

THE DIMENSION OF POLICIES TO FOSTER EMPLOYABILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The emphasis on graduates' employability is a significant challenge for universities to support their transitions to the labour market, especially in countries with high youth unemployment rates. The concept of employability and its main definitions constitute the framework of this paper, according to which its influence on higher education policies and practices is considered. In the context of knowledge economies and high-skilled labour demands, employability acts as an educational process that supports the transition from university to work. In this regard, the study directly addresses adult education studies, their impact on career pathways and resourcefulness in the development of a life plan.

Based on this framework, the paper illustrates a comparative analysis of employability policies that influence higher education strategies in Italy, Nigeria and Palestine.

KEY WORDS

employability; higher education; policies; comparative analysis



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A DIMENSÃO DA EMPREGABILIDADE NAS POLÍTICAS PARA O ENSINO SUPERIOR

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RESUMO

A empregabilidade de licenciados é um desafio importante para as universidades apoiarem a transição para o mercado laboral, principalmente em países com taxas elevadas de desemprego entre os jovens. O conceito de empregabilidade e as suas principais definições constituem o enquadramento deste artigo, segundo o qual se analisa a sua influência nas políticas e práticas do ensino superior. No contexto das economias do conhecimento e da procura de trabalhadores altamente qualificados, a empregabilidade surge como um processo educacional que apoia a transição da universidade para o trabalho. A este respeito, este texto aborda estudos sobre educação de adultos, o impacto do conceito nos percursos de carreira e capacidades de desenvolvimento de um plano de vida.

Tendo por base este enquadramento, o artigo inclui uma análise comparativa de políticas de empregabilidade que influenciam as estratégias do ensino superior em Itália, na Nigéria e na Palestina.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

empregabilidade; ensino superior; políticas; análise comparada



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LA DIMENSIÓN DE LA EMPLEABILIDAD EN LAS POLÍTICAS DE EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR

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RESUMEN

Enfatizar la empleabilidad de los graduados es un desafío importante para las universidades para apoyar la transición al mercado laboral, particularmente en países con altas tasas de desempleo juvenil. El concepto de empleabilidad y sus principales definiciones forman el marco de este artículo, según el cual se analiza su influencia en las políticas y prácticas de la educación superior. En el contexto de las economías del conocimiento y la demanda de trabajadores altamente calificados, la empleabilidad actúa como un proceso educativo que apoya la transición de la universidad al trabajo. En ese sentido, este estudio aborda directamente los estudios sobre la educación de adultos, el impacto del concepto en las trayectorias profesionales y las competencias de elaboración de un proyecto de vida.

Basado en este marco, el artículo ilustra un análisis comparativo de las políticas de empleabilidad que influyen en las estrategias de educación superior en Italia, Nigeria y Palestina.

PALABRAS - CLAVE

empleabilidad; enseñanza superior; políticas; análisis comparativo



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The Dimension of Policies to Foster Employability in Higher Education

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INTRODUCTION

The theme of employability is fundamental to international policies, however it has received little attention in the scientific field of Adult Education. This may be explained by the difficulty of placing work at the centre of adult education policy development. In this paper, addressing the issue is already an element of original research, departing from a perspective that seeks to be pedagogical and educational rather than socio-economic.

What is meant by employability? Different definitions have been advanced depending on the field of studies and on the periods when they were developed. The definition of employability adopted herein is that of Yorke: “a set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes - that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” (Yorke & Knight, 2006, p. 8). Yorke provides the most intensely pedagogical strands of the reflection on this theme. According to this definition, employability is not only the ability to gain and maintain a job, but also to understand the personal skills, desires and expectations; therefore, “to be successful” is realising that work guides and substantiates individuals' life course.

Thus, this paper approaches the theme of employability from a new perspective and the comparison leads us to reflect on at least three interesting factors that involve the very purpose of university education: firstly it addresses the role of the university, secondly the importance of transversal skills, and finally an understanding of the professions and the world of work.

