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UNIVERSITY YOUTH'S INTEREST IN OBTAINING PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATIONS AND THEIR ROLE IN INCREASING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND ENHANCING YOUTH WORK EFFICIENCY:A FIELD STUDY OF STUDENTS IN THE SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT AT MOHAMED BOUDIAF UNIVERSITY, M'SILA

إقبال الشباب الجامعي على الحصول على الشهادات المهنية ودورها في زيادة فرص التوظيف، ورفع كفاءة الشباب في العمل (دراسة ميدانية لطلبة قسم علم الاجتماع جامعة محمد بوضياف بالمسيلة)

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الملخص:

يعالج هذا المقال موضوع اقبال الطلبة الجامعيين على مراكز التكوين المهني من أجل الحصول على شهادات مهنية تزيد من فرص توظيفهم ورفع كفاءتهم المهنية في العمل المراد شغله، تم الاعتماد على المنهج الوصفي التحليلي لوصف الظاهرة وتحليل معطياتها كميا وكيفيا من أجل إيجاد العلاقة بين متغيرات الدراسة ومعرفة كيفية تشكيل المعايير الموجهة لعملية تكوين الشباب الجامعي وحصوله على الشهادات المهنية المكملة وعلاقتها بسوق العمل من حيث تلبية الاحتياجات وجودة الأداء، ولتحقيق أهداف هذه الدراسة اخترنا العينة العمدية تمثلت في الطلبة الذين يدرسون في الجامعة وفي نفس الوقت في مراكز التكوين المهني للكشف عن آرائهم حول تغير نمط التوظيف والحاجة الملحة في الحصول على الشهادات المهنية للفوز بالوظيفة مستقبلا.

الكلمات المفتاحيّة: فرص التوظيف، اندماج سوق العمل، الشهادات المهنية، الكفاءة المهنية، التدريب المهني.

Abstract:

This article examines university students' interest in vocational training centres to obtain professional certifications that enhance their employability and improve their professional competence in the desired workplace. The study employs a descriptive-analytical method to describe the phenomenon and analyse its quantitative and qualitative data. It aims to identify the relationships among the study variables and explore how university students form guiding criteria for engaging in vocational training processes. Furthermore, it investigates how obtaining supplementary professional certifications aligns with labour market demands and contributes to ensuring quality performance. To meet the study's objectives, the research utilises a purposive sample comprising university students concurrently enrolled in university programs and vocational training centres. This approach enables an exploration of their perspectives on shifting employment patterns and the increasing demand for professional certifications as essential assets for securing future job opportunities.

Keywords: *Employment opportunities, job market integration, professional certifications, professional competence, vocational training.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Today's world is witnessing significant, continuous, and rapid developments and changes in all areas of life. These transformations have altered many long-standing concepts and principles rooted in our minds for years. As a result, all the world's nations have faced the necessity of change to keep up with these advancements. Hence, it has become crucial for these nations to seek the primary driver of their development, which lies in human development. Such growth can be achieved only through education at all levels. This necessity has led to the ongoing need for educational reform to enhance human development and keep pace with the continuous advancements of the modern era.

Higher education has thus garnered increasing attention in most developed and developing societies, as it serves as a strategic resource that supplies society with the human resources needed to promote development in all fields of life. It also provides specialised scientific insights into various issues these societies face. Consequently, higher education has witnessed numerous initiatives for improvement, aiming to address the dynamics occurring in scientific and technological fields better. These efforts aim to deliver highly competent graduates and balance what the educational system produces with the demands of today's labour market, which has increasingly shifted toward specialisation. As such, education must incorporate the necessary tools and capabilities to lead these changes and developments and stay updated with all innovations.

1. Problem Statement

As a social and educational institution, the university plays a pivotal cultural and intellectual role as a hub of enlightenment. Its significance lies in shaping and training individuals, a responsibility that grows important as the institution strives to enhance its mechanisms, structures, and overall mission. These improvements encompass human resources, such as educators and administrative staff, and material resources, including infrastructure and organisational frameworks (Adour, 1999, p.48).

