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Lowered Expectations Towards Employer in the Current Labour Market: Analysing Graduate Recruitment Issues for Young Workers in Ireland*

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Bajas expectativas hacia el empleador en el actual mercado laboral: análisis de la problemática en la contratación de jóvenes titulados en Irlanda

Faibles attentes pour l'employeur dans le marché du travail d'aujourd'hui : analyse de la problématique de recrutement pour les jeunes travailleurs en Irlande

Expectativas baixas para o empregador no mercado de trabalho atual: analisando-problemas de recrutamento de graduados para jovens trabalhadores na Irlanda

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* Research paper, based on the Project 'Employment Research: Expectations in the Workplace', carried out in accordance with the requirements of MSC in Management for the National College of Ireland, Postgraduate Programme.

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is highlights the graduate's preferences or expectations towards employer in the current labour market and explore the employer's perception regarding graduate expectations. This study has been undertaken by exploratory qualitative and quantitative research into how graduates gain access to and their expectations in the labour market. A survey and interviews are provided to explore the employers' and graduates' perceptions. Taking into account the characteristics of 'Millennials' and the implications of their entry into the workplace for organisations' graduate learning and development programmes. Also, we will take into account the employers' recruitment, retaining, and development programs managed for organisations these days, drawing on academic literature. Findings of this study have been presented by the young generation's graduates' expectations and suggests that this generation is completely aware of what they want from employers. The career development programmes are a very important factor for them and for employers as well. Finally, there are practical implications – employers of graduates need to evaluate the effectiveness of their programme.

Keywords: impact in labour market; Millennial generation; graduate recruitment; young jobseekers; employers.

Resumen. El propósito de este estudio es destacar las preferencias o expectativas del egresado hacia el empleador en el mercado de trabajo actual y explorar la percepción del empleador con respecto a las expectativas del egresado. Este estudio se realizó mediante investigaciones cualitativas y cuantitativas exploratorias, sobre la forma en que los graduados obtienen acceso al mercado del trabajo y sus expectativas sobre este. Una encuesta y varias entrevistas se proporcionan para explorar las percepciones de los empleadores y los egresados, teniendo en cuenta las características de los "Millennials" y las implicaciones de su entrada en el lugar de trabajo para los programas de aprendizaje y desarrollo de los egresados en las organizaciones. También tomaremos en cuenta los programas de contratación, retención y desarrollo de empleadores manejados por las organizaciones en estos días, aprovechando la literatura académica. Los hallazgos de este estudio han sido expuestos gracias a las expectativas de la generación de jóvenes egresados que sugiere que esta generación es completamente consciente de lo que quieren de los empleadores. Los programas de desarrollo de carrera son un factor muy importante para ellos y para los empleadores también. Por último, hay implicaciones prácticas - los empleadores de los egresados deben evaluar la eficacia de su programa.

Palabras clave: impacto en el mercado de trabajo; generación del milenio; contratación de egresados; jóvenes en busca de empleo; empleadores.

Résumé. Le but de cette étude est mis en évidence les préférences et les attentes des diplômés à l'employeur dans le marché du travail actuel et explorer les perceptions des employeurs en ce qui concerne les attentes des diplômés. Cette étude a été réalisée en utilisant la recherche exploratoire qualitative et quantitative sur la façon dont les diplômés ont accès au marché du travail et les attentes à ce sujet. Une enquête et des entretiens sont prévus pour explorer les perceptions des employeurs et des diplômés, en tenant compte des caractéristiques des « Millennials » et des implications de leur entrée sur le marché du travail pour les programmes d›apprentissage et de perfectionnement des diplômés dans les organisations. Nous allons également prendre en compte les programmes de recrutement, le maintien et le développement des employeurs gérés par des organisations de nos jours, tirant parti de la littérature académique. Les résultats de cette étude ont été exposés grâce à la génération des jeunes diplômés que suggère que cette génération est pleinement consciente de ce qu'ils veulent des employeurs. Les programmes de développement de carrière sont un facteur très important pour eux et pour les employeurs aussi. Enfin, il y a des implications pratiques - les employeurs des diplômés devraient évaluer l'efficacité de son programme.

Mots-clés: impact sur le marché du travail; génération Millénaire; Recrutement du diplômés; jeunes qui cherchent un emploi; employeurs.

Resumo. O objetivo do estudo é ressaltar as preferências ou as expectativas dos graduados em direção ao empregador no mercado de trabalho atual e explorar a percepção do empregador com relação às expectativas dos graduados. Este estudo tem sido feito por pesquisa qualitativa e quantitativa exploratória em como os graduados obtém acesso e criam expectativas no mercado de trabalho. Uma pesquisa e entrevistas são fornecidos para explorar as percepções dos empregadores e graduados tendo em conta as características dos 'Millennials' e as implicações da sua entrada no local de trabalho para programas de aprendizagem pós-graduação e de desenvolvimento nas organizações. Também vamos ter em conta o recrutamento dos empregadores, retenção e gestão de programas de desenvolvimento para organizações estes dias, com base na literatura acadêmica. As conclusões deste estudo foram apresentadas pelas expectativas da geração de jovens graduados e sugere que a nossa geração é completamente consciente do que eles querem de parte dos empregadores. Os programas de desenvolvimento de carreira são um factor muito importante não só para eles, mas também para os empregadores. Finalmente, há implicações práticas - Os empregadores de graduados necessitam avaliar a eficácia do seu programa.

Palavras-chave: impacto no mercado de trabalho; geração dos Millenials; recrutamento de graduados; candidatos a emprego jovens; empregadores.

Introduction

The aim of this study is to highlight the graduates preferences or expectations towards employers in the current labour market and explore the perception of employers meeting these expectations. It is true that the present economic climate has significantly impacted on the way in which graduates approach the labour situation or the question of employment. Earlier research, which several authors have engaged in, suggests that focusing attention on the organisations would also help to identify the reality of what the graduates are expecting from them and how they should manage their employment relationship (Hauw & Vos, 2010). Greater harmony within the workforce can meet sustainable high performance, broader talent attraction, and high levels of innovation for employers (Hasluck 2012).

Firstly, this study seeks to answer the call from Friedell et al. (2011), into further probing why graduates want everything immediately, and that they expect that a career will include high benefits and well-paid salaries from the earliest days of their employment. Their preferences are extremely high regarding performance- based recognition and compensation as an internal motivation. Based on a recent report survey by NG *et al*. "most of the respondents expected to get a promotion by the end of 18 months in their first job" (2010, p. 285). This generation group expects rapid career advancement due to their strong ambitions to excel and hence are more likely to actively seek career opportunities within an organisation. The *Gen Up* report by CIPD regarding *Millennials* expectations for their future employers have found that this generation group are more engaged with their employers if their overall benefits package meets their needs, but however, only four in ten feel their needs are actually met (CIPD, 2012). For example, being able to be successful and having many opportunities to grow let them develop their skills and focus on their talents. Providing a critical framework for *Millennials* expectations; outlining how compre-

hension and actual learning may influence their preferences, satisfaction with, and commitment to the organisation (Choy et al. 2011).