Firstly, universities in every country or continent we observe, have the twofold primary task of training new generations and providing them with the technical and transversal skills required for entering the labour market, remaining in work and for their personal and professional growth in the world of work (Resta, 2021). Secondly, the university as a place of education must take responsibility for providing adequate preparation for the acquisition of transversal skills (European Commission, 2016). In a world that continually overpowers itself, it is crucial that, before graduation, students are able to achieve the skills and competences that will allow them to enter the world of work without fear. Thirdly, it is important that they understand the job prior to their graduation, i.e. during the Higher Education course, every tool needed to understand, grasp and penetrate the core business of each profession should be offered (Federighi & Del Gobbo, 2021). It is of utmost importance for the future of a country to accompany young adults so that they understand and are aware of what awaits them. These three factors can make the difference, if strategically pursued, and truly inclusive pathways, both in terms of facts and educational action, may thus be created.

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Indeed, the university must represent a social lift that allows young adults to progress further than their parents did (AlmaLaurea, 2021). This means creating an adequate and stimulating educational context, prepared to breast the challenges posed by the processes of innovation, environmental sustainability and acceptance of different social and cultural backgrounds for every country daily.

In practice, employability, which has also been taken into consideration in recent years by studies in and on adult education, calls for reflection on the above-mentioned factors. Constructing a training process, focusing on the human person and his or her own employability process in Higher Education means building pathways for the dissemination and acquisition of transversal competences. It also means accompanying each student to truly consider an internship, attending one, two, or over three to have the opportunity to observe and gain an in-depth understanding of the world of work, which for each of them will also be the world of life. Employability policies involve Career Services, Student Services and Service Learning, which are still not very widespread since, for the most part, they are somewhat unknown. They advance appropriate measures for training in transversal skills, entrepreneurship, creativity, and gaining in-depth knowledge of the world of work.

Employability policies provide the opportunity to create even closer connections between the world of training and the world of work. This latter point is likely to be the most challenging aspect, however it is one which could create ecosystems of innovation where the involvement of Higher Education could serve as a reference to increase the development potential of a country (PNRR-Italy, Mission 4, component 2, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

The following paragraphs address the research methodology used to analyse the dimension of the policies that influence higher education strategies in Italy, Nigeria and Palestine. The aim of the study is to deepen the understanding of how international and national policies support and foster employability in the mentioned countries. More specifically, the research was based on the following guiding question: what are the differences and similarities between the policies that support young adults' transitions from higher education to the labour market in Italy, Nigeria and Palestine? Thus, it focuses on a macro level analysis.

The comparison of the Italian, Nigerian and Palestinian contexts stemmed from the common experience of the Adult Education Academy 2020 “International and comparative studies in adult education and lifelong learning”, which adopts comparative adult education (Egetenmeyer, 2017) as a cornerstone of the analysis of national case studies. Departing from the theoretical perspective of employability and its implications for current national and international policies, several group studies focused on the theme of employability not only as the ultimate goal of the Adult Education Academy, but also as the object of a comparative analysis (Bray, 2005) at macro (international and national policies and laws) and meso (educational activities and programmes by universities) levels. The focus was geared towards the participants' concrete experiences of the reality in their home countries (Italy, Nigeria, Palestine).



During the comparative group work, the authors shared a common understanding of the structure and main features of the national policies on graduates' employability. In line with Egetenmeyer (2017), the comparison is structured as follows:

- The first step includes the identification of the research question(s). In this case, the state of international and national policies to foster employability in Higher Education is illustrated;
- The second step establishes the emersion of the comparative categories;
- The third step includes the juxtaposition, namely the isolation of similarities and differences according to the categories;
- The fourth step focuses on the comparison with a view to explaining the factors and causes by means of hypotheses, thus providing an interpretation.

ITALIAN POLICIES TO FOSTER EMPLOYABILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Young Italian adults and their transition to the labour market is the category in which numerous critical issues that first emerged with the 2008 crisis are observed. They have since become more acute as a result of the recent COVID-19 pandemic (OECD, 2021).

Hence, policies are required to address the issue of transition to work and laws and actions to support employability are needed. The category of employability is enrooted in the work of Harvey (1999, 2001, 2003) and Yorke and Knight (2006) which, in the Anglo-Saxon pedagogical context, have increasingly become a reference for the construction of educational pathways geared towards developing professionalism. The pedagogical perspective of this category has been assumed in the Italian context and has been the subject of research and numerous studies focusing on practices to support the employability of higher education students (Boffo, Federighi & Torlone 2015; Boffo, Fedeli, Lo Presti, Melacarne, & Vianello, 2017; Boffo & Fedeli, 2018). The issue of employability is by no means restricted to the mere search for employment and must be understood in its broader scope, which involves enabling people and contributing to their global training and to the full realisation of their life and professional projects (Harvey, 2003).

