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The Transition to Work of Education and Pedagogy Graduates: A Mixed-Methods Longitudinal Study from Sapienza University (2008-2018)

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LA TRANSIZIONE AL LAVORO DEI LAUREATI IN SCIENZE DELL'EDUCAZIONE E PEDAGOGIA: UNO STUDIO LONGITUDINALE MIXED-METHODS PRESSO LA SAPIENZA UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA (2008-2018)

Abstract

This article presents a mixed-methods longitudinal study on the transition to work of graduates in Education (Bachelor's degree) and Pedagogy (Master's degree) at Sapienza University of Rome between 2008 and 2018. Integrating administrative records (UNI.CO dataset) with narrative reconstructions of 23 career trajectories, the study explores employment outcomes through two indicators: the Employment Index and the Coherence Index. The findings reveal persistent contractual precariousness, high fragmentation in early career paths, and a gradual decline in job-coherence over the observed period. While formal alignment between degrees and job functions remains high, actual employment conditions raise critical concerns. The capability approach and narrative analysis help uncover the subjective and structural factors that shape the work transitions of graduates. Gender, academic performance and study regularity emerge as relevant but not decisive factors. The article concludes by stressing the need for educational policy to recognize the

specific challenges faced by graduates in education-related fields and to enhance the quality and stability of their professional opportunities.

Keywords: Capability approach; Education graduates; Job quality; Longitudinal data; Transition to work.

1. Introduction

The transition from university to work represents a critical phase in the life course of young graduates and has increasingly become an object of pedagogical, sociological and economic investigation. The Italian context, marked by structural fragility in the education labor market, reveals particularly significant trends when observing graduates in the fields of Education and Pedagogy. The aim of this study is to analyze, with both statistical precision and narrative depth, the employment trajectories of graduates from the Bachelor's program in Education (Scienze dell'Educazione e della Formazione – SEF) and the Master's program in Pedagogy (Pedagogia e Scienze dell'Educazione e della Formazione – PSEF) at Sapienza University of Rome, over the period 2008-2018.

Drawing on an integrated database that merges administrative university records and the Italian Ministry of Labor's compulsory employment communications (UNI.CO), this research investigates the occupational outcomes of 799 Bachelor's graduates and 275 Master's graduates, excluding international dual-degree students and those over 40. The investigation relies on two synthetic indicators: an Employment Index (days worked post-graduation over total observed days) and a Coherence Index (days worked in jobs aligned with the degree over total days worked), enabling a rigorous multidimensional analysis of job quality.

In line with recent methodological advances, the study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative longitudinal data with a qualitative interpretation of 23 individual work trajectories. This strategy allows us to explore not only the measurable outcomes of the transition to work, but also the subjective and contextual factors shaping these pathways.

The article is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a theoretical and empirical background on work transitions, with a specific focus on educational degrees, labor market segmentation and the concepts of coherence and capability. Section 3 outlines the methodology, including data sources, population and analytical strategies. Section 4 presents the results

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of the quantitative analysis on employment indicators, contract types and coherence by academic background. Section 5 discusses the qualitative findings, based on selected narratives. Section 6 concludes with implications for educational policy and labor market interventions.

2. Theoretical and empirical background

The longitudinal approach adopted in this study allows us to go beyond traditional models centered on occupational outcomes. Instead of reducing graduate success to fixed indicators at specific time points, this perspective focuses on the processual nature of transitions, emphasizing how individual trajectories unfold, adapt and respond to structural constraints. It makes visible the non-linear, fragmented and negotiated pathways that characterize many early careers in the educational field.

It involves a wide array of interdependent dimensions – structural, biographical, relational – that configure a young graduate's trajectory over time. As shown by Schizzerotto and Barone (2006), macro-structural approaches to education and labor systems are indispensable for understanding overall employment patterns. Yet, they are insufficient to explain the differentiated and often discontinuous experiences observed at the meso and micro levels (Walther, 2006).

In the context of Education and Pedagogy degrees, this complexity is amplified. These degrees occupy a peculiar position in the Italian academic landscape. On the one hand they are characterized by a strong social demand for relational, formative and educational competencies. On the other hand they are embedded in a labor market that exhibits persistent segmentation, contract instability and limited recognition of educational professions (Cavalli & Argentin, 2010; ISFOL, 2018).