Previous research considered in this study (Ahmed et al., 2010) has shown that the recognition by employers of graduate needs is perceived as an advantage when included in the organisation's business strategy; in order to attract suitable candidates it is essential for employers to be aware of the needs and preferences of this generation of graduates. This author also suggests that, regarding their entry into the labour market, this generation possesses very clear ideas about what they can expect from employers; these expectations can be quite demanding and if an employer cannot satisfy their needs, they will find another that is willing to (Hasluck, 2012).

Secondly, the suggestions for future research have indicated that this generation cohort is affected by the economic recession in terms of work opportunities. On the other hand, employers are struggling due to limited resources regarding their businesses which the graduates demand. However the outlook for graduates is more discouraging than for employers in times of recession because of the few opportunities in the labour market (Hauw & Vos, 2010). Finally, this generation believes that the current economic recession will have a negative effect on their opportunities in the labour market and will affect the employer inducements offered (Hauw & Vos, 2010).

As a result, it may be more likely to explore the possible agreement on expectations of each of the actors involved in this study (graduates and employers). Relating to the information set forth above, this study has proposed a number of research questions.

RQ_1. What are graduates expectations?

RQ_2 Do employers consider and value graduates' expectations in the current labour market?

In order to investigate graduates' perceptions, a main hypothesis has been identified; this hypothesis relates to the progression in the career development of graduates. The 1st hypothesis makes predictions about preferences related to organisational systems and expectations related to the job. The hypothesis and sub-hypotheses relate to the perceived importance of preferences based on material presented in this study, previous research and on possible approaches to future research.

H1. Expectations and preferences for the choice of employer, significantly related to the career development of graduates.

Career development of graduates is related significantly to job security

Career development of graduates is related significantly to work reward

The development of graduates is related significantly to branding

Methodology

Research Design

To develop this research it is proposed to explore the expectations of graduates in the current context utilising a method adapted from a study. According to the philosophical framework, this study is described as a pragmatic approach to science involving using the method, which appears best suited to the research problem (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). The Pragmatic approach

is using mixed methods of assessing the quantitative and qualitative data. Also this approach recognises that every method has its limitations and that the different approaches can be complementary, supporting the data collection method, convergence method, or triangulation (Saunders et al., 2009).

The intention of the researcher is to explore the perception of recent graduates towards organisations and their prospects of finding work; this research is based on the use of inductive and deductive research approaches. Both methods are combined in order to have more complete results.

The appropriate ways to collect the information and get the responses according to this study was by a formal questionnaire for the quantitative data, and conducting semi-structured interviews for the qualitative data. Data gathering for the research involves multiple sources to approach the research questions and the hypothesis; the questionnaire was used to identify the gap of graduates' expectations, and the reason for choosing this instrument in this study was due to the accuracy of the findings. The interviews were also used to identify the employers' perception. The aim of the interviews face to face was to find out whether the employers provide the same expectations or there was a minimum incidence in their responses.

Choice the Research Method

The mixed method research design seems to be most appropriate to this research as it is important to attain as complete a picture as possible regarding both employers' perception and graduates' perception with regard to their work opportunities and their expectations, through the use of a few different methods, rather than completely relying on just one.

According to the definition, mixed methods involve "collecting and analysing qualitative and quantitative data" (Creswell & Plano, 2007, p. 6). Quantitative (mainly deductive) refers to closed – ended, information (attitude, behaviour or performance instruments) and the most common instruments are the questionnaires and the checklist. On the other hand, qualitative (mainly inductive) consists of open – ended information based on observations or taking information verbally, the appropriate instruments are the interview, diary, minutes of meetings, self-reports and audio-visual materials (Creswell & Plano, 2007).

In mixed method studies, the researchers intentionally integrate or combine quantitative and qualitative data rather than keeping them separate. The reason for using mixed methods in this research is because the problem that is being addressed (graduates and employers expectations) could be utilised to view problems from multiple perspectives to enhance and enrich the meaning of a singular perspective. In addition, this research includes the combination of quantitative and qualitative data to develop a more complete understanding of a problem to thereby compare, validate, or triangulate results (Creswell et al., 2011).

According to the qualitative and quantitative methods of data collecting, it will be analysed separately in the same phenomenon and then the different results are converged. *The convergence model*, is one of the most commonly used methods to compare results or to validate, confirm, or corroborate quantitative results with qualitative findings, this method allows the description of perspectives of participants at different levels and the generation of new variables. This method is

also called triangulation design or concurrent parallel design (Creswell et al., 2011). In this study these methods are used to address the aims of the study; on one side the quantitative correlational data analysis and qualitative individual interview data and a combination of the two leads to best understanding. The data analysis consists of merging data and comparing the two sets of data and results.

Questionnaires Instrument

Questionnaires are used for descriptive and/or explanatory research. The design of the questionnaire differs depending on how it is administered. For example, internet mediated, postal questionnaires etc. could be used. These types of questionnaires are influenced by the characteristics of the respondents, the size of the sample, the types of questions and the collection of the data. In this study we are focusing in Internet-based questionnaires due to their easy access by the young generation.

The design and administration of the questionnaire has been adapted according to the education levels of the respondents. The type of questionnaire was a descriptive survey. The construction of each individual question was approached through two different types of questions; a closed question with multiple answers, and a scale for ranking answers, except for some demographic questions such as gender. The questionnaire was administered online by email. The questionnaire was used an instrument for this study due to the accuracy of the findings.

The questionnaire used for this study was developed as a result of an extensive review of previous research related to the topic. The particular survey which was adopted from different research was taken from Choy, Jusoh & Simon (2011) 'Expectation gaps, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment of fresh graduates' and Haw & Vos (2010) "Millennials' Career Perspective and Psychological Contract Expectations: Does the Recession Lead to Lowered Expectations?" with all the necessary modifications to this study, based on a pilot test too, which was amended to two students.

Questionnaire Sample

The current research determines the sample as a relatively small population using a non-probability convenience sampling.

The data reports that the participants were drawn from different higher education Institutions in Dublin. The size of this sample was 66 students, which were chosen from the final year of their degree course, or in the last 2 years of their course. The age range was between 18 – 34 years old and were both women and men. The reason why this particular group of students was chosen was because they belonged to the generation cohort, which is focused on in this study. The research was conducted from July to August.

