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# CAREER SERVICE AS A MEASURE TO SUPPORT EMPLOYABILITY: A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORENCE AND THE UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS

## ABSTRACT

*The paper examines models and activities of career services as a measure to support students' employability in higher education. It presents a comparative study between the University of Florence (Italy) and the University of Lagos (Nigeria). It starts from a meso-level analysis of service models and data based on institutional university reports. In fact, the literature at international level illustrates the relevance of career service organisations in supporting the educational process. The analysis of the models and structures of career service in both institutions has proven that they will help to implement measures to support employability. The common trend, from a future perspective, can be traced in close cooperation with stakeholders. The integration of employers' points of view as well as the co-planning of training and matching activities represent some of the key elements for creating connections at the higher education level. We can thus state that career services are expanding in scope and method in response to global employment trends and socio-economic, political and technological development.*

**Keywords:** *career service, comparative studies, employability, higher education*

## POKLICNO SVETOVANJE KOT UKREP, KI PODPIRA ZAPOSLJIVOST: PRIMERJAVA UNIVERZE V FIRENCAH IN UNIVERZE V LAGOSU – POVZETEK

*Članek raziskuje modele in aktivnosti poklicnega svetovanja v visokem izobraževanju kot načina podpiranja zaposljivosti študentov, in sicer na podlagi primerjalne študije med Univerzo v Firencah (Italija) in Univerzo v Lagosu (Nigerija). Začne se z analizo na mesoravni storitvenih modelov in podatkov institucionalnih poročil obeh univerz. Literatura na mednarodni ravni kaže na velik pomen poklicnega svetovanja pri podpiranju izobraževalnega procesa. Analiza modelov in struktur kariernih storitev na obeh institucijah je dokazala, da ti pomagajo pri izvajanju ukrepov, ki podpirajo zaposljivost. Z vidika prihodnosti skupni trend izhaja iz bližnjega sodelovanja z nosilci interesov. Upoštevanje perspektiv*

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*delodajalcev kot tudi skupno načrtovanje usposabljanja in sorodnih aktivnosti sta dva ključna elementa ustvarjanja povezav na ravni visokega izobraževanja. Na podlagi tega lahko trdimo, da poklicne storitve širijo svoj obseg in metode v odgovor na globalne trende v zaposlovanju in družbenoekonomskem, političnem in tehnološkem razvoju.*

**Ključne besede:** *poklicno svetovanje, primerjalne študije, zaposljivost, visoka izobrazba*

## INTRODUCTION

The young people of any nation are the human resource value and source of wealth creation for economic development (Andrés, 2005). The youths or young adults who passed through college and higher education at one point or another were taken through career education to provide them with the best career path that will develop their potential for self and societal development. Career education is considered an important form of education, capable of contributing to a nation's economic competitiveness by way of its human resource value (Cheung, 2012). Career education is about developing knowledge, skills and attitudes through a planned programme of learning experiences in educational and training settings which will assist students to make informed decisions about their lives, study and/or work options and enable their effective participation in working life. Career education is very common in secondary school education where students are given career guidance that will ensure their effective transition into higher education. However, in higher education, career education is provided in the form of career services to prepare students for their future endeavours. Thus, career service is born out of career education and continues to expand in scope and delivery as the world keeps changing largely due to socio-economic, political and technological advancements (Kumar, 2007).

Since time immemorial, career service has been designed to develop strong career pathways for students of higher education across the globe. Such services are also named Career Services Offices (CSOs), Career Centres, or Career Resource Centres (Herr, Cramer, & Niles, 2004). The advent of career service in the higher education sector was recognised as early as the 1940s but became popular in the 1970s and 1980s when graduate unemployment became more rampant, and career offices began emphasising skills development and training to prepare students for a more competitive labour market. Ever since then, service provisions have expanded to keep up with current labour market demands, student employability needs, and changes in technology (Dey & Real, 2010).

Institutions of higher learning are very particular about the success and future sustainability of their respective students and thus provide necessary career services that will help them actualise their goals and aspirations in life as well as compete in the world of work (Heppner & Jung, 2012). In every institution of higher learning, there is a centre or unit responsible for the provision of career services, but the nomenclature ascribed to each unit and services tends to vary from one institution to another (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014), hence the need for comparative study. Some of the career services provided are career

counselling/career talk, job placement, vocational guidance, professional networking, and so on. However, as a result of global social and economic needs leading to the production of unemployable graduates, demographic changes and the high pace of technological advancement, especially in the workplace, increasing pressure has been put on higher education to support the employability of students (Dey & Real, 2010; Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014; Rufai, Bakar, & Rashid, 2015). To this end, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and their respective career centres have had to adapt in terms of services provided and *modus operandi* to meet the demands of the 21$^{st}$ century world of work.

Higher education career centres are now tailoring their services towards empowering students with employability skills that will make them employable in the market economy as well as ensure career sustainability for future development. Employability in this sense connotes a set of achievements, understanding, personal attributes and competencies that make individuals gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which in turn serve as a benefit to such individuals, the workforce, the community and the economy at large (Yorke & Knight, 2006). Similarly, Pool and Sewell (2007) and Kumar (2007) opined that employability refers to how well knowledge and skills attained at school can be applied at the workplace. This means that employability could be regarded as a set of skills acquired during educational experience that helps students adapt and excel in the workplace (Yorke, 2006).

