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THE PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES OF PORTO-NOVO (BENIN) AND THE PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION OF STUDENTS

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Abstract

The difficulties of professional integration of graduates at the end of their training have always been the subject of many concerns. This research, which raises the problem of the lack of support for graduates at the end of their university training, aims to analyze the support mechanisms existing in the private universities of Porto-Novo by ruling on the case of UPAO and the Sonou Courts. The aim was to describe these mechanisms and evaluate their effectiveness based on the employability theories of DeFillippi and Arthur (1994) and Fugate and al. (2004). The targets consisted of 102 respondents, including students at the end of the training cycle, graduates, and training managers of these university centers. The results obtained show that the support mechanisms for professional integration in the private universities of Porto-Novo are insufficient or non-existent. As a result, the systems currently in place are deficient and fail to meet the needs of graduates for a successful transition to the labor market.

Keywords: support; professional integration; private universities of Porto-Novo.

Introduction

The professional integration of young graduates into the labor market represents a major challenge in the current global employment context, and as a result, skills and qualifications are key factors for accessing stable and fulfilling employment. Therefore, the place of training managers in these integration

policies is considerable. Universities play a crucial role in preparing students for their future careers while supporting them in their transition to the world of work. The considerable propensities caused by underemployment and inactivity of graduates throughout

the world following the new configuration of the labor market are leading public authorities to intensify their actions in terms of employment policy (Bougroum and al., 2002). The adjustment of supply and demand does not happen automatically, in terms of level or structure (Forgeot and al., 1997). In Africa, a large gap still exists between the aspirations of young people and the reality on the ground; the consequences are unpredictable (Fonlladosa and Sevaistre, 2021). In Benin, 65% of the active population is unemployed and despite an economic growth rate of 6.9% in 2019. Three quarters of the population are concentrated in the south of the country, notably in the large cities of Cotonou and Porto-Novo, the capital. The lack of jobs mainly affects young people. In fact, 53% are unemployed. Economic integration is particularly difficult for them. The integration policies put in place by the State do not always meet the expectations of young people looking for work. Likewise, the university institutions in which these young people complete their training are less willing to facilitate their integration into the job market. It seemed necessary to us to examine this situation in the capital of Benin. In short, what are the mechanisms put in place in the private university institutions of Porto-Novo to facilitate the professional integration of graduates? We are interested in the SONOU Courses and the Protestant University of West Africa (UPAO). After a theoretical approach to the subject, we will present the methodological approach, the results and the discussion we make of them.

1. Theoretical approach

1.1. Status of the question

Questions relating to the professional integration mechanisms of graduates have not left many researchers indifferent. Various works have addressed youth employment policies, the difficulties of professional integration of graduates and the strategies developed to remedy them.

Employment policies for young people

Verdier and Vultur (2016), in their study on professional integration, argue that today the notion of professional integration is more vague than ever, especially as it is expected to broaden to take into account increasingly diversified paths which tend to integrate phases relating to studies as well as those relating to individual careers. We can still point out attempts to include the notion in a broader interpretative framework. This is the case for works inspired by societal analysis such as those of Verdier (1996), who analyzes the specificities of the French integration model, or Lefresne (2003), who defines "national systems of professional integration" as "the set of standards and institutions which govern young people's access to the salary relationship in each national group" and combine two elements: "the mode of training-employment articulation and the place occupied by young people in the 'all labor mobility processes'". The professional integration process is marked by the articulation and intertwining of different sequences (training, employment of different qualities, unemployment, etc.). In this journey, professional integration schemes occupy a fluctuating but notable place. Bernard and Rey (2017), note that these different systems refer first to the sphere of training and qualification, including work-study, which combines training logic and incentives for companies. They then integrate the various subsidized contracts, which can be defined as contracts derogating from common law, including aid for the employer (hiring subsidies, exemptions from contributions, training aid), reserved for individuals experiencing difficulties accessing employment.

