

DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY



**Bridging Work Experience with Academic Qualifications to Improve
Employability of Business Studies Graduates in Gauteng**

by

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Philosophy - Management Sciences

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28/02/2023

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Declaration

I do hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my investigation and research and has not been submitted in part or full for any other degree to any other University. I, **Vuyokazi Nkomo**, conscientiously declare the following regarding this manuscript:

- that this thesis, entitled “**Bridging work experience with academic qualifications to improve the employability of business studies graduates in Gauteng**”, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Business Administration at Durban University of Technology, is my original work,
- that I have indicated and acknowledged the sources used and quoted herein utilising referencing using the Harvard referencing style; and
- that this thesis has not been submitted before for any other degree in any other institution.

Signed

28 February 2023

Date

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the following:

- My husband Sihle, Ngubeni! and my daughter Nala, for their love, endless support, constant prayers, and encouragement.
- To my mother, Veliwe, who believed in me.
- To my late dad, Bane – how I wish you were here!!!

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My thanks also go to Kabelo my best friend, who believed in me despite all the odds.

Abstract

Unemployment is one of South Africa's biggest challenges. The unemployment rate for graduates and others with university degrees currently exceeds 30 percent. Lack of work experience is cited as one of the main reasons for unemployment. Despite the relevance of work experience, there is insufficient evidence in the literature that it is used as the main criterion for recruitment. Previous research has shown that recruiters make recruiting recommendations based on applicants' work experience, overlooking other factors. This thesis examines the association between employment experience and graduate employability. A quantitative approach was utilised, aided by a questionnaire to collect data from a sample of 265 business graduates from the Gauteng province. The questionnaire yielded 124 responses. The data were analysed using Structural Equation Modelling. The main results showed that work experience had a positive, but statistically insignificant, impact on graduates' employability. These results suggest that work experience alone is not sufficient to make graduates employable. There are other aspects and skill sets such as behavioural skills, technical skills, strategic skills, and functional skills, which have a significant impact on graduate employability. Key stakeholders in higher education and labour markets should form meaningful partnerships in which they identify and prioritise the employability skills needed to seamlessly transition graduates into the industry. It is recommended that all students should be required to complete a work-based learning course or a structured internship as part of their studies, with students being required to work in the industry for a while before employment. In this way, they would be prepared to integrate into the industry after graduation, having already gained experience during work-based learning. A further recommendation is that employer involvement in course design and delivery could have a positive impact on graduate employability.

Keywords: *Employability, graduates, higher education, skill, work experience*

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List of Acronyms

| | |
|--------|---|
| ASGISA | Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa |
| BCEA | Basic Conditions of Employment Act |
| CDL | Career Development Learning |
| CHE | Council on Higher Education |
| CSE | Core self-evaluations |
| DOTS | Decision, Opportunity, Transition and Self-awareness |
| DoL | Department of Labour |
| EEA | Employment Equity Act |
| GEAR | Growth, Employment and Redistribution |
| HC | Human Capital |
| HE | Higher Education |
| HESA | Higher Education South Africa |
| JIPSA | Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition |
| LRA | Labour Relations Act |
| MTSF | Medium-term Strategic Framework |
| NYDA | National Youth Development Agency |
| NYD | National Youth Desk |
| NYS | National Youth Service |
| OECD | Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| QCTO | Quality Council for Trade and Occupations |
| | |
| RDP | Reconstruction and Development Programme |
| RSA | Republic of South Africa |
| SA | South Africa |
| SACG | South African Council of Graduates |
| SAGRA | South African Graduate Recruitment Association |
| SARS | South African Revenue Service |
| SETA | Sector Education and Training Authority |
| SAQA | South African Qualifications Authority |
| USEM | Understanding, Skilful Practices, Efficacy Beliefs, Metacognition |

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

South Africa (SA) faces a major threat from the triple challenge of poverty, inequality, and unemployment (Statistics [Stats] SA, 2018). As reported by Deghaye and McKenzie (2012), the Southern African region is experiencing a severe crisis, manifesting itself in unacceptably high rates of unemployment, poverty, and inequality. According to Stats SA (2018), in the third quarter of 2018, the percentage of unemployment in SA was 25 percent; meanwhile, the unemployment for youth was recorded as nearly 40 percent, signifying that the unemployment for the youth has reached a critical point. Individuals who are unemployed with less than a matric qualification accounted for more than half of the unemployed, while individuals who had a matric qualification accounted for three percent. Every 100 unemployed individuals, there exists two graduates (Stats SA, 2021). This chapter presents the background, the research problem, and the aims of the research. The research objectives and research questions have been derived from the research problem and are presented in this chapter.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Even though the notion of employability has not been precisely defined, it is slowly reshaping the landscape of higher education (HE). Because higher education is unable to resolve graduates' employability, it is difficult to compare empirical studies to establish the educational system's quality.

Table 1.1 indicates a gradual increase in unemployment in the Gauteng province, where Johannesburg is the area of study. Regardless of their educational degrees, the youth are at a greater risk of being unemployed.