These skills include: written and verbal communication skills, problem solving and analytical skills, interpersonal skills, creative thinking skills, information technology skills, adaptability skills, leadership skills, team work skills, emotional intelligence skills, demonstration and presentation skills, etc. (Finch, Hamilton, Riley, & Zehner, 2013). In the same vein, the World Economy Forum (2017) highlighted some employability skills that will be most desired by employers by 2020, such as complex problem solving skills, critical thinking, creativity, people management, coordinating with others, emotional intelligence, judgement and decision making, service orientation, negotiation skills, and cognitive flexibility. A quick point to take away from the above is that these skills tend to change with the demands of the modern world of work.

The challenges of career service are greater than ever before given the need to enhance the employability of students (Dey & Real, 2010). Employability in this sense has gone beyond the ability to secure a job and progress in it; rather, it is about developing critical and reflective abilities that empower and enhance the students' self-reliance. Hence, emphasis is placed on competencies required to sustain oneself and build smart cities for the future (Harvey, 2003). Career service today tends to add dynamism to their services by creating synergies between the office and the employers of labourers, practitioners and professionals in respective fields of work. This includes, for instance, training in the use of information and technological tools for solving complex problems; online employment boards and resources; workshops on résumé writing, mock interviews, and networking workshops; professional development and personality assessments; training programmes for students in hands-on skills, encouraging students to do more volunteer

work in reputable organisations, inviting experts and employers to expose students to career opportunities and labour markets demands and so on (Rufai, Bakar, & Rashid, 2015). These and many more are what career service does to support the employability of students in this millennium.

It should be noted that much has been written about Career Service and its support for student employability (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005; Usher & Kwong, 2014; Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014; Heppner & Jung, 2012; Cheung, 2012). Despite their increasing importance, little comparative analysis has been done on Career Services among different international institutions. Therefore, this paper presents a comparative study of Career Service as a measure to support employability between the University of Florence, Italy and the University of Lagos, Nigeria. These two countries and universities were selected as a follow up on the analyses from the International Winter School for Comparative Studies on Adult Education and Lifelong Learning where Career Service and strategies for enhancing student employability were discussed. These two countries and universities were selected for comparison due to the fact that both countries belong to different continents and cultural environments. While Italy is a European country and is regarded as a developed country, Nigeria is an African country often regarded as a developing nation. Additionally, Nigeria is known as a multiple ethnic nation with 250 ethnic groups and languages. Italy is known as one of the pioneers of western culture having left a powerful mark on it to date. Complimentarily, both universities are public universities controlled by state and federal governments. However, the quality of public universities in Italy is higher compared to their private universities, while the quality of private universities in Nigeria is higher than public universities, denoting the impact of government funding and provision of infrastructural amenities on their university institutions.

Additionally, youth unemployment is a big issue in the two countries. For instance, in Italy, the employment rate of recent graduates in 2018 was only 37.3% (Eurostat, 2018), while the unemployment rate in Nigeria by the end of 2017 was 40%, and it also ranked among the top ten countries with the highest unemployment rate in the world (Djibouti was number one with 54%) (National Bureau of Statistics, 2017). The statistics showed that the unemployment rate in Italy is lower compared to Nigeria. The implication of this is that the strategies and practices adopted by HEIs in these two countries are likely to be different because Italy has a high level of human development and Nigeria is struggling to raise it. The above justification emphasises the need for this comparative study between the University of Florence, Italy and the University of Lagos, Nigeria.

**METHODOLOGY**

The following paragraph deals with the research methodology used to analyse the career service models at the University of Florence and the University of Lagos. Studying Career Centres is nowadays a key factor for understanding emerging trends in higher education relating to social, economic and political challenges. The research aims to deepen

understanding of how universities are trying to bolster the employability of their students and graduates. The literature on Career Service at the international level (Lehker & Furlong, 2006; Dey & Real, 2010) clearly states the relevance of this structure in creating a link between education and work, with the main intention of facilitating graduates' transitions. The *connection model* identified by Dey and Cruzvergara (2014) suggests the relevance of a strategic role given to centres according to the emerging challenges of economies and labour markets (World Economic Forum, 2017). In this perspective, the research question focuses on understanding how the different organisation of Career Service can affect the educational process of young adults in higher education. In detail, the question that guided the research is the following: which are the differences and similarities between the organisational structure of educational activities within the Career Service of the University of Florence in Italy and the University of Lagos in Nigeria?

In fact, the paper aims to look at the pedagogical and formative values of career activities in order to increase the employability potential to create a common framework and exchanges of good practices at the international level. The pedagogical background is adult education and work pedagogy, a growing field for educational studies (Boffo & Fedeli, 2018). In this sense, the research sets out to focus on the organisation of Career Service (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014) and to provide some evidence about the educational offer of employability activities and the students' participation in them. In this connection, it concentrates on the meso level of university organisation and model (Bereday, 1972). Starting from an analysis of the context, it aims to highlight the universities' approaches to the challenges of job placement and career development. The models and services described here are taken from the official Career Service websites. The data refers to the official annual reports of the University of Florence[1] and the University of Lagos (Field Report, 2017; Annual …, 2016); elaborated by the Career Service units are their strategies put in place to enhance student employability. According to the career service units, the official sources reflect the institutional point of view of both universities in this field, which represents the only available and reliable standpoint at the moment. In fact, recent development on the topic at the national level has not yet produced specific public analyses at institutional level.