Factors of difficulty in professional integration

While some authors argue that employability depends on multiple factors, such as individual skills, labor market opportunities and economic conditions, others highlight external factors. For Santos et al., (2020), for example, poor employment opportunities and economic instability in a region can generate difficulties in professional integration, regardless of the efforts made to escape them. They mention that educational establishments cannot solve the employability problem alone but must work in collaboration with other economic development actors. Roberts and al., (2017) emphasize that support mechanisms, although important, cannot be considered the only influence on graduate employability. Other elements, such as degree specialization, prior work experience, and industry demand, can also play a significant role. Furthermore, Torres et al., (2017), postulate that with appropriate planning and monitoring of internships, the benefits for students could be maximized.

Non-recognition of diplomas and downgrading must also be recognized as difficulties. The work of Mahut (2014) on downgrading in migration, after his ethnographic survey carried out between 2007 and 2012 with around forty Bamako migrants and graduates residing in Paris, reveals to us that in France, they become delivery drivers, kitchen clerks, night watchmen, nurses or pharmacy technicians. Galarneau and Mauricette (2008), in their work on the professional integration of Senegalese migrants in Canada, reveal that if settling in Canada as a permanent resident is relatively easy for Senegalese graduates, the same is not true for their professional integration. But the quality of the training is always a favorable asset. The fact of having a diploma and the level of diploma play a decisive role in professional integration at the start of a career. Hence the need to perceive the real issues in terms of quality of training and adequacy between training and employment (Senou and al., 2010).

Support systems for professional integration

They are made up of internships in companies. Soares et al, (2018), emphasize that it is the responsibility of universities to provide career guidance and counseling services, as well as internship and networking opportunities to prepare students for the reality of the job market. work. It goes without saying that the absence of these mechanisms would compromise the professional transition of graduates. Smith et al., (2019), in their research argue that strong partnerships between universities and employers can facilitate students' access to internship and apprenticeship opportunities. The work of Johnson and al., (2018), had already noted the importance of effective support mechanisms to promote a successful transition to the professional world. Thus, they demonstrated that quality support can help graduates succeed in their professional integration. Companies play the game of these immersions for two reasons: the first, apparently dominant, borrowing from a "civic" convention and marked by societal considerations (the social responsibility of the employer being invoked); the second is more "commercial" in nature and sees in these immersion phases an opportunity to test candidates for employment and build up pools (Farvaque and al., 2016). The challenge of future youth employment systems will thus consist of acting as much on the supply as on the demand for work, by providing a service offer to both job seekers and potential employers. It is also wise to note that the effectiveness of support mechanisms also depends on collaboration between universities, employers and other stakeholders in the professional world. According to research by

Thompson et al., (2020), effective coordination between these actors helps to better understand the needs of the labor market to adapt training programs accordingly. Therefore, a lack of collaboration and solid partnerships can hamper efforts to improve the professional integration of graduates. Likewise, Leite and al., (2019), point out the need for collaboration between universities and the professional world to improve the employability of graduates. They highlight that insufficient support mechanisms do not allow students to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for successful professional integration.

However, Barros and al., (2017) question the very idea of support mechanisms for professional integration. They argue that these mechanisms can perpetuate socio-economic inequalities, favoring certain students over others. Instead, they suggest rethinking education systems, integrating more inclusive approaches and emphasizing the development of transferable skills. Silva and al., (2019) also highlighted the harmful effects of inadequate support mechanisms on the employability of graduates. The authors point out that limited services in terms of advising, mentoring and professional development can hinder students' ability to position themselves in the job market competitively.