Table 1.1: Unemployment rate by province, 2020-2021

| | January -March 2020 | October- December 2020 | January - March 2021 | Qtr - Qtr change | Changes from year to year |
|---------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| Western Cape | 20,9 | 22,5 | 23,7 | 1,1 | 2,8 |
| South Africa | 30,1 | 32,5 | 32,6 | 0,1 | 2,5 |
| Eastern Cape | 40,5 | 47,9 | 43,8 | -4,1 | 3,3 |
| Northern Cape | 27,0 | 28,7 | 23,4 | -5,3 | -3,6 |
| Free State | 38,4 | 33,4 | 35,6 | 2,2 | -2,8 |
| KwaZulu-Natal | 26,9 | 29,6 | 30,5 | 0,9 | 3,6 |
| North-West | 33,2 | 33,3 | 32,2 | -1,1 | -1,0 |
| Gauteng | 31,4 | 34,1 | 34,4 | 0,3 | 3,0 |
| Mpumalanga | 33,3 | 33,0 | 33,5 | 0,5 | 0,2 |
| Limpopo | 23,6 | 27,3 | 29,4 | 2,1 | 5,8 |

Source: Statistics SA (2021)

The official number of unemployed people increased by 0,1 percentage point to 32,6 percent in “Q1: 2021 compared to Q4: 2020”, as shown in Table 1.1 (Stats, 2021:1). The official number of unemployed people saw an increase in “six of the nine provinces, with the Free State (up by 2,2 percent), Limpopo (up by 2,1 percent), and the Western Cape (up by 2,1 percent) seeing the largest increases (up by 1,2 percent). The Northern Cape had the biggest drop, at 5,3 percent, followed by the Eastern Cape and the North-West, at 4,1 percent and 1,1 percent”, respectively (Stats, 2021:1).

Furthermore, according to Stats SA (2021), the official unemployment rate increased by 2,5 percent year on year. The official rate of unemployment grew in six provinces with the highest increase in Limpopo (5,8 percent), KwaZulu-Natal (3,6 percent), the Eastern Cape (3,3 percent), Gauteng (3 percent), and the Western Cape (2,8 percent). The official rate of unemployment decreased in the “Northern Cape, the Free State and North-West by 3,6 percent, 2,8 percent and 1,0 percent, respectively, during the same period” (Stats SA, 2021:1).

According to Stats SA (2017), in 2014, 168 356 students registered during the first year in tertiary institutions, whereas only 93 915 completed in 2016. Table 1.2 shows the rate of unemployment by educational level, based on data given by Stats SA during the first trimester of 2019. More than 30 percent of graduates and other qualification holders (between the ages of 15 and 24 years) face unemployment. This is the period following a student's attainment of tertiary education.

Table 1.2: Unemployment rates by age and education level Q1-2019

| | 15-24 years | 25-34 years | 35-64 years |
|-----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Total | 55,2% | 34,2% | 18,0% |
| Less than matric | 58,4% | 41,0% | 23,3% |
| Matric | 55,0% | 32,4% | 17% |
| Graduates | 31,0% | 12,9% | 4,3% |
| Other tertiary institutions | 47,5% | 25,2% | |

Source: Statistics SA (2019)

The statistics in Table 1.2 indicate that 55 percent of students did not complete their tertiary education, which is another factor that increases unemployment among the youth in SA (Stats SA, 2019). While SA's unemployment rate is increasing exponentially, the labour market is unable to mitigate this phenomenon, as most of the unemployed graduates are unemployable because of many factors, among others the absence of job experience, insufficient education, and the absence of a necessary skillset.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) aim to prepare students for different positions in the labour market. After graduation, these students begin to apply for professions that correspond with their qualifications, but without success (Niemela, 2016). The achievement of qualification marks the end of their official education and training, and graduates are expected to enter the workforce right away (Griesel and Parker, 2009). The workforce, therefore, faces the challenge of recruiting experienced professionals in a market flooded with inexperienced professionals who are trying to find employment.

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Individuals' opinions of their employability, according to Helbling and Sacchi (2014) and Lowden *et al.* (2011), impact how they retain and improve their desirability in the workforce in the current labour market, which no longer provides long-term work. Some employers have very negative views about hiring young graduates, as they question their preparedness for employment, their rudimentary skills, and their mindsets (Wolf, 2011). Graduates, as mentioned by Crossman and Clarke (2009) and the World Bank Group (2012), have the necessary knowledge of the subject, skills, adaptable knowledge, and traits required in 21st-century businesses. It is acceptable for graduates to continue studying and adjusting to the challenges of their jobs using their tertiary skills (Quintini, 2014). A study conducted by Makki *et al.* (2015) on the “work readiness of graduates concerning their skills” revealed that students have insufficient confidence and skills that are required at the workplace. Consequently, most businesses tend to focus more on previous relevant work experience, leading to the exclusion of graduates who could be of potential benefit to businesses (Hasluck, 2012).

According to Buchmann and Muller (2016), despite the importance of work experience, there is insufficient evidence to determine whether it should be considered a primary prerequisite for employment. Relevant or required job experience relates to situations that a person has encountered while performing a specific profession which is certainly essential crucial information on a résumé that recruiters use to determine whether an applicant is qualified for a position (Tsai *et al.*, 2011). According to Gambin (2015), many graduates are caught in 'an experience trap,' in which employers choose recruits based on previous work experience, and as a result, graduates entering the job market who lack that experience are unable to obtain the job that would allow them to gain that experience.

Buchmann and Muller (2016) point out that the utilisation of work proficiency, as a prerequisite, has not been properly investigated, even though it appears to be an essential selection tool in the labour market. Abdullah, Kamal and Muna (2014) state that it should be of concern that most job seekers, even skilled graduates, will not find employment due to the lack of relevant work experience.