The comparison between the University of Florence and the University of Lagos started from the common experience of the International Winter School Comparative Studies on Adult and Lifelong Learning (COMPALL). During comparative group work, the authors realised the common approaches and understanding of the structure of both Career Centres. The University of Florence has developed an institutional research-based model for Career Service during the last decade (Boffo, 2018), and the University of Lagos experienced similar growth starting in 2010. According to this point of view, and its implications for current national and international policies, the authors worked on a comparative analysis (Charters, 1992; Bray, 2005) at the meso level (strategies and measures implemented

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1    The annual reports are available at https://www.unifi.it/vp-11327-piano-del-job-placement.html.

by universities). According to Phillips (2006), "one of the principal aims of comparative education is to 'learn lessons' from the experience 'elsewhere'" (p. 313). In that perspective, this comparative study intends to provide a basis for analysing educational actions and providing new perspectives for policies and practices at higher education level (Egetenmeyer, 2017).

The structure of the comparison, following Phillips' (2006) and Bereday's (1972) comparative research approaches, is based on four specific steps, as showed in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Structure of the Comparative Process
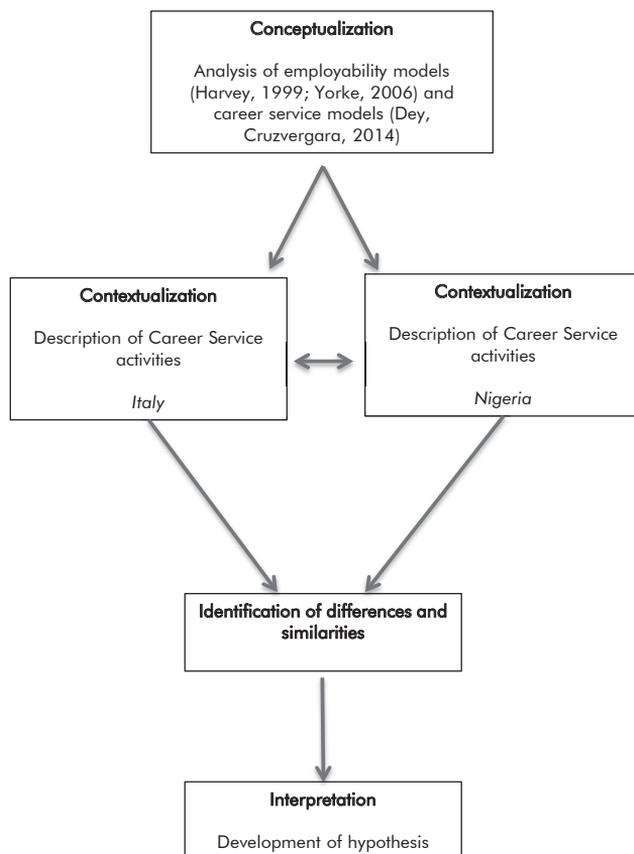


Source: Authors' own elaboration from Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2014.

- The first step includes the conceptualisation of the key dimensions in order to come up with the research question. In this case, we illustrate the state of international studies concerning Career Service models and practices.
- The second step includes a "detailed description of educational phenomena in the countries to be investigated" (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2014, p. 118); in fact, the

following paragraphs describe the Career Services at the University of Florence and the University of Lagos, following the perspective of three main categories: the organisation and model of Career Service, the educational actions provided and the numbers of attendees.

• The third step focuses on the isolation of similarities and differences according to the categories, to highlight common points and divergences in the offer of career services.

• The fourth step sets out to explain factors and causes through hypotheses, providing an interpretation (Egetenmeyer, 2017).

## STATE OF THE ART: THE DEVELOPMENT OF CAREER SERVICE MODELS AND PRACTICES AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

The relationship between education and work has longstanding roots from as early as the end of the 19th century as a policy approach in the Victorian Age (Peck, 2004). At the same time, it is equally important to underline how the approach starts from an educational perspective (Peck, 2004, p. 4) compared to other disciplines such as economics and sociology, which traditionally consider the topic in a placement perspective (Watts, 1997). The reconstruction of the historical pathway of Career Service models is extremely interesting to understand how we got to our institutional structures. Dey and Cruzvergara's (2014) study provides an interesting view of the evolution of these services in higher education. As Figure 2 shows, the authors identify six different phases in the journey from the early 20th century to today.