1.2. Problematic

In Benin, figures show low participation of young people in the labor market (26.7%) (INSAE, 2012) with an employment rate of 48.2%, the oldest being more favored in access to employment. employment (Alladatin and al., 2021). According to the recent country report of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA, 2013), underemployment is estimated at 72%. Furthermore, the country has more than two million unemployed graduates, according to data from the National Institute for Statistics and Economic Analysis, even though recruitment needs are expressed by companies. Porto-Novo, capital of Benin, has a considerable number of private university centers which have emerged in recent years to meet the growing demand for professional training. Unfortunately, the problem identified is the outlet for students from university schools (Mairie de Porto-Novo, 2021). The question that arises is: how do the mechanisms put in place in the private university institutions of Porto-Novo work to facilitate the professional integration of graduates? To answer this, several hypotheses are formulated: graduates of Cours Sonou and UPAO would not benefit from effective professional integration mechanisms at the end of their training. At best, the support systems for professional integration in the identified university centers would only concern academic internships. Thus, the ineffectiveness of the career guidance services available would be a determining factor in the professional integration difficulties of graduates of these university centers covered by this study. This research therefore aims to analyze the professional integration mechanisms of graduates of Cours Sonou and UPAO in the city of Porto-Novo. To achieve this, it will specifically be a question of describing the professional integration mechanisms of these universities, on the one hand, and of evaluating the effectiveness of said mechanisms, on the other hand.

1.3. Theoretical model

“The analysis model constitutes the natural extension of the problem by articulating in an operational form the fathers and the leads which will ultimately be retained to preside over the work of observation and analysis” (van Campenhout and Quivy, 2011 p147). As part of this research, the analysis model constructed is inspired by two scientific theories and will make it possible to

analyze the mechanisms supporting professional integration in the private universities of Porto-Novo. The levels of the theory of DeFillippi and Arthur (1994), the concepts of the model of Fugate and al., (2004) will be applied for this purpose.

-Any employability process requires a priori the acquisition of technical skills essential to the profession envisaged, but also certain transversal individual qualities necessary for professional development. The main concern would therefore be to know whether the training received and the content of the professional integration support mechanisms at their university enable them to meet the needs of the job market.

-As the conformity of training with the needs of the job market is assessed, steps to update skills to better adapt them to the new demands of the job market will be studied. The means and processes by which graduates of private universities in Porto-Novo who have not yet been integrated are supported to benefit from continuing training capable of helping them to better cope with the demands of the job market. This will then involve answering the question: “does your university organize skills development or refresher training courses useful for your professional integration?” » It is therefore necessary to ensure that graduates benefit from important refresher sessions from their university for their upgrading.

-The third level concerns the socio-economic environment of the job market and the organizational framework. This is the final level of assessment of the support mechanisms for professional integration in the private universities of Porto-Novo. It will be a question of responding to the concern: “what are the challenges or difficulties that you face or have faced during your professional integration process?” »

2. Methodological approach

2.1. Nature of research

This research is mixed in nature; it considers qualitative and quantitative aspects. Qualitative research allows you to explore the research subject in greater depth with targets capable of providing adequate and objective information. And the quantitative one makes it possible to have statistical and quantified information on many targets.

2.2. Target and sampling

The work was carried out on a well-defined target and with precise characteristics. A primary target population made up of students at the end of the cycle and graduates having been trained in one of the university centers: UPAO or Cours SONOU. Depending on the place of these end-of-cycle students and graduates in the functioning of professional integration mechanisms in universities, we have increased their number to 60% of the sample of this population. A secondary target population is made up of university center managers. These include directors, study or education managers, and staff in the career guidance services.

As part of this work, two sampling methods were used. The probabilistic method with the snowball sampling technique (relational network sampling) and the probabilistic method with the reasoned choice technique. The first was used with end-of-cycle students and graduates from identified university centers because they are no longer all in Porto-Novo. Thus, it is only between them who can know where each other is located to orient us. The reasoned choice technique was used mainly for those responsible for training centers. The sample size of final year students and

graduates was determined using the probabilistic technique of Schwartz (1995). It made it possible to retain 96 students in training and graduates from Cours Sonou or UPAO. For training managers, we carried out a survey 06 and arrived at the theoretical saturation threshold of our research (Marshall et al., 2013).

2.3. Data gathering

Three techniques were used in this research. On the one hand, the documentary research was useful for taking stock of previous work related to the research subject. It covered works, dissertations, theses, reports, journals and articles using IT tools. On the other hand, a questionnaire linked to the hypothesis made it possible to collect information from the target population. Finally, interviews were necessary to collect information on the assessments of training center managers regarding the mechanisms to support the professional integration of graduates implemented in their university. The themes covered by the interview guides relate to the responsible status of the training centers. Complete anonymity was maintained during these interviews to facilitate the collection of information.