Work readiness is defined by Caballero and Walker (2010) as the degree to which graduates should have named the attitudes and characteristics that prepare or equip them for workplace success. Abdullah *et al.* (2014) found that the process of recruiting and selecting graduates is gradually individual-centred rather than work-centred, with many managers more concerned with the mindsets, personalities, and versatile skills of applicants than the nature or extent of their qualifications. Previous empirical studies have shown that applicants' claims of work-experience information influenced recruiters' hiring recommendations and ignored important events that accumulated throughout a profession, including prospects to take on responsibilities or duties (Huang, Lai, Lin & Chen, 2013). Huang *et al.* (2013). Huang and Lai (2013) add that many young graduates look forward to creating a meaningful impact in the workforce when the opportunity is given.

Graduate unemployment in South Africa has increased over the years (Iwara *et al.*, 2019). It is important to improve our understanding of the reason for this phenomenon. In addition to the statistics highlighted in Table 1.2, graduate unemployment is also an important area of study because theory suggests that the South African economy experiences severe skills shortages while being unable to generate sufficient job opportunities for graduates. This seems to contradict studies suggesting that the higher a participant's education level, the higher the probability of finding employment (Broekhuizen & van der Berg, 2013).

It is therefore important to identify the necessary requirements for graduates to become employed. In this study, a graduate is defined with reference to degree holders, including those with postgraduate degrees. Unemployed graduates will be denoted as recently graduated youths (16-35 years) without employment. Graduate unemployment is important to study because the ages 20-24 shape the trajectory of labour market involvement and outcome (Levinsohn, Rankin, Roberts & Schöer, 2014). Obtaining initial work experience is a key objective for young graduates in this age category. Failing to do so may lead to undesirable outcomes that may be irreversible in many cases. The gap between work experience and employability of business graduates, which if not bridged, can have negative consequences for graduates, employers, institutions of higher learning, other stakeholders, and the entire economy.

1.4 AIM OF THE STUDY

The study aims to develop an integrated framework to improve the employability of business studies graduates.

1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research objectives of this study are as follows:

- To assess the perceptions of business studies graduates on possible factors that will enhance employability.
- To measure the relationship between employability factors and the employability of graduates.
- To examine the influence of other factors on business study graduates employability based on work experience.
- To explore the roles of employers in integrating business study graduates into the work environment; and
- To recommend an integrated framework that improve the employability of business study graduates.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the perceptions of business study graduates on possible factors that would enhance employability?
- How can the relationship between employability factors and graduates' employability be measured?
- What is the influence of other factors on business studies graduates employability based on work experience?
- What are the roles of employers in integrating business study graduates into the work environment?

- What is the recommend integrated framework to improve the employability of business studies graduates?

1.7 RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The research hypothesis for this study were as follows:

H₁: Academic knowledge positively influences the behavioural competence of graduates in SA.

H₀: Academic knowledge does not positively influence the behavioural competence of graduates in SA.

H₂: Academic knowledge positively influences the functional competence of graduates in SA.

H₀: Academic knowledge does not positively influence the functional competence of graduates in SA.

H₃: Academic knowledge positively influences the strategic skills of graduates in SA.

H₀: Academic knowledge does not positively influence the strategic skills of graduates in SA.

H₄: Academic knowledge positively influences the technical skills of graduates in SA.

H₀: Academic knowledge does not positively influence the technical skills of graduates in SA.

H₅: Behavioural competence positively influences the employability of graduates in SA.

H₀: Behavioural competence does not positively influence the employability of graduates in SA.

H₆: Behavioural competence positively influences the work experience of graduates in SA.

H₀: Behavioural competence does not positively influence the work experience of graduates in SA.

H₇: Functional competence positively influences the employability of graduates in SA.

H₀: Functional competence does not positively influence the employability of graduates in SA.

H₈: Functional competence positively influences the work experience of graduates in SA.

H₀: Functional competence does not positively influence the work experience of graduates in SA.

H₉: Strategic skills positively influence the employability of graduates in SA.

H₀: Strategic skills does not positively influence the employability of graduates in SA.

H₁₀: Strategic skills positively influence the work experience of graduates in SA.

H₀: Strategic skills does not positively influence the work experience of graduates in SA.

H₁₁: Technical skills positively influence the employability of graduates in SA.

H₀: Technical skills does not positively influence the employability of graduates in SA.

H₁₂: Technical skills positively influence the work experience of graduates in SA.

H₀: Technical skills does not positively influence the work experience of graduates in SA.

H₁₃: Work experience positively influences the employability of graduates in SA's public sector.

H₀: Work experience does not positively influence the employability of graduates in SA's public sector.

1.8 JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY

HEIs have focussed on training to reduce the levels of unemployment (Jonck, 2014). However, practical and technical work experience seems to be one of the employability challenges that cannot be overcome with ease. Unemployment in SA is declared as the highest among black graduates, certificate holders, Humanities graduates, and graduates who have recently completed their qualifications (Baldry, 2016). The findings from these studies indicate that it is not easy to find work even after the completion of a qualification. Table 1.3 provides statistics on business management graduates who have completed their qualifications.

It's not as easy as it seems to find work after graduation.

