

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND EMPLOYMENT OF YOUNG GRADUATES (A-LEVEL + 4 YEARS, A-LEVEL + 5 YEARS) IN ABIDJAN

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ABSTRACT

While education is the path par excellence to success, young graduates have inflated the already alarming rate of unemployment in recent years. The employment of young graduates and those of higher education in particular, is one of the problems encountered by many countries, particularly Côte d'Ivoire. To this end, it is important that particular attention be paid to it in order to lead to an understanding of the phenomenon and to propose reflections as to solutions. This study therefore aims to examine the relationship between professional identity and the integration of young higher education graduates in Abidjan. In other words, the objective of this work is to analyze the problem of the integration of young higher education graduates and to try to explain it in the light of the aforementioned variable, namely professional identity. It concerns two hundred and twenty (220) young graduates of higher education (A-level + 4 years; A-level + 5 years) whose age varies between 18 and 35 years. The approach consisted of collecting information from these young people about their professional identity through a questionnaire. This information allowed us to categorize the subjects according to whether they present a successful or confused professional identity and relate it to professional integration. The statistical processing of the data gives a very significant Chi-square ($X^2 = 12.04$; $P \leq 0.001$) and shows the existence of a link between the two variables under study. Thus, the analyzes reveal that young graduates with a successful professional identity are more likely to integrate compared to their peers who have a confused professional identity. These results confirm the working hypothesis put forward at the start and are in line with those of previous work carried out in this field. They allow an understanding of the phenomenon of unemployed graduates with regard to the Social Cognitive Theory of Careers of Lent Brown and Hackett (1994) and constitute an important contribution for researchers in education.

Keywords: Employment - Professional identity - Integration - Young graduate

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Education is the act carried out by the adult generations on those who are not yet mature for social life. It consists in methodical socialization of the young generation, to help them to grow up. Education is for all societies the key to its production, its social reproduction (relationship between human beings), and culture (relationship with its environment). It guarantees not only the order and the daily security of the ones and the others but also contributes to the construction of their future Ehui (2010). To this end, it appears as a

decisive and unavoidable parameter in the progressive and harmonious development of the human person in every respect. That is why, all over the world, large sums of money are allocated to the education of young people in order to ensure the succession when the time comes, because as it is said, the future of a nation lies on its youth. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, Ouattara-Goita and Aya (2016) note that since independence, the Ivorian authorities have made education one of their priorities by devoting themselves to the sector an average of 40% of the general operating budget. The policy of education for all is becoming obvious, because it is important that those who represent the future of a nation receive the necessary and/or adequate training and knowledge for the realization of this societal project, i.e. to integrate the labor market. For this purpose, the school institution is perceived by the great majority of social actors (family, teachers, and other social actors or politicians) as the most secure way to ensure one's social existence by getting a job according to one's level of education. Unfortunately, it has been observed that access to employment after leaving school remains one of the major problems facing the State of Côte d'Ivoire. The rate of unemployed young graduates is constantly increasing and the link between diploma and employment has become increasingly tenuous. Academic performance and a higher diploma no longer necessarily guarantee access to a better job than that other people with little or no diploma. A high rate of young people with higher education degrees are facing a real problem of professional integration after graduating from universities and colleges. According to the African Development Bank AfDB (2013), in 2012 the unemployment rate among young people with a university degree was 38.5%, including 4% for the doctorate, 6.8% for advanced degrees (DEA), 29.8% for students holding the master's degree, BTEC higher national diploma (27.8% for the DUT, 35.7% for the BTS), 21.3% for engineers, 23.8% for graduates of the diploma of specialized studies (DESS), and 42.9% for masters. This distribution gives to perceive that the graduates of Master are the most affected by the plague. The situation is therefore worrying, whereas education seems to be the best way to succeed.

Also, the scientific community wonders about the drivers of this phenomenon of unemployed graduates, in order to bring elements of response for its understanding and therefore its resolution. Hence, the question that seems relevant in view of the observations made is the following: is professional identity not the reason for the difficulty in employing young higher education graduates?