The transition for graduates in these fields is often marked by a paradox: formal coherence between training and job roles exists, but the conditions under which the work is performed – short-term contracts, low protections, scarce career development – suggest a structurally weak insertion into the workforce (Lucisano & De Luca, 2022).

The concept of coherence, central to this study, refers to the match between the content of the academic training and the actual job carried out by the graduate. While the literature on educational mismatch (Allen & van der Velden, 2001) has emphasized the detrimental effects of incoherence – lower earnings, dissatisfaction and occupational downgrading – in educational professions the issue is more complex. Many job titles may be

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formally coherent yet differ significantly in working conditions and career prospects. This requires a multidimensional operationalization of coherence, combining contractual types, job codes (ISCO classifications) and days worked in roles compatible with the degree.

Furthermore, this research draws on the capability approach (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011), which moves beyond outcome-oriented metrics to consider individuals' real freedoms and opportunities to convert their education into meaningful professional projects. In this sense, a graduate's ability to choose, adapt and negotiate their position within structural constraints becomes a key evaluative criterion (Bonvin & Galster, 2010).

The biographical-narrative approach complements this framework by emphasizing meaning-making processes and identity negotiation (Bruner, 1988; Alheit, 1995). Individual stories provide not only empirical enrichment but also epistemological depth, capturing nuances of resilience, aspiration and discontinuity that elude aggregate indicators.

Finally, recent empirical studies provide a comparative backdrop. AlmaLaurea (2023) highlights the structural disadvantage of humanities and education graduates in terms of employment rates and stability. However, these surveys rely on self-reported data and short-term follow-ups. By contrast, longitudinal datasets like UNI.CO allow for a more objective and comprehensive tracing of job transitions (Lucisano *et al.*, 2021). Internationally, reports by CEDEFOP (2020) and OECD (2023) confirm that Southern European countries continue to exhibit significant mismatch between tertiary education and labor market demands, especially in educational sectors under public investment constraints.

This study contributes to the literature by offering both granular longitudinal data and interpretive narratives, allowing for a rich and situated understanding of the work transition processes of education and pedagogy graduates.

3. Methodology

The present research adopts a mixed-methods design that integrates longitudinal quantitative data and qualitative narrative analysis. While the analysis covers all available records matching the criteria, it should be noted that the study refers to units of analysis, not to a statistically representative population. The quantitative component is based on the construction of a comprehensive dataset, derived from the integration of two main sources: academic records provided by Sapienza University of Rome and

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compulsory employment notifications managed by the Italian Ministry of Labor. The dataset UNI.CO enables the reconstruction of educational and occupational trajectories over a ten-year period (2008-2018).

The analysis model is based on the integration of administrative data, that is, data generated during institutional procedures. Specifically, the UNI.CO database used in this study results from the integration – carried out by the Italian Ministry of Labor and Social Policies (MLPS) – of graduate registries from individual universities with the Ministry's database of *Comunicazioni obbligatorie* (mandatory employment communications), which record all subordinate and quasi-subordinate employment relationships (Alleva *et al.*, 2015). This dataset does not include informal employment or self-employment arrangements such as freelance contracts under VAT registration (Partita IVA).

The data exchange is governed by the «Agreement for research and experimentation on the employment dynamics of graduates», and all processing is conducted in compliance with privacy regulations, ensuring the anonymity of individuals.

Over the years, the UNI.CO working group at Sapienza University has employed an approach based on administrative data to develop two observatories – one in the Lazio Region and one in the Tuscany Region – covering the entire university population of these two regions (Lucisano & De Luca, 2022). In addition, numerous case studies have been conducted on specific segments of the database, including research on foreign graduates (Lucisano *et al.*, 2020, 2021), female graduates (Lucisano *et al.*, 2022), and an in-depth study on graduates in STEM degrees (Lucisano, De Luca, & Favella 2022). The initial population of the present study consists of 810 Bachelor's (SEF) graduates and 343 Master's (PSEF) graduates. Two exclusion criteria were applied to improve analytical precision. First, graduates enrolled in the dual-degree program with the Moscow State University of Psychology and Education (MGPPU) were excluded, as their occupational trajectories mostly developed abroad and were therefore untraceable in the Italian labor market. Second, graduates aged over 40 at the time of graduation were excluded, given the structural and motivational differences in their career transitions and the potential gaps in pre-2008 contract registration. These exclusions had a minimal impact on the SEF cohort (1%) but affected 20% of the PSEF cohort.