Interviews Instrument

There are different typologies and structures of interviews used in the qualitative research methods. Considering the type of interviews such as structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, unstructured interviews and informant interviews, each of these interviews are related

to the nature of interaction between the researchers and those who participate in the process (Saunders et al., 2009). However, each type of interview has specific purposes, the structured interviews use questionnaires based on a predetermined and standardised set of questions (*Ibíd.*). Semi-structured interviews use a list of themes and questions to be covered, although these may vary from interview to interview (*Ibíd.*). Unstructured interviews are more informal involving an in-depth conversation without a predetermined list of questions. The informant interview is a more direct style in which the participants are limited to respond to the question only.

The interview conducted in this study was a semi-structured interview considering the purpose of this type of interview to explore and understand the employers' perception. The participants were initially asked questions regarding their career programmes, type of benefits amongst other things. The interviews were conducted face to face to obtain empirical knowledge of the subject, and also to have a wide perspective of the respondents in the list of themes (Kvale, 2007). The value of each question is determined, and in order to encode the results, open and closed questions were established.

The purpose of using this method is to capture the experiences and lives of the subjects. The purpose of these interviews face to face was to find out whether the employers can meet the graduate's expectations.

This method was used to hear the employers' voice, their perception, and their opinion and their methods that they have implemented in their own organisations with regards to the graduates. In this way, we could collect examples from the employers and provide a theoretical framework for evaluating their approach. The interview was an informal conversation between the different people responsible for the recruitment process in different sectors such as IT, the financial sector, the sea fisheries industry, and business support amongst others. The interviews were recorded, the duration of each being 20-25 minutes approximately, and the interview transcriptions underwent content analysis using the qualitative method. The interviews were conducted during a two week period in July 2014.

Interview Sample

The participants were drawn from small and medium size enterprises (SMEs), large organisations and public sector bodies and recruitment agencies. The sample was taken using human resource managers and recruitment coordinators from 5 different employers, from the public and the private sector in Ireland. Three of the participants were women and two were men. The research was conducted over 2 months from July to August. The organisations, which participated in this study, belong to the private and public sectors in different industries such as the Irish seafood industry, fast moving consumer goods FMCG, business services (recruitment agencies), and the financial and technology sectors.

The participant's description (table 1) is organised by the type of employer (multinational corporations - public organisations) and the number of employees approximately for each organisation (50-300). To identify the participants codes (A, B, C, D, E,) were used. The gender of the participants female (F) male (M), the role of each participant is categorised by the human resource managers (HR) and recruitment officer responsible (R). Finally, the years of experience (0-20) were also categorised.

Table 1. Demographic Participant Description

Number Employees	250	200	60	300	120
Type of Employers					
Multinational Employer A	PA MMG (10)				
Multinational Employer B		PB FMGR (8)			
Multinational Employer C			PC MR (4)		
Multinational Employer D				PD FR (6)	
Public services FMH (16) Employer E					PE

Participants (A – E); Gender (F) Female (M); Male Role (MG); HR Manager (R); Recruiter Years of Experience (5-20)

Source: author's original

Data Analysis – Questionnaire

In order to make an empirical analysis of the variables that affect the relationship between graduates' expectations and job preferences regarding their employer, this study was guided by the aim of the research, the issues that emerged and from the literature review. The quantitative analysis was carried out by the statistical software package *Stata*. By using the software, regression analyses and a t-*test* were generated and the distribution based on the dependent variable (development career of graduates) related to independent variables (employer choice, rewards, job security, work environment, branding, time to find job), allows the identification of the significant relationships between these variables.

Description of Variables

The variables used in this study were nominal except the socio-demographic variables which were to scale. In this study the dependent variable is the *career development of graduates*. This variable was combined with a couple of questions to establish the relationship of this variable with the different expectations. This variable was responded by 77% of the sample. The independent variables used were 1) expected time to find a job, 2) employer choice, 3) reason for looking for a job, 4) job security, 5) rewards, 6) strong company branding, 7) continual learning development, 8) image/reputation of employers influencing your choice of employer, 9) junior management 10) working atmosphere 11) training and skills development, 12) constantly controlling managers. The socio-demographic variables used as control variables are: 1) gender 2) age and 3) level of education.

To develop the regression analysis; every individual question with their respective answers were placed on a scale. For instance, to clarify this issue, we took into the account the fifth question from the questionnaire; "As a graduate, which of these employers do you believe you should focus attention on?". The answers to this question were 1) multinational corporations, 2) public organisations, 3) non-governmental organisations, 4) Volunteer/Charitable institutions. However, to facilitate the analysis of these variables, they were recoded from 0 to 100, where 0 had the lowest response and 100 was the most responded to.

Data Analysis Interviews

There are two fundamental approaches to analysing qualitative data (although each can be handled in a variety of different ways): the deductive approach and the inductive approach. The deductive approach involves using a structure or pre- determined framework to analyse data. Essentially, the researcher imposes their own structure or theories on the data and then uses these to analyse the interview transcripts (Spencer, Ritchie and O'Connor, cited in Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick, 2008). However, while this approach is relatively quick and easy, it is inflexible and can potentially bias the whole analysis process as the coding framework has been decided in advance, which can severely limit theme and theory development (Lathlean cited in Burnard et al., 2008).

On the other hand, the inductive approach involves analysing data with little or no pre-determined theory structure or framework and uses the actual data itself to derive the structure of analysis. This approach is comprehensive and therefore time-consuming and is most suitable where little or nothing is known about the study phenomenon (Spencer et al., cited in Burnard et al., 2008). The approach described in this study by the researcher is the inductive approach and the analysis for qualitative data is the thematic content analysis.

This method arose out of the approach known as Grounded theory. Content analysis is a technique for gathering and analysing the content of text. The content refers to "words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes, or any message that can be communicated" (Lawrance 2006, p. 322). The text is "anything written, visual or spoken that serves a medium of communication" (Lawrance 2006, p. 322). This technique is used for many purposes, to study themes of songs, answers to surveys, questionnaires, and personality characteristics among others (Lawrance 2006). In the qualitative research method, this technique is used to examine the tone of the text, and both the explicit and the latent context (Quinlan 2011). Indeed, the process of thematic content analysis is often very similar in all types of qualitative research. The process involves analysing transcripts, identifying themes and creating open codes by ordering them through lists of categories. The aim of grouping data was to reduce the number of categories (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007).

For this study, the analysis was completed using one way to group, and the information was interpreted by themes and categories. The categories used were; development career, rewards & benefits, branding proposition, organisational culture and recruitment. They were initially asked questions regarding career programmes and type of benefits, amongst others.