With the advent of the new millennium, universities have assumed a central position within educational systems, particularly in training highly skilled professionals capable of utilising knowledge to address societal needs and contribute to economic, scientific, and social progress. Algerian universities have undergone numerous reforms to meet these evolving demands like their global counterparts. The most recent and notable is the LMD (Licence, Master, Doctorate) reform introduced in 2004–2005. This reform aimed to enhance the quality of education, promote better professional integration, and strengthen the university's connection with external sectors. It was founded on studies emphasising the relationship between quality education, public life success, access to societal opportunities, and the broader societal

integration of graduates. Research has consistently demonstrated a strong correlation between educational attainment, employment status, and income levels, reinforcing the connection between qualifications, labour market participation, and financial stability across developed nations.

Despite these ongoing reforms, the professional reality for university graduates remains concerning. Unemployment among youth continues to be a pressing issue, compelling graduates to seek job opportunities to actively escape their precarious conditions. However, such opportunities are often scarce, absent, or highly competitive. The pre-employment contract program was introduced as a temporary measure to mitigate youth unemployment. Unfortunately, many young people question its effectiveness, as it primarily offers short-term contracts rather than long-term employment solutions. These contracts generally last two to three years, after which individuals frequently find themselves back in the cycle of unemployment.

Given the evolving nature of the job market and its increasing, particularly in specialised expertise and professional experience, graduates are adopting a more cautious approach to career preparation. Many students have recently attended vocational training centres to acquire additional professional certifications. These certifications enhance their employability and improve their prospects of securing stable jobs post-graduation. This shift has become an increasingly noticeable trend within Algerian universities, reflecting students' strategic efforts to adapt to the changing labour market.

In light of these developments, this study seeks to address the following central research question:

What are the reasons behind university students' increasing interest in obtaining professional certifications, and to what extent do these certifications improve their employment opportunities and work efficiency?

To further explore this issue, the study examines the following sub-questions:

- Do recent university reforms, particularly implementing the LMD system, play a role in students' pursuit of additional certifications?
- What are the motivations driving university youth to vocational training centres?
- Do professional certifications contribute to enhancing university students' work efficiency?
- Which fields are most popular among students in vocational training centres?

2. Research Hypotheses

The changes in the employment landscape and recent university reforms have led university students to seek complementary professional certifications.

The following sub-hypotheses further support this:

- The philosophy of the LMD system, which focuses on opening universities to their professional surroundings, has encouraged students to pursue vocational specialities.
- Limited employment opportunities have pushed university students to seek supplementary certifications.
- Professional certifications enhance human resource efficiency by providing practical skills that complement theoretical knowledge.
- Fields such as computer science and foreign languages are the most sought-after in vocational training centres.

3. Significance of the Study

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to identifying and analysing the issue and seeking solutions. The importance of this topic is reflected in the potential benefits the study's findings can provide, both scientifically and practically, as highlighted in the following points:

- Human resources are the primary driver of any activity; thus, studying and understanding their circumstances is essential.
- Exploring the relationship between university reforms, specifically the LMD system, and the emergence of this phenomenon.
- Understanding the importance of complementary professional certifications in helping university students secure employment after graduation.
- Highlight the value of vocational training and its role in providing professional specialities that assist university students in the labour market, ensuring that the right individual is placed in the correct position, and helping them choose specialities aligned with their abilities and understanding of the job market.
- Identifying the pressing factors that necessitate developing youth skills in the current context.
- Practical recommendations from the study are proposed to adopt suitable mechanisms for advancing scientific research and its outcomes.

4. Objectives of the Study

Defining objectives is crucial in any scientific research, guiding the researcher toward the proper path to achieve the desired results.

- The researcher's efficiency and knowledge can be improved by exploring the theoretical foundations of training and professional competence.
- Verifying the validity of the adopted hypotheses as potential answers to the research problem.
- This study provides theoretical and field-based materials for researchers interested in this topic.
- Shedding light on the reasons behind university youth's pursuit of complementary professional certifications.
- This study highlights the need for university youth to obtain complementary professional certifications to develop their skills and secure employment.
- Promoting training programs that contribute to developing human resource skills and abilities.
- Identifying the obstacles facing university youth in the labour market, particularly employment.