Figure 2: Evolution of Career Services in the USA
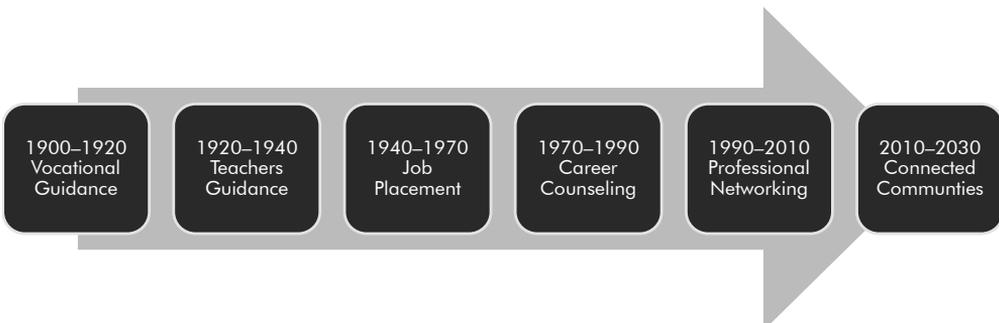


Source: Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014, p. 6.

Before the arrival of specific centres on individual college campuses, faculties assumed responsibility for offering mentoring and vocational guidance to students, preparing them for the workplace (1900–1920) (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014; Herr, Rayman & Garis, 1993). The first office is registered in Boston at the Frank Parson's Career Center and is called Vocations Bureau (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014, p. 7). In the post-World War One period (1920–1940), which brought with it the strong industrialisation of the country, there was

a gradual influx of students who increased the need of teachers in training to equip themselves with specific guidance skills.

However, it is only after World War Two that the US Higher Education scenario provided further change. The economic boom and the huge growth in the demand for workers, together with the necessity of relocating war veterans, accelerated the process of transformation into a new paradigm oriented towards job placement (1940–1970) (Herr, Rayman & Garis, 1993, p. 15). In fact, in these years university centres increasingly focused on matching the interests and skills of graduates with the demand for skills from employers (Kretovics, Honaker, & Kraning, 1999).

In the following two decades (1970–1980), higher education progressively moved towards a developmental model that places the responsibility for learning outcomes on students in a situation that, at the same time, offered a decrease in economy and a growing competition for job positions (Kretovics et al., 1999). This type of approach encouraged students to take charge of their professional development and subsequent job search (Herr et al., 1993).

For this reason, Career Service returned to an offer more linked to guidance and counselling, thus shifting the gaze towards the preparation of the students within the educational path (Herr et al., 1993). The explosion of technological innovations (1990–2000 and the following decades) involved the process of transition between education and work, with an impact also on the structure of Career Services. This constitutes a driver of change that "helped reengage career centers in employer relations and helped transform them into a comprehensive career services office that facilitated the relationship between students and employers through various networking career events and recruiting activities" (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014, p. 8). Both the recruitment software side and the dissemination of social media have had an important effect on the way students attribute meaning to their experience and come into contact with companies. At the same time, we can observe a reduction of funds made available to universities, with a consequent shift of attention to placement results: in fact, the budget requests advanced by Career Service to academic governance have influenced the shift from an approach based on measuring the results of access to services towards assessing employment results at the end of studies (Lehker & Furlong, 2006).

Against this backdrop, the models implemented in various universities at the international level can be many and various too. If the trend is to respond to socio-economic changes, with a relapse on generational trends, Career Service centres will become more and more like advanced centres for innovation and understanding the future. For this reason, research and analysis will play an increasingly crucial role in understanding the main lines to which career development services are heading. The following comparison will reveal the educational structure in the two case studies in Italy and Nigeria.

## THE COMPARISON BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORENCE AND THE UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS

The following paragraph illustrates the comparative analysis of the career service at the University of Florence and University of Lagos following three formulated categories: (a) the organisation of Career Service, (b) educational actions provided and (c) numbers of attendees. These three categories are developed for the comparative analysis because they constitute and represent the main functions and activities of career service in both universities.

### Career Service at the University of Florence, Italy

*Organisation of Career Service*

The University of Florence is one of the most important Italian public universities. Its 24 departments are organised in six scientific areas: biomedical, sciences, technologies, social sciences, humanities and education. It is an important and influential centre for research and higher training in Italy, with 1,800 lecturers and internal research staff, 1,600 technical and administrative staff, and over 1,600 research assistants and doctoral students. It offers a wide range of study programmes at various levels and in all areas of knowledge with a population of about 60,000 registered students (www.unifi.it/placement).

Job placement services only appeared in 2010; comparing this data to other Italian HEIs, the story of Career Service at University of Florence is relatively recent. Nevertheless, the growth of a structured model has been quick and effective during the last 7 years. Based on projects and research, the governance designed a model that follows the suggestions of Harvey (1999) and Yorke (2006) and their work on the concept of employability.

In fact, the structure of the Career Centre, with a variety of events, is not just the result of an administrative process for students' services, but a continuous process of reflecting on and researching the best practices at the national and international levels. Scientific conferences and publications, as well as specific research projects, support the foundation of a community that involves delegates, teachers, career officers, tutors and professional experts (Boffo, 2018). At the same time, the desire to consolidate periodic relationships with companies allows the Career Service to understand new labour market trends and future skills demand with these specific goals:
• supporting the transition to the labour market and the development of employability;
• reducing the duration of the transition from higher education to work, and facilitating supply-demand matches;
• taking care of relationships with local institutions and businesses;
• fostering knowledge transfer and the third mission of the university;
• organising programmes for creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship.

In this sense, in 2016 the job placement unit developed a model (see Figure 3) aimed at supporting students in the development of skills and capabilities for their professional lives.

