

YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY INTO THE MOROCCAN LABOR MARKET: SOFT SKILLS A DETERMINING FACTOR

L'INSERTION SUR LE MARCHE DU TRAVAIL MAROCAIN: LES SOFT SKILLS UN FACTEUR DETERMINANT

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Résumé :

L'employabilité des jeunes devient un sujet complexe à fort impact social et économique. Le manque de possibilité d'emploi est devenu un problème majeur qui s'est aggravé ces dernières années en raison de la crise économique et financière et aussi à cause de la détérioration subséquente du marché du travail en général. Ainsi, le Maroc, comme plusieurs autres pays de la région nord-africaine, est confronté à de grands défis économiques et sociaux à court et à long terme en raison de l'accroissement de sa population active dû à l'augmentation du nombre des lauréats de l'enseignement supérieur d'une part, et le dynamisme de son marché de travail d'autre part. A travers cette contribution, nous envisageons mener une discussion des opportunités et des défis que présentent ces deux phénomènes, tout en mettant l'accent sur l'importance des softs skills dans l'insertion professionnelle des jeunes diplômés, et aussi, en présentant les principales compétences douces les plus importantes pour garantir une meilleure employabilité.

Mots clés : Employabilité ; Insertion professionnelle ; Jeunes diplômés ; Marché du travail marocain ; Soft Skills.

Abstract :

The employability of young people is becoming a complex subject with a strong social and economic impact. The lack of job opportunities has become a major problem that has worsened in recent years due to the economic and financial crisis and also due to the subsequent deterioration of the labor market in general. Thus, Morocco, like several other countries in the North African region, is facing major economic and social challenges in the short and long term due to the increase in its active population due to the increase in the number of graduates of higher education on the one hand, and the dynamism of its labor market on the other. Through this contribution, we plan to conduct a discussion of the opportunities and challenges presented by these two phenomena, while emphasizing the importance of soft skills in the professional integration of young graduates, and also, by presenting the main most important soft skills to ensure better employability.

Key-words : Employability ; Occupational integration ; Young graduates ; Moroccan labor market ; Soft Skills.

INTRODUCTION

According to the latest figures published by the High Commission for Planning, the population of working age in Morocco in 2019 reached 26,359,000 people, 12,082,000 are active (10,975,000 employed and 1,107,000 unemployed) and 14,277,000 are outside the labor market¹.

Of the 10,975,000 employed workers, 42.8% are rural dwellers and 22.7% are female. Young people aged 15 to 34 constitute 36.7% of the labor market: 10.2% for 15-24 year olds and 26.5% for 25-34 year olds. On the other hand, the unemployment rate reached 24.9% among young people aged 15 to 24 against 7% among people aged 25 and over². This unemployment rate increases with the level of qualification³, while employed workers are characterized by low qualifications⁴.

Moreover, the labor market in Morocco is poorly organized and suffers from several dysfunctions⁵. Young people aged 15 to 24 and people with no diploma are the categories most affected by work without a contract, with 75.4% and 75.7% of the population respectively. Moreover, the functioning of the urban labor market can no longer be studied without taking into account its dualism and the importance of the informal sector in the economic fabric.

Faced with this situation, the integration of active young people into the labor market is a challenge facing Morocco when developing its new economic model. The objective, given the maintenance of economic growth at the same time as the improvement of the well-being of its population.

Several researchers have attempted to analyze the determining factors of the employability of young graduates. Thus, Robles (2012) shows that the most sought-after skills in the years to come are not sufficiently technical but rather cognitive and socio-emotional. In this perspective, the Moroccan education system will therefore have to improve the skills of its future generations so that they can be inserted into the labor market and thus join the Moroccan active population.

¹ HCP, the main characteristics of the employed labor force 2019.

² HCP, the main characteristics of the employed labor force 2019.

³ It thus goes from 3.1% among people with no diploma to 15.7% for those with a diploma and from 12.4% among people with an average diploma to 21.6% for those with a Higher Diploma (HCP).

⁴ More than half (55.4%) of employed workers have no diploma, 29.6% have an average diploma and 14.9% a higher diploma (HCP).

⁵ 54.9% have no contract formalizing their relationship with the employer, 26.5% have an open-ended contract, 11.4% a fixed-term contract and 5.8% a verbal contract (HCP).

The know-how and interpersonal skills of our young graduates are two factors, among others, that are decisive in guaranteeing them a place in the job market. Hence the purpose of this work which seeks to highlight the importance of soft skills, known as "soft skills" as determinants of professional integration, while answering the main question: What is the role of soft skills? in the professional integration of young Moroccan graduates?

Thus, this contribution follows the following plan:

- ✓ The increase in the active population in Morocco: a major challenge;
- ✓ The labor market in Morocco: A worrying dualism;
- ✓ The determinants of youth employability: soft skills as integration factors;
- ✓ Soft skills: a non-exhaustive list of skills.

