

EMPLOYABILITY AND THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

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Abstract

After the implementation of the Bologna Process in Portuguese higher education institutions, it's necessary to start looking at some of its first consequences. The Bologna Process is now an integral part of the lexicon of reference of the whole European higher education.

Although knowledge continues to be transmitted by the traditional way, Bologna covers qualifying new perspectives, generate changes of emphasis, including the Teaching for Learning and Education Training. Competitiveness, employment, labor market, etc. are concepts which are gradually internalized by the higher education institutions.

In Portugal, with the adequacy of the various courses to the Paradigm of Bologna, the higher education institutions do not intend to offer students a mere system of training / education but different learning approaches and a set of skills that allow an easier insertion on the labor market. The enormous competitive advantages are the improved intellectual and cultural skills, associated to the capacity building initiative, adaptability, flexibility and communication.

It is essential to reorient the provision of academic qualifications, focusing on courses tailored to the needs of the economy and society. That goal will be achieved if the connection between higher education institutions and the business world is strong. In this sense, it was essential to understand and analyze the adequacy of scientific training taught by the University of Évora to the graduates, in relation to the profession and occupational mobility, in line with the new European Space for Higher Education.

In order to complete this study, it was carried out a questionnaire survey applied to graduate students who attended the Masters in Economics and Business in the University of Évora, having been obtained the following results:

- The people who attend the courses of the 2nd Cycle are mostly young, female, and continues his/hers graduate studies at the same school where he earned a degree.
- The younger respondents are not available to go on mobility as it is proclaimed in the Bologna Declaration and consequently, for the construction of the European Higher Education Area.
- More and more, knowledge is being taken as the crucial element to getting a job, and that lack of experience, given to the very young age of graduates, may be a barrier to employability.
- In the opinion of graduates respondents, there is a proper relationship between the training received and the training required by the job market.
- The expectations of graduate respondents in relation to the acceptability of the labor market were partially thwarted.
- Graduates respondents hold a very reasonable knowledge of reality and actually believe in an adjustment between the expectations created around the Bologna Process and its acceptability in the job market, endorsing the new principles embedded in appropriate courses now (employability, mobility and international recognition, acquisition of new skills, etc.).

Generally, this study is to obtain a contribution of all stakeholders in order to boost the reflection and debate on the subject under study. In particular, it is believed that the higher education institution involved, the labor market factors and the students will be much more able to understand this new social and European business reality. And ultimately, the results could serve as indicators for the future of professionals in the studied area.

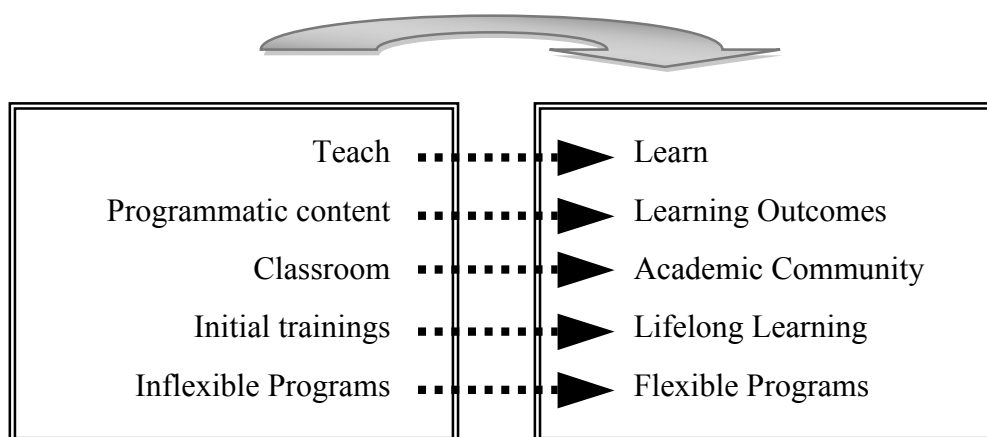
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THE HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

The Bologna Process is now an integral part of the lexicon of reference of any European Higher Education and works as a symbol of the announced change in grade structure and organization of curricula and teaching methodologies and learning.

The way it looked, until today, the teaching has become obsolete. With the Bologna Process, this activity has changed considerably, not only for teachers but also for students. Essentially, it is related to a radical change of paradigms of education (See Fig. 1).