Thus, it is important to gain an in-depth understanding of who the young adults facing the transition from university to the labour market are in order to comprehend their characteristics and to provide crucial data to the institutional actors who devise the measures for graduates' transitions (Boffo, Gioli, Del Gobbo & Torlone, 2017). Indeed, as stated by Boffo and Terzaroli:

Young adults' transition to work establishes not only the first path of professional construction, but also represents the passage to adulthood, with possible repercussions for the autonomy of the subjects and for their possibilities of personal and family fulfilment. (2017, p. 438)

Profile and employment status of Italian graduates

AlmaLaurea, an inter-university consortium and research organisation representing 78 Italian universities and around 90% of graduates, conducts annual surveys on the profile and employment status of graduates. The 2021 report provides a detailed picture: the age at graduation, after years of a decreasing trend, has stabilised to below 26 years. The regularity of students' studies has continued to improve, however this year has presented many obstacles as a result of the extended closure of educational establishments due to the Covid-19 emergency. As regards the experiences gained during the period of study, curricular internships, after a period of gradual increase, have contracted in the last year. On the other hand, the number of study experiences abroad recognised by the course of study has tended to increase. However, further growth is still required since according to AlmaLaurea these experiences increase the probability of finding a job one year after graduation: +14.4% for those who have done a study period abroad, +12.2% for those who have done an internship (AlmaLaurea, 2021).

In terms of employment status, the employment rate in 2020 was 69.2% among Bachelor graduates one year after graduation and 68.1% among Master graduates in 2019. Five years after graduation, the employment rate was 88.1% for first-level graduates and 87.7% for second-level graduates. It is therefore important to note that as the level of the degree increases, the risk of unemployment decreases. Graduates enjoy significant employment advantages over secondary school graduates throughout their working lives: according to the most recent National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) documentation, in 2020 the employment rate in the 20-64 years age group will be 78.0% among graduates, compared to 65.1% for those with a diploma (AlmaLaurea, 2021).

Active and passive employability policies in Italy

This, then, is the frame of reference of graduates which policies must consider. As far as the level of Italian policies is concerned, this must be inserted in the mega-level reference context constituted by European policies, which provide guidelines and directions for member states. The European Commission has assigned a crucial role to Higher Education to support the transition of young adults to the labour market and to reduce the growing skills mismatch (EHEA, 2015; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014).

The European guidelines have been implemented at national level through a series of laws and programmes. Among them, Law 30/2003, namely the *Biagi Law*, is particularly noteworthy. This law entrusts universities with the important job intermediation duty, and introduces the focus on job placement activities and young graduates' transition to work within the contexts of higher education. With the entry into force of the law, University Job Placement services have been established since 2005 (Candia & Cumbo, 2015).

The regulatory framework and labour policies in Italy were subject to a fundamental reform in 2014-2015 with the approval of Law 183/14 of December 2014 (known as the Jobs Act) and again with the subsequent implementation of eight legislative decrees. To date, the legislation that has regulated active labour policies and established a new way



of conceiving labour services is Legislative Decree 150/2015 'Provisions for the reorganisation of legislation on labour services and active policies'.

The objectives of the labour policies implemented by this law consist of a set of measures, programmes and public interventions geared towards:

- regulating the labour market;
- favouring employability;
- facilitating the insertion of people at risk of marginality in the labour market;
- tackling socio-economic problems caused by the lack of work, by providing forms of support for people experiencing employment difficulties.

The new employment policies (active and passive) model is based on a preventive approach to the employment problem: it is necessary to intervene in the causes of unemployment (active policies) and not merely face the problems linked to the absence of work (passive policies).

Active labour policies, however, follow the four guidelines established by the European Employment Strategy (EES) to improve and stimulate

- employability, namely the ability to enter the world of work;
- adaptability, namely the compatibility and updating of competences and skills with reference to the needs of the world of work; and
- entrepreneurship, namely the development of a quality and entrepreneurial spirit;
- equal opportunities, with the aim of increasing youth and female employment.