1- The increase in the active population in Morocco: a major challenge

In the 40 years since its independence, Morocco has experienced strong population growth⁶. Today, the situation is stabilizing thanks to a drop in fertility due mainly to a change in Moroccan society and more particularly with regard to education and social demographic⁷ parameters.

The change in the age pyramid of the population is one of the greatest consequences of the demographic transition. Young people are now the main component of the population representing one third of Moroccans. However, this age group has not been integrated into the national socio-cultural and economic development process due to a lack of youth-oriented government programs.

Admittedly, people aged between 15 and 25 represent enormous growth potential for the national economy, but on the other hand, this category exerts additional pressure on the demand for labour. Knowing that nearly 300,000 young graduates are added each year.

DSRC⁸ in its 2016 thematic report predicts that, while the population of working age currently stands at some 19 million people, this population will increase significantly over the next 35 years to reach 26.5 million people by 2040. From this date, the size of this population will experience a slight decrease to stand at 25 million people in 2064⁹.

⁶ Indeed, the Moroccan population which was 11.6 million inhabitants in 1960 rose to 29.9 million in 2004, i.e. a multiplication by nearly 2.6 in the space of 44 years. HPC

⁷ The socio-demographic parameters are household size, parental occupation, marital status, household income and parental education level.

⁸ Demographic Study and Research Center HPC

⁹ Moroccan demography: past trends and future prospects, CERED HCP, 2016.

The problem of employment thus remains the main challenge facing our economic system. Job creation currently meets only two-thirds of the need. Given the size of the stock of unemployed and economic growth that remains below expectations, the risks of aggravation of the employment deficit are not negligible. This situation could lead to the development of structural unemployment and particularly forces young people to carry out precarious or marginal activities in the informal sector.

Indeed, the latest information note from the High Commission for Planning (HCP) on the main characteristics of the active population employed in 2019 shows an activity rate of 45.8%¹⁰. This rate goes from 45% among workers with no diploma to 42.5% among those with an average diploma to reach 56.9% among workers with a higher diploma.

The active population in Morocco aged 15 and over is characterized by its youth. Those under 35 represent 47.7% of total assets (45.6% in urban areas and 50.2% in rural areas). According to the diploma, the active population aged 15 and over is characterized by a fairly low level of qualification (60% has no qualification). This proportion is 42.0% in urban areas and 80.4% in rural areas. It is 66.8% among women against 57.5% among men¹¹.

Faced with such a situation where the demand for employment, more particularly among young graduates, is abundant, the need for an organized and structured labor market is decisive in absorbing and cushioning the number of new graduates, which is increasing by year to another.

2- The labor market in Morocco: A worrying dualism

The shocks of trade liberalization and adjustment programs in Morocco have upset the balance of a system in which the public sector is a major source of employment, especially for young graduates.

The imbalances between job supply and demand are persistent and seem to be firmly established. They have encouraged the development of informal employment, which constitutes nearly 20% of Moroccan GDP. Although working conditions are precarious, informal workers do not benefit from real social protection and most of them are relatively poorly paid, the fact remains that this sector makes it possible to absorb part of the excess

¹⁰ In 2019, the population of working age reached 26,359,000 people, 12,082,000 are active (10,975,000 employed and 1,107,000 unemployed) and 14,277,000 are outside the market of work.

¹¹ HCP, Moroccan Women and the Labor Market: Characteristics and Evolution, 2019.

labor force, particularly in rural areas, and thus appears to be an important tool for managing the labor market.

The segmentation characterized by the duality between the formal sector and the informal sector on the one hand, and the low mobility of workers on the other hand, contributes to delaying the processes of reallocation of internal resources, which would make it possible to adapt to the shocks of openness policies and adjustment programs (Agenor and El Aynaoui, 2005). The flexibility of the labor market is not based on the adjustment of wages but rather on the increase in tertiary activities, mainly market services associated with certain activities in the tourism sector, which aggravates the problem of labor qualified. The flexibility of the labor market also depends on the development of the informal sector.

The difficulties of hiring young graduates and their absorption by the private sector is indicative of a state of development of the productive capacities of Morocco which does not make it possible to develop human capital. Obviously, the gap between the needs of the Moroccan economy in terms of jobs and the qualification acquired in the education system is significant. There is a net waste of human capital¹². Morocco therefore faces a dual challenge: absorbing a growing and evolving labor force and creating skilled jobs.