Figure 1 – New paradigms in Higher Education



Source: Authors'

Although knowledge continues to be transmitted by traditional way, Bologna covers qualifying new prospects, generate changes in emphasis (from Teaching to Learning, from Education to Training), and emphasizes the "new" life-long learning. Among them concepts such as competitiveness, employment, labor market, etc., are being gradually internalized by the institutions of higher education.

In Portugal, with the adjustments of various courses to the Paradigm of Bologna, institutions of higher education are not intended to provide the students with a simply system of training / education, but rather a range of learning and a set of skills that allow an easier insertion in the labor market (even in occupations not related to specific training), with a huge competitive advantage of greater intellectual and cultural skills, attached to the development of initiative capacity, adaptability, flexibility and communication.

In the new model, the current training courses of higher education are organized in three cycles, giving the degrees of Bachelor, when completed the first three years (1st cycle - 180 units of credit), Master, when completed over two years (2nd cycle - 120 units of credit) and Doctor, with a duration of three years (3rd cycle - 180 units of credit). In the particular case of Integrated Master, is also assigned a degree of the first cycle of training.

However, in most higher education courses already tailored to the Bologna Process, the academic record is composed of two cycles of studies (3 +2). In the 1st cycle (Bachelor) is offered to the students a basic scientific training that will enable them to accept a work at intermediate level, with general functions. The exercise of the profession in their particular field of graduate will, eventually, require additional training that is provided by the attendance of the 2nd cycle (Master). With regard to some courses, students are required to complete the second cycle in order to practice their profession, for that reason it is necessary to do the Integrated Master.

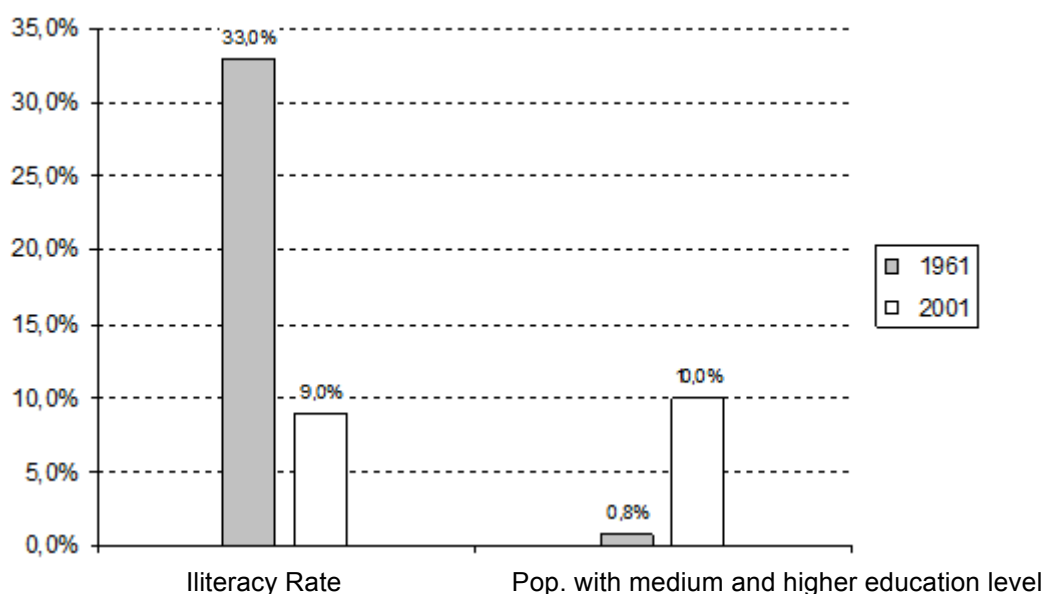
The second cycle allows the students to have a greater flexibility in the scientific area and the curriculum, which makes easier any changes of career. Moreover, the mobility is encouraged between the various National or Foreign Higher Education Institutions.

