

The Employability of the Tunisian Graduates

Sonia Agili

University of Sousse, Tunisia

Abstract

In Tunisia, like in any other country in the world, the employability of graduates remains always a big challenge. A deep look at the situation will reveal that because our local government fails to offer jobs for graduates they decide to continue their studies. Yet, their chance to get jobs decreased because of their over qualifications, sometimes the market does not need someone who has higher degrees. In fact, except for medicine, computer science, telecommunications, and architecture where opportunities to get a job increase, the other branches suffer from a bad fate: un-employability. For this reason, it is legitimate, to question the educational system in Tunisia and propose some solutions. Based on some authentic statistics which shall be depicted, the present study will seek methods to increase the employability of graduates. It is not then the problem of students but rather the problem of the educational system which does not take into consideration the link between what is theoretical and what is practical. The present paper aims to achieve two basic goals. First, it will be shown in detail the statistics of unemployed graduates in merely all the disciplines. Second, it will propose some practical solutions which are possible and might help in decreasing the un-employability of graduates.

Keywords: Employability vs. Unemployability, higher education, graduates, educational system, labor market.

1. Introduction

1. 1. Background to the Study and rationale

The movement of students from the educational system to the labor market is one of the most challenging issues in Tunisian society. Higher education institutions have been blamed for producing graduates who fail to meet employment demands in the labor market. This signifies the importance of the skills and attributes that graduates may need to demonstrate over and above their degree attainment. It seems clear that to be employed, a degree alone is not enough. It is graduates who exhibit attainment beyond the degree that employers look for (Hugh-Jones 2008). Therefore, it is the employability skill that matters the most to the graduates.

Taking into consideration the recent competition in the labor market, employability skills have become of great importance to university graduates (Tholen 2014). Higher education institutions are, therefore, obliged to offer the best education to their students to serve the economic growth and welfare of the society (Mbise 2014). However, universities have been blamed for producing graduates unfit to the labor market (MSTHE1 2000; CBE2 Workshop 2013 in Mbise 2014).

This category of people is experiencing a serious unemployment problem. Graduates have been particularly harmed by the increasing deterioration in job creation in the labor market. Addressing this problem depends mainly on three basic points: the correct understanding of the current education and methods used to increase the employability of highly qualified people, as well as the factors that have contributed to the rise of un-employability rates among youth. This paper will examine the shortcomings of the Tunisian educational system and how it could lead to unemployment among university graduates.

The research aims to investigate the nature of the gap between employer needs and graduate skills and how This skill mismatch leads to more number of unemployable graduates in the economy. Thus, all stakeholders: the government, the university system administrators, employers, and graduates themselves must all endeavor to find a solution to this gap. This study will also try to understand the evolution of integration paths, to what extent the problems of integration have been diminishing over time and identifying graduates who are still vulnerable to unemployment.

The research study will introduce the major views that have been developed on employability and the skills that are needed for the gaining of employment. Besides, some rates on unemployed youth and academics in the post-revolutionary period (2011-2018) will be given relying on Tunisian National Statistics Institute. Two research instruments; a questionnaire and an interview will be used to investigate the employability of graduates.

1.2. Research Questions

The following research questions were developed:

1. Does the Tunisian educational system provide graduates with the needed skills for the gaining of employment?
2. What are the determinants of graduates' un-employment?

3. How does education reflect a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical experience?
4. Are there any practical solutions for decreasing the un-employability of graduates?

2. Literature Review

2.1 International Perspectives on Employability

The employability of graduates has been a concern across the sector of employment, and a subject of much debate, for several years. Employability may be understood in terms of old discussions that have become separated from modern thinking. For example, Barnett (1994, 2003) explained employability as a set of achievements, understanding, and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations.

The promotion of ‘key’ or ‘core’ skills are similar to a set of achievements, understanding, and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations. Employment and employability are not the same, they should be differentiated. According to Lee (2002), being employed means having a job, being employable means having the qualities needed to maintain employment and progress in the workplace. Employability is therefore about producing graduates who are capable and able, and this impact upon all areas of university life. Consequently, employability is about learning – learning how to learn – and employability is not a product, but a process (LTSN - cited Lee, 2002).

Employability can also be defined as “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 benefit themselves, the workforce, the community, and the economy” (Yorke, 2004). A deep analysis of Yorke’s definition of employability reveals that ‘likely to gain employment’ and ‘be successful in their chosen occupations’ are different perspectives on employability. The ‘likely to gain employment’ is an output-driven view, the student on graduation makes a successful transition into the graduate labour market, with ‘successful’ meaning ‘positive destination’.

However, the ‘be successful in their chosen career’ represents a more open-ended view with employability seen as an on-going developmental process. What is also important to recognize is that the ‘skills, understandings, and personal attributes required for the outcome view of employability are different than those required for the developmental view. To enhance your chances of being ‘likely to gain employment’ a student needs to understand how to play the graduate labour market entry game – constructing focused CVs, labour market search skills, understanding recruitment practices in different sectors, coping with assessment centers, interview skills, etc.

Len Holmes in a recent paper (Holmes, 2013) makes the distinction between three types of graduate employability: ‘possessional’, ‘positional’, and ‘processual’. The ‘possessional’ category where graduate employability is based around the acquisition of skills and attributes “... as if they are capable of being possessed and used” (Holmes, 2013, p. 540). A recent study on employability believed that “employability may be seen as a social process as much as a labour market ‘outcome’ and this process inevitably entails the active positioning of

graduates within the wider labor market context within which that are located...” (Tomlinson, 2010, p. 80-81).