In particular, the text identifies those in the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, in the regions and autonomous provinces who "exercise the role of political guidance in the field of active labour policies, through the identification of strategies, objectives and priorities that identify the national policy on the subject" (Legislative Decree 150/2015). Furthermore, it identifies the network of services for employment policies, which consists of public and private entities.

Actors involved in the promotion and implementation of policies

Several actors are involved in the promotion and implementation of these policies. They are public and private actors who work together to support young people in their transition. Public actors include the National Agency for Active Labour Policies (ANPAL), established by Decree 150/2015, which promotes people's right to work, training and professional development, coordinates the national network of labour services, and is responsible for the labour market information system. It operates in collaboration with the employment centres, public structures coordinated by the Regions or Autonomous Provinces and public actors at the service of citizens who

facilitate the matching of supply and demand. Universities straddle the line between public and private actors and are responsible for planning and delivering higher education courses. In particular, they have increasingly begun to focus on Third Mission activities, with a view to building relationships with society and the territory for the transfer of knowledge and technological innovation. The action perspective of the universities does not only concern Job Placement as a support to the construction of employability but must also include the reconstruction and rethinking of curricular and extra-curricular activities, which contribute to the development of fundamental skills required in the world of work (Boffo, 2018). These actors are flanked by private bodies such as employment agencies, which are authorised by ANPAL and registered on the National Register of accredited subjects for employment services to offer services that match labour demand and supply.

Future perspective of employability policies in Italy

This section closes with some reflections on the future perspectives of employability policies in Italy: As stated, the recent pandemic has caused institutions and political actors to reflect deeply on this issue. The European programme for the next seven years (2021-2027) will guide Europe in the green and digital transition, through the Next Generation EU programme which envisages, among many other aspects, investments and reforms to support youth employment. For Italy, this programme represents an unmissable opportunity for development, investment and reform. The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) is the Italian project to put these reforms into practice and foresees a special focus on the new generations, on children and young people, by strengthening active labour policies and integrating the unemployed and by improving opportunities for access to education and the development of skills for the entire population (Governo Italiano Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, 2021, p. 13).

POLICY STRATEGY TO FOSTER EMPLOYABILITY AMONG HIGHER EDUCATION GRADUATES IN NIGERIA

The concept of employability refers to the ability of an individual to gain and maintain employment at any given level (Effiong & Agboola, 2014). Employability is dependent on the level of practical knowledge and skills an individual possesses. From another perspective, employability is the inherent ability of an individual (developed over time) to access employment opportunities and to nurture it at every point in time. In fact, studies have identified poor tertiary institution curricula and inadequate collaboration between tertiary institutions and employers of labour as the two critical factors responsible for graduates' unemployability (Ayonmike & Okeke, 2016; Pitan, 2016).

This shortfall of the tertiary institutions has made graduates of many developing countries today half-baked, skill deficient, and unfit for 21st century jobs when compared with the jobs of the 20th century (Ayonmike & Okeke, 2016; Paadi, 2014; Pitan, 2016). The wide gap between the work system of the 20th and 21st centuries has clearly shown



that potential employees require a broad range of skill sets to be employable. This problem in Nigeria has blurred graduates' high expectations regarding their transition to the labour market, mainly due to the fact that the millions of graduates are still unable to find a job in the labour market while more graduates are being added every day.

A typical youth in Nigeria, whether an undergraduate or a graduate, cannot afford to restrict the possibility of employment to his/her school grade alone, as this is definitely not a sole indication of the intelligence and abilities required for the 21st century. It is rather the time to scale up on knowledge so as to be fit for the present and future reality.

There are numerous skills required for graduates' ease of transition to the labour market. A skill represents individuals' possession of pertinent knowledge and experience which enables them to perform a specific task or job effectively and efficiently (Politis, 2003). According to Ravitz, Hixson, English and Mergendoller (2012), some of such 21st century skills are summarised as the combination of critical thinking skills, collaboration skills, communication skills, creativity and innovation skills, self-direction skills, local and global connection skills, and information communication and technology skills. Other skills may also include empathy, resourcefulness, eagerness to learn and relearn, delay of gratification, diligence, teamwork, leadership, time management and interpersonal skills etc.