Following the example of the countries of sub-Saharan Africa, the Ivory Coast suffers from the phenomenon of unemployed graduates. Young graduates of higher education have difficulty finding a place in the labor market in spite of their attractive resumes. Employability of these graduates has been a recurrent social problem for a number of years, often experienced with difficulty by young people and their families. It could now be said that it is a real social problem because of the discomfort it can cause. The situation of youth employment is a problem that is acute in Côte d'Ivoire where the unemployment rate of young people remains stuck at its highest level. Indeed, the AfDB points out that the cumulative share of vulnerable jobs and unemployed in the labor force varies between 70% and 90% in Côte d'Ivoire (AfDB, 2017). In 2017, 71,007 young people registered with the Youth Employment Agency, including 27,778 women (39%) and 43,229 men (61%), all of whom were mostly looking for their first work experience. The latter inflate year after year the infernal rate of unemployment, thus generating growth of the precariousness of their already pathetic situation. Naturally, this leads to underemployment, poverty and social

exclusion. It is, therefore, necessary that special attention be paid to this phenomenon given the numerous sufferings that it is likely to cause both from an individual and social point of view. To this end, efforts are being made to contribute to the understanding of the problem and to help in the decision-making and reflection on the resolution of this problem.

To this end, Landry et al (1990), in a research report, mention the economic factor as one of the main causes of graduate unemployment. According to these authors, professional integration is strongly influenced by the economic vitality of the region to which one belongs, and economic vitality is measured by the frequency and quality of economic activities that take place there. The economic vitality of a region is itself influenced by several other factors, such as the presence of natural resources in demand, the presence of institutions that can provide training and businesses that can provide experience, and government policies that promote entrepreneurship. According to these authors, a strong economy would allow for the absorption of young graduates after graduation through new employment opportunities.

For Melanie (2004), another factor could explain the difficulty of professional integration. She mentions the lack of knowledge of the sciences and technology of the new era in instantaneous evolution. Indeed, carbon paper has been replaced by ICT (Information and Communication Technology). Note that the labor world has undergone a remarkable evolution linked to the advancement of the technology of the current era. There is currently a massive invasion of new technologies into the world of employment. Due to a global context characterized by increasing competitive pressure and a demand for more and more productivity, companies are obliged to equip themselves with the latest generation of tools. In order to respond to a crucial challenge, not only to supply the market in a constant manner, but also to provide customers with goods and/or services that meet their expectations. In other words, they must produce in quantity and quality. To do this, the best solution is to keep pace with technological innovations. Paradoxically, young graduates enter the job market without any real knowledge of the tools needed to perform the tasks assigned to a job. In other words, obtaining a job requires certain requirements that allow the job to be adequately fulfilled, i.e. knowledge, particularly that relating to the use of tools assigned to the job. In this respect, the lack of knowledge or at least the ignorance of ICTs is a real barrier to the integration of young people leaving the education system.

The difficulty for young graduates to find a job after their training finds another explanation by Herne (2005), namely the lack of competence. For him, most of the skills required at work are not taught in schools. The best training for working life is not based on abstractions, rather it is derived from practice, which is the primary purpose of learning even in fields as specialized as medicine. Hence the interest of experimentation, repetition, on-the-job training. For instance, no one will trust a surgeon who has never held a scalp in his life, even if he has read everything on the subject. In a word, for this author, the difficulty of insertion is linked to the lack of practice in the education system. Whereas the employment policy that has been put in place, or at least is being imposed, requires experience on the part of job seekers. With the majority of job seekers looking for their first job, the situation looks to be difficult in any case. Kouamela (2016) shares this view. Indeed, in a study conducted on a sample of 88 subjects, the author highlights the fundamental role of professional competence in the integration process of young job seekers. It should be noted that professional competence is a very crucial component in the execution of a task in the sense that it allows one to be

effective or even efficient. It is a set of knowledge, expertise, and interpersonal skills that are essential for the optimal functioning of an organization. However, this efficiency can only be acquired after having exercised a professional activity. As we can see, professional competence is the condition for getting a job. For people who have already worked, this is a godsend. On the other hand, for young graduates, it is a rather rigid barrier that hinders their progress. According to Giret and Issehnane (2010), the internship is now, for the majority of higher education graduates, a mandatory step before entering the workforce. Walter (2005), considers that even though there are differences between the different courses of study and levels of training, the chances of being recruited by a company where the young people have already worked are all the greater in the case of professional training. The primordial nature of the internship is clearly perceived through the author's comments.

From the above considerations, it is clear that the employment of young higher education graduates is a complex reality due to the diversity of their causes. The need to explore more avenues with regard to this issue seems imperative, as the phenomenon is growing. The factor that seems to be quite decisive, in our humble opinion, concerns professional identity. The question that this study attempts to answer is the following: does professional identity influence the employment market entry of young higher education graduates?