This ‘active positioning’ reflects Holmes’ ‘positional’ approaches to employability and the idea that “...individuals can make a difference to the likelihood of gaining desired employment by what they do, the actions they take” (Holmes, 2013, p.548). The developmental view of employability in that “... higher education is merely one stage, albeit an important one, within the biographical trajectories of students and graduates” (p. 548) reflects the idea that the development of a graduate identity is merely one stage in an on-going process. From this active student-centric focus, the key to enhancing a student’s employability is not through them just passively acquiring employability skills and attributes, but by students developing their own distinct graduate identity (Holmes, 2001 and 2013, Hinchcliffe and Jolly, 2011, Stevenson and Clegg, 2011).

2.2 Overview of the Tunisian Higher Education System

The university is a service organization that focuses on understanding, application, and the implementation of the principles of marketing or market orientation (Klayton, 1993). The start of the higher education journey firstly started the University of Tunis in 1960. Later on, three universities have derived from this university. Nowadays, there are 13 universities six in Tunis, and seven in the other largest cities. There are also numbers of thirty superior institutes and more of other different institutions. Concerning the private institutes, they have reached some 20 and even more.

The prevailing system of education in the Tunisian universities is BMD or LMD in French (Licence, Master, Doctorat). The introduction of the LMD system was the last important reform done by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. But “where the Europeans had allowed five years for negotiation, Tunisia's former minister had adopted it illegally in haste, without appropriate texts and without consulting lecturers,” said Sami El Aouadi, a professor in the faculty of economics and management at Tunis University and a leading trade unionist in an official press conference in 2012.

El Aouadi also added that quality had been sacrificed for quantity. That is, because of student expansion and overcrowding, the quality of teaching, supervision, and evaluation, as well as conditions for students, had deteriorated badly. Universities accepted students who were not well enough qualified, under a system that artificially inflated their numbers, leading to a leveling down that had insidious repercussions on evaluation. “It’s a means of artificial retention of students to avoid complicating employment data,” Aouadi confirmed. “This politically manipulated choice has transformed the university into a waiting room for the threshold of the job market.”

The country took initiative to “tunisifier” the sector and to throw the first stone on which to build higher education. This political will “asserted” by François Siino (2004), to reform and modernize the system of Tunisian higher education can produce real results without the “increase in the number of people involved—students (some to become teachers) and teachers(who were students) is in itself one of the key elements of transformation and structuring of the university system.”

Unemployment among graduates of higher education according to Abdelaziz Ben Sedrine (2009), Halleb & Said (2006) is explained by the following factors. First, the university system has continued to train implicitly for the sector of employment in the public sector, which rewards the school level even if accumulated degrees do not improve productivity. Second, job seekers continue to be attracted by the benefits of non-wage public sector such as job security and holidays. These applicants are willing to wait long for their turn to become an official or leave their jobs in the private sector to apply for employment in the public sector. Finally, these job seekers have job expectations too optimistic, while their actual qualifications do not correspond to the demands of the private sector, (Ben Sedrine, Halleb & Said, 2006).

According to Ben Sedrine (2009), the mass flow direction of academic achievement of basic education to secondary school and then to higher education has produced the massification university graduates. This has been encouraged through free public education since the Tunisian independence (in 1956) and automatic access to the university for any bachelor. Ben Sedrine (2009) adds that this expansion can be explained by the slow implementation of the reform of vocational training which contributes to the upgrading of the Tunisian economy. The lack of creation of adequate jobs reflects one of the fundamental weaknesses of the Tunisian labor market, namely a persistent mismatch, even increasing, between supply and demand on the labor market (Boubakri 2010). Unemployment among educated youth underlines the existing mismatch between the educational system and the demand for labor skills. Therefore, addressing hindrances relating to the labor demand side as well as the labor supply side is essential to reduce unemployment and underemployment on a sustainable basis.

Beate Schindler-Kovats, the director of the DAAD- branch office in Tunis- said in the press conference that “in Tunisia, there is both a surplus of academics and a lack of qualified experts with professional training. The Tunisian state guarantees a place at university for everyone, so that nearly all graduates of secondary education go on to study. Vocational training, on the other hand, is not considered to be attractive or seen as an alternative”. In Tunisia, the manufacturing industry requires qualified employees, while the demand for academics is limited. “The chance of being unemployed increases in proportion with the level of the qualification”, Beate Schindler-Kovats resumes.

The Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Salim Khalbous said: "Most of the statistics presented reflect the size of the problems and programs and actions accepted by the Ministry of Higher Education in the current period," adding that "the past seven years have not recorded projects and concrete actions of change and reform." Khalbos admitted that "the Tunisian University has for years produced only certificate holders, and lacks many skills." He added that the old system has produced a purely artistic process at the expense of experience, value, knowledge, and openness to the economic and social environment.

Ali Marouani (2010) discusses potential solutions when trying to increase the demand for skilled labor in Tunisia. He suggests “a massive increase in public research development and incentives for enhancing private research development” but also concludes that poor knowledge of its cost-effectiveness is a problem (ibid, 2010, p.936).

It is needless then to say that the educational system in Tunisia is still in the progressive form. To be more accurate, even though it has reached some high ranks in this concern, there are

always some shortcomings that require reforms which are mainly reflected in the increase of unemployment among university graduates.

It is worth noting that little research was done on this topic, for this reason, more investigation should be performed to better understand the concept of un-employability and decrease unemployment rates among graduates.

3. Methodology

In this section, the researcher will analyze the setting, the subjects, the instruments used to conduct the research and procedures employed to analyze the collected data.

