

# EMPLOYABILITY ITINERARIES OF GRADUATES IN MARKETING: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

**KEYWORDS:** EMPLOYABILITY, JOB POSTINGS (ADS), MARKETING, SKILLS, TRAINING

## *PERCURSOS DE EMPREGABILIDADE DOS LICENCIADOS EM MARKETING: ESTUDO EXPLORATÓRIO*

*PALAVRAS-CHAVE: EMPREGABILIDADE, ANÚNCIOS DE EMPREGO, MARKETING, COMPETÊNCIAS, FORMAÇÃO*

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#### **Abstract**

The paths of employability of graduates in Marketing were analyzed by conducting an exploratory study through the use of a questionnaire. Were also examined ads for employment and their required skills that were published in a Portuguese newspaper, in a similar period. The results showed that, on the one hand, despite the published job opportunities for graduates in marketing were only 6.6%, about 48% of graduates work in their area of training. On the other hand, taking into account the skills required by employers, this study also pointed out a set of generic skills to be developed during the course.

#### **Resumo**

*Os percursos da empregabilidade dos diplomados em Marketing foram analisados através da realização de um estudo exploratório com a utilização de um questionário. Considerando o mesmo período temporal, foram igualmente analisados anúncios de emprego e respectivas competências solicitadas, que foram publicados num jornal Português. Os resultados mostraram que, por um lado, apesar das oportunidades de emprego publicadas para licenciados em marketing terem sido de apenas 6,6%, cerca de 48% dos licenciados trabalham na sua área de formação. Por outro lado, tendo em conta as competências solicitadas pelos empregadores, este estudo também apontou um conjunto de competências genéricas a serem desenvolvidas durante o curso.*

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ESPAÇO NOTAS

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of employability has been discussed in the literature for many years now. However, recently, interest in this concept has been growing, first by the nature of changes in employment policies and, secondly, the supposed end of the notions of career and employment insurance (Hillage & Pollard, 1998).

Although there is, in the management literature, a common interest [and use] for this concept, its significance remains unclear (Clarke & Patrickson, 2008). In fact, the term is used in a wide variety of contexts which makes it difficult to design (as construct clear and precise) and operationalize (Hillage and Pollard, 1998). So, we can find in literature different proposals for the concept of employability which can be defined as a set of individual characteristics that determine the future position of a person in a given work market (Grip et al., 2004) or the possibility of being employed, to obtain a job, or keep a job (Hillage & Pollard, 1998). Moreland (2006) further defines employability as a set of skills, knowledge and personal characteristics that make people not only more likely to be able to keep their job as well, to be successful in their chosen profession for the benefit of her own, the workforce, community and economy in general. On the other hand, Baruch (2001) sees employability as a reflection of the new psychological contract of work, in which the individual recognizes that self-management of career will provide a fair deal for the future and a greater likelihood of job success.

Clarke and Patrickson (2008), making this discussion even more complex, state that employers and employees differ in the understanding of the concept of employability: employees see it in terms of ability to find suitable employment and organizational change, when necessary or desired; employers perceive employability in terms of filling gaps within an organization, employing people who have the skills, experience and knowledge to meet their real needs and expectations.

In the past, specifically in the nineteenth century, workers were neither qualified as too, they were used as brute force to "feed" the plants (factories). It was only in the beginning of the twentieth century, that Taylor defined a set of skills that each employee should have according to the place he occupied in organizations. Finally, after World War II, the relationship between skills, education, training, work experience and health and the results obtained in the labor market, of each individual, has been defined (Thomas, 2007). Currently in the advanced economies, knowledge is considered the main factor in employability (Bonfour & Edvinsson, 2004), and the person is valuable to the company if his/her knowledge is not knowledgeable outside the company. In other words, someone adds value to a company if his/her knowledge is not interchangeable with other organizations (Thomas, 2007). Thus, the specificity of knowledge becomes one of the most important aspects.

Today, however, on the one hand, companies do not know what kind of knowledge they will need in five or ten years, and so, on the other hand, schools and universities also do not know if the disciplines they teach correspond to market needs (Tomé, 2007). In this sense, the ability of institutions of higher education may have in preparing their students for the current job

market, it is crucial and the development of this capacity is a major challenge. Employability is therefore a critical factor in the performance of these institutions, which receive more and more students, and these, as refers Yorke (2004), perceive the degree licensee increasingly as a necessary first step to commence careers. However, there is a growing belief that students feel that finding a job, become employable and start a career are important for the choice of institution and course. Thus, students become more selective in choosing courses and institutions (Rae, 2007).