Hence, creativity is the act of converting new and imaginative ideas into existence, the ability to perceive the world in more ways than one, to find hidden patterns, to find connections between seemingly unrelated phenomena, all with the aim of generating solutions to problems. It is an indispensable tool for young adults to boost their creativity, and this can only be achieved by engaging in hands-on skills from time to time.

With regards to employability, empathy is the ability to have meaningful interactions and to connect with the feelings of clients, co-workers, superiors and even subordinates. It is vital that young adults possess this seemingly basic ability to be humane in their employment positions and in the world in general.

Factors that hinder graduates' creativity and employment possibilities in Nigeria

- Outdated curriculum (Ayonmike & Okeke, 2016; Pitan, 2016);
- Low funding for quality higher education delivery;
- Lack of soft skills;
- Graduates' resistance to the 21st century reality;
- Over reliance on certificate;
- Inadequate collaboration between institutions and industries (Ayonmike & Okeke, 2016; Pitan, 2016).

The Nigerian Policy strategy to foster employability among higher education graduates takes various forms. These numerous policy strategies and programmes have been established to foster the employability and economic sustainability of graduates. The umbrella body regulating these programmes at the university level is the NUC (Nigeria University Commission) while the entity guiding all matters of

employment at the national level is the National Employment Policy (NEP). Employment generation has been and remains one of the most complex aspects of social and economic policy-making in Nigeria. The country produced the first NEP in 2002, however the Federal Nigerian Executive Council did not ratify the policy document for 13 years following its inception.

Moreover, the increase in population and the changing dynamics of work, employment and economic growth in Nigeria has been less inclusive and jobless in character. While the economy has achieved a commendable level of growth in GDP terms, many Nigerians have been left behind in the process. Thus, the challenges presented by the changing nature of employment are as follows: the diversity of Nigeria's labour market and industrial relations and the undermined nature of social protection collectively highlight the need for a review of the national employment policy in Nigeria; the recent review of the policy has given rise to several programmes geared towards reducing unemployment and providing an inclusive space for economic growth in Nigeria. Some of these programmes for graduates and youths are: Youth empowerment and development initiative, N-power (Subsidy re-investment and empowerment programme), Youth enterprise with innovation in Nigeria, The Private Sector Driven Agricultural Mechanisation Programme, Staple Crops Processing Zones, Youth Employment in Agriculture Programme (YEAP), Growth Enhancement Support (GES) Scheme.

Furthermore, stakeholders and actors in the NEP are involved in the implementation process owing to the fact that one ministry or department cannot unilaterally implement the NEP. Given that employment is a cross-cutting issue, many stakeholders and actors are naturally involved in the implementation of the policies, including: Federal government, private bodies, NGOs, labour unions, employer organisations and professional groups in Nigeria, International development organisations, NUC (Nigeria University Commission).

There are no solid data to provide an accurate percentage of achievement in the various employability policies and strategies that have been deployed, however it may be inferred from the current estimated youth unemployment/underemployment of 42.5% (Bureau of Statistics, 2016) that the success rate is still low, indicating that "Education" in its entirety calls for a major reform. Additionally, the World Bank report (2017) warns of a "learning Crisis" in global education. The report states that millions of young students in low -and middle- income countries face the prospects of lost opportunities and lower wages in later life as their schools are failing to educate them for success.

POLICIES TO PROMOTE EMPLOYABILITY IN PALESTINIAN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The Palestinian people suffer from many deep-seated and difficult problems that cast a shadow over many areas of life, such as the economic, social, political and cultural domains (Hamdan & AbuMdallalah, 2018). These challenges have notably affected the absorption of graduates from higher education institutions in the local labour market. The latest PCBS (2020) statistics show that the average number of young adults to



graduate from Palestinian Higher Education Institutions (HEI) is 40,135. These HEI include universities, college universities and colleges.

The PCBS [Central Bureau of Statistics] (2021) states that the unemployment rate among young graduates (19-29 years) holding an associated diploma certificate or above is 54%, 69% of whom are females compared with 39% corresponding to males in 2020.

The ILO (2018) has referred to unemployment in the Occupied Palestinian Territory as being one of the world's highest rates. The report mentions several reasons for this such as the current political situation which has resulted in a deteriorated Palestinian labour market. It proposes renewed concern for all those involved as it is well-known that the absence of opportunity for young people drives them to desperation.