Table 1.3: Business management graduates (2009 to 2016)

| 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 33 818 | 41 657 | 44 155 | 46 042 | 49 051 | 50 381 | 53 863 | 56 364 |

Source: Statistics SA (2016)

Table 1.3 indicates the increase in the number of graduates who completed their studies in business management from 2009 to 2016. In 2016, over 50 000 graduates completed their courses, which is a significant sum of individuals who desire to enter the workforce (Stats SA, 2016).

Oluwajodu *et al.* (2015) claim that graduate unemployment is also an important area of study because unemployment amongst graduates is potentially damaging to the economy. The South African government is aware of this problem and has used different policies in an attempt to address it. One of the strategies that was designed to solve the problem of graduate unemployment is known as the Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA).

Its strategy proposes the implementation of special training programmes aimed at bringing back retirees or expatriates to work in SA and attracting new immigrants (Oluwajodu *et al.*, 2015). This strategy has been able to provide some solution to the problem of graduate unemployment. It has, however, not been able to decrease graduate unemployment because there are more graduates searching for jobs (Oluwajodu *et al.*, 2015). Several studies have been done on graduate unemployment, but not many have been conducted recently on graduate employability in SA, keeping researchers and policymakers uninformed. This study on graduate employability will also explore other possible causes of graduate unemployment and its solution.

1.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH AREA

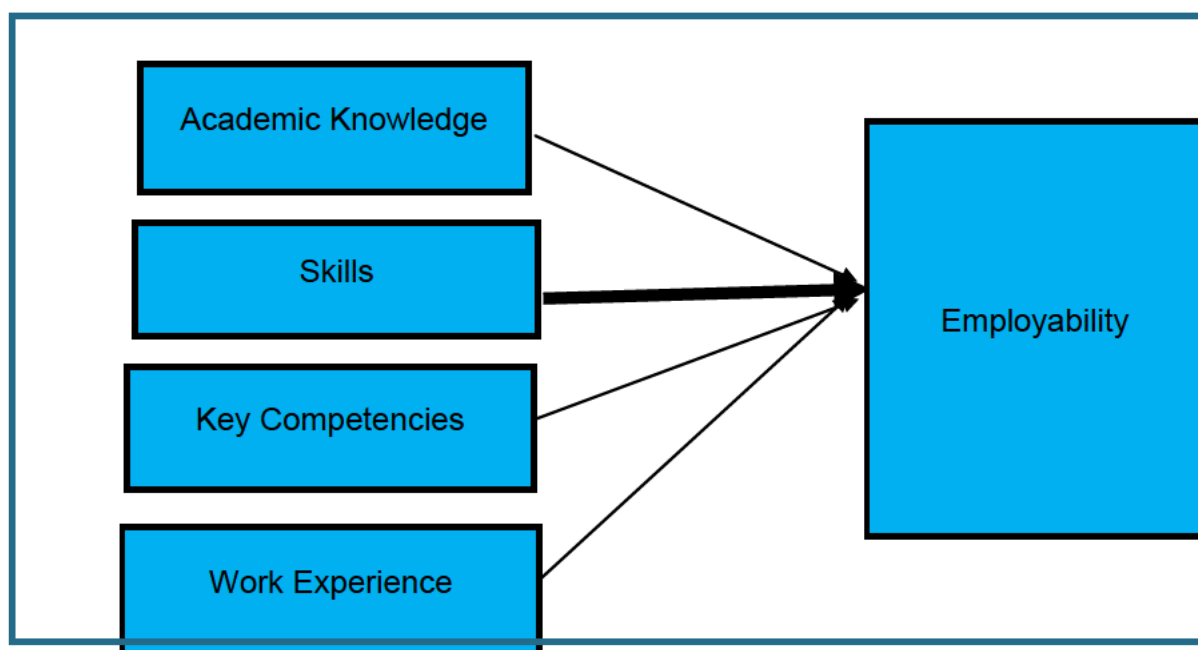
This study is significant as it presents facts on the current issues with graduate employability in South Africa. The facts enable various key stakeholders to gain a clearer understanding of what is happening in the world of graduate employability. It

is anticipated that the recommendations of this study will be useful to the government, HEIs, the labour market environment, and industries in implementing strategies to work towards adapting to the requirements that are required to ensure that graduates are able to be employed. The study will also add value to academic knowledge and especially to researchers interested in improving graduate employability. Finally, the results can be used at government conferences on youth employment and in industry workshops to see how both industry and HEIs can work together to bridge the current gap in graduate employability.

1.10 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1.1 illustrates the conceptual framework for this study. In a statistical perspective, the conceptual framework describes the relationship between the main concepts of a study. It is arranged in a logical structure to help provide a picture or visual display of how ideas in a study relate to one another (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). According to Akintoye (2015), the importance of the conceptual framework in the study is that it simplifies the way in which a researcher presents his or her asserted remedies to the problem that has been defined, as reflected in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1: Conceptual framework



Source: Researcher's creation

The conceptual framework created is relevant for this study because it looks at the relationship between the chosen variables (academic knowledge, skills, key competencies and work experience) and the impact they have on employability. The conceptual framework, as seen in Figure 1.1 is explained below

- **Academic knowledge**

According to Mohajan (2016), individuals' beliefs about knowledge (namely epistemological beliefs). Epistemology, the study of knowledge and knowing, has long been one of the cornerstones of philosophy. The term, derived from the Greek *epi* *teme* (namely, knowledge) and *logos* (namely, explanation), has remained a taproot of philosophical inquiry for centuries. An individual possesses general beliefs about knowledge as well as specific beliefs about more specific forms of knowledge (for example, academic knowledge). Knowledge is considered the principal source of value creation and sustainable competitive advantages.