Overall, the labor market in Morocco faces three major issues:

- ♣ Lack of inclusion: young people and women are less integrated into the labor market. The integration of women into the labor market is particularly low, that of young people has decreased while the proportion of young people staying in school has more than doubled. Although this indicates better skills upgrading, the youth unemployment rate has also increased, especially among young graduates.
- ♣ Weak job growth: Job creation has not been sufficient to absorb the influx of working-age population. Formal employment is concentrated in large and older enterprises, while small and medium enterprises face many constraints to operate and grow.
- ♣ Low quality of available work: informality dominates the Moroccan labor market. Growth in non-agricultural employment is weak, while employment in the service

¹² This mismatch reveals the weak performance of the education and training system. This is all the more alarming as graduate unemployment continues to increase and is beginning to take the form of a major trend.



sector¹³ is concentrated in low-skilled services. Productivity is low and workers lack sufficient protection mechanisms and social dialogue, leading to misallocation and underutilization of labour. For all these reasons, the national economy cannot achieve the expected objectives.

Nevertheless, there are opportunities to strengthen the Moroccan labor market and increase its contribution to the country's economic growth. It is up to the government to improve the functioning of this market, especially on the demand side, in order to increase the supply of jobs with better quality. This requires a more transparent and flexible regulatory framework to encourage private sector development. At the same time, complementary policies on the supply side could be important to improve the level of education and eliminate barriers to entry for young people and women.

In this sense, and in order to guarantee a better recovery of the Moroccan economy and achieve a balance between supply and demand on the labor market, it is essential to take an interest in the question of the integration of young people graduates as well as the determinants of youth employability in Morocco.

3- The determinants of youth employability: soft skills as integration factors

Improving the skills of young graduates and facilitating their integration into the labor market is not a new subject to be debated. The literature on the individual determinants of the employability of young people has thus insisted on the important role of their socio-demographic characteristics in finding a job. In other words, variables such as the characteristics of individuals, those of their parents and of the households to which they belong have been considered as explanatory factors for the employment difficulties of young people. Also, the influence, among other things, of differences in level of education, gender, age, environment and region of residence on the labor market outcomes of young people is now widely recognized (Behanzin et al. , 2019; Ezzrari et al., 2018; Benhabib, 2017; Escudero & Mourelo, 2014). Indeed, the importance of personal skills, essentially non-academic, is essential for obtaining a stable job in the labor market.

¹³ The service sector seems to be the main recruiting sector, nearly two-thirds (65.7%) of employed city dwellers work in the service sector and 17.5% in industry, including crafts. In rural areas, approximately 7 out of 10 employed workers (69.4%) work in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector. HPC



There are several names that the literature assigns to non-academic skills: soft skills, non-cognitive skills, personality traits or socio-emotional skills (Heckman and Kautz, 2012). Whatever the name chosen, the concept of soft skills is placed at the heart of the economy, because of its importance in ensuring better integration and employability of young people.

A study was conducted between 1980 and 2012 by David Dewing on the evolution of professions, he was able to come out with a conclusion concerning academic and non-academic skills. According to Davis Dewing, fashionable jobs require technical (mathematics) and social (soft skills) skills and competences, he considers certain soft qualities such as: empathy, cooperation, sharing, communication, critical thinking and negotiation, as important qualities for an individual's success in the job market.

As for Barnett (2006), he defines skills as “Qualities and dispositions that allow the individual to function effectively in a complex and constantly changing labor market”. According to the author, the most important attributes are the qualities of “courage, resilience, tranquility, disposition for self-change, engagement with the world, curiosity and willingness to communicate” (Barnett, 2006).

For Coopers and Lybrand (1998), they define “skills” according to four key areas: Intellectual skills¹⁴, key communication and computer skills, personal attributes¹⁵ and knowledge of the structures and organizations that make up the labor market. ”.

In the context of rapidly changing information and knowledge, employability involves much more than simply possessing soft skills. Graduates should be able to proactively navigate the world of work and self-manage the career building process.

For their part, educational establishments are one of the main actors in strengthening the employability of young graduates. They are increasingly required to produce highly qualified graduates capable of meeting the complex and constantly changing needs of the contemporary labor market.

Several questions have been raised about the ability of graduates to meet the needs of employers. Serious concerns have been raised about a significant gap between the skills of graduates and the demands of the working environment in an increasingly mobile and globalized society.

¹⁴ For example critical evaluation and logical argument.

¹⁵ Motivation, autonomy.



From the perspective of employers, skills and employability skills are defined as "the skills required not only to obtain a job but also to progress within a company in order to realize its potential and contribute successfully to its strategic directions" (Barnett, 2006). It is clear that employer criticism of recruit shortcomings is not the result of failure in higher education programs, but rather a failure in the process of transferring required skills and experiences.

Indeed, Atkins (1999) questions the transferability of key skills in employment contexts. He views transfer as a learning process in its own right and believes that if there is any hope of transferring learning from one context to another, the learner must use that learning in a variety of different situations. . Thus, it would seem that practice in different contexts is fundamental for the development of employability skills as well as their attributes.