Figure 3: The Career Service model of the University of Florence



Source: Boffo, 2018, p. 18.

*Educational actions provided by Career Education*

This model (see Figure 3) concentrates on four different sectors: *Career Education*, *Educational Activities for Employability*, *Meetings with Employers* and *Entrepreneurial Skills Development*.

The area of *Career Education* intends to accompany the development of awareness on the construction of one's own career project by enhancing soft skills through workshops. In detail, the programmes consist of[2]:

• *Skills Map*, a one-day activity to increase self-awareness and support the planning of one's personal and professional path through Design Thinking and Personal Business Model Canvas (Terzaroli, 2018);

The sector *Educational Activities for Employability Skills* offers a set of services to bolster the development of skills and capabilities able to support the transition towards the labour market. In detail, the programmes consist of:

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2    Retrieved from https://www.unifi.it/vp-10548-career-service-per-studenti-e-laureati.html.

- *Workshops for Active Job Research,* to support the development of tools to improve the effectiveness of job applications, with CV and Cover Letter elaboration and preparation for job interviews;
- *CV Check*, to individually scan the effectiveness of the CV and to improve awareness about personal and professional skills;
- *Video CV*, to elaborate on the format of a personal video CV. An innovative tool for job application, it consists in a synthetic presentation of personal and professional characteristics and provides information about communication and relational skills;
- *Assessment Centre*, to get to know the specific soft skills demanded by employers and to be able to face this recruitment tool[3].

The third area of *Meeting with Employers* organises events to facilitate skills demand-supply matching, with a various set of employers' presentation and recruitment days: those services help students and graduates gain insight into the world of work and experience real situations of recruitment methods. In detail, the programmes consist of:
- *Employer Presentations*, to get to know employers and understand the skills they require. The presentation is focused on the recruitment process and on professional profiles required by companies;
- *Career Lab*, to participate in recruitment activities and have job interviews directly with employers. It also represents a way to improve skills and to understand how job selection is organised;
- *Career Day,* to participate in the official University of Florence job fair days aimed at matching graduates and employers[4].

The fourth area, called *Entrepreneurial Skills Development*, is aimed at organising workshops and challenges to foster the intrapreneurial and entrepreneurial mind-set of young people (Boffo & Terzaroli, 2017). In detail, the programmes consist of:
- *Entrepreneurial Training Programme*, to improve entrepreneurial skills and to focus the research towards professional projects. It's a training programme aimed at fostering entrepreneurial skills through Design Thinking (Buchanan, 1992) and LEGO® Serious Play methodology (Kristiansen & Rasmussen, 2017). The focus is on the entrepreneurial attitude and on skills for project planning and management.
- *Job-In Lab*, to participate in joint innovative projects with companies that aim at starting changes or improving the productive process. The workshops are linked to experiences in the work context through which students improve their professional and personal skills[5].

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3    Retrieved from https://www.unifi.it/vp-10548-career-service-per-studenti-e-laureati.html.

4    Retrieved from https://www.unifi.it/vp-10548-career-service-per-studenti-e-laureati.html.

5    Retrieved from https://www.unifi.it/vp-10548-career-service-per-studenti-e-laureati.html.

*Number of attendees*

A glance at attendance at those services reveals an increase in the interest and participation of companies in Career Service activities. Figure 4 illustrates the evolution of University of Florence's partnerships with national and international companies from 2012. The relevance of this fact shows how the attention to university-to-work transitions have bolstered new connections: in a broader sense, the Career Service created a stronger environment in which both employers, students and graduates are able to meet their needs, transforming them in working opportunities.

Figure 4: University of Florence partnerships with companies



Source: https://www.unifi.it/vp-11327-piano-del-job-placement.html.
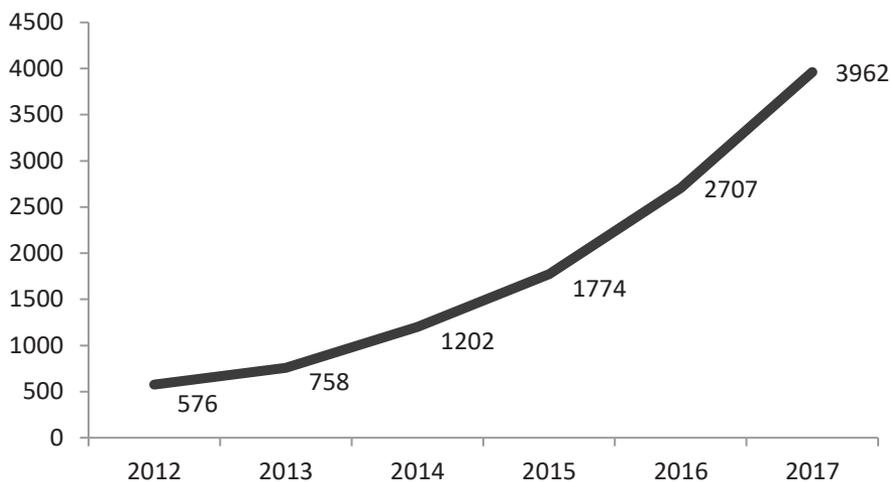
The same analysis can be traced in student and graduate attendance to services. Figure 5 reflects how people participate in Career Service events. Meetings with employers are the most appreciated types of service since they provide the opportunity to get to know companies and recruiters and to arrange job interviews too. At the same time, we can see the interest in educational activities for employability skills: in fact, students are increasingly recognising the relevance of workshops, resume reviews, video CVs and the Assessment Centre to better prepare themselves for their future careers.