- **Skills**

Benander (2018) states that skills are the ability and capacity to carry out processes and be able to use one's knowledge in a responsible way to achieve a goal. Skills are part of a holistic concept of competency, involving the mobilisation of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to meet complex demands.

- **Key competencies**

Wong (2020) mentions that the term 'competency' has a close relationship with the Latin word 'competentia' which means "is authorised to judge" or "has the right to speak." Competencies focus on a person's behaviours, describe the attributes of the person, constitute the underlying attributes of a person for superior work performance, and are assessed in terms of behaviours and attitude. Competencies are "motives, traits, self-concepts, attitudes or values, content knowledge, or cognitive or behavioural skills - any individual characteristic that can be measured or counted reliably and that can be shown to differentiate significantly between superior and average performers, or between effective and ineffective performers" (Spencer & Spencer 1993: 4). Competencies refer to "... a set of observable performance

dimensions, including individual knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours, as well as collective team, process, and organisational capabilities, that are linked to high performance, and provide the organisation with a sustainable competitive advantage" (Athey & Orth 1999: 216).

- **Work experience**

Work experience involves an evaluation of information about events that individuals have experienced related to work performance. The literature suggests that work experience is the most important information, which informs recruiters about whether applicants are suitable for a job opening (Huanga, Chenb & Laib, 2013).

- **Employability**

Saunders and Zuzel (2010) define employability as the educational, vocational, and technical skills acquired through formal and informal education that should be considered the minimum required to be pre-selected to fill a particular job.

Figure 1.1 of the conceptual framework describes academic knowledge, skills, key competencies, and work experience and the impact they have on employability. The framework makes it easier for the researcher to easily specify and define the concepts within the problem of the study (Luse, Mennecke & Townsend, 2012).

1.11 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was carried out in Gauteng, which is located in South Africa, to develop an integrated framework to improve the employability of business studies graduates. The research onion process devised by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill was used to arrange the methodology. The research onion separates the research process into logical, strategic, and realistic components, with different designs for each (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012).

1.11.1 Philosophy: deductive and positivist

The term "research philosophy" refers to a set of assumptions concerning the nature of realities, or the phenomena being investigated. (Saunders *et al.*, 2012; Bryman & Bell, 2015). The positivist paradigm assists to comprehend the world from the empirical standpoint that individuals learn by detecting how variables in the universe interact with each other by analysing them independently. As a result, observations are used to derive knowledge (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

On the other hand, Creswell and Creswell (2018) mention that the interpretivist paradigm assumes that knowledge is absorbed into theories about the universe through the views of various social actors. A positivist worldview is ideal for empirically testing links between theoretical notions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This work was supported by the positivist and deductive philosophy, which used quantitative ways to evaluate correlations between constructs (Burns, 2016; Saunders *et al.*, 2012; Bryman & Bell, 2015;). Due to the research objectives being empirical, it was necessary to derive relationships from the literature and objectively examine them (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Bryman & Bell, 2015).

The methodology adopted for this study is discussed in detail in Chapter Five. Below is a brief overview of the research methodology that was followed. Quantitative research, according to Saunders *et al.* (2016), collects data from a large sample, explores correlations between numerically measured variables, and analyses using a variety of statistical and visual tools. The quantitative approach is usually associated with a deductive approach that focuses on using data to test a theory. On the other hand, a qualitative approach is frequently connected with interpretive philosophy. A qualitative method is a series of interpretive, tangible acts that helps people see the world. Examples of qualitative practices that turn the world into a sequence of representations include a field note, a conversation, a photograph, a recording, and a memorandum. Qualitative researchers investigate phenomena in their natural surroundings and attempt to explain them in terms of the meanings that people assign to them (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston, 2013).

1.11.2 Population/target population

Strike (2014) defines a population as the entire group or set of individuals from whom research data is collected. The data were obtained from the “South African Council of Graduates (SACG)” in Johannesburg. A total of 3 559 170 unemployed business study graduates between the ages of 20 and 35 are recorded in the SACG database (World Population Review, 2016; Stats SA, 2011). SACG is responsible for registering unemployed students with the aim either to provide them with internships in various organisations or to offer them employment opportunities and skills training. Due to financial and time challenges, the study used a representative sample of the target population who participated in the data collection.

1.11.3 Sampling strategy

The research was devised to collect quantitative cross-sectional information with the use of a questionnaire. The questions were designed with a five-point Likert scale that collected data on the study’s constructs. This suggests that the statistics represent the respondents’ opinions at the time of data collection and not over a long period (Burns, 2016; Leedy & Ormrod 2014). Since the Johannesburg metropolitan has a huge population, it was crucial to choose a sample size that would provide 95 percent confidence and an acceptable sample to represent the population (Norman, 2010; Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2010). A minimum sample size of 265 was sufficient with a population of 3 559 170.

