

THE PUBLIC POLICY HUB

Policy Brief

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Bridging the Employability Skills Gap in Higher Education

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01.

Problem

This policy brief focuses on how to bridge the employability skills gap in higher education in Egypt.

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Egypt suffers from high unemployment rates for university graduates. The problem is that large numbers of university graduates are not qualified for the labour market. They do not have the needed competencies, skills, behaviors, or knowledge. A significant mismatch is reported between the outputs of the Higher Education Institutions and the demands of the labour market (Asaad et al, 2018).

According to CAPMAS, the total number of university graduates in 2019/2020 in Egypt totaled 481 thousand (CAPMASa, 2022). Unemployment among university graduates reached 15.7% in 2020 (CAPMASb, 2022). Meanwhile, unemployment for illiterates and holders of intermediate educational degrees was much lower during the same year, 2.8% unemployment for illiterates, and 7% for those with intermediate educational degrees (CAPMASb, 2022).

According to the 2012 School-to-Work Transition Survey in Egypt, around 47.7% of Egyptian youth are working in jobs that do not match their education, and 30% of the youth reportedly refused a job offer perceived as not matching their qualifications (Barsoum et al., 2014; Helmy, 2018).

Employability is defined as the ability to get and maintain initial employment; move between jobs and roles; and have the skills, abilities and attributes that will enable this to happen (Sharon et Beaumont, 2018). Meanwhile, the 'Employability Skills Gap' is defined as the gap between an employee's ability (higher education graduate) and employers' expectations (Bano and Shanmugam, 2019; Asonitou, 2015).

Egyptian employers identified several challenges related to higher education graduates, including: (UCCD,2022).

MISCONCEPTIONS AND LACK OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE LABOUR MARKET:

Graduates lack knowledge about the general culture of work, and lack information about needs, responsibilities, and duties related to the professions to which they are applying. They also lack an understanding of career progression.

LACK OF CORE AND LANGUAGE SKILLS:

Graduates lack language skills, especially English language, and sometimes are incapable of writing proper Arabic. There is a deficit in communication skills, leadership skills, and presentations skills.

LACK OF DIGITAL SKILLS:

There are graduates who have electronic illiteracy. Some do not even use emails.

HIGH LABOUR TURNOVER AMONG FRESH GRADUATES:

There are graduates who have electronic illiteracy. Some do not even use emails.



01.2. Employability skills gap's root causes

Among the root causes of the employability skills gap are the following:



LACK OF COORDINATION AMONG KEY STAKEHOLDERS:

A huge challenge persists related to coordination between key stakeholders.



CURRICULUM MISMATCH WITH LABOUR MARKET NEEDS:

The current curricula are not linked to the labour market. Educational institutions do not keep pace



OUTDATED TEACHING METHODOLOGIES AND LACK OF PRACTICAL TRAINING:

A huge challenge persists related to coordination between key stakeholders.

02. Previous Governmental Policies and Interventions

The GOE pursued several policies and interventions to try to deal with the employability skills gap in higher education.



THE NATIONAL AUTHORITY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION OF EDUCATION (NAQAAE)

NAQAAE's mandate is to review how higher education providers maintain the quality of their academic programs, and to ensure that students receive a high-quality educational experience (NAQAAE, 2022). The National Qualifications Framework within NAQAAE benchmarks qualification levels based on learning outcomes and acquired competencies (NAQAAE, 2022).



HIGHER EDUCATION OBSERVATORY (HEO)

HEO was established by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHESR, 2022). The observatory collects and analyzes data, statistics and information on higher education, and local and regional labor market demand and supply.



EGYPTIAN OBSERVATORY FOR EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT (EOETE)

EOETE was established at the Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC). Its mandate is to analyze information, and issue forecasts regarding inputs and outputs of education, training, and employment, to meet labour market requirements (Amer, 2012).

03. International Experiences

A lot of useful lessons can be gleaned from international experiences.

THE NETWORK OF SCHOOLS OF PUBLIC POLICY, AFFAIRS, AND ADMINISTRATION (NASPAA)

NASPAA is an accreditor of master's degree programs in the fields of public affairs, public administration, and public policy. NASPAA has seven standards that form the quality benchmark. The fifth standard: 'matching operations with the program mission' assesses the ability of the programs to use experiential learning and get students to apply what they learnt through practical exercises, internships, and interactions with practitioners (NASPAA, 2022).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS INDEX IN MALTA

In Malta in 2015, the Employment and Training Corporation, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Employment, launched an Employability Index to examine underemployment, and identify the graduates at higher risk of underemployment, due to a mismatch between their education and their work (ETC and MEDE, 2015).

"GRADUATE APPRENTICESHIP" PROGRAM TO BRIDGE THE DIGITAL SKILLS GAP IN SCOTLAND

The graduate apprenticeship program was established through building partnership between employers and Higher Education Institutes in Scotland. It is a degree program aiming at addressing the digital skills shortage and increasing the number of students gaining the higher-level digital skills needed by the labour market (Taylor-Smith et al., 2019).

