professional contacts to identify employment opportunities and to be referred;
3. **Interaction with the market/institutional arrangements:** Graduate's ability to comprehend what is being requested of them and recognize how to use available resources to improve their chances of obtaining employment.

The profile of graduates reveals some differences: specifically, graduates from the humanities rely on informal networks to find jobs while graduates of technical programmes (engineering) are proactive in developing skills. Graduates also have greater access to resources/opportunities in urban areas, as opposed to suburban/rural areas, therefore strengthening the likelihood of the strategic trajectory.

To summarise, the analysis of pathways through work indicates that movement from educational experiences to working experiences occurs in a non-linear, dynamic, and uncertain fashion, the success of an individual to develop their career is influenced just as much by the individual's effort and social capital than it is by institutional resources, thereby creating a typology that illustrates this relationship, while providing an analytical platform from which to examine the complexities and diversities of young Moroccan graduate integration processes.

2.3. Institutional support mechanisms

Through an analysis of the thematic interview data, I have assessed the role played by public and private institutional support structures designed to promote the successful integration of young graduates in to the labour market. The role of these programs has been variable and, in many cases, limited with regards to how they have functioned in the Moroccan environment.

Many of the participants appearing in the study are aware of many institutional programs to support labour market integration, including ANAPEC, other professional internship programs, incubation programs, and integration workshops; however, there is very little evidence that participation in any of these programs has resulted in actual job placements for graduates. For example, one graduate in a business program stated:

"... I have participated in programs offered by ANAPEC for young graduates... But all ANAPEC did for me was help me fill out forms and apply online. It really did not provide me with any new openings to obtain a tangible work opportunity." (*Participant 8*)

In addition to these difficulties, some participants report that many of the programs have not been designed to meet their specific needs and therefore much of the available training has provided no real value.

"... The training workshops that I participated in were of great interest to me, but they did not provide any consideration for my specific profile and therefore were not beneficial in providing me with a means of accessing employment opportunities." (*Participant 2*)

In order to understand and analyse the results, we developed a typology of integration trajectories based on the characteristics of various institutional mechanisms.

There are three main types of integration trajectories derived from graduates' access to employment - Institutional, Complementary and Circumventing Trajectories. For pairs of graduates who take an Institutional trajectory they will primarily be relying upon formal institutional programs to access employment, whereas for pairs of graduates who adopt a Complementary trajectory, they will be leveraging the use of these institutional mechanisms in conjunction with their own personal strategies and related social networks in access to employment.

Lastly, graduates who utilise the Circumventing trajectory do so primarily due how they perceive the institutional mechanisms to be insufficient and therefore utilise primarily their social capital or their own personal strategies to access employment. In the course of our analysis of the mechanisms, we found several interdependent factors that determine the effectiveness of these programs.

First, the extent to which graduates actively utilise the program opportunities plays an important role; those who actively participate in workshops, internships or institutional training will benefit in a more tangible fashion than those who do not actively participate.

Second, the ability to complement an institutional mechanism by means of utilising social capital to circumvent limitations would allow a graduate with personal or professional connections to more easily access a job.

Third, graduates who employ individual strategies (i.e. proactivity, perseverance, and continuous development of skills) in conjunction with the use of institutional programs will be more likely to benefit from these programs than those who may only rely on the institutional programs for their career trajectories.

Other distinctions also depend on each participant's profile. Graduates who come from urban areas tend to utilize institutional resources more than those coming from rural/personal fields. Some graduates indicated that they had limited access to these resources because of social constraints or

because there was no easy avenue for personalized support. In short, the findings suggest that institutional mechanisms are available and can help facilitate professional integration but are limited by several factors: (1). Lack of individualised supports related to graduate profiles; (2). Lack of congruence between the educational program curriculum and actual labour market requirements; and (3). Active engagement to develop their contacts and utilise their own abilities by young graduates.

The conclusion of this analysis highlights that the transition from education to employment relies on the dynamic interplay between institutional mechanisms, social capital, and personal strategies; thus, requiring an integrated vision for maximising the effectiveness of professional integration programmes in Morocco.

2.4. Social capital and professional networks

The Interviews show that social networks and professional networks are powerful strategic tools for accessing employment for young Moroccan graduates. When institutional mechanisms show themselves to be ineffective, social capital is a vital resource for finding job openings and surmounting barriers to transition from education to employment.

Many of the participants underscored that their own and their families' connections provided access to the information necessary to find jobs as well as direct recommendations to people hiring. One engineering graduate said:

"... I found my first job through a friend who helped me get an interview at the company. I would not have been able to do that if I did not have that connection." (*Participant 12*)

Professional and social networks (especially LinkedIn) serve as additional channels for expanding social capital and for applying for specific jobs. For example, one management student said:

"... I used LinkedIn to connect with people who work in my field and to apply for job openings, but it was through the direct personal relationships I have with associates who work at the company that led me to my first job." (*Participant 10*)

The analysis of mechanisms shows that social capital has many dimensions that contribute to its effectiveness: disparate access to 'invisible' opportunities, enhancement of personal strategies (proactive, developmental, recommending), and complementing institutional mechanisms and competencies.