2.4. Data processing

The qualitative data collected was transcribed for processing. The comments of the people interviewed were analyzed and allowed the processing of the data to be able to find common or diverse points between the comments. As for the quantitative data, they were recorded in Kobotoolbox software, then extracted and processed with Excel 2016 and IBM SPSS version 26.0 software.

Some difficulties, however, complicated data collection. They are linked to the unavailability of certain target people, to the geographical distance of certain graduates and students who were no longer in Porto-Novo. Likewise, some people had difficulty participating in the research.

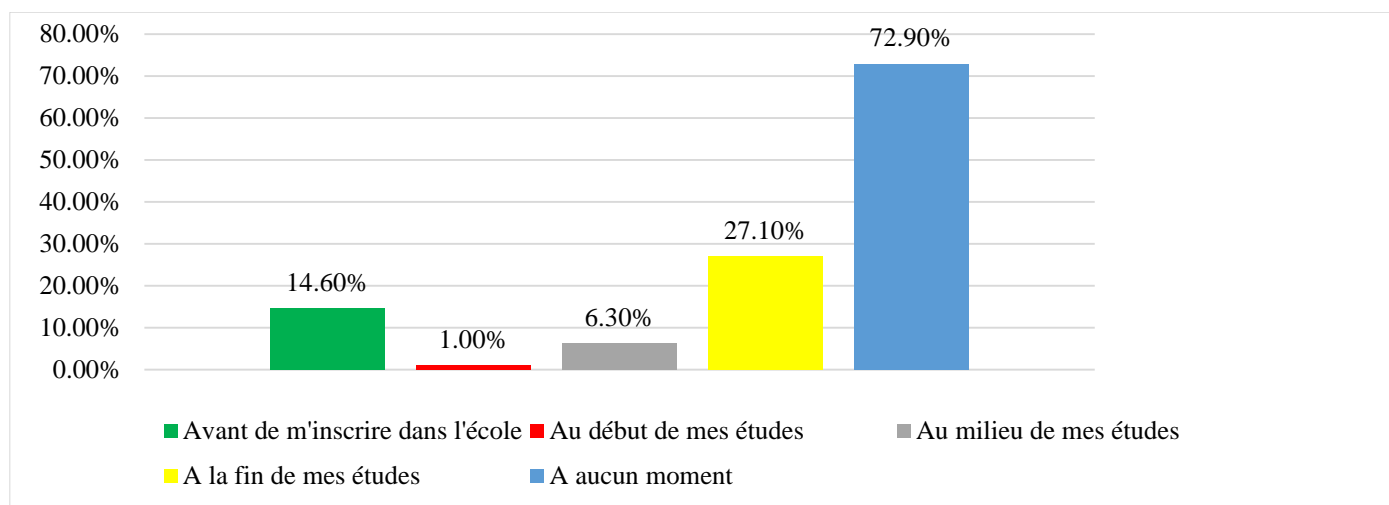
3. Results

3.1. The existence of professional integration mechanisms in universities

Were students and graduates informed of the existence of a MAIP at their university? 40.63% admitted not knowing it while 23.96% said their university did not have it. We deduce that the majority are final-year students and graduates from private universities in

3.2. The effectiveness of support mechanisms for professional integration

On what occasions do students think they have received support for professional integration? The graph below schematizes certain observations.