3.1 Setting and Subjects

The participants of my study could be divided into four categories: (1) university graduates from different disciplines (Arts, Sciences, Mathematics, etc...) with different graduation levels: some of them had the license degree, others the master's degree, and some others got their PhDs. (2) University administrators and teachers and (3) and (3) employers. I also visit (4) the Tunisian National Statistics Institute (TNSI) to provide me with true and reliable statistics about unemployment. All subjects that have participated in this research are from various regions of Tunisia and they were randomly selected. Twenty graduates, twelve university teachers, four managers from different corporations, and one representative person of the TNSI accepted to participate in this research.

3.2 Instruments

Two instruments were administered to conduct this research: a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. For this article, I used both quantitative and qualitative research: quantitative research always answers the questions of "how much" and "how many" using numbers and statistics. It always tries to discover a phenomenon, a process, or perspectives of the people involved. It often includes a description, interpretation, and understanding of a concept.

Three different questionnaires are used in this study: one for graduates, one for university teachers, and another one for employers. Graduates are asked about (1) years of unemployment, (2) skills they have, (3) their specialty, and (4) their degree level (Licence, Masters, or Ph.D.). Instructors are asked about (1) students' performance in class, (2) quality of education offered to learners, and (3) type of skills they give to students at university. Employers are questioned about whether the graduates' skills fit the skills they need or not to hire them in their companies.

A semi-structured interview was used to collect data. The findings resulting from this interview will be compared to those of the previously mentioned instrument. University teachers graduates and employers were all interviewed. The interviews were recorded and analyzed considering variables such as (1) reasons behind unemployment, (2) the shortcomings of the educational system and (3) how it reflects a gap between what is

theoretical and what is practical, and (4) some practical solutions which are possible and might help in decreasing the un-employability of graduates. The interviews were tape-recorded to get access to them later for content analysis, so a qualitative analysis of the variables was conducted and interpreted.

It is important to mention that interviews are more reliable than questionnaires because “an interviewer can follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings, which the questionnaire can never do” (Bell, 2005, p. 157). The instruments have provided the researcher with valuable information that will be discussed in the chapter of findings and interpretations.

3.3 Procedures

As it was previously mentioned, the first thing the researcher did was the preparation of 3 questionnaires, one for teachers, one for managers and another one for graduates. Before distributing the questionnaires to the participants, I informed them that their participation was voluntary and the survey was anonymous. Besides, I told them that they were free to withdraw at any time and for any reason.

I prepared two versions of questionnaires for each category of subjects: an English version and an Arab version since most of them did not understand English. In that way, they could answer correctly. The questionnaires were distributed at universities and in companies. Some participants got them via e-mail. I asked them to tick the option that best applied to them. I also informed them that they could skip any question that they felt uncomfortable with. The representative of the TNSI provided the researcher with statistics and data needed for the study and did not receive any questionnaire.

After getting back the questionnaires from teachers and graduates and employers, the researcher interviewed some of these participants; seven teachers, three managers, and 12 graduates from different disciplines accepted to be interviewed. It took about 5 weeks to finish the interviews. All the interviews were then tape-recorded with the consent of the interviewees to get access to them later for content analysis.

4. Findings and Interpretations

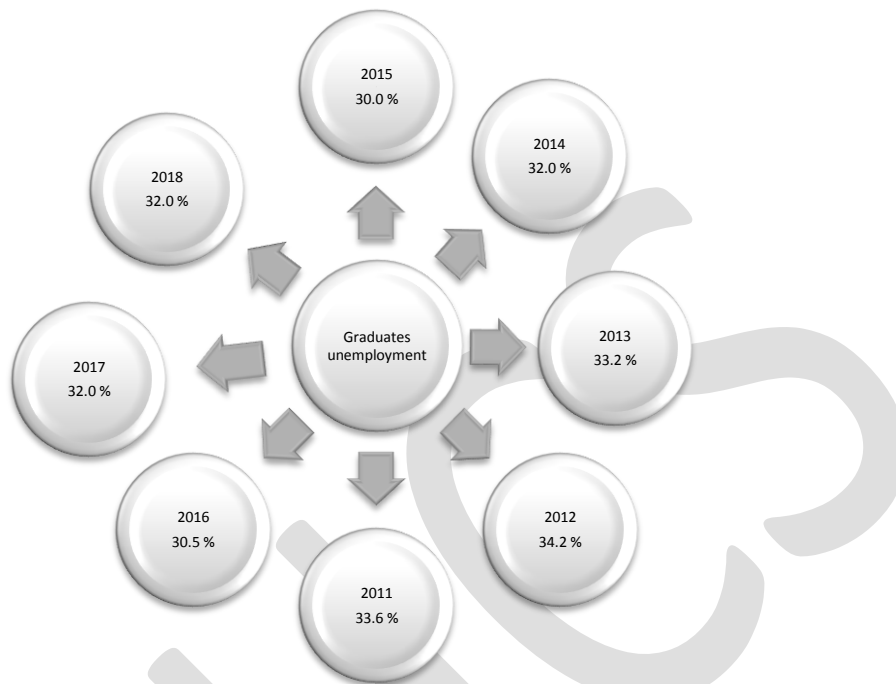
This article discusses the major findings resulting from the two instruments. That is the questionnaires and the interviews of teachers, employers, and students. It also presents and analyzes the unemployment rates among graduates since 2011 according to the National Statistics Institute.

4.1 Rates of Unemployed Academics in Tunisia

The number of those who have become a burden on the State is accumulating annually, as it is unable to provide a solution to the problems of their employment. A feature of unemployment in Tunisia is the unemployment of graduates. According to the Tunisian office of statistics, 40 percent of females and more than 20 percent of male university graduates in Tunisia are

unemployed. These rates are expected to rise in the coming years despite all the arrangements made for young graduates to insert them into the labor market. How do these figures come about and how can unemployed academics in Tunisia be equipped for the labor market?