The objective of this work is to analyze the problem of the insertion of young graduates of higher education and to try to explain it in the light of the aforementioned variable, namely the professional identity. This suggests the following hypothesis: Young graduates with a successful professional identity fit in more than their peers who have a rather confused professional identity. This hypothesis is given a factual test through a methodology that has yielded relatively credible data, the exploitation of which reveals instructive lessons.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This study is conducted according to procedures that must be explained for the clarity of the results to be reported. The variables involved, the sample, and the instrument used to collect the data will be examined in turn. The analysis of the data collected and the interpretation of the results obtained will then follow.

The independent variable concerns professional identity: this variable refers to the identification with a worker or a worker's corporation (desired job) in relation to a professional project. Since the professional project or aspiration is the underpinning of any identification, it is empirically the key element of our variable. Thus, an individual has a successful professional identity if the actions are undertaken in the context of his integration fit into the framework of a professional project or aspiration.

Naturally, if the actions taken by an individual do not in any way concern a professional project, we will say that he or she has a confused professional identity. It is measured on a value continuum using a Likert-type scale also designed for the purposes of this study. With a Cronbach's Alpha greater than .60 ($\alpha = .77$), this scale, called the "professional identity scale", has five (5) response possibilities with scores ranging from 16 to 80 with a median score of $Me = 65.5$. This variable is also quantitative in nature.

Professional insertion is the dependent variable of the study. It is also a qualitative variable of a dichotomous nature, depending on whether there is integration or not. In other words, this variable has two modalities, i.e., those subjects who are integrated on the one hand and those who are not integrated on the other. An individual is integrated when he/she has a professional activity that allows him/her to acquire self-reliance. In fact, work allows the person performing it to satisfy his or her needs, to build an identity and to ensure harmonious social integration. It is under this aspect that the notion of autonomy through work takes on its full meaning. On the other hand, a person who is not integrated is either looking for a job or in training. In other words, by deduction, it is a subject who does not exercise any professional activity.

The participants in the study were young male graduates whose ages varied between 18 and 35 years, who were either in professional activity or seeking employment, residing in the northern part of the city of Abidjan, and holding a BAC + 4 or BAC + 5.

The subjects in the sample were subjected to a questionnaire survey. The questionnaire was divided into two parts:

- the first part concerns general information such as age, gender, level of education, willingness to work, and the status of the subject at the time of the survey
- the second part allows us to evaluate the professional identity of the respondents. The objective of this measure is to determine the type of profession with which our subjects identify themselves, through the items proposed to them. This measurement was carried out with the help of a scale called the "professional identity scale", also developed for the needs of the study. Speaking of the professional identity, it is built according to Havighurst (1964) around 3 main indicators which are
 - identification with a worker;
 - acquisition of the fundamental habits of the industry;
 - acquisition of an identity as a worker.

The integration of these three stages by the subject will contribute to making the job seeker a potential candidate. The items developed to revolve around these three indicators and allow us to determine whether the job seeker's professional identity is a success or a failure. In terms of form, like the Personal Identity Scale, the Vocational Identity Scale is an ordinal measurement scale similar to Likert-type scales. It consists of items, i.e., descriptive phrases (positive or negative) on which subjects must also give their degree of approval or disapproval by choosing, for example, one of the following response categories: (1) Strongly Disagree; (2) Somewhat Disagree, (3) More or Less Agree, (4) Somewhat Agree, (5) Strongly Agree." The scale consists of a set of 16 items. For example, some of the items on the scale are: "The job I am looking for is part of a career plan"; "I have already chosen the type of work I would like to do"; "I am guided by a well-defined career plan"; "It is not really necessary to have a career plan in order to get a job". These items facilitate the collection of data that can be easily analyzed statistically to determine whether or not our hypotheses are valid.

The tool was conducted in the northern part of the city of Abidjan (Abidjan North), which is the study area for this research. Since young graduates of higher education (those who are

employed and/or looking for work) are the target, we were particularly interested in the agencies and structures for youth employment located in the northern part of the city of Abidjan. These are the youth employment agencies in the town of Abobo, Yopougon, Plateau, Adjamé, and the campus of the University Félix Houphouët Boigny in Cocody.

The target population of our study is composed of young graduates of higher education (inserted and/or in search of employment), we went to the university halls of residence, in this case, the residence of the "Rivera 2" and "Cité Rouge". In each case, the survey was conducted individually or in groups. To be validated, the respondent had to answer all the questions on the questionnaire.