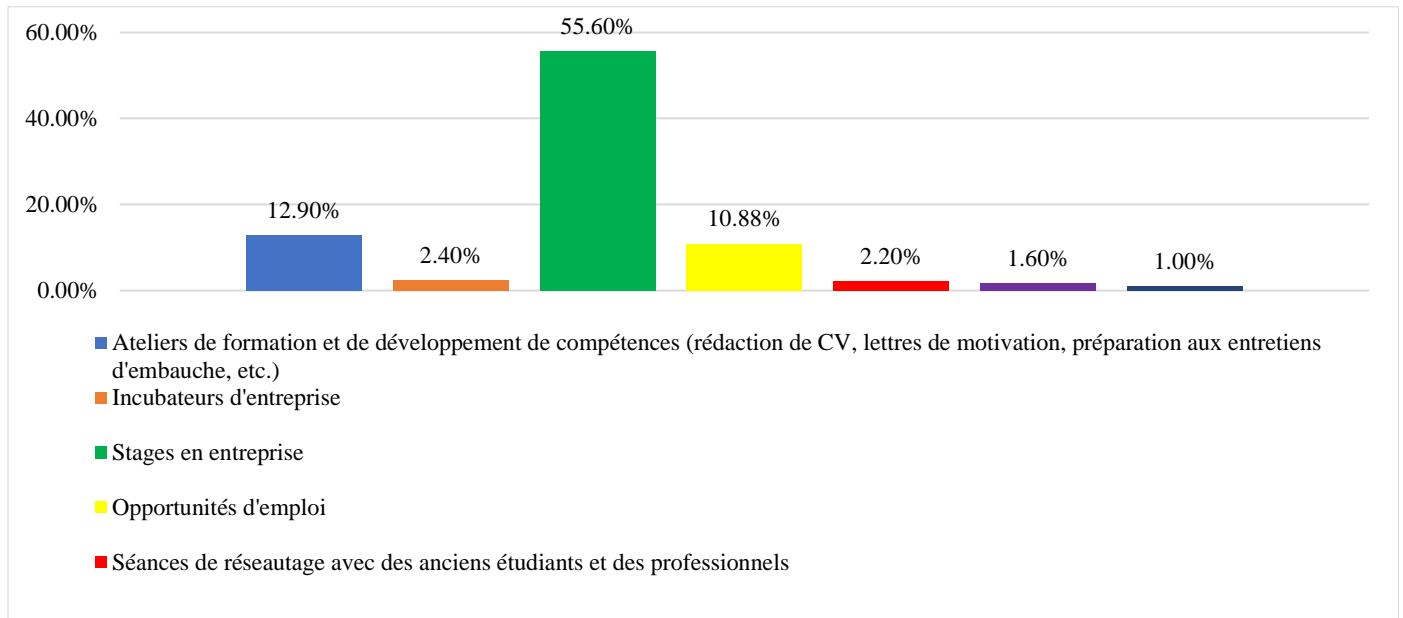


Graph 1: Period of support for professional integration in the private universities of Porto-Novo
Source: Field data, June 2023

Porto-Novo. On the other hand, the response from training managers is different regarding the existence or not of a MAIP in their university center. In fact, most training managers interviewed stated that they had a MAIP in their university center. "We even have a centralized orientation service, which is responsible for ensuring the integration of graduates from the end of their training until they take up their position" (Field data, June 2023), says one two. Another training manager also supports the existence of a support mechanism in these terms: "Yes, we have a support mechanism for the professional integration of graduates which ensures that our students are followed in their professional integration process. (Field data, June 2023). We therefore understand that contrary to the opinion of students and graduates of private university centers in Porto-Novo, there is a MAIP, according to their training center managers. The question therefore arises as to whether the actual content and implementation of these MAIPs meet the standard characteristics and requirements for those responsible to claim to have them or whether it is graduates who deny the existence of their university's MAIPs because that their expectations are not met. But what are the contents of the MAIPs in the private university centers of Porto-Novo?"

The internship in companies constitutes 51.20% of the content of the professional integration support mechanism of their university center. Some graduates also mentioned looking for job opportunities (14.00%). Conversely, it must be recognized that other graduates confided that their university center contained nothing (27.90%) as a support mechanism for professional integration. It therefore emerges that internships in companies represent the fundamental activity on which the private universities of Porto-Novo base their process of supporting their graduates in professional integration. Those responsible for their training confirm this and declare "playing on their personal relationships to find the structures in which they do the internships" But what does their support mechanism for the professional integration of graduates consist of? A trainer responds: "already during the training there are academic internships, then we send all our students on an internship at the end of their training, because it is also an opportunity for them to reveal themselves to potential recruiters and if they perform well, they can get hired easily." (Field data, June 2023).