On the other hand, is well known that the employment crisis is present throughout the world. Since a few decades ago that European countries face the problem of unemployment in a growing number of people with significant tertiary education (Gonçalves et al., 2006). Indeed, the difficulties that graduates face to get the job they have always dreamed of during their academic career are enormous, partly due also to the increasing number of students who complete higher education and arrive at the same time at the labor market. Also, today students are facing with job offers that require not only some experience in the activity desired but also skills that are often considered not developed along the course.

However, in the current context, what does "job offer" means? The most used definition of "job offer" is the one stating that a company has a job offer if it is looking for a person to fill an existing vacancy or, in a more appropriate way, if the company intends to employ a person (which includes offers of stock to fill future) (Burdett & Cunningham, 1998). In this sense, as Mathews and Redman (2001) report, job offers current data provide information about the demands and changing on business. Thus, many universities have developed strategies for employability, because they believe that action is needed, towards a new direction, contrary to the belief that the preparation provided by those is increasingly less responsive to labor market. As Santos (2001) reports, the increase in unemployment may strengthen the idea of having an inadequate training in universities.

In fact, graduate students are a reflection of the education institutions, and their profile, along with their performance in the labor market will always be associated with the institution that nurtured them. In this sense, the profile of the licensee represents a competitive factor between institutions of higher education.

Thus, employability is increasingly becoming an important and growing concern (Yorke, 2004) and, as Pool and Sewell (2007) refer, such issues as whether the graduates uses or not the skills, knowledge and understanding acquired during the course, should be placed and studied.

The educational debate of the century focuses on the challenge of globalization and on the clash between education systems, academic qualifications and professional skills (Gonçalves et al., 2006). This has led universities to confront one of its main problems: the choice of fields of study and its relevance to the labor market. In this sense, universities have developed complex sys-

tems of academic planning that aim to involve employers in the validation of courses, thus ensuring that the databases meet the academic requirements of employers (Rae, 2007) as well as employability rates.

Today, there are studies that identify gaps between some educational programs and expectations of employers (Blankson-Hemans & Hibberd, 2004). In this sense, an analysis of the factors of employability, forces us to reflect on the role and responsibilities of universities, about its relationship with the labor market and on the expectations of employers (Gonçalves et al., 2006).

Since 1988, the Portuguese Ministry of Labor collects and publishes data on employment, skills and academic qualifications at national level but produces few indicators on the relationship between training, skills and employability (Thomas, 2007). In this context, emerged the following question: How to identify the determinants of employability in general and, more specifically, in Portugal?

This brings us to the analysis of theoretical models of employability that in recent years have been published in the literature. Pool and Sewell (2007), based on results from studies of research in the context of employability, built a model that they characterize as practical and consistent. The model is anchored in a set of components (learning and career development, life and work experience, degree of subject knowledge, understanding, soft skills and emotional intelligence), considered essential, and the absence of any, will considerably reduce the employability of graduates.

Another interesting model is that proposed by Hillage and Pollard (1998). The authors suggest that the employability of individuals is based on a combination of four elements: their assets in terms of knowledge (what they know), skills (what they do with what they know) and attitudes they have (as they do), how individuals use the assets (a set of skills including skills of career management skills, job search skills and strategic approach), the way they present to employers (this includes, for instance, the experience of submission of resumes, references and work experience) and, crucially, the context, the personal circumstances that may affect the ability to seek different opportunities (for instance, family responsibilities or disability) and the environment of the labor market (for instance, the pattern and level of employment opportunities and recruitment of employers).

Like other models (eg, Bennett et al, 1999), the above referred reflect a multidimensional concept of employability, which makes its study a challenge for us all.

## 2. Purpose of the study

Given that employability is not only a multidimensional concept, but also a cross-jurisdiction throughout life and that no one is ever perfectly employable [...], and that there will always be aspects of the employability of an individual that can improve" (Pool & Sewell, 2007:288), with this study, we want to examine,

first, the career development of graduates in Marketing since 2007, through the use of a questionnaire. Secondly, we want to examine job opportunities and skills through analysis of job vacancies that were published in a Portuguese newspaper, in a similar period.

In this context, we want to explore the relationship between the tasks that Marketing graduates are playing in their current jobs and skills acquired during their academic training, which may or may not enhance the contribution of higher education institutions in the educational context, to ensure/create their employability. Secondly, and based on the skills required in ads, we want to find out the (new) professional qualifications that are being introduced in the workplace to be assessed the need for possible adjustments in the curricula of higher education institutions.

## 3. Empirical study

### 3.1. Participants and data collection

We collected two types of data/information: one related to the career paths of graduates and other related job vacancies and skills required in the ads.