After exclusions, the final sample consists of 799 SEF graduates and 275 PSEF graduates. Within this group, graduates were categorized as «matched» if at least one employment contract was recorded in the UNI.CO database. Importantly, «matched» status does not imply full employment, as it includes cases with minimal contract duration. For analytical purposes,

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the study distinguishes between all matched contracts and those initiated after graduation, focusing primarily on the latter.

The employment trajectories were examined using two synthetic indicators:

- Employment Index (EI) – Ratio between the number of actual working days (excluding overlaps) and the total number of days observed post-graduation.
- Coherence Index (CI) – Ratio between the number of days worked in positions aligned with the graduate's field of study, based on a predefined list of ISCO-08 codes identified as coherent with educational and pedagogical roles, such as 234, 235, 263, and selected cases within group 3 (e.g., 331, 332), as defined in the project criteria (Lucisano *et al.*, 2021). These indicators are designed for descriptive purposes, allowing for the reconstruction of longitudinal employment patterns. No inferential statistical models or hypothesis tests were applied, as the aim was not to identify causal relationships but to map trends and variations within the observed cohort. The choice of administrative data enhances objectivity and completeness but limits the range of analytical techniques to those compatible with institutional records.

These indicators provide a multifaceted picture of job stability and relevance and were analyzed in relation to academic background (type of diploma, university performance, graduation regularity), demographic features (gender, geographic origin) and contract typologies.

The qualitative component complements the statistical findings through an interpretive narrative analysis of 23 selected graduates. Cases were purposively sampled to reflect diverse trajectories in terms of employment stability, contract coherence and overall occupational outcomes. Narrative cases were selected following predefined criteria: an Employment Index above 50%, between 10 and 20 contracts, and a final position characterized by coherence and stability (e.g., permanent contract in education). These were considered «successful transitions». Other cases were selected for their capacity to illustrate discontinuity, mismatch, or redirection (see project technical report, 2023). Starting from coded variables, life histories were reconstructed to explore individual strategies, constraints and meaning-making processes.

Narratives were analyzed following a hermeneutic approach inspired by Bruner (1988), emphasizing the epistemological value of storytelling in understanding agency and adaptation in labor market transitions.

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4. Results

A distinction was made between contracts held before graduation and those initiated afterward. For analytical consistency, we focused on post-graduation contracts. Among SEF graduates, 684 were matched with at least one contract, but only 640 had contracts post-graduation. For PSEF, 258 were matched, with 254 contracts initiated after graduation. This distinction is crucial, as some graduates began working before or during their studies, potentially influencing their transition pathways.

4.1. *Unit of Analysis description*

The observed unit of Analysis includes 799 SEF graduates and 275 PSEF graduates. The majority are women, with female graduates constituting 94% of the SEF cohort and 93% of the PSEF cohort. Most students come from Central Italy (77.7% SEF, 63% PSEF), while 18% of SEF and 17.8% of PSEF students are from the South. Notably, 16% of PSEF students are from other European countries. Educational backgrounds reveal a prevalence of students from humanities-oriented high schools. Among SEF graduates, 26% held diplomas from the Liceo delle Scienze Umane, 21% from classical lyceums, and 19% from scientific lyceums. In the PSEF cohort, scientific and humanities lyceums were equally represented, each comprising around 20% of the population.

In terms of academic performance, there is a significant correlation between high school and university grades ($r = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$). However, while SEF graduates tend to improve their academic performance at university, university grades for PSEF graduates appear more homogeneous and skewed towards excellence (61.4% achieved a final grade of 110/110).

Graduation regularity diverges sharply: only 27% of SEF graduates complete their studies on time, compared to 71% of PSEF graduates. The delayed graduation among SEF students is partially explained by the high proportion of working students.

Most SEF graduates entered university with a high school diploma score between 76 and 80 out of 100 and graduated with a final mark between 105 and 109. This suggests that the university experience had a limited compensatory effect. For instance, students with lower diploma scores (60-70) generally achieved mid-level university grades, while those entering with higher scores had a greater probability of graduating with top marks. This pattern reflects structural inequalities in academic performance and points to the need for better support mechanisms for students entering with weaker academic preparation.

