Employability discourse and recruitment practices in Sweden
Consequences for non-traditional graduates

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Background

EMPLOY - Enhancing the employability of non-traditional students after Higher Education (2014-UK01-KA203-001842-TP) financed by Erasmus +

Aim

To understand the discourse of employability through the biographical experiences of non-traditional HE graduates' transition between HE and working life and employer's perspectives on the recruitment of non-traditional graduates.

Research questions

- What struggles do non-traditional graduates express in the transition between HE and working life?

- How do employers perspectives on recruiting non-traditional graduates relate to non-traditional graduates' strategies for becoming employable?

- What consequences do the recruitment practices have for non-traditional graduates' opportunities to become employed?

The discourse of employability

- A labour market model making the individual responsible for becoming employable on the labour market.

- A shift from employment towards employability – a shift in responsibility from labour market and society towards the individual

- HE a means for providing students with the "right" competencies needed on the labour market

The concept of employability

- An individual's ability to find, retain and/or move between jobs
- In Sweden: A competence based definition: Students skills in relation to the needs of the labour market
- HE graduates: students establishment on the labour market one or two years after the award of qualifications within the area for the graduate degree
- Analysed on societal, organisational and individual level.

Previous research

- The transition between HE and working life – differences between educational programmes and professions

- Non-traditional students learning in HE

- No research on non-traditional students transition in Sweden

Theoretical points of departure

- Analysing employability from an individual and an organisational perspective:
- A biographical perspective – the theory of biographical work
- ✓ anchoring vs. floating
- ✓ Adopted, floated and multiple integrated identity
- A theory of organising
- ✓ Organising, narratives and sense-making
- ✓ Recruitment practices

Method

- Biographical interviews with three students:
- ✓ Clare
- ✓ Emma
- ✓ Lars
- ✓ studying PAO at Stockholm University
- Semi-structured interviews with employers
- ✓ 4 private,
- ✓ 3 public
- ✓ 3 third sector

Clare's story

- Came to Sweden from a EU country with English as a main language, 41, seven years ago, because of meeting a Swedish man and has a son
- Her parents lack HE, but she already has two degrees in law and psychology, and has been working as a lawyer for several years
- It turned out to be difficult to get a job which led to a crisis
- Takes the PAO programme to get a Swedish degree to get a job
- Likes to study and has good grades
- Tries to get a part time HR assistant job but is seen as overqualified
- Takes care of her son and learn Swedish
- She applies for an internship course but is not successful in getting a work place
- She applies for HR jobs but is not asked for interviews
- After a year she finally gets a job in the Insurance agency even if not in the HR sector.

Emma's story

- Started to study at 23 (too late)
- Choose the PAO programme because of work experiences from bad managers and a robbery
- Likes to study but has to start working part time in HR sector during her fifth semester for becoming employable
- Struggles after her studies not knowing what to work with – real crisis
- Getting a job in recruitment after one month

Lars' story

- Lars is over 35 when he starts to study in HE after being fed up with his job
- For being able to be enroll he studies at the municipal adult education
- He is a free rider choosing courses related to the HR sector but does not follow the PAO programme
- Half a year before graduation his father dies and he is divorcing which leads him to a crisis
- To handle this crisis he renovates his house and cottage and take care of his three sons every other week.
- After graduation he is back in his old job struggling to find a new job

Student struggles in the transition

- **Being non-traditional**
- ✓ age, ethnicity and family responsibilities
- **Balancing between demands from HE and future employment**
- ✓ forced to get a part-time job
- **Finding the 'right' job**
- ✓ getting into the HR sector

Graduates' strategies for getting employment

- **Having the 'right' competencies**
  - ✓ having a HR degree
  - ✓ having the 'right' work experiences
- **Strategies during the studies**
  - ✓ Mentor programme
  - ✓ Part-time job in the HR sector
  - ✓ Internship course
- **Strategies after the studies**
  - ✓ apply to the 'right' company
  - ✓ having a good CV
  - ✓ Having good references
  - ✓ Using social networks

Employers' perspectives

- Recruiting non-traditional students
- ✓ Ethnicity and disabilities most problematic
- ✓ Class non-problematic
- ✓ Gender as a problem for the HR sector
- ✓ Age a problem or not?
- ✓ Four recruitment practices

Four recruitment practices

- The informal recruitment practice
- The pragmatic recruitment practice
- The standardised recruitment practice
- The strategic recruitment practice

Recruitment practices	Methods	Graduate strategies
Informal recruitment practice	Internal recruitment and/or recruiting someone you know and/or from social contacts	Informal contacts through networks, work experiences, mentors, references and internship
Pragmatic recruitment practice	Finding someone that fits the needs at the moment, using suitable techniques depending on situation	Different strategies: right references and doing right in interviews
Standardised recruitment practice	A process in five steps: 1. Analysing job requirements, identifying key competencies and personal profiles 2. Personal test in accordance with personal profiles 3. CV review in accordance with key competencies 4. Referee-taking from two sources 5. Interview of candidates	Create a good CV and references
Strategic recruitment practice	Recruiting certain groups for change and finding new ways of attracting and finding candidates	None of the graduates' have strategies in relation to this practice

Conclusions

- Three of the recruitment practices are related to the discourse of employability, while the strategic recruitment practice - to the discourse of equality

- The students' strategies in becoming employed follow the discourse of employability. There is a right path that students learn in playing the game of employability.

- The opportunities to follow the path differs between graduates, because of age, family responsibilities and discrimination

Conclusions

- The transition between HE and working life, seems to be most difficult for Emma despite the fact that she is more successful in following the path and getting the right job. For the others another things in life matters

- Being a mature student is a disadvantage to become employed, a dilemma for employers in their wish to enhance diversity on the labour market

- Is the right path of an HR employee upheld through the recruitment practices where graduates as their first job choose those following the right path?