The successive Palestinian governments have sought to develop plans to address the policies aiming to improve the opportunities of absorbing graduates into the local labour market. Both the Ministry of Labour (MoL) and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MoHESR) have adopted new strategic plans to achieve higher employment rates in an effort to contribute to achieving sustainable development goals. These plans are based on the National Policies Agenda (2017-2022), published by the Palestinian government in 2017.

Ministry of Labour Policies

In its Labour Sector Strategy (2021-2023), the Ministry of Labour (MoL) advocates decent work and enhanced employment opportunities through the following policies:

Strategic Goal One: Development of Employment Opportunities and Services

- supporting self-employment implemented locally (governorates) and nationally;
- supporting temporary and permanent employment implemented locally (governorates), nationally, and internationally;
- providing downtime benefits for workers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic;
- supporting the wages of workers in affected establishments due to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- institutionalisation and effective old and new cooperatives in different specialisations and governorates implementing cluster development plans;
- qualitative and regularly updated legal and vocational counselling and guidance services available to several groups of the labour force.

Strategic Goal Two: Rehabilitation and Preparation of a Professionally Trained Labour Force corresponding to the needs of the labour market:

- quantitative expansion in TVET outputs;

- increased effectiveness and relevance of TVET for the needs of the labour market;
- a modern TVET system governed and regulated by laws and legislations in line with international standards.

Strategic Goal Three: Reinforcing the Application of Decent Work Principles in Palestine

- Amended, ratified, and efficiently implemented labour laws, legislations, policies, and safety monitoring measures;
- specialised union organisations and labour committees working professionally and effectively;
- conscious workers and employers defending their legally ascribed rights and duties
- regulated and reinforced bilateral labour relations;
- decent work programme in harmony with partner needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. (MoL, 2020)

In its agenda, the MoL concentrated on the employment development feature, endeavouring to enhance the quantity and quality of local job opportunities. It also sought to motivate the labour force to create its own employment opportunities. A sound and effective approach was considered, which involved providing qualitative and regularly updated legal and vocational counselling and guidance services to several groups of the labour force.

The MoL stressed that having a higher employment rate also depended on the quality of the labour force. This quality was aligned with the outputs of the TVET programmes offered to meet the labour market needs. It also planned to work on the labour laws, policies, work unions and other principles that would promote decent work for the Palestinian labour force.

It should be noted that the new plans for the MoL are more mature than the previous one, concentrating more on sustainable rather than temporary action.

Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research Policies

Based on the National Policies Agenda (2017-2022) published by the Palestinian government in 2017, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research Policies (MoHESR) developed its 'Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017-2022' in which it set forth a number of policies and objectives. Some of these policies are related to adapting the higher education systems to ensure a better situation regarding the "Education to work transition". As mentioned above, the number of graduates is increasing among the labour force, therefore the MoHESR pays particular attention to the quality of the outcomes of HEI programmes (MoHESR, 2017).

The strategic plan addresses some policies related to education and higher education. It prioritises 4 policies according to their importance (MoHESR, 2017).



Table 1
MoHESR Policy Priorities

Inclusive and Quality Education for All Policy Priorities			
Early Education for our children	Improving the quality of education	Sustained enrolment	From Education to Employment
. Creating Early Childhood Development programmes . Expanding and improving pre-school education	. Reforming and modernising primary & secondary curricula . Developing e-learning programmes . Providing teacher/staff training . Upgrading facilities to ensure a safe and healthy learning environment	. Maintaining high (f/m) Basic Education enrolment rates, reducing dropout . Providing support, protection of education in Jerusalem, Gaza, "Area C"	. Aligning TVET, higher education with labour market need . Upgrading TVET infrastructure, facilities . Strengthening Palestine's science and research capacity

Source: authors

The MoHESR adopted the same approach as the MoL i.e. concentrating on the quality of the education side. This guarantees that labour market needs are effectively met, especially when aligning the higher education and TVET programmes with the labour market needs. This approach focuses on the sustainability of the education outcomes which are supported by the ministry and the Palestinian Authority.