Probability and non-probability sampling are the two common forms of sampling methods that are available to a researcher. Probability sampling enables a researcher to decide the probability of selecting a unit or individual of the population for the sample (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2012). In this study, stratified random sampling was utilised to choose the study participants, because of their knowledge of the topic under study. A sample of 265 business studies graduates was selected to participate in the quantitative data collection, as follows: 130 graduates with national diplomas, 50 graduates with B Tech degrees, 50 graduates with bachelor’s degrees, 25 graduates with honours degrees, and 10 graduates with master’s degrees. The questionnaire was tested in a pilot study with 30 respondents to validate its viability.

1.11.4 Data analysis

Due to the study's multivariate structure, the data was analysed by the utilisation of structural equation modelling (SEM). SEM is a well-known multivariate analysis approach that is employed in both academic and business settings. It can use multiple regressions and factor analysis at the same time to quantify links between complicated conceptual structures with numerous latent variables (Kline, 2012; Nusair & Hua, 2010). SEM can be done with a variety of statistical software packages, but Partial Least Squares (SmartPLS®) was chosen because of its robust capacity to estimate connections between components, as well as its ease of use, compatibility, and accessibility (Hair *et al.*, 2017).

SmartPLS® was utilised to confirm a model with adequate prediction capabilities throughout both the structural model assessment and measurement phases of SEM. While SEM was used to get inferential statistics, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS®) was used to construct descriptive statistics. The results of the study are used to support discussions and judgments on the attainment of empirical aims, as well as the study's contributions.

1.12 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study was carried out in the province of Gauteng. The category of respondents in the survey was limited to unemployed business study graduates. The study was confined to the Gauteng province, which comprises eight municipalities, namely the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality, Midvaal Local Municipality, City of Ekurhuleni, City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, Lesedi Local Municipality, Emfuleni Local Municipality, Mogale City Local Municipality and Merafong Local Municipality. The outcome of the study, therefore, cannot be generalised. The focus of this study was on business school graduates and the challenges that lead to them not being employable. The demands of employers, who require work experience and other competencies from graduates, are compared with the expectations of graduates upon graduation. The complexity of graduate employability combined with

new practices and technologies requires future researchers to assess the market demand for graduates.

1.13 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

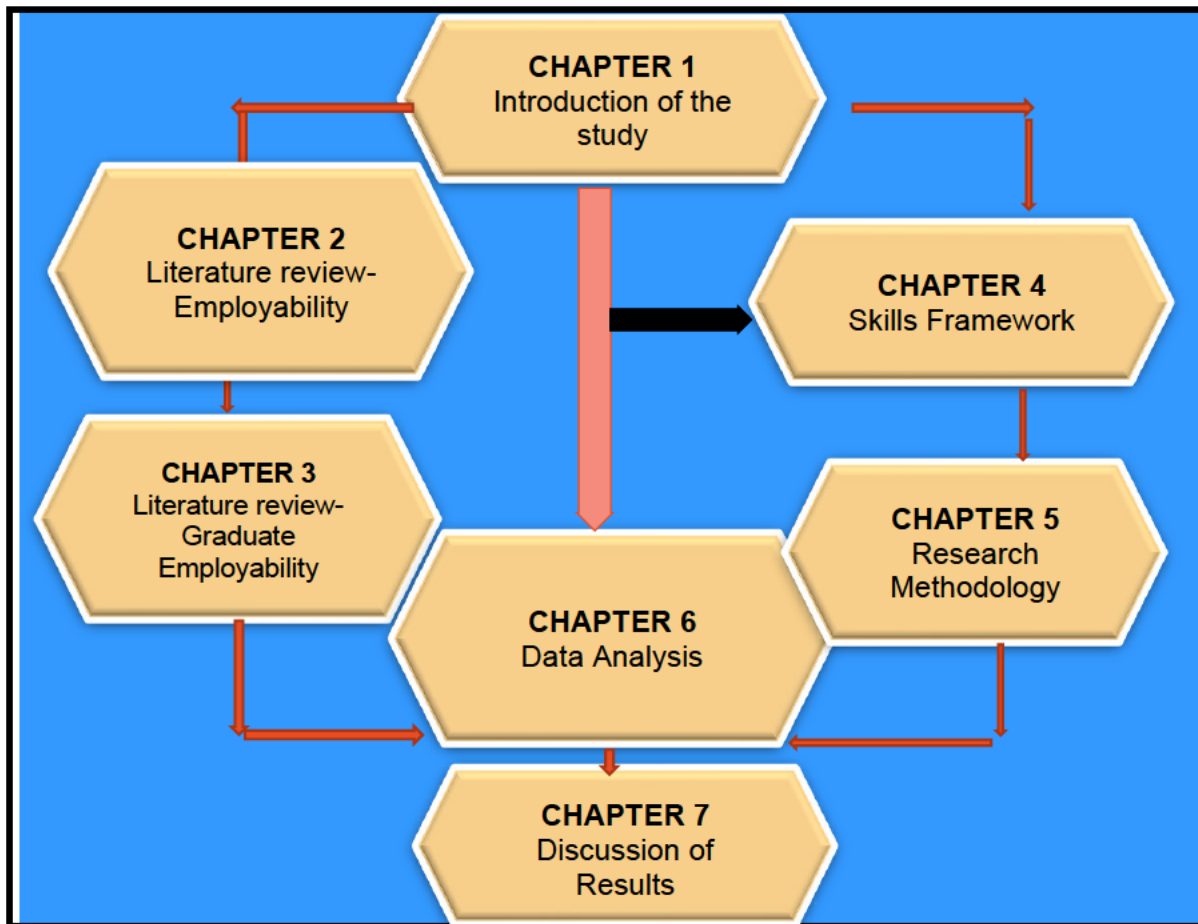
The study was limited to the Gauteng province. The participants in the survey were limited to unemployed business school graduates between the ages of 20 and 35. This study excluded other provinces, and as a result, the conclusions of the study cannot be applied to other provinces, as the concentration was in the Gauteng region, and other provinces might have more assistance for graduates. In terms of the construct to be studied, the focus was on supply-side or individual-level employability, which emphasises individual attributes, competencies, and skills important to an individual's suitability for future employment. This differs from demand-side perspectives, which include contextual factors such as the demand for labour and economic conditions that are not under the control of the individual.