This enabled the interviewees to reflect and discuss the graduate programmes that they are currently offering to fresh graduates. The advantages for using this method are evaluating the responses, and contrasting the results with existing data. Also reflecting on the personal meaning of

the findings and identifying questions for further research related to the topic, we found considerable similarities between employers' responses and their graduate programmes, some of which highlighting how they are pushing out these programmes regarding the unemployment issue that has arisen due to the economic recession. In addition it presented an opportunity to share some of their experiences of having graduates at work.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical research is based on the principles laid out in the Belmont report (1979), the protection of a subject's autonomy and the provision of informed consent; before administering the questionnaire and the interview, the target population were informed of consent and confidentiality issues by using notes in the questionnaire which were read to the employers' participants. This study was developed into the category that was limited to get employers access interviews, mentioned earlier. Confidentiality and privacy for organisations was the main consideration in this study.

Result

Quantitative Findings

In order to make an empirical analysis of the variables that affect the relationship between graduates' expectations and preferences of job and employer. The total responses were 66 *(N=66)* and the probability of this regression analysis was (*R2 0.303*), which means that the analysis regression was positive.

The analysis (see table 2) of the logistic regression model, showed that the dependent variable *career development of graduates* was positively influenced by the following variables; 2) *employer choice,* 3) *preferences for looking for job,* 11) *Investing & skills development*, these three independent variables were obtained with a high statistical significance. However, other variables such as 1) *time to expect find a job* 2) *job security*, 3) *rewards,* 4) *branding & reputation of the organisation*; were obtained with lower statistical significance H_1.

Table 2. Analysis of the Logistic Regression Model

Independent Variables	Coefficient	Standard Error
Gender	-.249	(.770)
Age	-.546	(.544)
Education Level	.100	(.590)
Time to expend find a Job	.701*	(.343)
Preferences for looking for a Job	-.2193**	(.749)

Continúa tabla...

Independent Variables	Coefficient	Standard Error
Job Security	-.1064**	(.395)
Reward	-.1054*	(.590)
Continual learning & development	.697	(.355)
Strong Company Branding	-.331	(.324)
Image & Reputation for the organisation influence	-.2452*	(.292)
Junior Management	.355	(.373)
Working atmosphere	.252	(.241)
Employer invest on training & development	.506**	(.220)
Managers are constantly controlling	.318	(.425)
N	*66*	
R^2	*0.303*	

*Sig. < .05; ** Sig. < .01; *** Sig. < .001

Source: author's original

As predicted in our first main hypothesis the *career development of graduates* was positively and highly statistically significant with the expectation or preference of *choice of employer (p>z)* (** Sig. < .01) *(**p >0.003)* This is reflected in question number 5 of the questionnaire "*As a graduate, which of these employers do you believe you should focus attention on?"* The alternative answers were 1) multinational corporations, 2) public organisations, 3) non- governmental organisations, 4) volunteer/charitable institutions. 76.1% of our sample of graduates responded multinational companies as employer choice. A negative inverse relationship was found in the regression with respect to these two variables (-2,193) this means that; there is an existent relationship between career development of graduates, and the type of employer that graduates choose to work for (figure 1).

Remarks

(i) As predicted in our first sub-hypothesis the *career development of graduates* is positively and of lower statistical significance with the expectation or preference of *rewards*. *(p>z)* (* Sig. < .05) *(*p >0.049)* This is reflected in question number 10) "*which of the following aspects do you consider to be the most important as a graduate?"* Please chose 3 possible answers; rewards, job security, branding, work environment, strong company branding. 58 (65%) of our respondents, answered *rewards* and the following question was, *what rewards means for you when you looking for an employer?* The alternative options were; 1) higher salary than national average, 2) a competitive compensation package, 3) extra-legal benefits 4) annual salary increase over inflation. 43% answered

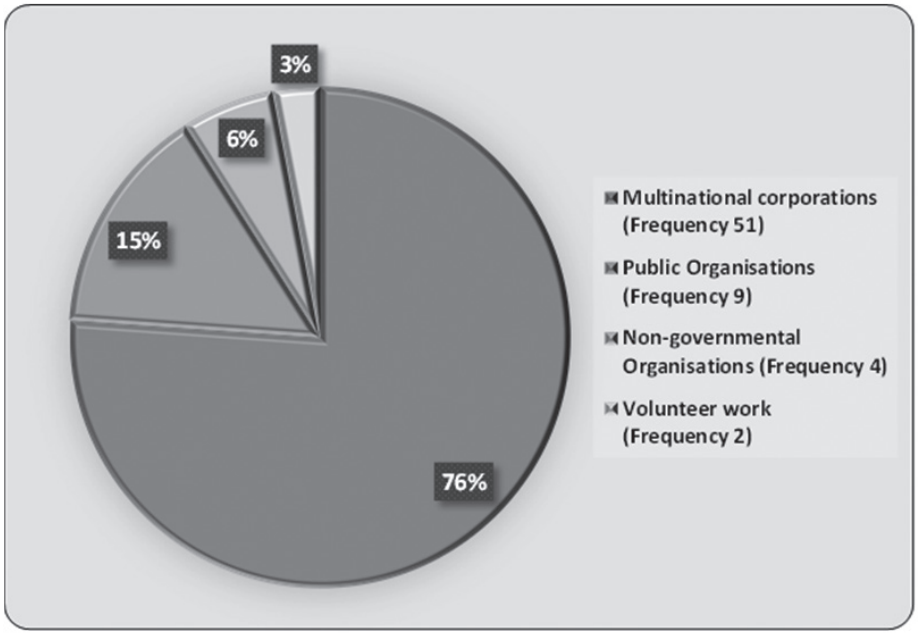

Figure 1. What you should prioritize as a graduate looking for job?
Source: author's original

salary higher than national average. A positive direct relationship was found in the regression with respect to these two variables (.697). This means that; there is an existent relationship between *career development of graduates* and *rewards,* which means that this has become an important issue when it comes to job search for graduates and is necessary once you get to the labour market.

(ii) As predicted in our second sub-hypothesis the *career development of graduates* is positively and of lower statistical significance with the expectation or preference of *job security*. *(p>z)* (* Sig. < .05) *(*p >0.044).* This is reflected in the question number 10) *"which of the following aspects do you consider to be the most important as a graduate?*" Please chose 3 possible answers; rewards, job security, branding, work environment, strong company branding. 60 (68%) of our respondents, answered *job security* the following question was, *what does job security mean for you?* 1) Long term contract 2) Place with physical security 3) place with emotional security 4) a strong economic industry. 65% of our respondents, answered *long-term contract*. A positive direct relationship was founded in the regression with respect to these two variables (1,054). This means that; there is an existent relationship between *career development of graduates* and *job security* which means that this has become a very important factor for graduates in these days after the economic recession and the landscape for the current labour market

(iii) The prediction based on this sub-hypothesis was rejected as it did not reveal a non-significant relationship of *career development of graduates* with *work environment*. There was a non-existent relationship between those two variables.

(p<z) (p<0.296). A negative inverse relationship was revealed by the regression (-.252).