Figure1: Unemployed Academics' Rates in Tunisia (%)



Source: National Statistics Institute

Since the revolution, the Tunisian economy has been showing signs of weakness and the region has been struggling with unemployment rates of around 15 percent. As for university graduates, around 30 percent of highly qualified people have problems finding a job. The unemployment rate among high school graduates rose to 217.8 thousand in May 2011, compared with 157.3 thousand in May 2010, due to the increasing number of graduates of the higher education system, especially the first flow of LMD.

The number of unemployed persons in this category reached 269,600, compared with 258,600 during the same period (2018), according to the National Statistics Institute. The number of employees during the third quarter was estimated at 3 million, 502 thousand and 700 active workers (73.6 percent male and 26.4 percent female) compared to 3 million and 497 thousand and 700 during the previous quarter, an increase of about 5 thousand workers.

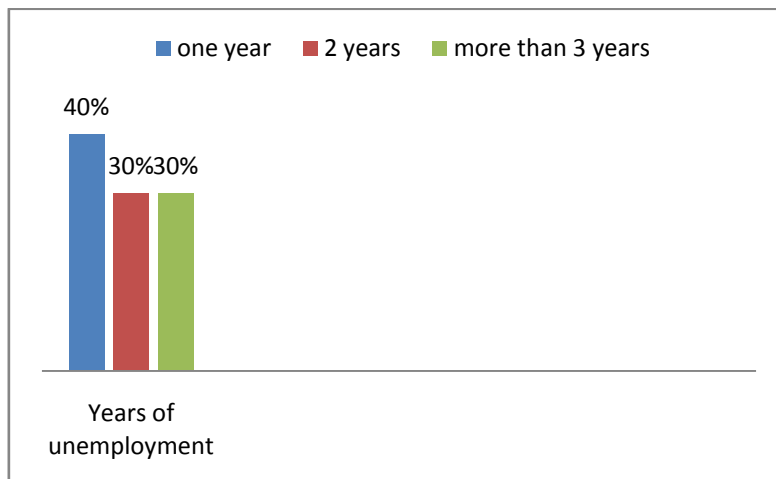
4.2 Results of the Graduates', Teachers', and Employers' Questionnaires

The analysis of the first questions of the questionnaire gave an informative profile of the participants.

4.2.1 Years of Unemployment

Relying on the data collected through the first instrument (graduate questionnaire), the researcher asked the participants to choose their years of un-employment and found out that most graduates had just got their certificates (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Graduates' Responses to their Years of Unemployment (%)



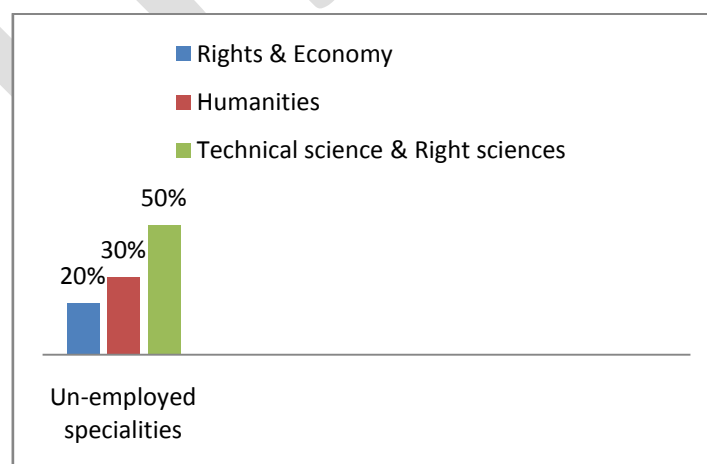
Source: Graduates' Questionnaire

As it is clear in the figure above, forty percent of participants said that they have graduated for one year. Thirty percent had 2 years and more than 3 years of unemployment.

4.2.2 Field of Study that had the highest Un-employment rates

Graduates were also asked about their field of study. This question was designed to know which field was most exposed to unemployment.

Figure 3: Graduates' Responses to their Specialties (%)



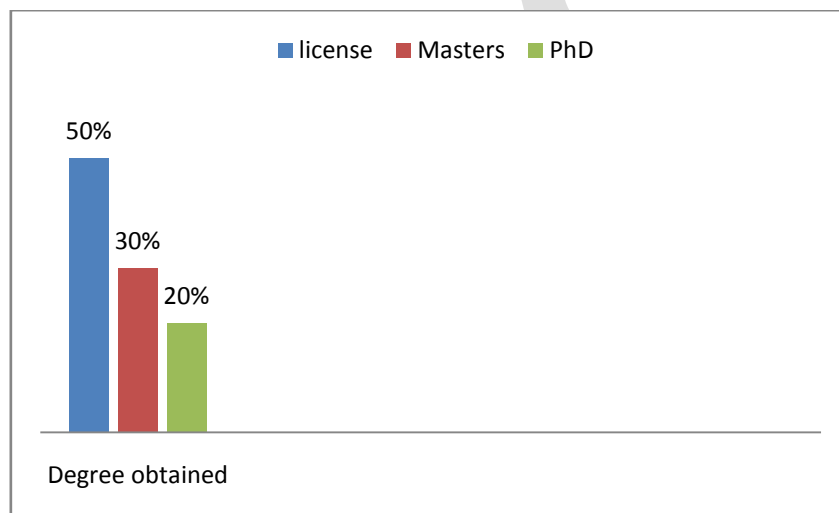
Source: Graduates' Questionnaire

As it is displayed in Figure 3, the percentage of unemployed graduates from the technical and right sciences (50%) was higher than the percentage of the other two specialties. So, when speaking about the most un-employed fields of study, technical and right sciences came the first, then the humanities field, and finally rights and economy.