COMPARISON

Research question and comparative categories

This paragraph illustrates the comparative analysis of policies to foster employability in Italy, Nigeria and Palestine. Departing from the comparative research question "What are the differences and similarities between the policies that support young adults' transitions from higher education to the labour market in Italy, Nigeria and Palestine?" the authors "inductively" identified four categories:

1. International policies
2. National policies
3. Aims
4. Actors

The adoption of these categories was driven by the research objective to analyse the employability policies in depth and consider their richness for comparison (Egetenmeyer, 2017). They were selected for the comparison since they represent the key elements to understand the dimension of the policies in all the countries.

Juxtaposition

By presenting the juxtaposition, it is possible to observe some similarities and differences. All the countries under analysis face the problem of high unemployment rates among graduates. The causes of this problem are economic, social and political for all three countries. To tackle the problem of youth unemployment, each of the three countries has specific policies that aim to promote employability for graduates. The national policies, only in the case of Italy, are guided by international guidelines that hold the Recommendations and Communications of the European Union as a reference. In fact, although employment and youth policies are the prerogatives of European Member States, the European Union provides guidelines and launches initiatives with a view to their integration in national policies. In Nigeria and Palestine, however, there are no international policies, only International Labour Organisation (ILO) interventions. In fact, the Nigerian and Palestinian National Policies are formulated in accordance with ILO standards.

At the national level, as already mentioned, each state has specific policies. In Italy, the current labour policies have been developed since the introduction of the Biagi Law in 2003, in Nigeria, the first national policy emerged in 2002, while Palestinian Labour Law No 7 was adopted in 2000 and a decade later, the PNA issued more than 30 laws to support its implementation or to make amendments where necessary (ETF, 2014). From a historical point of view, therefore, it may be argued that the beginning of the new millennium represented a crucial moment for the definition of employability policies, which were then followed by further laws and legislative decrees to update them, in line with the economic, social and political changes up to the recent pandemic.

The third category that emerged inductively from the comparative analysis of the national cases was the aims of the policies to foster employability. Table 2 provides a summary of the main policy objectives in each country. In Nigeria and Palestine, the creation of decent work is a priority on the political agenda. The promotion of employability and employment opportunities is at the core of the policies of the three countries, as well as the attention to the most vulnerable categories and their integration in the labour market. The Italian legislative decree does not explicitly state among the aims the importance of developing human capital and training in the skills required by the labour market, which is present in the Nigerian and Palestinian aims. The development and updating of skills, however, is an absolute priority within Italian policy and, as mentioned, is at the centre of the recent National Recovery and Resilience Plan. Italy distinguishes itself from the other two countries by combining passive and active labour policies, supporting measures in response to the socio-economic problems caused by the lack of work.

Finally, observing the last comparative category related to the actors implementing the employability policies, the promotion of public-private partnerships in Italy and



Nigeria emerges to ensure the employment problem is tackled comprehensively. Thus, a multistakeholder approach is observed to address the mismatch of graduate skills. Nevertheless, there is still considerable state intervention in Nigeria, as it subsidises graduates' hiring costs in the form of NYSC and N-Power paid allowances. In Italy, this is not the case owing to the political orientation, while there are different forms of hiring young graduates, for example by means of an apprenticeship, however the organisations themselves are not paid. In Palestine the government subsidises graduates' hiring costs only when an external fund is available, but does not bear them alone.

Moreover, the multi-stakeholder approach is interpreted differently by Italy and Nigeria. In Nigeria, work on a community basis is considered the best means of engaging different stakeholders through the Community Development Services under the NYSC scheme. Conversely, Italy is culturally anchored on a family/personal network that plays a significant role while community-based action is rare.

Regarding Palestine, however, the idea of promoting public-private partnerships exists, but with no implementation or follow-up policies. Palestinian actors are solely public and are represented by the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. Furthermore, it is important to underline the lack of centralised services in all three countries. In fact, Italy, Nigeria and Palestine have decentralised services based on context.

In conclusion, as far as the educational actions that can be taken by the Higher Education system itself are concerned, in all the countries the integration of curricular and extra-curricular activities is considered a strong element to address the mismatch of graduates' skills. This shows that the value of non-formal learning is beginning to be recognised, even in Higher Education. Curriculum updates are also frequently recommended by the policy, even if several country-related elements may inhibit such updates, namely:

- lack of connections with labour market organisations/other relevant stakeholders;
- fragile or fragmented labour market/social tissue;
- lack of information on social/graduates' needs;
- lack of funds;
- resistance to change among Higher education systems.