5. Definition of Key Concepts Related to the Research Topic

Vocational training is essential to the educational and professional landscape, directly influencing employment opportunities, professional competence, and workforce integration. As a social and academic institution, the university plays a crucial role in preparing students academically, professionally, and culturally, equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate a dynamic job market (Ould Khalifa, 2017). As the primary beneficiaries of this educational process, university students must adapt to evolving employment trends and develop specialised expertise to meet market demands. In this context, employment is not merely about securing a job. However, it involves a structured recruitment process, selection, and integration within an organisation, ensuring alignment between institutional goals and workforce capabilities (Darrah, 2008, p. 25). Professional competence is a key factor in this process, encompassing an individual's knowledge, skills, experiences, and behaviours, which are continually developed and assessed within workplace settings (Hussein, 2005, p. 174). Given the growing emphasis on specialisation, vocational training has become a strategic pathway for students seeking to enhance their employability. It bridges the gap between academic education and market demands by providing practical training tailored to industry needs. Unlike traditional education,

which primarily focuses on theoretical knowledge, vocational training emphasises career selection, guidance, and professional adaptation, ensuring that individuals acquire relevant skills for sustainable career growth (Mannheim, 1936; Dewey, 1916).

Furthermore, professional compatibility plays a critical role in successful workforce integration, as it reflects an individual's ability to align with workplace expectations, adapt to diverse professional environments, and maintain career satisfaction (Awida, 1996, p. 165). The increasing reliance on vocational training to secure stable employment and enhance professional expertise highlights its growing importance in modern education and labour markets. By equipping individuals with practical knowledge and specialised skills, vocational training enhances workforce efficiency, boosts productivity, and facilitates smoother transitions from academic settings to professional environments (Gharbi, 2004, p. 24).

7. Methodology and Research Design

This study employs a descriptive-analytical approach, which is appropriate for analysing university students' increasing interest in obtaining professional certifications. This method describes the phenomenon under investigation while applying quantitative and qualitative techniques to explore its implications.

7.1 Research Approach

The study adopts a mixed-method approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The quantitative aspect is based on numerical data collected through structured questionnaires, while the qualitative aspect involves analysing students' motivations, perceptions, and challenges related to vocational training.

7.2 Population and Sampling

A purposive sampling technique was used to select students enrolled in university programs and vocational training centres. This non-probabilistic sampling method ensures that participants possess relevant characteristics to answer the research questions effectively.

Total sample size: 39 students

Sampling criteria:

- Must be enrolled in a university degree program and a vocational training centre.
- Must have completed at least one semester of vocational training.
- Must be actively seeking employment or preparing for future job opportunities.

7.3 Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was the primary tool for data collection. It was designed to assess:

- Students' motivations for pursuing professional certifications.
- Perceived impact of vocational training on their employability.
- Challenges encountered during vocational training.

The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions (Likert scale) and open-ended responses, allowing for both statistical analysis and qualitative insights.

7.4 Data Analysis

- Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics (percentages, frequency distributions) to determine trends and patterns.
- Qualitative responses were subjected to thematic analysis, categorising key themes emerging from students' experiences and perspectives.

8. Presentation and Analysis of the Results

Table 1

Distribution of sample members by gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Males	12	30.76%
Females	27	69.23%
Total	39	100%

The table shows the distribution of respondents by gender; 69.23% of the sample is female, whereas 30.76% is male. This disparity, with a more significant percentage of females and a lower percentage of males, can be attributed to the fact that females tend to be more inclined toward education and training and are more eager to secure employment. This trend aligns with the prevailing perception that employed women have more fantastic opportunities across various aspects of life. Employment fulfils their ambitions and desires and enables them to assert their identity, prove their competence, and secure their societal position.

Table 2

Distribution of Sample Members by Age Group

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
21 – 25	12	30.76%
25 – 29	12	30.76%
29 – 33	15	38.46%
Total	39	100%

From the table analysing the distribution of respondents by age group, we observe that respondents aged between 21 and 25 years and those aged between 25 and 29 years, representing 30.76% of the sample, share similar interests and tendencies in education and training. This is because the research sample was purposive and included individuals who met the research criteria. Therefore, our interpretation of this similarity aligns with the research objectives and goals of the sample participants. On the other hand, we found that 38.46% of the sample consists of individuals aged between 29 and 33 years, which is a higher percentage than the different age groups. We interpret this disparity as stemming from this group's recognition of the importance of training before and after graduation from the LMD (licence–Master–Doctorate) system. This may be attributed to their challenges in securing employment, prompting them to pursue additional training to improve their chances of obtaining a job based on their past experiences in the job market.