Figure 5: Students' and graduates' participation in Career Services



Source: https://www.unifi.it/vp-11327-piano-del-job-placement.html.
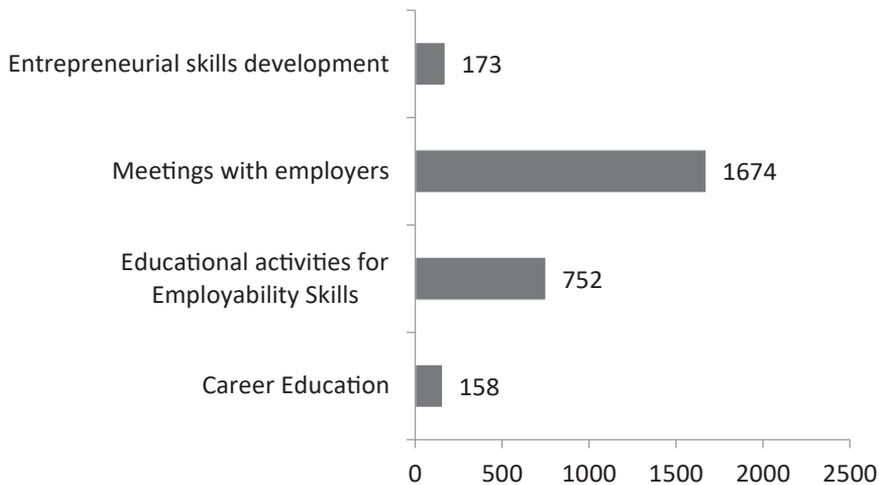
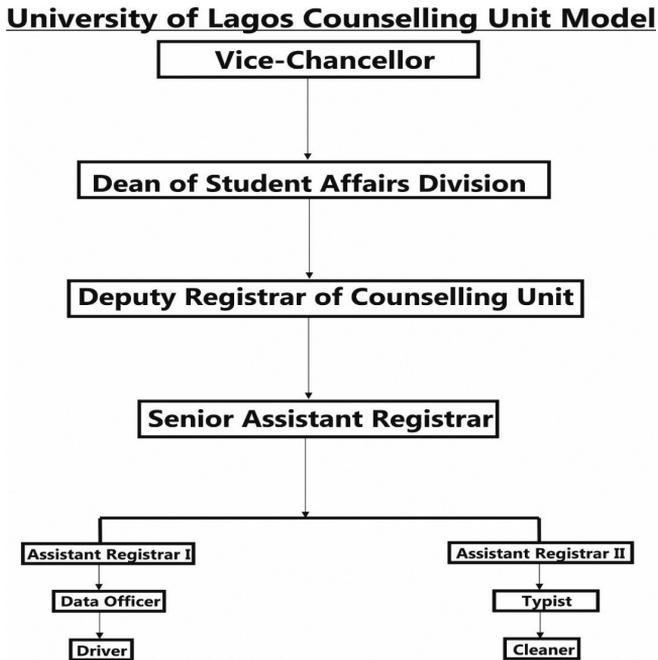## Career Service at the University of Lagos, Nigeria

*Organisation of Career Service*

The University of Lagos, Nigeria was established in 1962. Career service in the University of Lagos is provided by the counselling unit under the auspices of the Student Affairs Division of the University of Lagos. Hence, the unit responsible for providing career services and guidance for students at the University of Lagos is regarded as the 'Counselling Unit'. It is responsible to the Student Affairs Division, which in turn is responsible to the office of the Vice-Chancellor of the University. Therefore, the Deputy Registrar of the counselling unit reports to the Dean of Student Affairs Division, while the Dean of Student Affairs Division reports to the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Lagos.[6]

The administration of the counselling unit in the University of Lagos is a top-down model. The Vice-Chancellor of the University is the head of the administration, down to the Dean of Student Affairs Division, to the Deputy Registrar of the counselling unit, to the Senior Assistant Registrar, then to the two Assistant Registrars, to the Data Officer, followed by the typist, driver and the cleaners. The information is presented in Figure 6 below.

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6    Source: https://unilag.edu.ng/about-us/.

Figure 6: University of Lagos counselling unit model

**University of Lagos Counselling Unit Model**

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              Vice-Chancellor
                    |
                    v
        Dean of Student Affairs Division
                    |
                    v
      Deputy Registrar of Counselling Unit
                    |
                    v
          Senior Assistant Registrar
                    |
       _____
      |                            |
Assistant Registrar I      Assistant Registrar II
      |                            |
  Data Officer                  Typist
      |                            |
   Driver                       Cleaner
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Source: Field Report, 2017.

### *Educational actions provided by the counselling unit*

The following are the educational actions provided by the counselling unit of the University of Lagos as regard career service programmes, presented in Figure 7.

Figure 7: University of Lagos Counselling Unit model for Career Services

Source: Developed by Yinusa Oyekunle.