4.2.3 Level of Study

The third question in graduates' questionnaires was about their level of study. Some had the license degree, others had a Masters's degree and some others had a PhD. The findings of this question will be shown in the figure below.

Figure 4: Graduates' Responses to their Degrees (%)



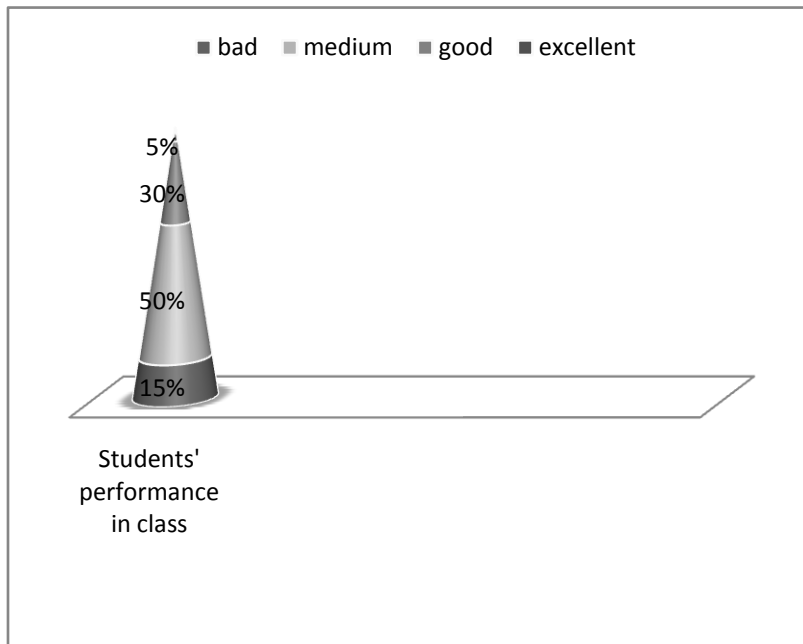
Source: Graduates' Questionnaire

The figure above displays the graduates' responses to their obtained degrees. The percentage of license certificate (50%) was the highest. thirty percent of graduates had a Masters's degree and only 20% had PhDs. The findings indicated that even graduates decided to continue their studies. Yet, their chance to get jobs decreased because of their over qualifications, sometimes the market did not need someone who had higher degrees.

4.2.4 Teachers' Responses to Students' Performance in Class

University teachers were asked about their learners' performance in classrooms. Whether they could reach the designed goals of the lesson or not. The findings reflected different points of view.

Figure 5: Teachers' Responses to Students' Performance in Class (%)



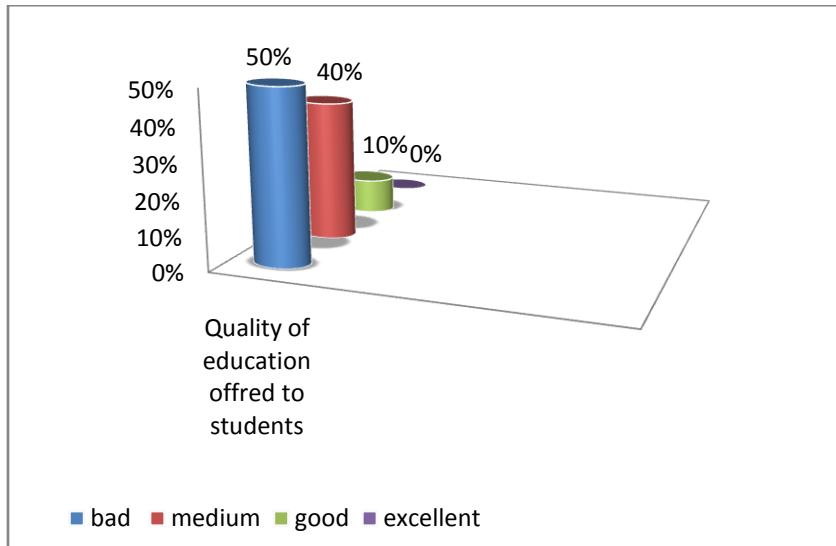
Source: Teachers' Questionnaire

Teachers' role in this question was to rate students' performance in class on three options. Five percent of them said that it was excellent. Fifteen percent said that it was bad. Thirty percent said it was good and the highest percentage was for those who opted for the choice "medium". Thus, it is clear that most teachers are dissatisfied with learners' efforts to acquire learning skills.

4.2.5 The Tunisian Educational System

University teachers were asked about the quality of education offered to students. In other words, the effectiveness of programs included in the curriculum. The findings of this question will be further explained in the figure below.

Figure 6: Teachers’ Responses to the Tunisian Educational System (%)



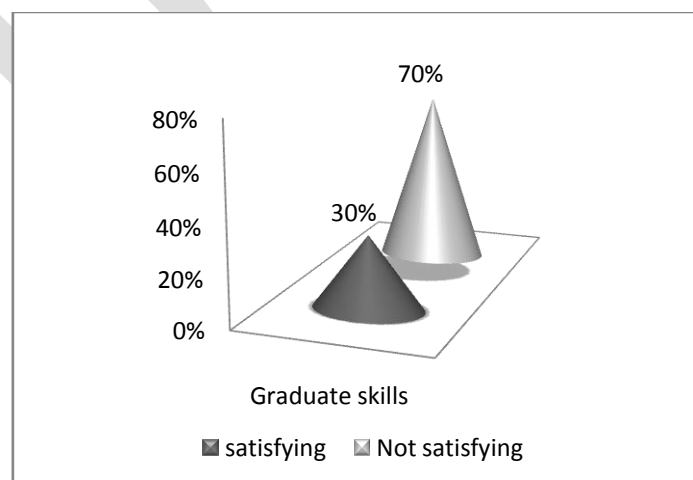
Source: Teachers’ Questionnaire

The figure above examines Teachers’ responses towards the quality of education offered to learners. Fifty percent of teachers said that learners received bad quality of education at university. Forty percent thought that it was medium. Only 10% of teachers agreed that students had a good education. However, no one agreed with the fourth option “excellent”. This mismatch between the instructors’ responses revealed a serious problem within higher education which needed attention from the government.