04.

Anticipated Policy Results

After bridging the employability skills gap in Egypt, amongst the main desired policy results are:

Students graduating with the required labor market skills and competencies, curricula aligned with labour market needs, and teaching tools and methods incorporating a strong link between theory and practice and emphasizing practical training of students.

05.

Proposed Policy Alternatives

To achieve the desired policy results, five policy alternatives are outlined:

01 MAINTAIN AND SUPPORT A MECHANISM FOR ACTIVE COLLECTION, ANALYSIS, REPORTING AND DISSEMINATION OF LABOUR MARKET NEEDS POSSIBLY HOUSED AND MANAGED BY CAPMAS (EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS INDEX):

Building on the efforts by the HEO, IDSC, and CAPMAS, a mechanism for active collection, analysis, reporting and dissemination of comprehensive data on the labour market should be maintained and supported. The data analysis should provide recommendations to both the macro and micro levels of decision making in the HE system: the Minister of Higher Education, university presidents, school deans, department chairs, program directors, etc. The results and recommendations should be accessible to HE institutes, and all relevant stakeholders.

02

INCORPORATE A NEW STANDARD FOR LINKING THEORY TO PRACTICE WITHIN NAQAEE'S ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY OF HE PROGRAMS WITH CLEAR KPIS.

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03

ESTABLISH PERFORMANCE-BASED BUDGETING FOR UNIVERSITIES LINKED TO THEIR ABILITY TO BRIDGE THE EMPLOYABILITY GAP

Universities that provide evidence for establishing a solid link between theory and practice, as measured by agreed to KPIs, should be entitled to additional budget allocations from the central level. The budgetary allocations will be to the university as a whole in recognition of its achievements in solidifying the link between theory and practice.

04

REVAMP UNIVERSITY CENTERS FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT WITHIN UNIVERSITIES AND WIDENING THEIR SCOPE OF WORK

UCCDs' role to include: periodic hearings and consultations with potential employers, trainings and capacity building workshops for students and graduates to develop required competencies, career counseling and advice services, organizing employment fairs, and coordinating job and internship placement in the labour market.

05

REVISE THE FACULTY PROMOTION AND APPRAISAL SYSTEM TO INCLUDE MEASURES FOR LINKING THEORY TO PRACTICE

The promotion and appraisal system of faculty in higher education institutes should include points for ability to demonstrate how they updated their curricula and how they link what they teach to practice, and to the needs of the labour market.

06.

Recommendations

01

Establish a system for active collection, analysis, reporting and dissemination of comprehensive data on the labour market, such as the Employability Skills Index.

02

The second recommended alternative is to have an incentive system that guarantees the sustainable link between theory and practice in all HE programs through the incorporation of quality standards requiring linking theory to practice in NAQAEE's accreditation, making this link part of the evaluation of faculty's promotion portfolios, and through using performance-based budgeting rewarding the HE institutions that manage to solidify this link.

03

The third recommendation is to further enhance and expand the role of the University Centers for Career Development so as to provide services, such as trainings and capacity building workshops for students and graduates, career counseling and advice services, employment fairs, and job and internship placements in labour market.

Criteria Alternatives	Political acceptance	Economic viability	Administrative/ institutional feasibility
Alternative One	Perceived as acceptable and CAPMAS making sure to give credit to all sources of data collected and the organizations that collected the data to enhance acceptability.	Requires some financial resources to be allocated to hire administrative and data inputting personnel and to implement surveys needed for data collection.	Perceived as feasible with the necessary institutional coordination mechanism.
Alternative Two	Perceived as politically acceptable as it meets international quality measures and national priorities and goals.	Resources will be needed in the different HE institutes to be able to implement a better link between theory and practice. This requires greater investments by the Ministry of Higher Education.	Some additional support services are needed. Labs should be better equipped, support staff hired to implement field trips, and financial resources allocated.
Alternative Three	Already HE institutes are piloting the use of performance budgets in parallel to line-item budgets.	Spending more on HE may not be politically acceptable with the tight financial resources available for the educational sector and current the difficult economic situation Egypt, it may be a mechanism for implementing a more rational use of resources.	Budgetary teams in HE institutes already trained on developing performance-based budgets.
Alternative Four	Already received training and partnered with UCCD Project implemented by ILO and AUC so the idea is acceptable.	A sustained source for funding for the revamping and support of the Career Centers is needed beyond the funding coming from international funding.	The staff has already received training.
Alternative Five	Politically acceptable with some resistance from faculty envisioned but this resistance can be surmounted.	Needs resources to be made available for faculty support.	Administrative support can be provided from the career centers provided they have access to resources.

«All the academic references used in this brief are mentioned in the policy paper.»

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