In detail, they consist of (Field Report, 2017, p. 2):

- *Work Study Programme* – the University of Lagos established a work study programme in 2010 for students who are on good academic standing (i.e. 3.5–5.0 scale). This programme allows qualified students to gain work experience and practical skills for a semester by serving in various administrative units of the University.
- *Coach for Pay Programme* – this programme was instituted in 2014 to enhance the teaching and communication skills of students. Usually, students who are academically successful are afforded the chance to teach other students who needed help to improve on their academic performance. The student instructors are known as coaches and are paid for the services rendered.
- *Career Counselling* – organised for students to guide them on their career path to success, this programme is done every session to equip students with relevant information on 21st century vocations to enhance their career development. Career counselling can be individual or group counselling. Group counselling can be run in batches across all disciplines in the university.
- *Job Placement Service* – the counselling unit of the University organises an annual job placement programme for final year students to increase their chances of employability on the labour market. Final year students are given the opportunity to meet with the representatives of companies and multi-national organisations. This programme gives room for students to network with and be recruited by potential employers. Organisations like Procter & Gamble, Nigeria, PZ Cuttons, Nigeria and banking institutions in Nigeria, etc. participate.
- *Hands-on-Skills Training* – human resource experts are invited from reputable organisations to talk to and train students in skills for employability on the labour market, vocational skills and career development. Hands-on-skills training is mostly practical skills such as information and technological skills, training in professional cosmetology, event planning, bead making, etc.
- *Leadership Training* – the counselling unit of the University of Lagos, Nigeria organises leadership training for undergraduate students mostly from 200 level to 500 level. The counselling unit partners with organisations and non-governmental organisations in Nigeria such as Impact Your World Initiatives and Slum-to-School Initiatives to deliver a talk and take students through a short training period to awaken their leadership potential.
- *Effective Study-Habit Training* – this training is organised for students across all levels in various disciplines. Students are trained in how to study effectively and efficiently in order to perform excellently in their academic pursuit.

*Number of attendees*

When the counselling unit is organising programmes in collaboration with other companies or organisations, attendance is dependent on the participating companies. Most times, these organisations might want the participation to be in batches which makes attendance 30–50 students per training. However, for programmes organized within the

university, attendance ranges from 100–200 students per programme annually (Field Report, 2017, p. 3).

**Similarities and differences in career services provided at the University of Florence and the University of Lagos**

*Differences*

• Organisation

At the University of Florence, job placement services came into the limelight in 2010. Hence, the establishment of career services as a unit is relatively new. In terms of the administrative process, career service at the University of Florence has maintained a structured model during the last 7 years since its inception, targeted towards student employability, which is in line with the suggestions and works of Harvey (1999) and Yorke (2006).

At the University of Lagos, the provision of career services has been in existence since over a decade ago. This service is provided by the counselling unit under the auspices of the Dean of Student Affairs Division. The administrative process of the counselling unit is tailored towards the students and staff of the university. However, the counselling unit at the University of Lagos does not have a structured model designed for student employability, it provides a variety of services tailored towards it.

• Activities for the employability of students

At the University of Florence, the Career Service Centre provides 4 main services to enhance student employability. The model presented in Figure 3 above revealed these key activities, which are: Career Counselling, Entrepreneurial Skills Development, Meeting with Employers, and Educational Activities for Employability Skills. All other activities are subsumed under these 4 main services. Hence, it has maintained a narrow or focus view in its service provision.

At the University of Lagos, the counselling unit provides broad career services for the students. These services, presented in Figure 7 above, are: the Work Study Programme, the Coach for Pay Programme, Career Counselling, the Job Placement Service, Hands-on-Skills Training, Leadership Training, and Effective Study-Habit Training. Hence, the counselling unit maintained a broad view in its provision of career services.

It should be noted that while the University of Florence's Career Service is responsible for providing entrepreneurial skills development for students, the University of Lagos' counselling unit provides minor services on entrepreneurial skills development for students. The University of Lagos' Entrepreneurial and Skills Development Centre was established in 2015 and is responsible for providing major services in entrepreneurial skills development.

Subtle difference also exists in the range of services offered by the Career Centre in Florenece and the counselling unit in Lagos. While the counselling unit covers the 4 main

activities of the career centre, activities or programmes like work-study and the Coach-for-Pay programme were not covered by the career centre at the University of Florence.

• Participation and attendance

At the University of Florence, companies have shown strong interest and a high level of participation in the career service provided by institution's career centre between 2012 and 2017, as evidenced in Figure 4 above. Student and graduate attendance and participation in the services provided is also encouraging, as revealed in Figure 5.

At the University of Lagos, there was no accurate data on the interest and participation of companies in the career services provided by the counselling unit. However, the counselling unit has ensured and maintained a cordial and strong relationship with the participating companies while working on the prospect of involving more companies in order to bolster student employability. In addition, student and graduate attendance is mostly determined by the participating companies which is sometimes around 30–50 students per programme and for programmes organised internally, attendance ranges from 100–200 students per programme annually.

*Similarities*

In discharging their duties, the career centre and the counselling unit of the two universities maintain a cordial relationship and effective collaboration with the companies which allow the units (the career centre and the counselling unit) to understand new labour market trends and future skills demands required for the employability of their students.