4.2. *Employment rates and indexes*

Among SEF graduates, 684 were matched to at least one contract, but only 640 had contracts initiated after graduation. For PSEF graduates, 258 were matched, with 254 matched post-graduation. Employment continuity remains low: 28% of SEF and 24% of PSEF graduates worked for 25% or less of the observed post-graduation period. Full employment (i.e., 100% of the period) was achieved by only 5.6% of SEF and 7.9% of PSEF graduates.

This fragmented pattern reveals that job insertion, even among those with matching contracts, remains largely discontinuous.

Table 1 below summarizes the distribution of the Employment Index by graduate cohort. It confirms that a significant portion of graduates experienced highly discontinuous work trajectories, with only a small minority achieving continuous employment throughout the observed period.

Table 1. – Employment Index (by category).

Employment Index Range	Bachelor's Degree (%)	Master's Degree (%)
Up to 25%	28.10%	23.70%
26% to 50%	23.90%	25.40%
51% to 75%	24.20%	22.10%
76% to 99%	18.10%	20.80%
100%	5.60%	7.90%
Total	*100.00%*	*100.00%*

4.3. *Contract types and qualifications*

A total of 12,037 contracts were recorded for SEF graduates and 7,418 for PSEF graduates. For SEF, 88.5% of contracts were fixed-term, 5.8% were coordinated collaborations and only 3.4% were permanent. Similarly, for PSEF, 91% were fixed-term, 5% coordinated collaborations and 2% permanent contracts.

Table 2 illustrates the breakdown of contract types. The overwhelming dominance of fixed-term contracts – especially among PSEF graduates – reflects systemic precarity within the educational labor market. Permanent contracts remained extremely rare.

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Table 2. – Contract types by degree.

Type of contract	Bachelor's (n)	Bachelor's (%)	Master's (n)	Master's (%)
Permanent	414	3.40%	170	2.00%
Fixed-term	10,654	88.50%	6,758	91.00%
Internship	153	1.30%	58	1.00%
Apprenticeship	109	0.90%	35	0.00%
Job placement	7	0.10%	2	0.00%
Freelance collaboration (Co.Co.Co.)	700	5.80%	395	5.00%
Total	*12,037*	*100.00%*	*7,418*	*100.00%*

Contractual qualification by ISCO classification indicates that 77.2% of SEF and 89.5% of PSEF contracts fall under «Intellectual and Scientific Professions». However, for SEF graduates, 10.5% of contracts were in «Commercial and Service Professions», indicating partial mismatch. For PSEF, only 6.7% fell into this misaligned category.

Table 3. – Job qualification by ISCO classification.

Occupational qualification	Bachelor's (n)	Bachelor's (%)	Master's (n)	Master's (%)
Armed Forces	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Executives	26	0.20%	5	0.10%
Intellectual and Scientific Professions	9,297	77.20%	6,637	89.50%
Intermediate Technical Professions	902	7.50%	280	3.80%
Office Employees	377	3.10%	177	2.40%
Commercial and Service Sector Occupations	1,259	10.50%	267	3.60%
Agricultural, Forestry and Fishing Skilled Workers	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Artisans and Skilled Workers	18	0.10%	0	0.00%
Plant and Machine Operators, Assemblers	4	0.00%	0	0.00%
Unskilled Workers	153	1.30%	52	0.70%
N/A	1	0.00%	–	–

As shown in *Table 3*, the majority of contracts fell under the «Intellectual and Scientific Professions» category, suggesting formal alignment between academic training and job function. Nevertheless, approximately 10-15% of graduates accepted roles classified as lower-level or unrelated, highlighting hidden forms of mismatch.

Fragmentation in work trajectories was analyzed by counting the number of contracts per graduate. Among SEF graduates, 39% had 2-4 contracts and 23% had 5-9, with an average duration of over a year and a half. Remarkably, 21% had only one contract, typically lasting around 712 days. Similarly, 39% of PSEF graduates had 2-4 contracts, with 23% having 5-9. A very small group had more than 50 contracts, often short-term school substitution roles. These results challenge the stereotype of extreme precariousness in educational careers.