THE EMPLOYABILITY IN PORTUGAL

As it has been successively reaffirmed since the beginning of this process (Bologna Declaration, 1999; Prague Communiqué, 2001, U.S., 2003 and 2005), the training of graduates and specially, employability for European labor market, are the crucial pillars that institutions of higher education must consider when they are reorganizing the curricula

In recent decades, Portugal has made a unique effort to recover the skills gaps, nearly two centuries that separate school from most European countries. The generality of the indicators is symptomatic of this development. According to the data by the OECD (2007), Portugal had in 1961, an illiteracy rate of 33% vs. 9% in 2001 (See Fig. 2). In turn, the population with medium education level or above rose from 0.8% in 1961 to 10% in 2001, and students enrolled in higher education doubled in the last 15 years (186.780 in 1990 against 373.891 in 2004).

Figure 2 – Changes in Educational Attainment in Portugal



Source: Own elaboration based on OECD (2007)

Despite these enormous advances, with few comparable cases in international terms, Portugal still has a marked shortage of skills of the different levels of education, including higher education. From a national workforce of about 5.1 million people, only 900 000 (17.6%) have more than secondary education, a number well below the needs of an economy and a competitive society.

Despite the almost universal intuition of the existence of excess of graduates in Portugal, the truth is that the data published by the OECD (op. cit.) contradict that sentiment. Across Europe, Portugal continues to have one of the lowest percentages of population with secondary or higher level qualifications. Even in an economy in slow recovery, with a low level of economic growth, graduated people are those with higher levels of employability. The average duration of unemployment of graduates is around eight months, compared to an average of more than 15 months in other levels of education. This means that when the labor market is not large enough to absorb the resources available, graduated people, but also with difficulties, are more likely to obtain employment.

Moreover, in a changing economy in which knowledge is increasingly crucial as to ensure employment, the more the country grows, the more relevant is the possession of a degree.

But this positive correlation between graduation and employability is neither simple nor automatic. Will be stronger for the more sustained qualification to answer the challenges of society and the economy. It must therefore find ways to improve the relationship between higher education and businesses, ensuring a greater absorption of graduates into the labor market.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Assuming that it is essential to reorient the provision of academic, focusing on courses tailored to the needs of the economy and society, it's important to step towards for promoting a deeper understanding of reality and a more effective adjustment to the expectations of all parties involved. That objective will be achieved much more the longer the connection of higher education institutions for business sector.

From this perspective, it was essential to understand and analyze the adequacy of scientific training taught by the University of Évora for the graduates, in relation to the profession and occupational mobility, in line with new European Space for Higher Education. In this sense, it was developed a study aiming to analyze information related to:

1. The degree of confirmation of the expectations of a graduate, when he sought to integrate into the labor market;
2. The relationship between the skills provided by higher education and the skills demanded by the labor market;
3. The expectation of the graduate with the changes introduced in the suitable courses to the Bologna Process and its acceptability in the job market;
4. The impacts expected by the graduate on the new principles incorporated in appropriate courses to the Bologna Process (employability, mobility and international recognition, acquire new skills, etc.).

For doing this study, it was carried out a survey questionnaire to 50 graduate students currently attending the Masters of the area of Economics and Business in the University of Évora, shared by 43 students of Master in Business Administration (Finance and Marketing branches) and 7 of the Master in Economics. It were collected, respectively, 35 and seven copies of these questionnaires, verifying a response rate of 81.4% for the first and 100% for the last. Table 1 summarizes the results and their conclusions.

Table 1 – Results and Conclusions

	Results	Conclusions
Characterization of respondents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The average age of graduates who were surveyed is 27 years. ▪ 57.1% are female elements. ▪ 54.8% of respondents correspond to the age group of 21-26 years. ▪ 88.1% of respondents recently completed an undergraduate program, with a duration of four years (59.5%), in the University of Evora (52.4%). 	The people attending the 2 nd cycle courses are mostly young, female, and continue their training at the same school where they earned an undergraduate degree.
Mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 95.2% of respondents said they did not participate in any student exchange program with foreign institutions. • 69% said they'd like to have participated but weren't able to do because of : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ financial difficulties (31%) ▪ lack of information (21.4%), ▪ ignorance of foreign languages (16,7%), ▪ lack of institutional support (16.7%) ▪ family problems (4.8%). • They also highlighted that the country they would like to do this program would be, especially England (16.7%) and Spain (9.6%). 	It's important to emphasize the limited availability of young respondents for the mobility proclaimed in the Declaration of Bologna and, consequently, for the construction of the European Higher Education Area.