4.2.6 Teachers’ Responses to Graduate Skills

Teachers were asked about how they viewed graduate skills and they were given two options: “satisfying” and “not satisfying”. The findings will be exposed in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Teachers’ Responses to Graduate Skills (%)



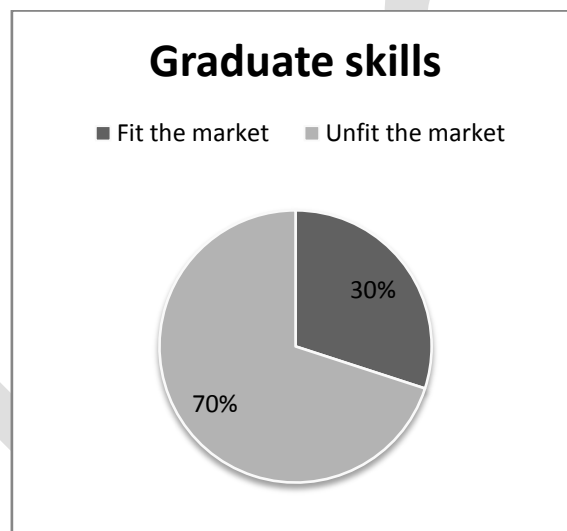
Source: Teachers’ Questionnaire

Most university teachers (70%) asserted that graduate skills were not satisfying to meet the labor market needs. However, thirty percent thought they were good and satisfying. It seemed that most teachers were not satisfied with the skills that learners got from university and that maybe was the main reason for unemployment.

4.2.7 Employers' Responses to Graduate Skills

Like teachers and students, employers were questioned about graduate skills; whether the skills corroborated their needs or not. The results of this question will be interpreted in the following figure.

Figure 8: Employers Responses to Whether Graduate Skills fit the Needs of the Market or Not (%)



Source: Employers' questionnaire

As it is clear in the figure above, thirty percent of employers said that graduates' skills fit the labor market. On the other hand, seventy percent of them disagreed; they considered most graduates' skills as unable to meet the market needs. It is important to mention that managers can be suitable persons to judge graduate skills because they often interview job seekers and hire only those that best go with their needs.

4.3 Results and Interpretation of the Interviews

University teachers, graduates, and employers participated in the implemented interviews. They were asked different questions about several points like (1) determinants of unemployment, (2) the shortcomings of the educational system and (3) how it reflects a gap between what is theoretical and what is practical, and (4) some practical solutions which are possible and might help in decreasing the un-employability of graduates. These points will be analyzed and interpreted according to the interviewees' responses.

4.3.1 Determinants of Graduates Unemployment in Tunisia

When asked about the determinants and impacts of graduate unemployment, several causes of the rise of the unemployment rates for graduates can be listed out. For instance, most teachers said that the main cause of this phenomenon was “the massification of higher education”. They further explained that after World War II, all developed and developing countries opted for a strategy of ‘massification’ of their higher education to give their country the skills needed for the reconstruction of their national economies. In Tunisia, the massification strategy was ‘profitable’ in terms of human capital. However, these “student flows” posed a great problem to the Tunisian state, knowing that the number of graduates in 2004 reached the number of 40,321 and exceeded 52,092 in 2012 according to the National Statistics Institute. So, “how can the state manage so many students? How will it increase the intake capacity of institutions, whether local or proposed courses, to provide training that combines the needs of students with those of the labor market?”, one teacher interrogated (source: teachers’ interview).

In the same vein, one graduate affirmed that “universities accommodate large numbers of students annually without prospects for employment”. They explained that since the moment they receive their certificates, the journey of misery begins for this group of young people who find themselves at a “crossroads” and unable to choose the “right path” in the search for work. So, they choose either to surrender to unemployment or to resort to temporary solutions often, “incompatible or beyond their educational level” said one graduate. This raises the paradox that the higher the level of education, the more difficult it is to get a job. Unfortunately, often this group of young people becomes “a prey to a four-dimensional social scourge; poverty, suicide, migration and extremism, ribs of one square” said another PhD graduate. This clearly confirms that the unemployment crisis has worsened in recent years in Tunisia, to reveal that the education plans do not take into account the needs of the labor market. (Source: graduates interview)

“The Tunisian economy is facing a very specific problem” said one manager; “this economy does not create enough jobs, especially for university graduates”. Faced with this inadequacy of the labour market for graduates in higher education, private sector plays its role as a main actor in the labour market through its generation of labour market demand for persons qualified in computer science, finance, management and marketing. (Source: employers’ interview)

Faced with this situation in Tunisia, an employer said that some young people chose to illegally cross the border in boats called "boats of death" even if this was a danger to their lives and the possibility of their death at sea. HE added that young people did not believe “promises” and “slogans” of politicians. Eight years of the revolution, the politicians and rulers of Tunisia did not achieve what the graduates were waiting for decades until it came to some unemployed as that “what connects them in Tunisia is only an identity card and a nationality, no more than that”.(Source: employers’ interview)