4.4. *Coherence and academic performance*

The Coherence Index shows decreasing trends over the years, particularly for PSEF graduates. For SEF, coherence exceeded 60% in earlier years but declined below 55% post-2014. For PSEF, coherence fell below 50% after 2013 and dropped to just 18% by 2018. These results suggest increasing difficulty in securing roles that match the educational profile.

Voter performance analysis reveals a weak association between grades and occupational outcomes for SEF graduates. For example, those with grades below 100/110 were overrepresented in the highest employment index category (> 76%). In contrast, PSEF graduates showed a clearer relationship: 31% of those with 110/110 had employment indexes over 76%, versus 0% among those with grades below 100.

Tables 4-5. – Employment Index by graduation grade (SEF and PSEF).

Degree Mark Range	1-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%	N Graduates
110	30%	24%	22%	23%	196
105-109	25%	26%	24%	25%	198
100-104	29%	23%	27%	21%	182
Below 100	30%	20%	22%	28%	64

Degree Mark Range	1-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%	N Graduates
110	25%	23%	21%	31%	169
105-109	14%	29%	29%	29%	42
100-104	24%	36%	20%	20%	25
Below 100	50%	25%	25%	0%	4

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Graduation regularity does not systematically predict better employment outcomes. SEF students graduating on time were more likely to achieve high final grades but did not significantly differ in employment outcomes. Among PSEF students, timely graduation was associated with both higher grades and slightly better job coherence, yet even late graduates managed to access coherent and sustained employment.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study confirm and expand on the existing literature regarding the fragility of employment transitions in the field of education. Despite a high formal coherence between academic degrees and occupational roles, the observed transitions are largely characterized by precarity, discontinuity and weak professional recognition. The predominance of fixed-term contracts and the minimal presence of permanent employment opportunities point to structural limitations in the education labor market, as also observed in ISFOL (2018) and OECD (2023).

The divergence between SEF and PSEF graduates, while not extreme, highlights some important distinctions. PSEF graduates show higher levels of employment coherence and slightly better employment indexes, particularly among those who achieved high final grades and graduated on time. However, these advantages do not compensate for the overall instability that affects both groups. This suggests that formal educational progression does not shield graduates from structural barriers in the labor market, a finding that resonates with previous analyses by Lucisano *et al.* (2021b).

Interestingly, the weak predictive power of timely graduation for SEF graduates contrasts with institutional discourses that emphasize efficiency and on-time completion as markers of merit. Our data suggest that delayed graduation may be linked to factors such as employment during studies, which could reflect early entry into the labor market rather than inefficiency. This highlights the importance of nuanced interpretations of educational trajectories and their labor market implications.

The analysis of the Coherence Index further problematizes assumptions about the effectiveness of the degree as a professional qualification. For both cohorts, coherence declines over time, particularly for more recent graduates. This trend could be interpreted as a growing misalignment between the training provided and the available occupational roles, or alternatively, as a consequence of broader changes in employment structures that devalue educational qualifications in favor of flexible, generic competencies.

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From a capability perspective, these findings underscore the constraints that limit graduates' real opportunities to convert their education into meaningful and stable careers. Although many manage to access jobs within the educational sector, the quality of these jobs remains questionable in terms of stability, professional identity and progression. The presence of significant numbers of graduates working in misaligned roles or under temporary arrangements suggests a lack of institutional support in translating educational capital into sustainable professional pathways.

The narrative dimension of the research, discussed in the next section, will provide further insight into how individuals navigate these constraints, exercise agency and construct meaning in their transitions. These stories are not merely illustrative but epistemologically central to understanding the human experience behind the data.

6. Selected life trajectories: a longitudinal reading of complexity

This section explores the interpretive value of translating numerical data into life narratives. The approach combines a top-down view, typical of quantitative analysis, with a bottom-up reading that captures the specific dynamics of individual transitions. In this way, what may appear as an impersonal sequence of contracts and indicators is reconfigured into a narrative capable of highlighting subjective complexity, revealing hidden criticalities and opportunities.

Inspired by Dewey and Bruner, we adopt the view that narrative is a fundamental mode of interpreting human experience. Meaning emerges not from isolated events, but from their connection. As Dewey (1949) noted, the distinction between description and narration is an analytical artifact, not a real separation in lived phenomena.