From this graph, we note that 72.90% of students and graduates say they have not received professional integration support at any time. On the other hand, 27.10% acknowledge having benefited from support for professional integration at the end of their training. It emerges from these values that not all students have the chance to do internships; For the managers interviewed, “we cannot find internships for everyone, the learner or graduate must first be competent and we are convinced that it will benefit them or that they are really interested (Data field, June 2023); a second manager gives another explanation for this situation: “There are structures which refuse to grant internships to our students because generally internships must lead to the writing of a dissertation. So, fearing that some of their professional secrets will be disclosed to potential competitors, companies refuse.” (Field data, June 2023). We were interested in the different mechanisms used by students who said they had benefited from the MAIP implemented in their university center. The graphic below describes it.

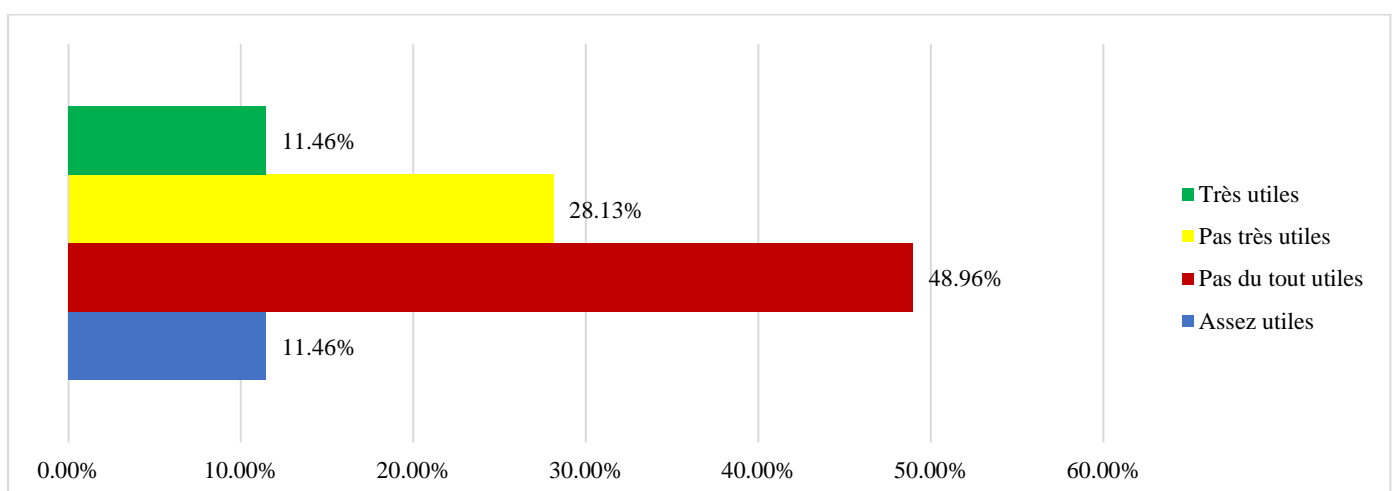


Graph 2: Mechanisms to support professional integration beneficial for graduates

Source: Field data, June 2023

When graduates were asked about the MAIPs they benefited from for their professional integration by their university center, 55.60% responded that the internships in companies had been useful for them and others in minority number said mentioned job fairs (1.00%). Furthermore, it should be noted that there was mention of training and skills development workshops and business incubators. This underlines the focus on work placements. They even represent the mechanism most used by private universities in Porto-Novo to integrate their graduates.

How did graduates who did not benefit from the MAIP implemented in their university center proceed? 52.03% of them say they personally looked for job opportunities. Others (33.50%) came through their parents. It is therefore observed that many graduates use personal strategies for their professional integration. Under these conditions, how do our respondents appreciate the support mechanisms for professional integration offered by their university?