1.14 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The structure of the thesis is presented in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2: Structure of the thesis

Figure 1.2: Structure of the thesis



Source: Researcher's creation

The organisation of the chapters and the chapter content in this study, aimed at achieving the purpose of the study, are discussed below:

- **Chapter 1: Introduction to the study**

Chapter one is the introductory chapter. It offers an overview of the study, outlining the research problem, the objectives of the research, the rationale of the research, the research questions, an overview of the research methodology and the significance of the study.

- **Chapter 2: Literature review – graduate employability**

Chapter two includes an examination of the literature of work done by other authors/researchers and a definition of terms. This chapter discusses in detail graduate employability trends, globalisation, and employment experience that is related to the success and learning of a student.

- **Chapter 3: Literature review – theories of employability**

This chapter looks in detail at work previously produced by other authors on the subject of employability. It also examines theories of employability, the link between employability and HEIs, current job trends, graduate status and graduates, graduate recruitment, and the recruitment process.

- **Chapter 4: Legal framework**

This chapter discusses the legal framework of the specific research questions on the constructs and influences on graduate employability. It also provides a comprehensive review of the literature discussing the legal and policy framework, knowledge, competencies and skills to increase employability. The chapter also discusses the challenges that graduates face when they first enter the labour market.

- **Chapter 5: Research design and methodology**

The research methodology used in the study is presented in this chapter. The sampling procedure, as well as the unit analysis and population from which the sample size is obtained, are all defined by the methodology. The research instruments are thoroughly explored, including their advantages and disadvantages.

- **Chapter 6: Data analysis**

Chapter 6 presents the results of the study and a critical examination of the findings. The findings of the primary data are grounded in the secondary findings.

- **Chapter 7: Summary, conclusion, and recommendations**

This is the final chapter, which summarises the results, draws conclusions and makes recommendations.

1.15 CONCLUSION

This chapter, the introductory chapter, presented the main aim of the study. It also provided an overview of the study, which included research problem, research objectives, research questions, and research hypothesis. It was crucial to include the justification of the study and the significance of the research area. The discussion on the conceptual framework was included in this chapter. The research methodology to be applied in the which include the philosophy, population, sampling strategy and data analysis. Lastly an overview on the structure of the thesis was highlighted. As can be seen from the discussion in this chapter, despite the importance of work experience, there is insufficient evidence on whether it should be considered a primary prerequisite for recruitment. In the next chapter, the literature review according to the research objectives are presented.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW: EMPLOYABILITY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, SA has seen an increase in the number of learners registered at HEIs; however, the number of graduates finding jobs is rapidly declining (Oluwajodu *et al.*, 2015). Statistics published by Stats SA (2018) and Trading Economics (2018) show an increase in the number of graduates who have no jobs in SA between 2013 and 2016 and the trend is distressing because the sources Stats SA (2016) and Trading Economics (2016) also indicate that 50 percent of unemployed people are 25 years old and younger. Graduates of majors, such as the Humanities, arts and education, are less likely to find employment than graduates of majors such as engineering and medicine (Naong, 2011). South African graduates seeking work encounter obstacles such as poverty, the economic crisis, inadequate experience, and a skill level that differs significantly from the requirements of employers (Ismail, 2015).

This chapter sets the theoretical context for the study. It focuses on a comprehensive discussion of the employability of graduates that relates to theories. An overview of the theories that support various models of the employability of graduates emphasises comprehension and development related information on graduate employability. The identification of a link between employability and HEIs is also briefly discussed.

2.2 DEFINITION OF TERMS

- **Employability**

The concept of employability is defined in a variety of ways. Employability has been described by academics and researchers from their respective views. Employability

is typically characterised as the opportunity to identify and keep a job, as well as the opportunity to maintain and locate other jobs when necessary (Maltby, 2011; Bennett, Knight & Rowley, 2020). Liu *et al.* (2013:497) state that employability "Strengthens the exercise of the graduates' reserve capacity". Yorke (2006) describes employability as the combination of achievements, abilities, understanding and personal qualities that enhance graduates' opportunities for employment and successful career entry. This ultimately benefits not only themselves but also their communities and the economies of their countries.

Solotaroff *et al.* (2020) point out that what they call human capital, developed through education, skill acquisition and work experience, is positively related to perceived employability. Stojković (2019) stated that there are various definitions of the term employability and the perceptions of employability skills. Rukuni *et al.* (2018) link the concept of graduate employability to graduates' success in obtaining employment in fields related to their studies. Saunders and Zuzel (2010) define employability as the educational, vocational, and technical skills acquired through formal and informal education that should be considered the minimum required to be pre-selected to fill a particular job.