Regarding the career paths of graduates, the study involved 842 graduates in marketing (a convenience sample), who graduated in January 2007 and December 2008. They were contacted by e-mail, and it was presented the study and requested their cooperation. In this mail, a form questionnaire was attached, with a deadline for it return. Thereafter, 68 emails were returned because they were not delivered (wrong email address or non-existent) and were received 164 valid questionnaires. In order to improve the sample size, we send new mail with a different date for return. After this second period, there were obtained over 51 valid questionnaires, with a final response rate of 27.8%.

The questionnaire in the final version (after completion of pre-test, it was necessary to make some adjustments) was composed of open and closed questions, divided into three groups. The first group concerned the professional career and included questions aimed at whether the licensees had a job before or during the performance of their course, if their current job was in the area of their training, and if they had changed jobs and why.

The second group of questions concerned the present occupation of the licensees. In other words, we wanted to know if graduates were employed or not, what was their contractual situation and how they got the job. In this group of issues we also wanted to know if the current job was in the area of their training and what was the name of his post. Finally, the last group of questions was related to the socio-demographic data of graduates.

The second type of data/information collected related to the vacancies and the skills required has been collected through an analysis of advertisements of job vacancies published in a newspaper. The study was not intended to be exhaustive, or even cover all sources of recruitment in the market but only a detailed analysis of the jobs advertised in a particular source of

recruitment. The source of information chosen to serve as a basis for data collection, was a reputable journal in the Portuguese market, whether by employers (or potential employers), or by candidates, which each week features a book devoted solely offers of employment in general. The analysis included all the jobs that called for an individual with a degree of at least bachelor published between 19 February 2008 and March 7, 2009. During this period they 6412 vacancies, of which 6.6% (425) requesting an individual with degree in Marketing. For these vacancies, was considered the job title and all the skills that were requested in the profile.

Finally, with regard to data analysis was performed a frequency analysis using the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences, version 17). In respect to information gathered from newspaper ads, firstly it was performed a content analysis to identify the positions and skills required. Then, a frequency analysis was performed with the aim of finding the positions and skills most requested.

### 3.2. Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the results obtained related to sex, age, semester/year in which the graduates completed the course and also the final course classification.

As we can see, 52.1% of respondents were female and the majority of respondents is 30 years or less years of age (73.4%). With regard to their final course average, the results indicate that 40.3% of graduates had a B and 25.4% had an A (already converted to the European credit transfer and accumulation system).

Regarding to the career of the respondents, this is represented in Figure 1. As a result of this analysis, respondents were divided into two groups: those who had a job before or during the course (65.6%) and those who had not (34.4%).

For the first group, those who already worked, the results showed that 40.4% of those jobs were already in the area of training of graduates. After completion of the course, 84.2% of people who worked in the area of training remained until the

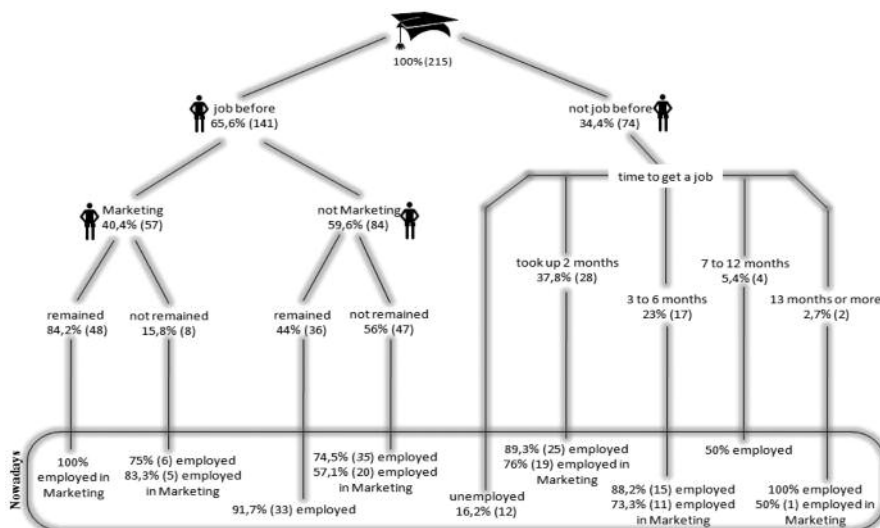
Tabela 1. Sample demographics

	FREQUENCY	VALID PERCENT
<b>GENDER</b>		
Female	112	52,1
Male	103	47,9
Total	215	100
Non-responses	--	--
<b>AGE</b>		
25 or less	82	38,1
26-30	76	35,3
31-35	35	16,3
36-40	9	4,2
41 or more	13	6,0
Total	215	100
Non-responses	--	--
<b>GRADUATION SEMESTER/YEAR</b>		
1st semester 2007	25	12,0
2nd semester 2007	80	38,5
1st semester 2008	31	14,9
2nd semester 2008	72	34,6
Total	208	100
Non-responses	7	3,3
<b>GRADUATION AVERAGE</b>		
(10-11) E	1	0,5
(12) D	18	9,0
(13) C	50	24,9
(14) B	81	40,3
(15-20) A	51	25,4
Total	201	100
Non-responses	14	6,5