Individuals develop strong ties through their family or friendships; these ties will provide an individual with the direct support of the two types of resources; close ties will provide an individual with direct support, as well as trustworthy recommendations/references, while weak ties provide an individual with access to opportunity and cannot be accessed through other routes, thus validating Granovetter's theories.

Differences in networks are seen in graduates' geographic backgrounds: graduates of technical programs or those raising their families in urban settings develop more extensive networks through formal/informal means, whereas graduates of humanities programs or those from rural settings depend more on their families for support.

In addition, several women found it difficult to access professional networks, indicating a need for targeted mentoring assistance and/or alternate strategies for establishing professional connections. In conclusion, social capital is a primary lever for supporting recent graduates in their transition from the educational system to an employment relationship, a bridge to support their technical skills and institutional relationships, and also assist in decreasing uncertainty and improving the employability prospects of young Moroccan graduates.

2.5. Employability and Skills

According to interviews conducted with young Moroccan graduates, they tend to utilise both soft skills and technical skills for their entry into the job market. The graduates reported that their university education supplied them with specialised knowledge. However, they remarked that the university does not always provide them with the practical skills or behavioural skills that would allow them to meet the employers' needs or expectations.

The graduates reported that the most common skills they use include; (1) oral communication, (2) adaptability, (3) team work and (4) proficiency using digital tools. The graduates also stated that the use of these skills gives them the opportunity to effectively navigate through uncertainty and adapt to an unpredictable career trajectory. For example, one computer science graduate stated:

"... even though my first job was not directly aligned with my field, I still needed to learn how to function effectively in a team and quickly adapt to new software in order to be successful." (*Participant 14*)

Further, other graduates highlighted areas of deficiency relating to practical skills or work experience that impacted their ability to be integrated into a professional environment. To address these deficiencies, the graduates reported they developed their own strategies, which included participating in additional training, access to online tutorials, and taking on temporary or short-term job opportunities in order to enhance their work experience. For example, one graduate working in retail noted she was able to develop her competitiveness in the job market through the following:

"... I took several online courses and did an unpaid internship to develop the skills I missed while in university, which has helped to make me a more competitive applicant."
(Participant 4)

In addition, employability is derived from more than academic skills; it is an amalgam of generic, soft and technical ability, together with individual initiative. The combination of graduate

employment/ability is also affected by how graduates cope with uncertainty and have learned to handle this uncertainty through the implementation of coping strategies to further increase their employability. Many graduates have a variety of backgrounds, such as those with a Background in Technology and those living in an urban environment, appear to be much better at utilizing the skills and opportunities available to them than their counterparts with a Background in Humanities or rural environments.

Additionally, female graduates have reported that they experience some difficulty accessing further education/training and/or practical experience placements. These testimonials illustrate the need for specific programs aimed at maximizing employability opportunities for low-income/disadvantaged women. In short, the ability of a young graduate to utilize and develop their existing and/or transferable skills, to identify their own areas of weakness and to create individual strategies to access qualifications is the primary determinant as to whether or not they will successfully transition from their studies to post-study employment.

In conclusion, employability is also considered to be a key lever for successful career advancement independent of any institutional mechanism, in an environment of unpredictability and non-linear career advancement in Morocco.

2.6. Relationship of results to the problem

The objectives of this research study were to explore how young Moroccan graduates create their future careers amid uncertainty and the resources they mobilise to obtain employment. Findings show that despite a strong theoretical underpinning provided by university education, it is frequently inadequate at meeting the practical realities of working. Respondents cited disconnects between their initial expectations for entry into the labor market and actual employer requirements, providing further evidence of the misalignment of education and employment.

Such findings are consistent with the career transition theories that assert that the interaction between personal resources and social/institutional context shapes the development of one's career path. The actual career path of graduates in Morocco tends to be characterised by discontinuities and uncertainties such as periods of unemployment, periods of precarious employment, and career changes. The narratives of graduates reflect that these experiences require multiple adjustments and that the process of transitioning from education to employment is neither linear nor uniform; this assertion is also supported by the international body of literature (Frenette, 2020; Tomlinson, 2017). Collectively, the strategic actions taken by the graduates including broadening their application pool, pursuing additional training and/or accepting temporary job offers illustrate that flexibility and resilience are critical components of successfully navigating the challenges of dynamic labour markets.

I Although many institutional mechanisms are in place, they have limited capacity to support graduates' unique needs. Most of the programs from existing public or private entities (ANAPEC) provide only administrative or theoretical assistance, as opposed to direct access to employment opportunities (either stable or jobs that match graduates' specializations).

Therefore, the effectiveness of these institutional mechanisms is contingent upon the extent to which young graduates are proactive and able to use them along with their own social and professional networks.

This observation challenges the overly positive conclusion made in other studies regarding the effectiveness of public employment integration policies (Chouaibi et al, 2022) and emphasizes the need for an integrated approach to public policy that utilizes both institutional mechanisms as well as graduates' social capital and individual strategies. Social capital is also a critical factor in this process. Graduates who have large personal or professional networks can identify job opportunities not accessible through traditional methods and thereby offset some of the institutional system deficiencies. For example, utilizing family, friends, and professional contacts via social networks (LinkedIn) demonstrates how much social capital can strategically facilitate access to job opportunities.