Table 3

Illustrates Job Acquisition

Job Acquired	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	12	30.76%
No	27	69.23%
Total	39	100%

The table above shows that most students have not secured a job, accounting for 69.23%, whereas a minority have obtained a job, accounting for 30.76%. This statistical analysis revealed that most students remain unemployed because they do not meet their education level (diploma). This is because some individuals in the sample are still in their first year of university studies. Additionally, this may be attributed to students' lack of satisfaction with only a bachelor's degree, as they aspire to secure employment with a master's or doctoral degree to ensure a career that aligns with their personal abilities, preferences, and inclinations toward certain professions they consider suitable for their socio-professional lives.

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Table 4

The training content aligns with actual employment needs

Alignment with Employment Needs	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	30	76.92%
No	09	23.07%
Total	39	100%

From the table above, we observe that most students responded "Yes," accounting for 76.92%, while the percentage of respondents who answered "No" was 23.07%.

Based on the statistical analysis of the table, we conclude that the training programs are designed to meet the job market's needs. This aligns with the nature of the training, which is mainly theoretical and practical across most fields, directly contributing to developing the respondents' skills and competencies. This enables them to keep pace with evolving employment demands, which change in response to local, national, and global developments. A sociological interpretation of this table indicates that the benefits of training align with job requirements. Through this alignment, individuals gain high competence within institutions.

Table 5

You Have Prior Knowledge of People Who Were Employed Thanks to the Supplementary Certificate Obtained Through Training

Prior Knowledge of Employment Through a Certificate	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	36	92.30%
No	03	07.69%
Total	39	100%

From the table above, we observe an apparent disparity in the results. The percentage of respondents who answered "yes" was 92.30%, which is a high figure, whereas those who answered "no" accounted for 7.69%, representing a low percentage. Based on the statistical analysis of the table, this disparity can be interpreted as an indication of the respondents' strong belief in the significant role that supplementary professional certificates add to a job application and contribute to success in securing employment. This belief is based on the students' observations of individuals who obtained jobs owing to the certificates they earned through training. This highlights the importance of these certificates and encourages students to pursue training at various centres without hesitation.

Table 6

Training Contributes to Improving Your Knowledge of Modern Technological Tools

Contribution of Training to Enhancing Knowledge	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	38	97.43%
No	01	02.56%
Total	39	100%

The table above shows that a significant % of respondents, 97.43%, answered "yes," indicating that training enhances knowledge and enables modern technological tools. On the other hand, a tiny percentage, 2.56%, answered "No." Based on the statistical analysis of the table, this disparity can be interpreted as evidence of the critical importance of training. Training plays a significant role in preparing and equipping individuals capable of keeping up with ongoing advancements and meeting job market demands. Moreover, it ensures the optimal utilisation of material and human resources, enabling individuals to achieve greater productivity with less effort and in shorter time frames. This is especially vital in an era that demands highly skilled individuals to cope with the rapid pace of technological advancement, even at a modest level.

Table 7

Training May Increase Future Work Proficiency

Training Increases Work Proficiency	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	39	100%
No	00	00%
Total	39	100%

The table above shows that 100% of the respondents answered "yes," whereas 0% answered "no." Based on the statistical analysis of the table, we conclude that respondents are high based on the importance of training at all levels, particularly in practical, knowledge-based, and professional aspects. Training enhances and develops their abilities and skills while guiding them through various training methods to improve their performance. Additionally, it equips them with the flexibility needed to adapt to any unforeseen changes in the professional field.

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Table 8

Specialisations Studied in Training

Specialisations Studied in Training	Frequency	Percentage
Information Technology	15	38.46%
Accounting	09	23.07%
Human Resources Management	05	12.82%
Documentation and Archiving	04	10.25%
Marketing	01	02.56%
Languages	01	02.56%
Sewing and Cooking	01	02.56%
Hairdressing and Beauty	02	05.12%
Secretarial Work	01	02.56%
Total	39	100%

As shown in the table above, 38.46% of the respondents studied information technology, whereas 23.07% studied accounting. This is followed by human resources management at 12.82% and documentation and archiving at 10.25%. The percentages were lower for the remaining specialisations, with Hairdressing and Beauty at 5.12% and Secretarial Work, Sewing and Cooking, and Languages at 2.56%.