To deepen our mixed-methods interpretation, we selected four narratives (from a total of 23) that exemplify recurring patterns in graduates' transitions to work. These cases were chosen not for their exceptionality, but for their capacity to reveal the interplay between structural constraints and individual agency. Compared to earlier summaries, these reconstructions restore temporal depth, geographical mobility and subjective negotiation.

Each case integrates administrative data (contract type, duration, location, coherence index) with interpretive narrative methods. The trajectories illustrate different configurations: delayed but stable entry (Letizia),

high coherence without security (Ludovica), initial peripheral mismatch followed by gradual stabilization (Rebecca), and intense contractual activity with limited coherence (Lavinia) (Lucisano *et al.*, 2021b).

These narratives show how employment pathways evolve across sectors, roles and regions, with varying levels of coherence and identity development. They serve as interpretive anchors, connecting statistical indicators to lived experiences of uncertainty, adaptation and in some cases, consolidation or persistent precarity.

As noted by Stanzione *et al.* (2020), «today's employed may be unemployed tomorrow, and employed again the day after». Narrative offers a way to make sense of fragmented transitions, giving coherence to events, revealing motivations and expectations. It allows individuals – and analysts – to embed data in meaningful contexts.

In a fluid and shifting labor market, such narrative reconstructions are particularly useful. Aggregated data alone may overlook the experiential dimension of transitions. Storytelling, by contrast, enables both self-understanding and improved tools for guidance, placement and policy design.

When applied to big data, this narrative perspective offers an innovative contribution: by transforming data points into life stories, we gain deeper insights into job quality, international mobility and the design of more effective educational and labor interventions. Ultimately, meaning-making through narrative provides a more nuanced and human reading of occupational realities.

Case 1 – Letizia: a late entry with linear progression

Letizia, born in 1965 in a small town near Rieti, represents a case of late but steady professional consolidation. After earning a secondary school diploma in Pedagogy in 1983, she spent over two decades outside the formal higher education system. At age 42, she enrolled in the Bachelor's programme in Education Sciences at Sapienza University while simultaneously beginning her career in education with fixed-term contracts in rural municipalities.

She completed her degree on time in 2010, at age 45, and continued working without interruptions, accumulating a succession of long-term but fixed-term contracts in the same professional role – primary and preschool teacher. In 2016, she secured a permanent position in Torri in Sabina, thus closing her transition trajectory with full contractual stability. Letizia's pathway illustrates a non-linear educational route converging into a highly coherent and geographically localised professional outcome.

Case 2 – Ludovica: navigating peripheries and precarity

Ludovica, born in 1986 in Campania, relocated to Rome to enrol in the Bachelor's programme in Education Sciences in 2006. Her trajectory is marked by geographical displacement and early entry into precarious work. Between 2008 and 2011, before completing her degree, she worked multiple jobs in Northern Italy, including as a barista, teaching assistant and substitute teacher in many different municipalities in Northern Italy.

Despite the demanding work-life balance and the lack of formal teaching qualifications at the time, she regularly held temporary contracts in roles often requiring higher credentials than those she possessed. After graduating in 2011, she continued working in education-related roles, particularly in social care settings, and later in secondary education, often under fixed-term arrangements. Her trajectory is emblematic of a «decentralised transition», where occupational coherence is achieved under spatial and institutional strain, with no permanent contract secured by the end of the observation window.

Case 3 – Rebecca: from peripheral retail to professional recognition

Rebecca was born in Calabria in 1981 and obtained her degree in Education Sciences from Sapienza in 2009, after an extended period of study. Prior to graduating, she held multiple temporary, low-skill jobs in Rome and Fiumicino in retail sales. These were followed by a series of fixed-term contracts as a secretary, indicating a prolonged phase of occupational mismatch.

Her professional turning point occurred in 2012 when she secured her first short-term position in a role aligned with her degree, within health-related educational services. This was the beginning of a series of increasingly stable and coherent contracts, first in south of Lazio and then, from 2016 onwards, in Liguria. In 2017, at age 36, Rebecca finally obtained a permanent teaching position as a primary school teacher. Her transition exemplifies a delayed but successful consolidation, marked by geographical mobility and a shift from peripheral occupations to professional coherence over time.