Additional Analysis

The variables considered in this analysis yielded no relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables with the exception of the above, and some others that will be explained below. Two other variables which were not considered in any of the hypothesis established earlier in this study obtained a highly statistical significance with respect to *career development of graduates*.

The variable *preferences for looking for a job* was not predicted in any of our hypothesis, although it obtained a highly statistical significance ($p>z$) (** *Sig<0.5)* ($p< 0.033$) with respect to *career development of graduates*. A negative inverse relationship was found in the coefficient (-1.064).

The variable *investing in training & development* was not predicted in the hypothesis, however, this variable had a highly statistical significance ($p>z$) (** *Sig< 0.5)* ($p< 0.021$) with respect to *career development of graduates*. A directly proportional relationship was founded with respect these two variables (.506). This means that graduates are expecting to have an employer who invests in training and development for their employees, on the other hand, employers are looking to attract and retain talent: including graduates.

The variable *time to find a job* was not predicted in any hypothesis, but the results revealed a lower statistical significance ($p>z$) (* *Sig< 0.5)* ($p< 0.007$) with respect *career development of graduates*. A direct positive relationship was found in the coefficient (.701). This particular question was focusing on the period of time that graduates are expected to take to find a job. (*Figure 2*) The responses to this question were given in different ranges 1. Immediately, 2. 1-3 months, 3. 3-6 months, 4. 6-12 months, 5. A year, and 6. More time. 37.9% responded 3-6 months, 25.8% responded 1-3 months and 16.7% responded 6-12 months. This means that graduates are aware of the current situation and the period of time that they could spend looking for job. However, some others are expecting to have a job in less than 3 months which is very hard to achieve for graduates, according to the literature. (Figure 2)

Qualitative Findings

Results have shown that the discourses and perceptions of employers regarding graduate expectations make it clear that graduates needs' and concerns are taken into account by employers. Although total understanding of the graduates' necessities is a challenge for employers, they strive for it in order to achieve better adaptation and transition of graduates from college into their organisation. A summary has been presented in the table 3, where the following themes have been identified according to employers' perception focusing on graduates; *development programme, recognition, attracting talent, recruitment methods and business strategy.*

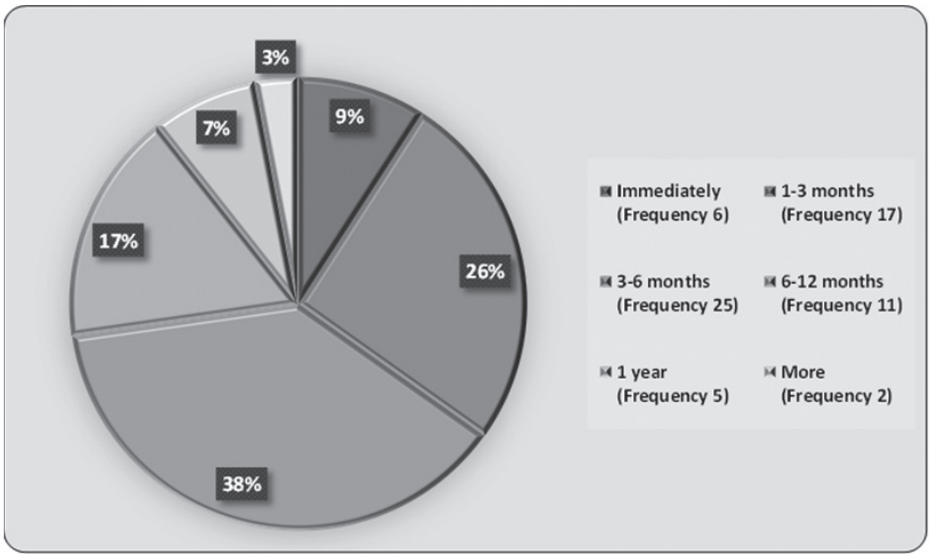

Figure 2. Under the current economic situation and taking into account the higher standards the companies demand, how much time you think will take to find a job after graduation?
Source: author's original

Table 3. Initial Coding Framework

Participants responses	Categories	Themes
	Career progression	
These may include work tasks or conditions, including compensation, professional development, training, interpersonal relation- ships and wellbeing. PBFMGR(8)	Strong opportunities of promotion. People with the right skills.	
Development value refers to the extent to which an employer recognises the achievements of its employees, and provides career enhancing experiences that act as a springboard to future employment. PEFMH(16)	Accompaniment constant graduate. Training technics: Shadow/Mentoring/Couching	Development Programs
Finally, application value is based on the perception that the employer offers recruits the prospect of applying their skills and knowledge at work and of teaching others through training, coaching and mentoring opportunities. PDFR(6)	Monitoring the program: Improving mistakes Reaching the targets (performance) Evaluate learning Feedback	
	Global Brand	
Exclusive/corporate social responsibility/ industry or sector PAMMG (10)	Branding	Image

Continúa tabla...

Participants responses	Categories	Themes
Organisational Strategy		
This is where you target a small number of high calibre candidates with opportunities for fast-track career progression. PBFMGR(8) Graduates are the key and would be expected to contribute 10 strategic planning after just a few months at the company. PAMMG(10) These candidates who will be in high demand so you will need to appeal to their individual needs with the package you offer. PEFMH(16)	Business strategy	Strategy
Recognition		
It's not all money, money, money and a big brand name on their business card for career savvy graduates.	Recognition/Bonuses/opportunity to get experience. (Incentives, salary, food, transport)	
There is also a high regard given to benefits such as health insurance, flexible working or holiday allowances and you can use these as sweeteners to make your offer stand out from the competition. PAMMG(IO)	The opportunity for interesting and varied work is just as important to people at this stage in their career so look to write job descriptions and develop training courses that will match that need.	Rewards & Benefits
Attract talent		
Travel benefits relate to the opportunities to travel for work. Culture benefits accrue from a work environment that includes an open and supportive management structure. Prestige benefits arise from wider perceptions that working for the employer is highly regarded. PBFMGR(8)	Friendly environment! investing in training /development environment	Organisational culture
Recruitment		
A graduate is a different breed to an employee who has a few years experience under their belt. They are ambitious, carry little baggage and are eager to impress in their first role. They expect a competitive salary PBFMGR(8) They want a high degree of responsibility PCMR(4) They want a formal training programme PDFRG (6)	Recruitment Strategy	Recruitment

Source: author's original

Considering that the employers interviewed were taken from the private sector and the public sector made for more interesting results based on this difference. Our first question of the interview was related to the number of places that organisations could offer to graduates today, *"Does your organisation offer placements for graduates each year?" How many?* The multinational com-

panies responded between five or seven places although, every year the number of graduates is changing, depending on vacancies and their budget. The public organisations affirmed that they do not have a specific number of graduates to recruit, as it depends on whether there is a specific area which requires a graduate. It could be two or three per year.