date of the study in the same jobs. Furthermore, 56% of those who do not work in their area of training (marketing) (59.6%), changed jobs, 74.5% are employed and 57.1% of them are employed in their area of training, jobs that remain to the date of the study.

In the other group, consisting of graduates who did not work before the completion of the course (34.4%), the results indicate that 16.2% there were still unemployed. For the remaining, the time they took to find an employment ranged from two months (37.8%) and seven to twelve months (5.4%), and 2.7% more than a year to achieve an employment. Comparing these results with the average time that a licensee takes until he takes a job in Europe, which is 5.9 months (Gill et al, 2006), we conclude that the majority of graduates surveyed landed a job soon. We can

Figure 1. Professional trajectory



also add that the majority of graduates who found employment is working in their area of training.

Unfortunately, we cannot thoroughly discuss the results that we have been presenting because there are no other contributions in this context. However, we assume that the results are positive, since almost half of the participants in this study is employed, and many of them in their area of training.

In the case of results related to the second group of issues, Table 1. rent occupation of graduates (results not shown in Figure 1), showed that 77.8% of graduates are employed and 81.8% were employed by others. These graduates were able to reach their jobs through personal acquaintances (27.4%), by response to announcement (23.6%), via spontaneous application (17.8%) or after completing an internship in the company (10.8%).

These results show the importance of having relevant knowledge and lead us to conclude that knowing someone with influence makes them more employable. However, we can not underestimate the job ads as an important means to get a job.

Regarding to the title of the graduates who are currently working, and as Santos (2004) noted in an earlier study, not all the titles of professions required include the word "marketing". The

Table 2. Job title

	FREQUENCY	VALID PERCENT
Account Manager	6	6,2
Brand/Product Manager	10	10,3
Business Manager	10	10,3
Commercial	3	3,1
Commercial Assistant	4	4,1
Commercial Director	2	2,1
Commercial Manager	3	3,1
Commercial Technical	2	2,1
Consultant	5	5,2
Customer Manager	4	4,1
Executive Director	4	4,1
Marketing Assistant	13	13,4
Marketing Director	6	6,2
Marketing Manager	17	17,5
Marketing Technical	8	8,2
Total	97	100,0

analysis emerged a number of names used to identify the profession that the licensees exercise (Table 2).

As observed, 17.5% of graduates who perform their duties in the area of training (marketing), perform functions such as Marketing Manager (the name of the course for graduates), 13.4% served as a Marketing Assistant, and 10, 3% are Brand/Product or Business managers.

The results of the analysis of job advertisements are shown in Table 3 (title of job) and Table 4 (skills required).

A reading of Table 3 tell us that the title of the job, the training area of marketing that appears more often is Marketing Manager (15.3%), which correspond to those reported by most licensed as a currently operating. The title of the second job offer was prompted more Brand Manager/Product (13.9%), followed by Business Manager (10.8%) and Account Manager (9.6%).

Table 3. Job Vacancies Title

	FREQUENCY	VALID PERCENT
Account Manager	41	9,6
Brand/Product Manager	59	13,9
Business Assistant	4	,9
Business Director	4	,9
Business Manager	46	10,8
Bussiness Manager	13	3,1
Commercial	24	5,6
Commercial Assistant	9	2,1
Commercial Director	24	5,6
Commercial Manager	17	4,0
Commercial Technical	8	1,9
Consultant	12	2,8
Customer Assistant	2	,5
Customer Manager	9	2,1
Executive Director	3	,7
Marketing Assistant	24	5,6
Marketing Director	10	2,4
Marketing Manager	65	15,3
Marketing Technical	32	7,5
Sales Assistant	2	,5
Sales Manager	13	3,1
Teacher/Trainer	4	,9
Total	425	100,0

Regarding to skills required in advertisements (see Table 4), we can say that the skills most requested are the following: language skills (including English, 67.3%), the ability to use new technologies (52.9 %), good communication skills (36.7%), ability to work as a team (24.7%), good interpersonal skills (24.2%), availability for traveling (23.1%), take initiative