At the same time, higher education graduates are required to develop new tools and skills themselves to increase their chances of effective professional integration.

4- Soft skills: a non-exhaustive list of skills:

Several research works have focused on improving the ability of university students to meet the needs of the new work environment. A classic approach is to determine the skills sought by employers. Higher education institutions seek to develop these skills in students to facilitate their integration into the labor market after graduation (Meisinger, 2004; Hartshorn and Sear, 2005; Raybould and Sheedy, 2005; Hart , 2008; Omar et al. 2012).

Smith and Comyn (2003) believe that the problem of employability is a question that should concern graduates and not higher education establishments. Indeed, the skills developed throughout the academic course of a graduate remain general and not specific to a job. However, graduates will have to identify the skills necessary for the different types of employment on the labor market in order to develop them in a personal way according to their professional objectives. However, for York and Harvey (2007), it seems impossible to construct a list of general skills that would satisfy all employers because of the differences that exist between sectors of activity.

Thus, it seems difficult, if not impossible, to establish an exhaustive list of skills to facilitate the employability of young graduates. In other words, instead of being focused only on getting a job and progressing in a career, employability must be more about acquiring life skills. According to Thi Tuyet (2014), it takes time and effort for graduates to transform the knowledge and skills acquired in universities into a work context. Lowden (2011) suggests



that certain attitudes and values should be contextualized, that is, developed through real and practical engagement on the part of the graduate in the workplace.

In fact, for several authors, soft skills are essential to be able to function successfully in an organization. Non-technical skills or "soft skills" have been defined by Russell and Tastle (2005) as "the ability to demonstrate and establish an effective interpersonal relationship, demonstrate self-management strategies, work in a team, solve problems in a creative and Finally, make decisions.

Westerstrom (2009) believes that to be employable, a young graduate will need theoretical skills such as fundamental knowledge and technical design, in addition to problem solving skills, soft skills, managerial skills such as negotiation skills and interpersonal relations, global skills such as the ability to work in a multidisciplinary way with societal problems and the ability to find solutions to the various problems encountered. This list compiled by Westerstrom (2009) also includes the ability to seek new information, the ability to solve problems encountered, the ability to work independently, written communication skills, teamwork skills, computer skills and the ability to identify solutions for business problems.

As for Robles (2012), he lists 10 important soft skills to guarantee better employability:

- Communication: Speaking, writing skills, listening.
- Teamwork and collaboration: Getting along well with others.
- Flexibility: ability to accept change and adapt.
- Professional ethics: Punctuality, sense of initiative, loyalty, etc.
- The positive attitude: Enthusiasm, self-confidence, optimism, etc.
- Courtesy: Business etiquette, courtesy, respect, etc.
- Integrity: Personal values (honesty, ethics and high morality).
- Interpersonal skills: Kindness, sense of humor, etc.
- Professionalism: Good appearance, punctuality, etc.
- Responsibility: Self-disciplined, serious, reliable, resourceful, responsible, etc.

Andrews, Higson (2008) and Feldman (2009) believe that the employability of young people develops more easily and effectively outside the formal academic path. Indeed, they emphasize job-based training and experience. Young graduates are aware of the importance of experience in the development of employability skills and the value placed on experience by employers, which is why they seek to benefit from a work-study internship at the during their training course to increase their chances of getting a job (Harvey, 2005). In general,



improving these skills in young graduates will lead to a process of continuous development. These skills should equip young graduates with the ability to get a job and keep it.

CONCLUSION

The number of young graduates in Morocco has increased considerably in recent years. The diploma, previously considered as a guarantee of employment, has become a prerequisite for employment even in sectors which did not require a diploma at the entrance. Young graduates are increasingly aware of the need for additional skills¹⁶ and attributes to enter the job market. The notion of employability skills is ambiguous¹⁷. It is used to define a limited set of skills or a wide selection of knowledge and attributes that young graduates must prove to have acquired during their higher education. There are, in fact, several synonyms related to skills at work or employment such as essential skills, key skills, generic skills, academic skills, personal skills¹⁸, etc.

By way of conclusion, the integration of young graduates into the labor market is a complex phenomenon which brings together variables linked both to the nature of the training, to the environment of the labor market which is constantly changing and finally personal skills and competences of young graduates. They must develop their own employability skills before reaching the job search stage.

¹⁶ The notion of skills is not limited to technical skills, but refers to a diversity of specific, transversal and adaptation skills. These are in line with the typology of skills given by Le Boterf (1988): knowledge, know-how, life skills, know-how to learn and make known.

¹⁷ The notion of skills necessary for employability expressed by De Grip et al. (2004) who spoke of two necessary attributes in the individual: capacity and will.

¹⁸ Also called soft skills, they include personal skills related to job and internship search, CV design, computer skills, time management, communication skills, decision-making skills. decision-making and teamwork skills, etc.

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