The interviews carried out allowed us to concentrate more on issues related to the expectations of fresh graduates. The majority of those interviewed highlighted the role of these talent development programmes for companies in benefiting both parties, both graduates and employers. In addition, employers suggest that, if the organisations follow up the programmes in the correct way, the outcomes will be successful and graduates will be promoted very quickly.

According to the following question related to development programmes, "Does your organisation offer a structured career progression programme for each graduate?" Four of those interviewed responded positively to this question, highlighting that these programmes are in place to provide strong opportunities for graduates to progress. However, one of the interviewees mentioned that this graduate generation comes with necessary skills and extensive knowledge in the subjects they are interested in, thus facilitating their career development. On the other hand, the public organisation participant affirmed that their graduate programmes are only for 9 months, because this programme is conducted in collaboration with universities, which promote these programmes in the case of the seafood industry.

> Yes, PepsiCo has defined a career development model, which applies for each employee within the organisation, including graduates. (PBFMGR8)
> Yes, we have a graduate programme with UCC and LYIT. UCC is a university, and LYIT is a college. In UCC we recruit business science students and also food scientist and food business. In LYIT we have recruited a graduate chef there and we have recruited a food business person there, so basically it's all about food and food science. The graduates are only with BIM for a period of 9 to 10 months. After that they go to the company, so the development programme would be the remit of the company that they go. (PE FMH16)

Participants agreed that they are providing through their career programmes all type of resources, and agree that they consider this important for the development of these graduates. Employers claim that all these tools are offered to graduates, with the sole purpose of promoting and building their career path. Nevertheless, not all these graduates take advantage of the best resources provided by the employers.

These tools offered by employers are used to adapt the new graduates to the organisation environment and work. One of the programmes offered by the employer to graduates to start their career path in the organisation is the induction programme. This is seen for employers as the first step to approach these new starters and they can build a relationship between them. In addition, this programme allows employers to make it clear the goals and expectations that the organisation have regarding those young newcomers.

> Yes, we do - we always make sure that all our candidates before their start date, know exactly what is going to happened, a kind of induction - we call it welcome evenings. Well each job for each graduate provide to despite 4 weeks of training - let's say that kind of probation time. They can make mistakes, they can ask questions if they don't know (PC MR4)

> We count on an On-boarding programme in which graduates of all functions don't just learn about global and corporate general information, but also learn about our business going out to market to sell our product through different channels, and also to understand our chain value and product process (PBFMGR8).

Most of our respondents made clear that the tools generally used to hold and adjust their development are; coaching, shadowing, mentoring, training classroom. This initial development plans; integrate all resources individually for each graduate to contribute with their performance at work.

> When someone starts the first five weeks from a task point of view they have two full weeks training where they learn the tools … learn the systems that they will be using. Then they've three more weeks on top of that where they do some classrooms … some shadowing then they start to work within their team, so it's a very structured process for them to learn. (PA MMG10)

As for the question related to the internal promotion of graduates and time to carry out these promotions; five of those interviewed responded: Yes, it is feasible for the young generation to be promoted internally within the organisation, provided that they meet their goals and excel in their work.

The permanence or duration of their role is not a limiting factor for graduates, as long as their performance will be positive with respect to the objectives in their particular work.

> Our organisation believes that there is not a unique standard of time to be promoted because it depends on each graduate, his/her potential and skills and flexibility to go to the next level. Anyway, the average could be 2 years, ensuring consolidation in the role and the ability to demonstrate strengths in the diverse career development programmes. (PBFMGR8)

Nevertheless, one of our respondents noted that it is not easy to promote graduates in a span of less than four or five years, as the company currently does not offer this option for these people. On the other hand, public organisations argued that in the public sector it is less likely that these graduates remain over 9 months because their programmes are of short duration.

Passing to rewards and benefits, not all employers are in the position to offer a competitive salary for graduates. Although the main benefit that employers can offer is the opportunity to gain experience, as suggested by the public sector. Although multinational companies, have the capacity to provide several types of benefits such as transport benefits and food benefits which are including in the programme, also one of those interviewed said that their particular graduate programme offer a benchmarking salary and accommodation for those young workers. Some other extra benefits such as holidays and health care would be very attractive for graduates.

Two of our interviewees considered that organisations who can provide all those benefits mentioned above are those who have the resources to retain these graduates. It is a privilege and a great advantage having all these types of benefits for young workers, considering the current economic situation. Multinational companies argued that if you are interested in having those people in your company you might need to know them very well, share some things and understand the mentality of this generation to build a relationship.

This tends to assume that employers recognize that the young workers, and the development of these people is the basis for a relationship and successful adaptation of graduates.

> We locally offer extra-legal benefits such as health & life insurance, bonuses, parking, work-life balance benefits – gym, nutritionist programme, flexitime (PBFMGR8)
> From Google's point of view there is a bonus structure in place, so it's the PBP as it's called on site, so your base salary and your performance bonus structure. On the top of that we have food benefits and transport benefits. (PA MMG10).

Some of our interviewees who referred to reputation & image in their organisations or their products, propose that this issue is of vital importance as a recruitment method used by many companies to attract young workers who have the skills required to work. This means that the employer believes that the organisation is made known by its brand name, prestige and social responsibility, which draws attention from young people. Employer branding is an integral part of an attraction strategy and there are a range of ways companies can place their brand in environments in which it might be recognised by prospective employees. Even more if these people we are talking about are graduates who are seeking experience in large companies.

> Besides our brands being a leader in almost every market where we have presence, we widely use our brand positioning to attract and retain talent, feeling proud of our products and value promises which create our stakeholders. (PBFMGR8)

For Google, a global technology company with a presence in many countries it is constantly looking for graduates who are willing to learn and evolve the market with their knowledge and ideas. They are the same graduates who want to fill their resume with this type of businesses.

> Yes, yeah and I mean Google is probably one of the strongest brand names in the world. There isn't a known person in the first world that wouldn't have used a Google product or at least know the name Google so I think that from attracting people to the role itself, you know, who wouldn't want to have Google on their CV? It's an amazing company to have on your CV for young workers. Absolutely. (PAMGM10)

Organisation culture is highly valuable for employers in all regards. Employers perceive organisational culture as an important factor for attracting, recruiting and retaining employees. Employers understand that a strong culture attracts the right people. Best practices in achieving a cultural fit would include assessing a candidate's alignment with company values, multiple interview rounds, and simulated work experiences to get a sense of candidates' abilities and interpersonal style before they're hired.

Also employers from Multinational Corporations pointed out, that with respect to the culture front, it is about creating a fun, celebratory environment that is meaningful to employees. A variety of engaging practices and events are often integrated into daily work life, punctuated by big celebrations once or twice a year. All these are designed in order to consolidate and strengthen the culture of each organisation and engage more of its own employees.

