

ACCESS

African Center for Career Enhancement and Skills Support

Workshop

Dynamics of Employability and Soft Skills Development



01/08/2023



Ekanola Adebola & Dmitri van den Bersselaar



DYNAMICS OF EMPLOYABILITY



- Shift in thinking around 2000: from employment to employability
- In teaching institutions in the Global North: schools and universities should produce graduates who are not just able to get a job upon graduation, but graduates who can adapt to the constantly changing demands on the job market
- Also connected to a shift from reducing unemployment through measures that (are supposed to) create jobs, to shifting the responsibility for employment onto the individual (part of the neo-liberal turn)
- Unemployment no longer defined as a failure of the State, but of individuals who need to become more employable
- At the same time: strong increase in people going to university (also in Africa)
- Following a period in the late 1980s and 1990s when „structural adjustment“ caused decline of universities in Africa (Mkandawire 2015), since 2000 we see the growth of (often private) universities as answer to labour market problems
- But: research using statistical data for Tunisia 1975-2018 has shown how push for literacy and education went along with increased unemployment for those who have been educated

EMPLOYABILITY AND SKILLS



- The challenge for many African universities: much is expected of them, especially producing graduates who get jobs, but what if those jobs are not there?
- (Graduate Unemployment | Brain Drain)
- Employers often claim that they find it difficult to identify people with the skills and aptitudes they need (even though there may be high graduate unemployment): is there a problem with matching graduates to the right jobs?
- Teaching „the skills the labour market needs“ does not lead to employability. Producing graduates that are employable includes teaching them to reflect on their skills, what they can use them for and how they can show what they are capable of to prospective employers.
- What skills are we talking about? Technical, subject-specific skills? Or transferable, „soft“ skills?
- How can we support our students in acquiring those skills?

WORKSHOP AIMS



- Together, to discuss how we can support students' „soft skills“ development through the curriculum as part of a strategy to improve graduate employability (though teaching soft skills is not always about employability)
- To think about in what ways we already teach „soft skills“, and what we can do more, or do differently?
- To consider the differences between disciplines (is there a „one size fits all“ approach?)
- To try, as a group, to formulate concrete ideas or suggestions that can help students' „soft skills“ (or transferable skills?) development?

WORKSHOP PLAN



Activity	Duration
Intro	10 mins
Definitions	10 mins
Group Conversations 1 – which are needed?	20 mins
Feedback from the Groups and Plenary Discussion	20 mins
Group Conversations 2 – what more than soft skills?	20 mins
Feedback from Groups and Discussion on Dynamics	20 mins
Identify/formulate suggestions	20 mins

DEFINITIONS



- „Soft Skill“:

- Employabilty:

DEFINITIONS



- **„Soft Skill“:**

Differs from a subject-specific skill. Is more generally applicable in various employment contexts (in curriculum development we also call it a transferable skill); may be explicitly taught, or acquired as part of learning other skills or a trade, or informally acquired in mother (often social) settings.

- **Employability:**

The ability to find employment, not just the first job following graduation, but throughout the career – requires (usually) successful education/training in a particular field having mastered subject-specific skills, as well as a set of transferable skills and aptitudes, a certain mentality, a flexibility to adapt to new technologies, confidence, and often also experience (through work, internships, etc.) and reflexivity on this experience

→ employability is not something achieved at graduation (or not), it needs to be maintained!

GROUP CONVERSATIONS I



- Which soft skills are needed?
- Which ones do we already teach?
What are our experience in teaching them?
Any examples of things that have worked well?
- Examples of developing and practising soft skills
- Are they the same across the disciplines?

FEEDBACK AND DISCUSSION



• ...



GROUP CONVERSATIONS II



- Apart from soft skills, what else is needed for employability?
- Can we also help our students with that?
- What are our experiences? (Cases, examples)

FEEDBACK AND DISCUSSION



• ...



IDENTIFY SUGGESTIONS



• ...