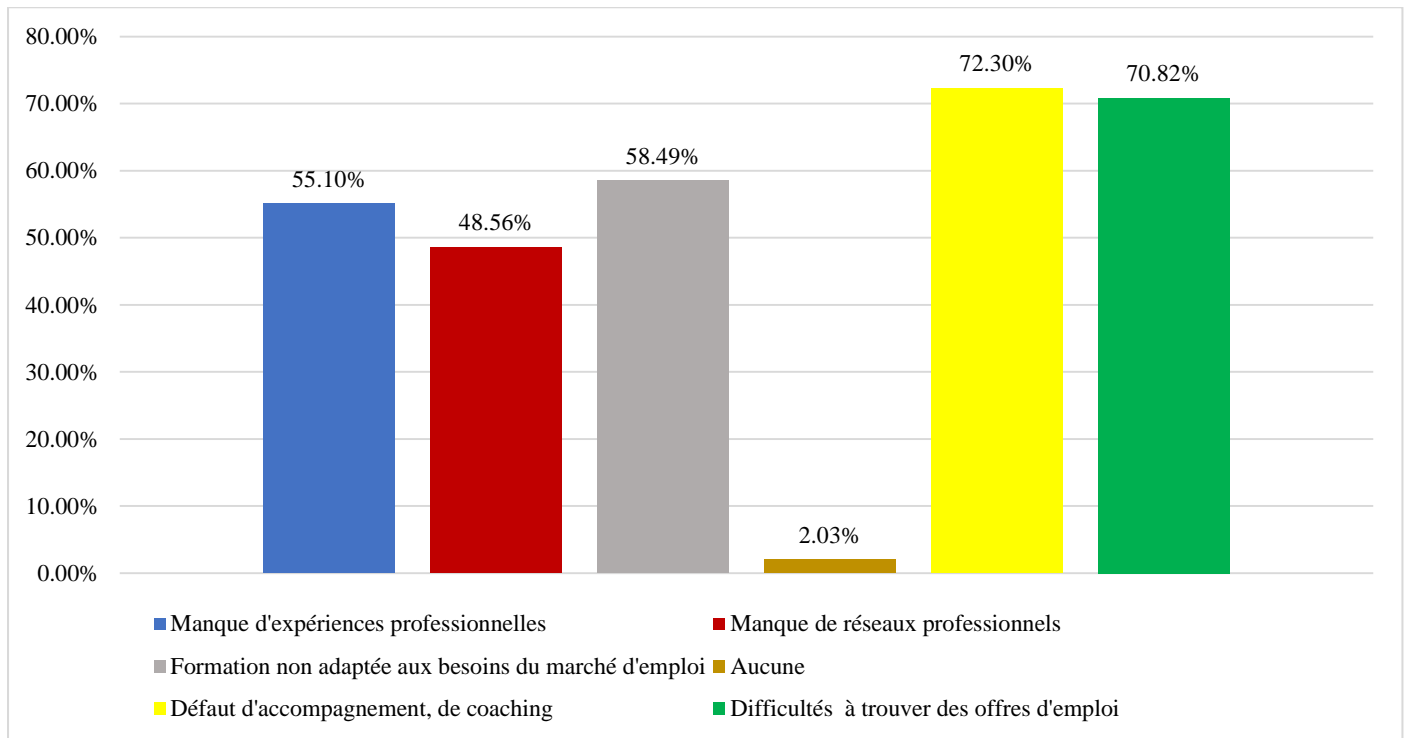
Graph 3: Assessment of support mechanisms for professional integration

Source: Field data, June 2023

We note that 48.96% of learners do not find the MAIPs useful at all, there are only 11.46% who found them very useful. This difference in responses highlights that the large number of graduates from private schools in Porto-Novo do not find the MAIPs used by their school effective

for their professional integration. Managers favor academic and professional internships. This underlines the lack of interest in other essential aspects in a professional integration process. To enter the job market, have the skills acquired prepared them?

37.50% responded that they were not very prepared, 35.4% said they were prepared; 3.13% said they felt very prepared while 23.96% said they did not feel prepared at all. This highlights the lack of sufficient preparation that graduates face at the end of their training to access the job market. So, what are the difficulties encountered by graduates in their professional integration process and which the MAIPs of their university center would have helped to overcome? The graph below summarizes their responses.