> It's really important to us that we retain in our talent so we help people as much as we can while they are here. We are going to support them we are going to train them we are going to push them as much as we can into higher positions but also then when the contract comes to an end we are going to help them as well not only making sure they have the skills necessary to transition (PAMGM10)
> The attraction is the opportunity they are being given. I mean, there would always be a lot of people that interview for these positions - so they are sought after positions. (PE FMH16)

General Recruitment Issues in the recruitment phase, employers interviewed addressed this issue from the perspective of their recruitment programmes for graduates which are using methods of attraction and engagement to recruit them, such as their name to identify the type of company.

Most of the multinational employers suggest that to find the right person, it is necessary to go looking for them, so colleges and universities are used by the employers as a resource to get access to graduates and let them participate in their recruitment process. To follow this process employers are using their main tool, employer value proposition (EVP); offering a job by first giving their name, in educational institutions and recruitment agencies as well, resulting in faster attraction. However, other employers prefer to do it by offering the benefits before mentioning the name of the company.

The difficulty in actually recruiting graduates was to find the specific person in the specific area. This issue emerged across companies in the various sectors that we explored. The problem seemed to be most pronounced for IT and engineering employers who were experiencing problems in attracting graduates of a sufficiently high calibre from the local universities. Therefore, several of the organisations studied were beginning to experiment with newer and more innovative methods of attracting potential graduate employees, by placing greater emphasis on development and training, including providing for professional engineering and Chartered Accountancy Institute membership.

> From the beginning of the recruitment process, we share our value proposition which is evident from the modern and comfortable facilities, up to the leadership style and spontaneous and fair treatment that we show to our people. (PBFMGR8)
> Advertisement is the first step to attract people. Ads need to be prepared from beginning to end, so we need to think exactly what we will put into the ads, good description of the company, the role, it has to be good graduate profile and of course you need to put what kind of benefits, because that is what most attracts people. (PD FR6)
> With the young people I think the most important benefits will be career progression, to get more experience, this is most important in my opinion for young people. When they graduate they don't have lot of experience, so they won't know that they will get job where they will be happy. (PD FR6)

Regarding the Business Strategy the last question of the interview was with regards the previous questions. How do your answers link in with the overall business strategy? Employers responded; the business strategy is connected to the development programmes for every single employee in the organisation, regarding graduates as well. A graduate level is a different breed to an employee who has a few years' experience under their belt. They are ambitious, carry little baggage and are eager to impress in their first role. However, they also think very highly of their knowledge and skills so will require an attractive package to entice them to your company.

> Our HR strategies are 100% aligned with our business strategy, which is focusing on talent. Considering talent and leadership as the most important factors that the organisation needs to achieve their business goals. (PBFMGR8)
> The business strategy for the overall organisation, the particular division that is involved with this programme is the business development and innovation division. Their remit would be to promote the agriculture and sea fisheries industry - they are trying to help seafood. Companies become more successful and therefore create more employment. So this is a way for BIM to contribute to raising employability (PE FMH16)

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore graduate expectations with respect to their first employer. This means that, taking into account the fact that this particular generation has gone through the different changes mentioned previously in the academic review, they expect to find an employer who will meet their own preferences or expectations. However, the question that arises is whether employers value, consider and finally manage to fulfil these expectations when hiring graduates.

Working on the premise that the transition from college to work, is one of the most difficult stages in life, where people experience fear, anxiety, expectation, curiosity and insecurity among other feelings associated with the risk involved in starting their own professional career (Friedell et al., 2011). This recent generation has gone through many hardships to enter the current job market. Despite this, *Millennials* have managed to excel through its strength, will, and desire to achieve their goals (Friedell et al., 2011).

Based on the academic literature, reports, experiences, and feedback from employers and graduates, this study has aimed to contribute to the academic literature on *Millennials'* perception, employer perception and the period of economic crisis that has faced this generation and hindered their efforts to gain entry and remain in the current job market. Evidence was provided by two research methods: quantitative and qualitative methods.

The results for both qualitative and quantitative studies were taken into the account to affirm or deny the research questions and hypotheses considered in this study. Finally the researcher used the triangulation research approach to extract the information from the tests performed on both studies (qualitative and quantitative) to complement this research. In order to be consistent with the literature reviewed, the researcher has referred to the perception of employers, based on their interview responses with regard to, development and career progression, recognition, and recruiting of graduates. In other words, organisations are aware of *Millennials'* expectations and are attempting to meet their preferences.

First of all, having considered the findings with regard to the first main hypothesis of this study, i.e., the relationship between the career development of graduates, with respect to choosing an employer; the results showed that graduates are more attracted by large multinational companies that are part of the private sector, than the public or government companies. However, this answer is also relevant due to graduates' expectations when choosing a multinational corporation as an employer, which provides different opportunities such as the career development of graduates.

The relationship found between a) the graduate's preferences when looking for a job and b) career development. These two variables formed the basis of graduates' motivation to find their desired job. The high statistical significance of this variable means that graduates expect to have a job where they can have career development and feel comfortable enjoying what they are doing.

Having considered that, the main expectation for this generation cohort is their career development. Employers have agreed that one of their main priorities regarding graduates, is development and career progression. In addition, they concluded that, the key is to offer the new employees tasks where they can realistically put their newly acquired knowledge into practice. Multinational organisations are not afraid of spending money on training employees, because from their point of view, this is a way to show them that employer cares about them and will let them progress. Therefore, training makes employees feel competent and allows them to develop capabilities to match their jobs and related challenges. Our findings have shown that employees consider this aspect to be moderately important.

The academic research reviewed previously is consistent with the results found in this study. Over the past decade, organisations are concerned with creating new resources or programmes that facilitate the attraction and retention of young employees, and it has revealed three broad factors that are essential for organisational learning and adaptability for new employees: a supportive learning environment, concrete learning processes and practices, and leadership behaviour that provides reinforcement (De Vos et al., 2009) We refer to these as the building blocks of the learning organisation.

Secondly, in terms of job security, the results of this study have shown that graduates have been affected by employers and the economic crisis, in addition to their expectations with regard to the length of employment and opportunities to obtain a permanent contract. Furthermore, employers' perception has created a grim picture for this generation because they do not want to risk losing money and time on people, who do not show progress. On the other hand, employers from the public sector have argue that their graduate programme is for a period of 9 months only, because of the moratorium in place they cannot hire graduates. Based on this employers' perspective, this issue is not consistent with the previous research. According to the earlier researchers, graduates may yet be employed on permanent contracts, although many businesses opt to put them on a fixed length contract so they can evaluate against set milestones and end the relationship if things aren't going as planned (De Vos et al., 2009). This means, that employers cannot guarantee labour stability for those people.