3.0 RESULTS

The examination of the hypothesis that Young graduates with a successful professional identity fit in more compared to their peers who have a rather confused professional identity, required the use of the chi-square test. At the $P < 001$ probability level, there is a significant difference between the theoretical and calculated chi-square values. When we also refer to the numbers, we can read that out of a total of 74 subjects employed, 44 have a positive professional identity against 30 presenting a confused professional identity. We also note a fairly large number of young graduates who are not inserted and who present a confused professional identity, i.e. 76%.

Table 1: Distribution of the observed and theoretical numbers of young graduates of higher education who have been integrated according to their professional identity

Tableau croisé

			professional integration		Total
			Integrated	Non integrated	
Professional identity	Confused professional identity	Size	30	95	125
		Theoretical size	42.0	83.0	125.0
		% included in Professional Identity	24.0%	76.0%	100.0%
	Positive professional identity	Size	44	51	95
		Theoretical size	32,0	63,0	95,0
		% included in Professional Identity	46.3%	53.7%	100.0%
Total	Size	74	146	220	
	Theoretical size	74.0	146.0	220.0	
	% included in Professional Identity	33.6%	66.4%	100.0%	

Table 2: Chi-square test

Tests du Chi-squared

	Valeur	Ddl	Asymptotic significance (bilateral)	Exact significance (bilateral)	Exact significance (unilateral)
Chi-squared de Pearson	12.042 ^a	1	,001		
Continuity adjustment ^b	11.063	1	,001		
Likelihood ratio	12.030	1	,001		
Fisher's exact test				,001	,000
Linear by linear association	11.987	1	,001		
Number of valid observations	220				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have a theoretical size lower than 5. The minimum theoretical size is 31.95.

b. Calculated only for a 2x2 array

The Cramer's V test associated with the Chi-square indicates the existence of a relationship

Table 3: Symmetrical measures

Mesures symétriques

	Value	Approximate significance
Nominal per Nominal Phi	- .234	.000
Cramer's V	.234	.000
Number of valid observations	220	220

a. The null hypothesis is not considered.

b. Use of the asymptotic standard error in the null hypothesis.

(mean) between the two variables, with a value of 0.23.

All these statistical data indicate a significant difference between professional identity and the insertion of young graduates of higher education. The hypothesis of the study is therefore verified. Professional identity is a key indicator in the integration process of young people. According to Havighurst (1964), three stages of occupational development (identification

with a worker, acquisition of basic industry habits, acquisition of an identity as a worker) pave the way for the realization of an occupational identity, which stages should correspond to the professional evolution of young people. These stages are considered to be the components of the professional identity. And their integration, depending on whether it is more successful or less successful, could have rather positive or rather negative consequences on the socio-professional integration of young people (Bujold, 1989). Thus, when this integration is successful, it leads to a successful professional identity, and when it is less successful, it contributes to a rather confused professional identity. Indeed, when a young person is characterized by a successful professional identity, he or she is guided by a model of professional success, i.e., he or she identifies with a worker. Whether it is a close relative or any other significant person, this identification allows this young person to develop the concept of work as an essential part of the ego ideal. According to Freud, the ego ideal would be the instance of the personality resulting from the convergence of narcissism (idealization of the self) and identifications with the parents, their substitutes and the collective ideals (La Planche and Pontalis, 1967). As a differentiated instance, the ideal of the self constitutes a model to which the subject seeks to conform. This could have positive effects on his future social and professional integration because it is inspired by a model of success with the objective of reducing the gap between this model and himself as much as possible. However, the fewer models of workers the young person has had to identify with, or the more poor models he or she has had, the more likely it is that he or she will not have developed an ideal concept of a worker. This could eventually make it more difficult for them to succeed in their social and professional integration.

A successful personal identity is a significant advantage for the youth's professional integration in the sense that it allows the latter to acquire the fundamental habits of the industry. The industry is about dispositions, namely, a sense of accomplishment and success, a willingness to work, a desire to learn and to master one's learning, a sense of responsibility, and, finally, a feeling of competence. These dispositions provide a sense of organization of work, the ability to channel one's energies into getting a job done, and the habit of prioritizing work over playing inappropriate situations. On the other hand, the more this sense of industry is absent, the more likely the young person would experience feelings of uselessness and futility as well as a lack of interest in work. Having a rather confused professional identity, therefore, exposes the young person to difficulties in socio-professional integration, because they have not learned to define the place of work in their lives. The importance of professional identity in the process of integration of young people can also be seen through actions orchestrated in favor of work, in this case, a professional project. Indeed, one of the keys to maximizing integration is to have a good job search strategy. This strategy necessarily involves the development of contact elements for the search, but also a clearly developed and relevant professional project. The professional project is a projection of oneself in a professional field in which one would like to evolve. It is structured by a set of models and values that create this or that aspiration. The act that builds the project is built according to an axis between the past and the future; it is also the self-project to build the professional person (Aman, 2019). The professional project is one of the important explanatory factors of the situations occupied during the process of insertion in the labor market. Access to the latter is the privileged moment of both testings the investment in the previous job search and building a professional experience. A well-developed professional project is a sort of action plan for reaching a set goal. Employment as previously defined, i.e.