These results indicate that information technology is the most popular specialisation among students. This is likely due to its necessity in all institutions and its more excellent prospects for employment opportunities.

Table 9

The nature of the training studied

Nature of Training	Frequency	Percentage
Theoretical	00	00%
Practical	03	07.69%
Theoretical and Practical	36	92.30%
Total	39	100%

The analysis of the data presented above reveals several key findings:

Nature of training:

- Most respondents (92.30%) indicated that the training they received was "Theoretical and Practical."
- No respondents stated that the training was exclusively "Theoretical," as this category received 0%.
- A smaller group, 7.69%, described the training as purely "Practical."

These results suggest that the dual nature of training (theoretical and practical) is highly valued for enhancing employability.

9. Results Obtained

1. **LMD System vs. Classical System:**
    - The respondents indicated that the LMD (licence-master-doctorate) system is equivalent to the classical system in terms of scientific value, with a reported percentage of 61.53%. This equivalence is attributed to the similarity in curricula between the two systems.
    - However, the LMD system introduces new professional specialisations, which better align with labour market needs, accounting for 53.84%.
2. **Challenges in LMD Implementation:**
    - 92.30% of the respondents believe that the Algerian university system does not implement the LMD system correctly, adversely affecting students' outcomes and performance.
    - Most students achieved only acceptable results, with 53.84% reporting moderate success. Only 6.15% reflected limited employment opportunities.
3. **Recognition of LMD by Employers:**
    - Employers have not fully acknowledged the widespread adoption of the LMD system in Algerian universities, with 76.92% of respondents indicating that it is not considered during recruitment.

These findings reveal a partial disconnect between the LMD system's theoretical expectations and its practical alignment with labour market requirements.

Professional Certificates and Employability

- The hypothesis that "Limited job opportunities drive university students to seek additional certificates" was supported, as training programs are shown to fulfil market needs. The alignment of training content with employment requirements was 76.92%.
- 92.30% of the respondents highlighted the practical importance of professional certificates in securing jobs, which explains the growing interest among students in pursuing vocational training.

Enhancing Human Resources Efficiency:

- The hypothesis that professional certificates enhance the efficiency of human resources in practical applications was validated. The results show the following:
    - Training develops abilities, skills, and knowledge when its content is optimally utilised.
    - A high percentage (97.43%) of respondents confirmed the role of professional certificates in adapting to employment requirements.
    - Additionally, 100% of the respondents agreed that training improved job proficiency.

Popularity of specialisations in vocational training:

- The hypothesis that "Specialisations in information technology and foreign languages are the most attractive in vocational training centres" was substantiated:
    - Information technology ranked as the most attractive specialisation, with 35.29%, driven by high demand in the labour market and its inclusion in various recruitment competitions.
    - Human resources management and accounting followed, both at 24.70%.

These findings highlight the significant role of vocational training and professional certificates in aligning educational outcomes with labour market needs and improving students' employability.

10. General findings of the study:

The study yielded key findings regarding university youth's pursuit of professional certifications and their impact on employment opportunities and work efficiency.

- **Significance of Professional Certificates**
- Professional certificates are of considerable importance in the employment process and are given more attention in the job market than university degrees are.
- **Insufficiency of LMD Degrees:**
- It was concluded that a degree obtained through the LMD (licence-master-doctorate) system alone cannot secure employment.
- **Challenges with the LMD System:**
- Opinions regarding the LMD system and its policies are disparate, and the findings indicate that it is not being implemented effectively in Algerian universities.
- **Role of training in human resource development:**
- Training plays a significant role in developing human resources, especially in technological and technical fields.
- **Most Popular Specialisations:**
- The most attractive specialisations in training centres are information technology, accounting, and human resource management.

Conclusion:

Through our theoretical and practical study of university youth seeking professional certificates to increase their work efficiency and increase employment opportunities, we discovered that this phenomenon is strongly present in the university environment.

The undeniable truth is that a university degree alone is not sufficient to secure a job. Instead, additional professional certificates from various training centres are needed to strengthen the job application. A robust application demands substantial documents with practical experience and diverse professional certificates. This combination increases the chances of securing a job that matches an individual's professional and personal abilities.

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