Graph 4: Challenges or difficulties encountered by graduates and relating to the function of the MAIP of their university center

Source: Field data, June 2023

72.30% responded that they had suffered from a lack of support and coaching. 70.82% said they had encountered difficulties finding job offers. Furthermore, other difficulties were mentioned such as the lack of professional experience and professional networks or training not adapted to the real needs of the job market for 58.49%. In a few rare cases, there is no difficulty to report.

4. Discussion

4.1. Professional integration mechanisms appear in the university organization chart

It appears that the mechanisms to support professional integration exist in the private universities of Porto-Novo but do not present all the required qualities. Indeed, in centers where training managers believe they have a career guidance service, it must be clarified that the service is not efficient enough to carry out its functions. However, according to the work of Fugate et al (2004), the professional integration process must facilitate the acquisition and development of key skills in the individual: personality traits, attitudes and individual behaviors that promote employability. For Santos et al, (2020), poor employment opportunities and economic instability in a region can generate difficulties in professional integration, regardless of the efforts of universities. According to these researchers, universities cannot solve the employability problem alone, but must work in collaboration with other economic development actors. It is with this in mind that Roberts et al, (2017), emphasize that support mechanisms, although important, cannot be considered as the only influence on the employability of graduates. Other elements, such as degree specialization, prior

work experience, and industry demand, can also play a significant role. For the moment, even if Barros et al, (2017) question the very idea of support mechanisms for professional integration, appropriate planning and monitoring could be put in place (Torres et al, 2017), to make internships more effective, with the definition of clear objectives, adequate supervision and evaluation of the skills acquired during internships.

4.2. Existing mechanisms do not benefit students

Field data revealed that the mechanisms to support the professional integration of graduates in the private universities of Porto-Novo are ineffective and do not consider all the realities of the job market in supporting them. graduates. It must be recognized that in other university contexts the same observation is made.

The work of Johnson et al (2018) alluded to this and highlighted the importance of effective support mechanisms to promote a successful transition to the professional world. Silva et al, (2019) also highlighted the harmful effects of inadequate support mechanisms on the employability of graduates. They say limited services in terms of advising, mentoring and professional development can hinder students' ability to position themselves in the job market competitively.

However, it is also wise to note that the effectiveness of support mechanisms also depends on collaboration between universities, employers and other stakeholders in the professional world. This is why Thompson et al, (2020), recommend effective coordination between these actors to help better understand the needs of the labor market to adapt training programs accordingly.

Conclusion

This research focused on “support mechanisms for professional integration in private universities in Porto-Novo: case of UPAO and Cours Sonou de Porto-Novo”. Its general objective was to analyze the support mechanisms for professional integration. It appears from the surveys that the existing professional integration support mechanisms in the private universities of Porto-Novo are deficient and sometimes almost non-existent. Thus, this state of affairs does not allow private universities to provide effective support for learners. However, in light of the analysis model of DeFillippi and Arthur, (1994) on the one hand, and Fugate et al, (2004) on the other hand, it turns out that the place occupied by acquisition of technical and general skills in any employability process and the responsibility lies with training managers, politicians and training stakeholders. Consequently, the hypothesis according to which the support systems for professional integration in the private universities of Porto-Novo would only concern the academic internship aspect is confirmed. Likewise, the one stipulating that the ineffectiveness of the professional guidance services available in the university centers of Porto-Novo would be a determining factor in the professional integration difficulties of graduates from these centers is verified.

Considering the results of this research, there are many prospects for making the support mechanisms for professional integration in the private universities of Porto-Novo effective. On the one hand, it is necessary to strengthen links with the professional world and develop career guidance and advice programs and on the other hand, integrate courses focused on professional skills with job search skills. Finally, the mechanisms must integrate into their operation a regular system of evaluation and adjustment of their practices. Furthermore, would it not be wise to seek to know the mode of operation of the professional integration support mechanisms of the university centers of public universities to also help them in their integration process and limit the subsidy rate? - youth employment?

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