	Results	Conclusions
Attainment of Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 71.4% of graduate respondents were employed. 35.7% obtained employment within six months after graduation. On a scale from 1 (unimportant) to 4 (very relevant), the graduates found: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> professional experience as the most crucial attribute on average (3.71), to obtain employment. gender as the least important attribute (2.10) for this same purpose. 	Reinforces the idea that knowledge is increasingly taken as the crucial element to getting a job, and that lack of experience, given the very young age of graduates, may be a barrier to employability.
Professional Activity versus Academic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 50% of respondents reported that employability determined the selection of the course taken and completed. 40.5% said that having a college-level education was very important for getting the job. 38.1% of respondents said that, nowadays, a college degree is very important and the same percentage said that is important for the national labor market. 52.4% thought that graduates in the same area of science, namely in the area of Economics and Business, found themselves in a professional situation generally good. 61.6% reported that the curriculum of the course was adequate to the job market. 40.5% indicated that their work falls partly in the area of initial academic. 38.1% of respondents reported that the experience or knowledge acquired in the course were relevant to their work. 57.1% rated their degree of preparation after completion of the course, as to be reasonable for the exercise of its functions. 50% said that the current or last job, in addition to the course they have, were requested and / or felt the need for other types of "training," 31% of respondents highlighting the computer skills. 50% of graduates indicated that they are satisfied with their work, referring to the location as the factor that generates higher levels of satisfaction. 	In the opinion of graduates respondents there is a proper relationship between the training received and training required by the job market.

	Results	Conclusions
Expectations towards to Labor Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A large proportion of respondents considered the reality identical to those expectations with regard to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ responsibility (61.9%) ○ remuneration (47.6%) ○ autonomy (47.6%) ○ working environment (45.2%), ○ the variety of tasks (42.9%). • Very few graduates said they found the reality was better than expectations with regard to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the speed of hiring (14.3%) ○ the diversity of tasks (8.6%) ○ autonomy (7.1%) ○ responsibility (7.1%) ○ to career prospects (2.4%), ○ remuneration (0%). • Many of the respondents considered the reality itself found, after completing the course, worse than expectations, as regards the speed of hiring (50%) and in relation to career prospects (57.1%). • 28.6% of respondents stated that the professional features correspond fairly to those idealized when started the course and 33.3% reported little match. • The main causes of non-confirmation of the best expectations, 38.1% said the term politico-economic changes and 31% of the politico-economic structural changes. 	<p>Respondents' expectations in relation to the acceptability of the labor market were partially thwarted.</p>
Labor Market and Process of Bologna	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 54.8% of respondents reported having a good level of knowledge about the theme "Bologna Process". • 35.7% reported that this process is very important to the issue of mobility within the European Economic Area and 42.9% reported that it is important. • 35.7% of respondents indicated that they agree with the fact that a higher superior degree is organized according to the rules of the Bologna Process be seen by the labor market as an added value and 38.1% disagree with that. • 52.4% reported that the adequacy of the courses to the rules of the Bologna Process is an incentive to return to higher education, showing as fundamental reasons of this option: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ acquiring new skills (26.2%) ○ international recognition (23.8%) ○ mobility (23.8%) ○ employability (19%) ○ new teaching methodologies (14.3%) ○ the new teaching-learning paradigm (11.9%), ○ flexibility (7.1%) ○ comparability (7.1%). 	<p>Graduates respondents hold a very reasonable knowledge of reality and actually believe in an adjustment between the expectations created around the Bologna Process and its acceptability in the job market, endorsed the new principles embedded in appropriate present courses (employability, mobility and international recognition, acquire new skills, etc.)..</p>

Source: Authors'

However, this project does not end here! These are the first results of a broader research project, architected and programmed to, in a second phase, already initiated, to extend this study to students of the 1st Cycle (bachelor) and various employers, in order to determine the impacts of the adequacy

to the Bologna Process in the labor market, with regard to courses in the area of Economics and Business.

In general, we intend to obtain a contribution from all stakeholders in order to stimulate reflection and debate on the subject under study. In particular, it is believed that the higher education institution involved, the labor market factors and the students will be better placed to understand this new European social and business reality. And ultimately, the results could serve as indicators for the future of professionals in the studied area.

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