4.3.2 Shortcomings of the Educational System

A manager of Trade Corporation said in the interview that "the failure of the university in the last twenty years may be due to the closure of this university institution itself and the absence

of culture and creativity, as well as the limited interaction with the positive economic institution, and with the international environment". He also stressed that the increase in the phenomenon of unemployment among graduates of higher education is due mainly to "the incompatibility of educational curricula in Tunisia with the requirements of the current labor market". (Source: employers' interview)

"Unemployment is spread among Tunisian graduates because of the lack of educational curricula on the field," said one graduate. "Most educational institutions only provide general theoretical aspects". "The newly graduated Tunisian student finds himself facing unprecedented challenges in the labor market, especially when it comes to modern industries or technology". For these reasons, graduates and teachers call for reforming the educational system by "re-dividing student times between universities on the one hand, and factories, departments, and laboratories on the other, so that the graduate can find himself in the face of familiar tasks". (Source: teachers' and graduates' interviews)

4.3.3 The Link between Theoretical Knowledge and Practical Experience

"There is a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical experience," said a manager of a manufacturing company. He added that "universities do not generate the required labor skills for the society and undergraduates lack knowledge about the reality of the labor market situation". Thus, this skill mismatch leads to more number of unemployable graduates in the economy. In this respect, the causes of unemployment and the existence of university specialties are not compatible with the labor market and are what made the number of unemployed accumulates. (Source: employers' interviews)

The manager describes the reasons for the high unemployment among academics in Tunisia as follows: "On the one hand, there is a huge gap between what the universities are teaching and what the economy needs: study courses in Tunisia are much too theoretical and the students don't have enough practical experience. On the other hand, many graduates are hard to place because they don't know how to write a job application or how to present themselves in a job interview." (Source: employers' interviews)

4.3.4 Methods to Increase the Employability of the Tunisian Graduates

All participants of the interviews suggested different solutions to overcome the crisis of unemployment. One teacher said that "the solutions are very difficult and require enormous resources over several years". Another one said: "The Tunisian economy has to create more skilled jobs, with a more domestic and foreign investment with high added value". It was obvious that economic policies already adopted by the Tunisian government proved to be insufficient to absorb the unemployed university graduates. These policies were mainly focused on attracting foreign direct investment often low value-added and thus requiring few skills. A manager added that "the program of upgrading and modernization of the industry at this level has not achieved the desired results. Many students want to continue their studies in Tunisia or abroad to escape unemployment, which can only aggravate the mismatch between supply and demand in the Tunisian labour market". (Source: employers' and teachers' interviews)

“Reforms should involve the economic and the academic sphere; they have to undergo a profound investigation. Besides, graduates who outnumber the jobs generated by the economy for this category, and mismatches between the needs of the economy and the production skills of higher education institutions. These imbalances should be better analyzed with appropriate statistical surveys to better ensure the employability of the Tunisian graduates in the labor market” said a university teacher. (Source: teachers’ interview)

5. Discussion of the Main Findings

It transpires from the results that most of the respondents seemed to acknowledge the importance of the employability of graduates. As the results indicated in the questionnaires and according to the map of the graduates working and not working, we found that most of the unemployed were from the holders of higher degrees in technical science followed by the license in the right sciences (mathematics, physics, chemistry ...) and license in the humanities ... license in the rights and economy occupied the fourth rank in the number of unemployed among the holders of higher degrees. While the number of unemployed graduates in other sections such as medicine, engineering, pharmacy, and masters is fewer ... These sections were considered to be working compared to others in Tunisia. These findings corroborated the findings of the Tunisian National Statistics Institute.

Moreover, one of the goals of this research was to investigate what made graduates un-employable for the labor market. After conducting the interviews, the main determinants of graduate un-employment were (1) lack of creation of adequate jobs, (2) the massification of higher education which led to the deterioration of quality of teaching, supervision, and evaluation, and (3) slow implementation of the reform of vocational training that contributes in the upgrading of the Tunisian economy. These findings echoed those mentioned in the literature review by Ben Sedrine (2009) and El Aoudi (2012).

The results of this research indicated that the un-employability of graduates underlines the existing mismatch between the educational system and the demand for labor skills. This finding is similar to that found by Boubakri (2010) which highlighted the fact that there was no link between theoretical knowledge and practical experience. This imbalance was due to the lack of partnership between the education and employment sectors, a partnership that the state has not taken as a support in the development of schemes, as well as reform of education and an emphasis on the practical aspect of providing graduates with experience to obtain employment.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of the Main Findings

Tunisia has experienced for some years a real blockage of social mobility which is a sign of the failure of economic and social policy in recent years. The research aimed at investigating the employability of the Tunisian graduates and to make recommendations for improving the existing university curriculum to match real employers’ needs. Employability is not only a statistical concept, but also a multidimensional social phenomenon. It results in substantial crises in psychological, social, and economic perspectives, some of them are increasing crime rates and violence, dependence on family, low self-esteem, poor social adaptation, depression, and loss of confidence (Kabaklarli et al 2011).

A discrepancy was found between theoretical knowledge and practical experience. In other words between what the universities are providing and what the labour market needs. This is the mismatch between supply and demand. The massification of higher education and insufficient creation of adequate jobs are also other causes of the exponential rise in the unemployment rate of graduates.

The degree and specialty are key determinants of integration in the job market. Those in medicine, engineering, pharmacy...continue to improve their already positive position in the workplace, but those in law and social sciences continue to be more often unemployed, 3 years after graduation. Besides, The LMD (License, Master, and Doctorate) reform requires additional financial and human resources that are missing from the University of Tunisia. Meanwhile, it is necessary to enhance the system of vocational training with additional resources. This would reduce the number of students and ensure better employability of youth. This latter is conditioned by the consolidation of regional integration in the Maghreb and Mediterranean countries.