Table 2 provides a summary of the comparative categories observed in all three countries to offer an overview of the similarities and differences identified from the comparative analysis discussed above.

Table 2

Comparison of employability policies in Italy, Nigeria and Palestine.

Category	Italy	Nigeria	Palestine
International policies	European policies for education and labour market	Not present but some interventions	Not present but some interventions
National Policies	Legislative Decree n. 150/2015	National Employment Policy	National Policies Agenda (implemented by Labour Sector Strategy, Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017-2022)
Aims	. regulating the labour market . promoting employability . facilitating the employment of people at risk of marginalisation . addressing the socio-economic problems caused by the lack of work by providing forms of support for people in employment difficulties.	. promoting the goal of full employment as a national priority . human capital development, employability of labour force and skills acquisition . private sector growth . enhancing the integration of vulnerable groups (i.e., women, youth, people with disabilities, migrants) in employment generation . creating decent work	. developing employment opportunities and services . rehabilitation and preparation of a professionally trained labour force corresponding to the needs of the labour market . reinforcing the application of decent work principles in Palestine . supporting the transition from education to employment
Actors	Public and private (Anpal, centri per l'impiego, University and private entities)	Public and private (Federal government, Private bodies, NGOs, Labour unions, employer organisations and professional groups in Nigeria, International development organisations, Nigeria University Commission)	Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

Source: authors

INTERPRETATION AND CONCLUSION

Departing from the four categories under analysis, namely international policies, national policies, aims and actors, the findings of the comparison of these three countries are not very encouraging. At the heart of the problem is the high unemployment rate in all three countries, despite some support for employability policies. However, all the critical points observed, i.e.: lack of connections with labour market organisations/other relevant stakeholders, fragile or fragmented labour market/social tissue, lack of information on



social/graduates' needs, lack of funds, resistance to change among higher education systems, were mentioned at the beginning of this paper. Both internal and external factors emerge, with varying degrees of importance. Internal factors may be considered the lack of connections with labour market organisations/other relevant stakeholders, the lack of information on social/graduates' needs, and resistance to change among the higher education systems. External factors refer to a fragile or fragmented labour market/social tissue and lack of funds.

While university policies have little impact on external factors, they may have a significant influence on internal factors. Thus, the implementation of cultural transformation processes is necessary and urgent. Firstly, as stated at the beginning, the crucial point is represented by the connection between the world of education and the world of work. In the in-depth comparisons on the three countries which differ considerably in terms of their social, political, economic and cultural contexts, it is possible to note a substantial absence of consolidated relations between the world of higher education and the world of business. This crucial aspect is central to the construction of policies supporting employability, as attested by other scientific studies (Harvey, 2003; 2004). What does a connection, a bridge, a link between training and work mean? It means bringing knowledge of the world of work into all courses of study, it means being acquainted with the professions, it means organising the educational architecture on the basis of work. On the other hand, the world of work is also aware and takes little advantage of the technical and disciplinary skills and knowledge acquired by graduates and PhDs. In this regard, traineeships, internships and in-company experience can be important measures to implement policies to support job placement programmes. This measure requires substantial effort on the part of institutions and companies, but their openness would increase the ensuing benefits. .

Finally, in relation to the third critical point, resistance to change among higher education systems, a systemic reflection is necessary: no institution can remain the same or speak a self-referential language. As previously mentioned, universities should become sites connected to "ecosystems of innovation". This is a perspective that could support the employability of graduates and offer them an appropriate education for the future that has already arrived. An "innovation ecosystem", as the Ministry for Research and Universities' Guidelines (2021) for the PNRR in Italy attests,

are networks of highly qualified and internationally recognised universities, public and private entities that are highly qualified and internationally recognised, hopefully organised in the form of a consortium, aimed at fostering interaction between them to stimulate the creation and promotion of innovation and sustainability for a given area/territory. Their activities are linked to higher education, applied research, innovation in specific areas, defined according to the specialisation of the territory. (Ministero dell'Università e della Ricerca, 2021, p. 16)

The university should be part of local, territorial, national and international networks to promote the connection between training and work. To this end, it is important that political deliberations on higher education systems can be addressed, in each country, with the necessary determination and vision of a solidarity-based future. In conclusion, it is important to create local, national communities for a pact that has the development and well-being of young adults at its core.

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