Case 4 – Lavinia: high contractual activity, low professional coherence

Lavinia's case illustrates a fragmented yet intense employment trajectory. Born in Rome in 1987, she graduated from Sapienza in Education Sciences

with top marks, though two years behind schedule. Her early career was marked by frequent job changes, oscillating between Rome and Milan, with contracts as short as one day.

Despite holding a high number of contracts deemed formally coherent with her field of study – particularly in administrative support – these positions had limited connection to her educational background. The transition includes several overlapping contracts, internships, and temporary posts, culminating in a two-year fixed-term contract as a technical administrative role in financial services. Although Lavinia worked 53% of the days post-graduation and maintained a high rate of formal coherence (86%), the substantial disconnection between her academic training and actual job roles highlights the limits of surface indicators of coherence.

7. Conclusions

This study has examined the work transitions of graduates in Education and Pedagogy from Sapienza University of Rome across a ten-year period, combining quantitative data from administrative records with qualitative narratives of individual career paths.

Although based on a complete set of units of analysis from a specific institutional context, the findings are not intended to be generalized to the national level. They offer an in-depth case study that may inform broader hypotheses, but require further comparative research for validation.

The findings depict a structurally fragile occupational field, where graduates face limited opportunities for stable and coherent employment despite formal alignment between their academic training and the professional roles they perform.

The prevalence of precarious contracts, low employment continuity and decreasing levels of job coherence underscores the need for policy interventions aimed at supporting employment quality in educational sectors. While some graduates manage to activate coherent and meaningful trajectories, structural limitations – especially in the availability of stable, adequately recognized professional positions – pose significant barriers to most.

From a methodological perspective, the integration of administrative data and narrative analysis has proven effective in capturing both macro patterns and subjective dynamics. This approach not only confirms known trends from survey-based research but adds a layer of complexity and richness, showing how transitions are embedded in individual biographies and socio-economic contexts.

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The study invites a rethinking of institutional strategies, both in higher education and labor policy. Universities must consider the long-term occupational outcomes of their degrees, while policymakers must recognize and invest in the professionalization of educational work, especially in early childhood education, social pedagogy and lifelong learning.

Future research may expand the scope of longitudinal observation and explore comparative frameworks, both nationally and internationally. The evidence provided here contributes to the understanding of how educational credentials are transformed – or not – into sustainable careers and calls for systemic responses to address the challenges of mismatch, fragmentation and undervaluation in the education labor market. In contrast with common perceptions of extreme precarity in educational professions, the evidence from this study suggests that most graduates experience a formally qualified yet structurally insecure employment: formal contract coherence, reasonably long durations and reduced fragmentation. Nonetheless, the precarious nature of contracts still creates instability. Framing the transition to work as a *continuum* rather than a binary success/failure condition allows us to appreciate the nuanced positioning of graduates who maintain partial coherence and continuity, even under insecure terms.

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Riassunto

Il presente articolo propone uno studio longitudinale con approccio mixed-methods sulla transizione al lavoro dei laureati in Scienze dell'Educazione (laurea triennale) e Pedagogia (laurea magistrale) presso la Sapienza Università di Roma nel periodo 2008-2018. L'indagine integra i dati amministrativi del dataset UNI.CO con l'analisi narrativa di 23 storie professionali, adottando due indicatori: l'Indice di Occupazione e l'Indice di Coerenza. I risultati evidenziano un'elevata frammentazione contrattuale, una diffusa precarietà occupazionale e un progressivo calo della coerenza tra titolo di studio e mansioni svolte. Sebbene l'allineamento formale tra formazione e occupazione sia elevato, le condizioni lavorative effettive appaiono fragili e poco valorizzanti. L'approccio delle capacità e l'analisi biografica consentono di far emergere i vincoli strutturali e le strategie soggettive che modellano le traiettorie occupazionali. Genere, performance accademica e regolarità negli studi risultano fattori rilevanti ma non determinanti. Il contributo invita a un ripensamento delle politiche formative e occupazionali, valorizzando il lavoro educativo come ambito strategico per il futuro della società.

Parole chiave: Approccio delle capacità; Dati longitudinali; Laureati in Scienze dell'Educazione; Qualità del lavoro; Transizione al lavoro.

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