
In a context where mass higher education has eroded the job security once guaranteed by higher qualifications, students are more likely to view higher education as an ‘investment’ which should yield return in terms of their employability. The aim of this study is to understand whether Portuguese students consider employability as the main reason to choose to enrol in higher education, to choose a specific programme and to choose a specific higher education institution. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 60 first-year students, from universities and polytechnics, both public and private, and from three first-cycle study programmes (Arts, Pharmacy and Computer Engineering). The analysis is based on a qualitative study exploring Portuguese students’ perceptions underlying their higher education choices. Findings suggest that the majority of the students interviewed considered employability as the major reason to enrol in higher education, although its importance was largely undervalued in the choice of study programme and of institution.