Nonetheless, data reveal that the impact of social capital is not universal; rather, it exhibits variability in accordance with gender, academic area of concentration and geographical origin, demonstrating inequality of access to opportunities. Successful integration of graduates into society requires not only mobilization and development of technical and general (transversal and behavioral) skills, but also an ability to create their own personal initiatives (through further education, an unpaid internship or self-directed learning) in order to successfully navigate uncertainty and meet market demand. The above observations confirm employment-driven orientation (Fugate et al., 2004), but qualify the notion that merely having a degree or education equates with successful integration.

Employability is viewed as a critical lever for success; it represents amalgamation of skillsets, networking and individual actions to optimize the likelihood of traversing into employment. Finally, the subjective experiences and perceptions of graduates provide insight into the human/emotional element of making the transition from school to work. Unmet expectations creating frustration will exist together with learning and personal development opportunities.

Individual persistence, proactivity and the ability to foster their emotional/motivational state will greatly influence an individual's career trajectory. The various qualitative factors discussed throughout the study contribute to a fuller understanding of the professional integration process by illustrating that success in terms of professionals being able to achieve successful integration into

the workplace can be impacted by both institutional mechanisms and technical skills as well as by how personal traits and social capital dynamically interact with one another.

To summarise, the study found that professional integration of young beneficiaries of Moroccan higher education, as measured by the criteria that they report to have experienced, was associated with: uncertainty; continuing gaps between formal training and the job market; and interpersonal strategies, including the use of social capital. These results confirm earlier trends captured in other studies; however, this research provides a qualitative dimension to the actual experiences of the graduates studied by adding another level of understanding through the use of qualitative methods. The study recommends an integrated approach that will improve the effectiveness of institutional mechanisms; improve employability; decrease inequities of access to professional opportunities in Morocco.

Conclusion

The study on the transition from education to employment among young Moroccan graduates shows that this phase is a critical and complex moment in their career paths. The results reveal that graduates face significant gaps between their university training and the demands of the job market, periods of unemployment, precarious employment, and career changes. Successful integration depends heavily on the mobilization of individual strategies, the ability to develop and adapt technical and transferable skills, and the effective use of social capital, including informal and professional networks such as LinkedIn.

Analysis of institutional mechanisms shows that, although public and private programs exist, they are often insufficient or poorly adapted to the actual needs of graduates. The human dimension of the transition, as seen through the perceptions and personal experiences of young people, underscores the importance of adaptability, resilience, and personal initiative for successfully navigating this stage.

In summary, this research highlights that the transition from education to employment in Morocco is not a linear process: it is uncertain, discontinuous, and strongly influenced by individual strategies and social capital. These results confirm the relevance of the theories employed (professional transitions, social capital, and employability) and provide a profound qualitative understanding of the mechanisms underlying professional integration.

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be made. Public policies should strengthen the link between education and the labor market, while educational institutions must integrate more practical, transferable, and digital skills, as well as internships and professional experiences, from the outset of their curricula. Mentoring and professional coaching programs, along with supplementary training and short certifications, would help reduce the gap between education and employment and better prepare graduates for market needs.

Strengthening university guidance and placement services, combined with promoting and developing formal and informal professional networks, is a key lever for facilitating integration. Finally, personalized support programs should target the most vulnerable young people or those from sectors with high unemployment rates in order to reduce inequalities in access to employment. In conclusion, the success of the education-to-employment transition in Morocco depends on an integrated approach combining appropriate public policies, effective institutional mechanisms, skills development, and individual strategies for graduates. Such an approach could reduce uncertainty, improve job placement, and sustainably enhance the performance of young people in the labor market.

Limitations

The limitations of this study should be clarified. Methodologically, this study used semi-structured interviews as its qualitative data collection method, which only provided a low number of participants, making the generalisability of this study's sample to all young graduates unable to be achieved. This may have led to a certain level of subjectivity on behalf of the researcher in terms of how they interpreted the interviews provided by the participants.

It may also have caused the sample to not be fully representative of all possible profiles that could be found in the same environment. Furthermore, as the study was only of qualitative and not a greater quantitative/longitudinal design, the statistical validation of the results was limited and no insight into how the sample's career path evolved over time could be gained.

The scope of this study is narrow from an empirical standpoint, as it only covered Moroccan graduates, thus making it difficult for researchers in other countries with different levels of graduate population and different attitudes towards classifying graduates as graduates to transfer results from this study to their own situation.

The study also did not cover a sufficiently wide range of graduate profiles across all industries nor all types of employment sectors. Some employment institutions that relate to graduate's ability to gain employment were not analysed sufficiently within this study. There is also a lack of sufficient analysis of the differences between geographical and sectoral areas. Access to empirical data was limited due to the low number and variation of participants interviewed, which has limited the depth and richness of the analysis undertaken.

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