In contrast to the perspective above, there is a consistent approach from the academic literature, and employers' perception regarding this particular issue. Based on the academic research, young workers put a very high emphasis on both work expectations and life expectations, so that their personal ambitions and career goals are quite related and connected to each other, and they see job security as an important issue (Haw & De Vos, 2010). They are always seeking work in something that they would actually prefer and feel comfortable doing. However, this generation are constantly changing the idea of work because there are not many options, and nobody can guarantee long-term stability and permanence. From the employers' perspective, job security is one of the big concerns for them as well, however, they are addressing this issue trying to offer growth opportunities and development, promoting them during their tenure in the company over a relatively short period based on their performance.

Thirdly, the results have shown that graduates ultimately value career development based on recognition and compensation. This is caused by the fact that recognition provides graduates with an internal motivation to pay attention to their actions and performance (Shatat, El-Baz, & Hariga 2010). On the other hand, graduates consider recognition of their performance by rewards to be extremely important, as our results have shown with a high number of graduates agreeing on this subject. Moreover, employers have agreed that these types of rewards are not necessary. There is also a high regard given to benefits such as health insurance, flexible working hours, or holiday allowances. Following this, public organisations have added that the most important reward that this generation can have is experience and opportunity to work, due to the fact that some companies cannot compete with the benefits that large companies offer them. The results of earlier research (De Vos et al., 2009) showed that graduates consider this issue (financial reward) mostly determined by contextual variables, analysing the economic framework that they are facing now. This means that, that this issue is part of an individual factor reflecting one's subjective interpretation of the socioeconomic context.

The results found in this study can show that some other variables were related to them; a *development programme for graduates* as a main variable and *employers investment in training & development*. This significance and direct relationship have shown that these two variables mean that graduates are expecting to have a training and development atmosphere, in their future employment, where they can develop their skills according to their needs. The academic literature suggested that organisations that contribute to personal and professional development, providing environments where people can grow in their career, are more likely to have graduates who will stay working there.

The results have shown that, in terms of *recruitment and attraction*, graduates are likely to follow large companies which can meet their overall expectations.

This means that they have recognized these companies by name and presence, and the benefits that some of them can provide. As a result, employers' responses affirm that having a good reputation and huge branding, graduates will be always interested in working for them. These affirmations are consistent with the literature review.

According to Wallacer, Ligins, Cameron & Sheldom (2014), a large-scale study conducted by the researchers with the purpose of identifying how different factors influenced the strength of an employer's brand. The results found that the large number of applications for a job from undergraduate students through career Service College, was for the employers with good reputations (Wallacer et al., 2014). Large multinational organisations have used marketing and branding practices to engender product and service brand loyalty, allowing them to expand their activity to differentiate themselves and make themselves desirable to employees and customers (Wallacer et al., 2014).

Highlighting this, graduates have been involved in this recruitment strategy in order to attract and retain talent in competitive labour markets by these types of organisations.

From a recruitment perspective, these represent basic motivations such as remuneration, compensation and benefits, training and development, promotion opportunities, and job security. You find very few people who stay with one employer for their whole career, but there are certain things you can do to help reduce graduate departures.

Conclusion

This study recognises the importance of employment prospects for graduates highlighting their own characteristics and the preferences of this generation. However, these people intend to develop themselves in this environment faster, more efficiently, and with more skills than other generations. With regard to work experience and employment opportunities, graduates seem to have some doubts about the landscape that they face. The doubts being considered by graduates, such as, career development, commitment, job security, long-term career prospects, salary, and benefits. These conditions are prevalent in both their professional and personal lives, and have become a long-term expectation for these people; this is partly due to the fact that such conditions are not promoted in the today's labour market.

The purpose of this study was to explore and identify the graduates' expectations with respect to their first employer. The quantitative and qualitative research conducted in this study facilitated a resolution to the research questions and the hypotheses raised in this study. The quantitative research allowed us to explore and identify the expectations and preferences of graduates in their attempts to secure their first employment. On the other hand, the qualitative research confirms that employers continue to engage in competition in order to attract and retain talent. This strategy is based on the productivity and performance of each employee: if the employee does not perform correctly, they are not promoted. This perspective is consistent with the theoretical framework developed in this study by the author. Arguing once again that the shift in focus from employment to employability reflects the view that many companies are no longer able (or willing) to offer long-term career opportunities to their employees (graduates) (Brown & Hesketh 2004).

Emphasis on training and development for graduates has set a precedent that the millennial generation has a strong motivation for progress and professional growth. This generation cohort is seeking any kind of development and work experience that allows them feel secure – even in an insecure economy. At the same time, graduates have in mind a strong focus on personal career advancement; they believe that their employer should value and consider their expectations and concerns and offer them not only an interesting job and attractive financial compensations, but also a career. This is due to the specific economic situation which has affected this generation.

However, employers seem to be addressing this issue by providing experience and opportunities; in particular, multinational companies, which are in a position to offer more graduate programmes and in turn attract more candidates. Based on our results, only large multinational companies are in the position to offer a competitive package of rewards and compensation benefits for those graduates. In contrast, public services cannot compete with this expectation, due to the nature of their work. The term 'job security' is perceived by graduates and employers in different ways. Employers are trying to address this issue through career development programmes.

From a graduate's perspective, for them to be afforded the opportunity to assume a position in an organisation is not without its disadvantages; for example, it can prove difficult for new workers if employers are unable to offer terms consistent with career preferences; thus, employers should be encouraged to incorporate such needs into their recruitment strategy. It is important to create employment awareness by encouraging essential educational programmes promoted

by employers and education institutions to motivate graduates; it is difficult for graduates and potential future workers to be sure of their career needs and expectations. Successful programmes should encourage the active involvement of graduates, in order for companies to attract and retain talent.

Furthermore, as we have seen in this study is that the most important for this generation is a development programme that is flexible enough to enable them to move laterally as well as vertically – allowing them to gain knowledge, skills, and experience in their career path.

Perhaps there may be other criteria that are very relevant for futures studies such as career satisfaction and career success which are part of graduates expectations.

Also it would be interesting for further research to explore what influence to young workers to focus in their career success. On the other hand, organisations would need to focus their attention in the HR strategies to develop a good fit between the requirements of graduates and themselves.

Findings of this study may greatly contribute to the theoretical literature in the fresh graduates' preferences regarding their future employer. This study faced a few limitations, for example, gaining access to organisations and finding employers who were of the Millennial generation to contribute to the interviews. In addition, the researcher has undertaken survey research. The data can be taken at face value, although there could be some potential of social desirability bias, which occurs when respondents feel pressured to give socially desirable answers. Although the respondents knew that their answers would be kept in the strictest confidence this may have affected their answers to the survey. Furthermore, the size of the samples was small and did allow us to compare the responses of graduates from different courses. These limitations reduced the ability to obtain a larger sample and produce more reliable and more valid findings.

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