

GRADUATES WHO FIND JOBS DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN

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Conference Question:

b) Do HE institutions successfully help graduates to make the transition to work (short-term) and their professional career (long-term)

- Graduates early stage of career
- Low success in their career search.
- Low success in obtaining jobs and work in an area of their choice.
- After graduation award, they do not make significant progress in developing a viable career.
- This is a group of people who arguably most need active support from HE institutions with their job search as well as their initial and subsequent career development.

The Middle East region and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) context,

- Rapidly growing population in the Arab world is expected to increase from 145 to 278 million by 2050.
- It is estimated that 85 million new jobs will need to be created by 2020 to accommodate the large number of new entrants to the labour market.
- Youth unemployment is high amongst nationals
 - In the 25-29 years age group, 31% Saudi and 33% of Bahraini nationals are unemployed.
 - In the United Arab Emirates (UAE)
 - The population (nationals) under 30 is 66%
 - Youth unemployment is 23%
 - Female workforce participation rate is 44% (15-64 years old)
 - Nominal GDP per capita is \$57,884 (IMF, 2011; ILO 2011).

The Middle East region and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) context,

- The GCC countries remain highly dependent on expatriate labour, and the IMF estimates that over the last decade 5 million of the 7 million jobs created were filled by expatriates.
- These labour markets tend to be highly segmented with expatriate workers hired to occupy specific roles on 3 year duration visas.
- In many organisations in GCC countries nationals are more mobile changing jobs frequently especially in the private sector which is much less popular for most nationals than are the government and semi-government sectors.

Expatriate Women

- This study concentrates on Indian expatriate women (some of the largest groups of expatriates working and residing in the UAE come from India, Pakistan and the Philippines).
- The consultancy AonHewitt predicts that attracting, motivating and retaining more women in the workplace will be a growing priority for employers in the region.
- Currently, approximately 30% of unemployed women are university graduates and constitute a low proportion of the workforce compared with those of many other high GDP countries (Qudurat, 2012, p.14).

The Research Participants

- P1 BSc in Biotechnology, MSc in Medical Biotechnology, Postgraduate Diploma in Patent Law and MBA (Pharmacology Business Management and Marketing).
- P2 BA Commerce
- P3 BSc in Engineering.

Early Stage of Career

P1 does not have a Ministry of Health licence to practice in her field of specialisation and has been unable to find work in the disciplines of her qualifications. P1 earns income from an on-line academic writing job assisting students and companies with their essays and presentations.

P2 is employed as an administrator in an area of work outside of her interests in commerce and accounting. P2 works in an advertising company engaged mainly in secretarial tasks.

P3 is currently working not as an engineer but deployed on tasks within her father's company which is a software development firm. P3 works in generalist roles including seeking new business, representing the firm to clients and prospective clients and pursuing non-payment and debt issues.

2011

P1 perceives some benefit from her current job in developing her research skills relevant to future doctoral study. She plans to study for a PhD outside of the UAE, but has not considered employment in another country. Currently, she is looking for employed work and does not intend to continue with on-line academic writing.

P2 views her job as an administrator as having developed her skills and as a stepping stone in her career. She says that she is bound by family values not to work outside of Dubai.

P3 sees the work in her father's firm as an interim measure following failure to obtain a job in engineering. P3 wants to remain living and working in Dubai and does not want to work elsewhere. She is looking out for vacancies in engineering as well as contemplating studying for an MBA.

2012

P1: “I have got a job as food and health officer in a four star hotel in Jebel Ali were I went through training and obviously have not let down the desire to do my PhD; still hoping to get to some university to study PhD and in the meanwhile also working as food and health officer in a hotel in UAE.”

P2: “Still working in the same position nothing much changes has happened in my life still attending interviews, and trying my level best to attain a position of my choice and also looking for similar position which I am currently working with a better pay and benefits.”

P3: “Nothing much changes or development in my life, still trying to expand my father’s business and also is on the verge to complete my MBA degree as quickly as possible.”

Common Themes

- No work experience during university
- Exclusive focus on successful completion of their first degree
- No search for a job prior to graduation
- Ad hoc job search after graduation
- Reduced communication with peer group
- Rejection of employment offers due to low pay
- Not proactive in career-focused job search once in work
- Increasing focus on family roles and responsibilities

Work Competence

- Limited growth and transition away from the institutions of youth (parents and school)
- Dissatisfied with the world of work
- Insufficient development of technical and social work competences. Failing to develop a sufficiently positive and motivating understanding of:
 - self, work, other people and the tools/activities of work.

The Story So Far

- P1 first settled for improving her writing abilities but now is developing new work skills in the food and hospitality industry
- P2 is bored and seems less hopeful about making a job transfer
- P3 is less hopeful that the collection of entrepreneurial skills will in some way contribute to technical development as an engineer.

An Interpretation

- P1 and P2 seem to be predominantly focused on self and a modicum of disenchantment with their work.
- Whereas, P3's work in her father's company involves slightly alienated orientations to self, work and clients

Developing Work Competences

- The particular challenges faced by this group of graduates draw attention to the role of career guidance, including
 - students' skills preparation in job search
 - actual experience of relevant job tasks and workplaces prior to graduation.
- They also demonstrate the need for more accurate and responsive information on:
 - available jobs and vacancies
 - advice on practical ways that individuals create their job opportunities and career growth.

Informed and Realistic about the Local Labour Market

- Parents, as well as other members of the family, are influential on young graduates, who often need assistance with being properly updated on the realities and challenges they face.
- Graduates and their families should be clear about practical considerations such as:
 - going rates of pay for jobs in the local region and elsewhere,
 - so that they can use their knowledge and understanding in ways relevant to the current environment of work.
- HE, employers, government institutions and media organisations can all assist with providing this information.

Support, Participation and Improvisation

- In addition to HE institutions delivering course-related learning in job seeking skills, initial work experience, and providing graduates with dynamic information on employment trends and job opportunities,
 - there is a need to provide more support that motivates graduates who are being unsuccessful in their early careers.
- Much of this work is related to career counseling and peer group facilitation
- Helping less successful graduates to remain focused on their job search and in maximising their opportunities
 - By active individual participation and a degree of improvisation.

A Happy Ending

- P1 embarks on successful PhD research and obtains a relevant job afterwards;
- P2 makes the move into accounting and finance and thrive in this new functional work environment
- P3, through a client contact of her father's company, secures a position as an engineer, and develops and advances rapidly in her career finding her entrepreneurial and small business management skills relevant to working in engineering project teams.