stable, long-term work in a company, seems increasingly uncertain (Filion and al., 2002). The acquisition of a successful professional identity, therefore, seems to be essential, because it not only makes it possible to make a professional choice but also to be psychologically prepared to access the dream job. A successful professional identity contributes, so to speak, to acquiring an identity as a worker in a professional structure. This identity allows one to choose an occupational field, to prepare oneself for it, and to experience work as the basis for this choice and its assurance of economic independence. On the other hand, the more these elements are absent, the more the youth would be left without vocational direction and preparation and without meaningful work experience. Indeed, preparation to become a productive person in a specific field of endeavor is associated with the mastery of the skills inherent in the profession as well as promotion in that profession. Conversely, the less the young person has developed this concern for competence in a specific occupation, and the less he or she will has the desire to set goals for career advancement, the more he or she will compromise his or her chances of socio-professional integration. Professional identity corresponds in a way to what Schlossberg calls an anticipated transition (Cohen-Scali, 2001). Since professional integration is a transition from the educational system to the job market, it is important to anticipate the likely difficulties that may or may not prolong this period, by acquiring a positive professional identity.

4.0 DISCUSSION

The objective of this study is to show the influence of professional identity on the professional integration of young graduates of higher education. In order to make this study effectively, we have used a quantitative technique, namely the questionnaire. The processing of the data collected allows us to arrive at results that confirm our hypothesis. This indicates that the professional identity influences the employment of young graduates of higher education. Clearly, young graduates with a successful professional identity are more frequently employed than their peers with a less successful professional identity. They have a clear idea of the job they want and are aware of the steps they need to take to reach their goal. They are guided by a professional project and are motivated by a model that constitutes an ideal to achieve. This result is also corroborated by the work of certain authors such as Dumais (2013). In his study on the development of the professional identity of new teachers, he shows that undergraduate students entering the education sector have a positive perception of themselves and of other teachers. This perception suggests that the choice of the teaching profession responds to a project that they are seeking to achieve. Indeed, the purpose of the study was to explore professional identity, particularly during the transition from student to teacher.

The results of this study are consistent with Muriel's (2009) study of the construction of professional identity in nursing students. For the author, the aim was to highlight the issues related to this period of life in a nursing training context. The transcripts of interviews conducted with four students at the end of their training and two at the end of their first year of bachelor's degree enabled the author to identify three main themes for analysis: identity, alternation, and self-concept. These elements allow the author to reach the conclusion that subjects who have a successful professional identity construction integrate more easily with their first job. And this is due to their ability to integrate, which is much faster and more efficient.

Chelin and Rouvrais (2010), who argue that students should go beyond simple job search techniques and master the methods and tools to approach their professional mobility throughout their lives in an autonomous manner, reinforce the importance of professional identity in the integration process. Clearly, students need to build a professional identity through the development of a professional project or a personal life project. The career perspectives lead the young graduates to become actors in their integration, by acquiring methods, techniques, and tools upstream of their integration to choose their professional orientations (Chelin and Rouvrais, 2013).

5.0 CONCLUSION

In conducting this research, we set ourselves the goal of showing that professional identity is a major driver of professional integration for young higher education graduates. At the end of the investigations carried out, we have, in the light of the results obtained, achieved the objective set. The working hypothesis which stipulates that young graduates with a successful professional identity integrate more than their peers who have a rather confused professional identity is confirmed. This observation is very perceptible through the observations made in the framework of the study. Individuals whose professional identity is successfully constructed have much more professional aptitude, which is manifested by an almost perfect knowledge of the tasks related to the function to be performed. They have a thorough knowledge of what they are looking for in a job, as well as the requirements of that job. This is not the case for those for whom the construction of a professional identity is less successful. For the latter, there is a lack of information about the opportunities offered by the training they received, as well as a lack of knowledge about the skills needed to obtain the job they are looking for. This kind of situation confuses the young graduate, which can have a negative impact on his or her job search.

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