In terms of activities for employability, the two units provide 4 key activities (career counselling, entrepreneurial skills development, meeting with employers, educational activities for employability skills) which are essential to support their students in the development of skills and capabilities for their professional lives.

**Interpretation**

A glance at the structure of career services adopted by the University of Florence and the University of Lagos seems to be very interesting in terms of open reflection. The presence of two models could determine the effectiveness of activities offered to students and graduates. Both of them have a diverse mix of educational and matching actions that could provide young adults with the opportunity to prepare themselves for the transition towards the labour market. In this sense, Career Service could effectively impact the students' employability as well as the presence of specific programmes.

In addition, it was revealed that structure and organisation is key for the effective running of Career Service in higher education: it determines the direction and flow of delivery of career services to support employability within the multiple connections of the university (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). The University of Florence and the University of Lagos had a strong structure for Career Service, which makes it easier to support student

employability (Boffo, 2018). Although the University of Florence's structure and organisation of career service is stronger compared to the University of Lagos' due to the structure model in place. The good news here is that there is room for improvement at both institutions following international trends in Career Service models. The University of Lagos can design a structure model targeted at employability (see Figure 7). The lack of a strong and effective structure of Career Service will render the programmes and strategies designed to enhance students' employability insignificant whether or not the institutions have viable programmes.

The study also revealed that Career Services at both universities have some measures in place to support employability with their activities (Harvey, 2003), such as career education, entrepreneurial skills development, meeting with employers, and educational activities for employability skills. Educational activities like presentations and seminars on career opportunities, and networking workshops with employers are good measures to support the employability of students if the institutions could strengthen the collaboration and synergise with experts, professionals and employers to determine the trends in the workplace and incorporate it into teaching and learning programmes (Lehker & Furlong, 2006). One of the essences of comparative study is to identify gaps and adopt best practices from the compared institutions to suit one's purpose and practices. In other words, activities that support employability and are not practised by the other institution can be adapted or adopted to suit the other institution's practices, and other higher institutions can learn and benefit from them as well.

Based on the analysis we could state that the implementation of a model of services has supported, despite the differences, the dissemination of students' approach towards the professions. It is not so complex to conclude that the absence of those services won't have helped the acquisition of work-related skills and capabilities (Boffo, 2018).

At the same time, the peculiarities of student attendance and participation in employability reveal different policy strategies in the two countries. For example, students at the University of Florence are much more focused on matching skills in demand and supply than on developing an entrepreneurial perspective: it refers to a traditional approach based on the research of jobs rather than to the creation of new companies and start-ups, which is just a recent trend. On the other hand, the University of Lagos, due to a developmental approach in the employability process, pays a lot of attention to counselling, coaching and training for the continuous growth of young people.

Furthermore, student participation and attendance in Career Service programmes is important for ensuring programme effectiveness targeted towards employability. The above analysis on participation and attendance rates quickly points to one thing – awareness development and mobilisation. Awareness creation and the mobilisation of students to participate in programmes organised by Career Centres is the duty of the institution's administration as well as the career service offices. Through awareness and the mobilisation process, students' interests could be raised and motivate them to participate in Career

Centre programmes that will enhance their employability at the global level. Campaigns, rallies, sharing fliers, institutional mobile communications and so on are various avenues they can use to increase awareness across all levels of the activities and programmes the career service of the institution provides (Cheung, 2012).

In its approaches and measures to support employability, a Career Service must avoid bombarding students with career information but rather empower them with practical career skills that will help them link their personal values with career choices in tandem with the demands of the skills required by employers. In retrospect, it is crucial for Career Service professionals and providers in each institution to understand the contextual and social demands on career services and play a dynamic role to react to socio-economic challenges with their service innovations. Therefore, the various services offered by career service professionals should reflect and be able to help students meet the present demands of the workplace and the modern world of work (World Economic Forum, 2017).

The common trend that suggests the future perspective for Career Services in both institutions can be traced to close cooperation with companies. The integration of the employers' point of view as well as co-planning training and matching activities represent one of the key elements for creating connections at the higher education level (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). Following this flow, the future will show how universities will embed employability programmes within curricula, study courses and their planned strategic actions.

## FINAL REMARKS

The place of Career Services in HEIs cannot be over-emphasised, especially when it comes to supporting students to garner employability skills that are sellable and sustainable in the global market as evidenced in the analyses carried out at the University of Florence and the University of Lagos. While Career Services in higher education have been in existence as far back as 1900 and became noticeable in the 20th century in response to the underemployment of graduates across globe, they at the time offered services for students such as job placements, career counselling, career education and guidance, and professional networking. Thereafter, Career Services began to expand in scope and method of delivery in response to trends in global market demand and socio-economic, political and technological development.

In conclusion, this comparative study helps to bridge education with work. It provides a valuable opportunity to reflect on the Career Service of both institutions: they provide a diverse mix of educational and matching actions that will enhance young adults' employability in the labour market. The models, structures and organisations of Career Service in both institutions have proven that to a large extent, they will help achieve the measures put in place by the Career Service to support employability in a future perspective (World Economic Forum, 2017).

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