Table 4. Skills required in job vacancies

	FREQUENCY	VALID PERCENT
Ability to use new technologies	225	52,9
Good communication	156	36,7
Teamwork	105	24,7
Good interpersonal relationship	103	24,2
Willingness to travel	98	23,1
Initiative	98	23,1
Organisation ability and method	94	22,1
Dynamism	93	21,9
Negotiation ability	85	20,0
Proactivity	75	17,6
Commercial skills	68	16,0
Flexibility and availability	61	14,4
Responsibility	61	14,4
Autonomy	58	13,6
Leadership	55	12,9
Ability analysis	46	10,8
Client oriented	43	10,1
Goal driven	43	10,1
Creativity	41	9,6
Market knowledge	37	8,7
Driven results oriented	37	8,7
Ability to work under pressure	26	6,1
Entrepreneurship	24	5,6
Good presentation	21	4,9
Motivation	17	4,0
Accuracy	17	4,0
Self confidence	11	2,6
Versatility	11	2,6
Ambition	11	2,6
Adaptability	7	1,6
Dedication	4	0,9
Integration ability	4	0,9
Enthusiastic	3	0,7
Ability to summarize	3	0,7
Problem-solving ability	2	0,5
Language skills		
English	286	67,3
Spanish	71	16,7
French	37	8,7
Italian	4	0,9
German	11	2,6

(23.1%), organizational skills and method (22.1%), dynamism (21.9%) and negotiation skills (20%).

Analyzing this set of skills, and as Bennett et al (1999) argue, we can see that these are generic skills and as such, they can potentially be applied to any other area of training and any course of higher education. Thus, our results, as in other studies of employability (Arcodia & Barker, 2002; DEST, 2002; Oneil et al, 1992) showed that these skills are crucial to employability.

#### 4. Conclusions and key points

Regarding to the career of graduates, the percentage of employees is 77.4%, 48.4% of whom work in their area of training (marketing).

Employment opportunities for graduates in marketing published during the period under review was only 6.6% of all job vacancies (425 in 6412). However, although this number is low, 23.6% of graduates found employment through the response to an advertisement.

Although we do not know exactly the content of the tasks being performed by the licensees, the analysis of current titles of positions (marketing manager, marketing assistant, etc.) leads us to believe that a relationship exists between the tasks that licensees are playing and the skills acquired during their academic training.

Finally, in relation to professional qualifications that are being introduced in the workplace, and based on the skills required, we can say that the curriculum of a degree should involve developing the skills most wanted:

Language skills (67.3% of job offers asking for English); course programs must offer disciplines in different languages, particularly English, as well as the possibility of other disciplines be taught in English;

Ability to use new technologies (52.9% of job offers requesting that ability), and the use of new technologies to be encouraged in all units of each course;

Good communication skills (36.7% of job offers requesting this jurisdiction), the curriculum should provide opportunities for developing skills of communication, such as public speaking;

Know how to work as a team (24.7% of job offers requesting this power) and good interpersonal skills (24, 2% of job offers requesting that jurisdiction), the disciplines of the courses should include the development of these skills both within and outside the classroom, using the methodology of group work;

Negotiation skills (20% of job offers requesting that jurisdiction) and leadership skills, the curricula of courses must be available to develop the leadership and negotiation;

Thus, even though many employers believe that students do not develop certain skills during the course, the truth is that teachers are addressing issues of relevance in the area in their curricula (Barr & McNeilly, 2002).

#### 5. Study limitations and future research

Despite the results of this study are interesting, it includes some limitations, of which we highlight two: one refers to the small sample size and the other, to the lack of information on the specific skills that licensees use in their current jobs. In fact, this study only collected information on the job title, but do not know exactly their job descriptions. Thus, in future research, it is important to gather information about the functions that licensees perform in their jobs.

Although we have found a match between the skills needed in a particular job (analysis of job advertisements) and those that their graduates often developed during the course (curriculum analysis), we ask: "is it possible that employers be satisfied with the performance of graduates?" As Barr and McNeilly (2002, p. 168) asked, "when employers analyze a curriculum vitae, which is the sought information showing that in fact the applicant has the relevant skills for employment? They look past experience? They look at the syllabus of the course? "

In this sense, and once it is important finding the new skills being introduced in the workplace, it is still necessary to explore in future investigations:

The perception of employers about the skills (theoretical and practical) acquired by the graduates and their adequacy;

The expectations of employers on the performance of graduates;

The perception of graduates regarding the adequacy of what they learned and what they really need in practice.

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