Higher education is a vital sector for all generations; it is the 'factory' that produces skills that will be subsequently injected into the labor market. And that is why sustained employability gives us an idea of the health of the higher education sector. Meanwhile, beyond acquired theoretical knowledge, the university should develop the entrepreneurial skills of students to integrate effectively in the labor market. This can only be achieved if the entire staff and faculty engage in a construction contract. Indeed, it seems that political interference in a democratic context can improve the situation of Tunisian higher education by creating laws and regulations that work in the interest of public authorities concerning higher education.

6.2 Recommendations

6.2.1 Employers

- Companies should change their attitudes regarding graduates lacking skills and employers should be flexible to find the best graduates.
- Organize information sessions provided by recruiters so that students have an opportunity to evaluate and learn more about the companies interviewing on campus.

6.2.2 Universities

- Private-sector job has more opportunities for career advancement for the graduates than in the government sector so the university can arrange the company visit each year.
- They should learn how to apply the theoretical knowledge they gain and how to act or behave in the organization.
- Three months before graduation from the university, the final year students of the university can organize the career fair with the support of companies. Undergraduates can understand the real business culture and get a real insight into the organization.

- During the undergraduate study time, university should arrange training program for students who have entrepreneurial abilities. How students can enter self-employment and/ or how they can start their business after graduation.

6.2.3 Graduates

- Changing the attitudes regarding expectations for a higher salary and a higher position from the employers are needed. Changing attitude regarding the instability of private-sector jobs and more stability on government jobs is also needed.
- Personal development through acquiring the necessary skills by investing more in training themselves, keeping oneself updated with the labor market requirements, and evaluating company needs and specialization field.
- Practice and apply effectively, the knowledge acquired in the university, and improve communication skills.

References

Articles and books

- Ali Marouani, M. (2010)., "More jobs for university graduates: some policy options for Tunisia" *Applied Economics Letters*, 17, 933-937
- Ben Ouada Jamoussi, Hanene & Gassab, Maher. (2011). *Determinants of Graduate Unemployment in Tunisia*. ESC Tunis, URMA –FSEG Tunis.
- Ben Sedrine, H. (2009). « Etudes de cas : La Tunisie », In B. Labraki (Ed). *Enseignement supérieur et marché du travail dans le monde arabe*, Collection électronique de l'IFOP.
- Fraisse-D'Olimpo, S. (2009). *Les Fondements Théoriques du concept du capital humain*.
- Hajri, Mahdi. (2017). *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review (Kuwait Chapter) MARKET ORIENTATION IN TUNISIAN HIGHER EDUCATION*. Vol. 6 (12).
- Haouas, I., Sayre, E., & Yagoubi, M. (2012). *Youth Unemployment in Tunisia: Characteristics and Policy Responses*. Abu Dhabi University.
- Hinchcliffe and Jolly (2011) "Graduate Identity and Employability", *British Educational Research Journal*, 37 (4), pp. 563 – 584.
- Holmes L. (2001) "Reconsidering Graduate Employability: the 'graduate identity' approach", *Quality in Higher Education*, 7 (2), pp. 111 – 119
- Holmes L. (2013) "Competing Perspectives on Graduate Identity: Possession, Position or Process?" *Studies in Higher Education*, 38 (4), pp. 538 – 554.
- National Institution of Statistics (INS), several reports.
- Kabaklarli, E., Er, H.P, and Bulus, A. (2011). *Economic Determinants of Turkish Youth Unemployment Problem: Co-Integration Analysis*. *International Conference on Applied Economics – ICOAE 2011*. 267.
- KH., Wafa. (2016). *Tunisian Educational System*.
- Lees, D. (2002). —Information for Academic Staff on Employability, <http://www.palatine.ac.uk/files/emp/1233.pdf>
- SIINO., François. (2004). *Science et pouvoir dans la Tunisie contemporaine*, Paris, IREMAM-Karthala.
- Stevenson J. and Clegg S. (2011). "Positive selves: students orientating themselves towards the future through extracurricular activity", *British Educational Research Journal* 37(2) pp. 231 – 246.
-
- Tomlinson M. (2010). "Investing in the self: structure, agency, and identity in graduates' employability", *Education, Knowledge and Economy* 4 (2), pp. 73-88.

Yorke M. (2004). "Employability in the undergraduate curriculum: some student perspectives", *European Journal of Education* 39(4), pp. 409 – 427.

Electronic Sources

Al Jazeera. (2011 January 15th). Tunisia's Ben Ali flees amid unrest. Al Jazeera
<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/africa/2011/01/20111153616298850.html>

Higher education and scientific research in Tunisia
http://www.mes.tn/anglais/donnees_de_base/p_etud.htm

Ministry of vocational training and employment in Tunisia
[http://www.emploi.gov.tn/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF/statistique/Evotx_chom_niveau.p](http://www.emploi.gov.tn/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF/statistique/Evotx_chom_niveau.pdf)
[df http://www.emploi.gov.tn/index.php?id=407](http://www.emploi.gov.tn/index.php?id=407)

National Institute of statistics – Tunisia
http://www.ins.nat.tn/fr/donnee_demographiques0.php?code_theme=0201

Tunisia - Higher Education. State University
<http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1554/Tunisia-HIGHER-EDUCATION.html>
<http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1551/Tunisia-EDUCATIONAL-SYSTEMOVERVIEW.html>

[https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/tunisia/unemployment-rate.](https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/tunisia/unemployment-rate)

[http://ses.ens-lyon.fr/1242027840911/0/fiche____article/&RH=05.](http://ses.ens-lyon.fr/1242027840911/0/fiche____article/&RH=05)

<https://www.alumniportal-deutschland.org/en/study-continuing-education/continuing-education/unemployed-academics-tunisia>