- **Operational definition of employability**

According to McIlveen (2018), employability is more than a list of skills that are in demand at any given time in the labour market. Certainly, skills are part of the elements of employability, but other elements must be included. Employability skills contribute to work performance in combination with technical or discipline-specific skills and core language, literacy, and numeracy skills. Further, McIlveen (2018) added that employability embodies individual characteristics that foster adaptive cognition, behaviour, and affect and enhance the individual-work interface as explained below:

- Adaptive cognition, behaviour, and affect: This dimension of employability is often referred to as career adaptability. Characteristic adaptations are more flexible and can be learned and developed over time and with experience.

- Individual-work interface: Employability depends on the situation and can only be understood in the context of a chaotic mix of factors that have a big impact on a person's chances of getting a job.

A person's ability to change careers shows in his or her ability to (a) know the difference between appropriate and inappropriate training and (b) if given a choice, make an informed, meaningful decision and take actions that help the person.

- **Graduate employability**

Employability is also referred to as the competencies and skills graduates require to improve work prospects in the job market and the social and economic growth of the nation (Harry, Chinyamurindi & Mjoli, 2018). However, no guarantee having the correct skills-set will secure employment but will only increase the chances of securing a job (Lourens, 2016; Paterson, 2017). According to Gerhardt and Annon (2021), employability can be described as a collection of knowledge, accomplishments, and individual qualities that makes graduates more prone to find a job and succeed in their specialised occupation. Furthermore, employability profits graduates, workers, society, and the economy.

Dhakal *et al.* (2018) stated that the interest in graduate employability arguably benefits all stakeholders, including universities, governments, employers and graduates themselves. Employability is primarily about ensuring that graduates can contribute to economic competitiveness in a global context from the perspective of government and employers. There is some uncertainty about employability terminology in SA, which has caused some damage to the labour market. According to Tan and French-Arnold (2012), economic imbalances contribute to the high proportion of unemployed graduates.

The recent economic crisis and economic downturns undoubtedly contributed to the decline in the number of employment available, but supply-side issues also played a role in the excessive number of unemployed graduates. Many job seekers do not find a job because they have no or insufficient experience. It should be noted that the

inability to find a job makes it impossible to gain the necessary work experience. Experience as a prerequisite for obtaining a job is therefore considered a trap (UK Commission for Employment and Skills, 2012).

The success and sustainability of a company depend mainly on its competitiveness, which in turn depends on human talent in the areas of stability and well-being, which employers expect (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Schwab, 2012). Academic programmes at various universities pursue different strategies by providing work-related learning, work experience, employability components, and career preparation events, as well as including business partners in the creation and delivery of courses. In most cases, employable skills are part of the existing course as universities adopt different initiatives to ensure that such initiatives are visible to students (Saunders & Zuzel, 2010).

“SA’s medium-term strategic framework (MTSF) refers to employability, specifically graduate employability, under the heading ‘skilled and capable workforce to support an inclusive growth path’ (Republic of South African [RSA], 2014: 22). The MTSF argues that post-secondary graduates should have sufficient knowledge and skills to address the present and future expectations of the economic system and society (RSA, 2014). Su and Zhang (2015:1) define employability as *“a set of achievements, namely skills, knowledge, and personal attributes that ideally make graduates more likely to find employment and succeed in their chosen occupations.”*

- **Employability skills**

Employability skills refer to cognitive skills such as learning skills, analytical and problem-solving skills, innovation skills, and communication skills (Ng, 2022; Nikadimovs & Ivanchenko, 2020). Foroudi and Palazzo (2019) describes employability skills as ‘including personal image, interpersonal skills, and good habits and attitudes.’ Basic skills, career and employability skills (C & ES), and workplace principles or expertise are all terms that have been used to describe employable skills (Ornellas, Falkner & Stålbrandt, 2019; Damoah, Peprah & Brefo, 2021).

Zunker (2015) points out that employability skills refer to the following major areas: traditional academic abilities (for example analytical assessment and sound reasoning), the main skills of communication, (namely Information Technology), and the individual aspects of self-confidence, motivation, and knowledge of organisations and how they function together. Suarta *et al.* (2017) state that employability skills are associated with problem-solving, analytical thinking, ingenuity, origination, cooperation, and communication skills.

- **Work experience**

Work experience involves an evaluation of information about events that individuals have experienced related to work performance. The literature suggests that work experience is the most important information, which informs recruiters about whether applicants are suitable for a job opening (Huanga *et al.*, 2013).

2.3 THEORIES OF EMPLOYABILITY

The work of Yorke and Knight (2006) can be seen as critical to graduate employability. The research by Yorke and Knight (2006:3) was ground-breaking with regards to establishing “a working definition of the concept as a set of achievements, skills, knowledge, and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to find employment and succeed in their chosen occupations, benefiting themselves, the workforce, the community, and the economy”.

2.3.1 Understanding, skills, effectiveness, and metacognition model

The understanding, skills, effectiveness, and metacognition (USEM) model is used as the theoretical framework for this study. The USEM model is widely recognised as instrumental in the literature on employability and important in comprehending the employability of graduates and interconnection with HEIs (Pool & Sewell, 2007). USEM refers to “four broad and interrelated components, namely understanding (U), skill practices (S), efficacy beliefs (E), and metacognition (M)” (Pool & Sewell, 2007: 277). Knight and Yorke (2002) mention that USEM model of employability is one of

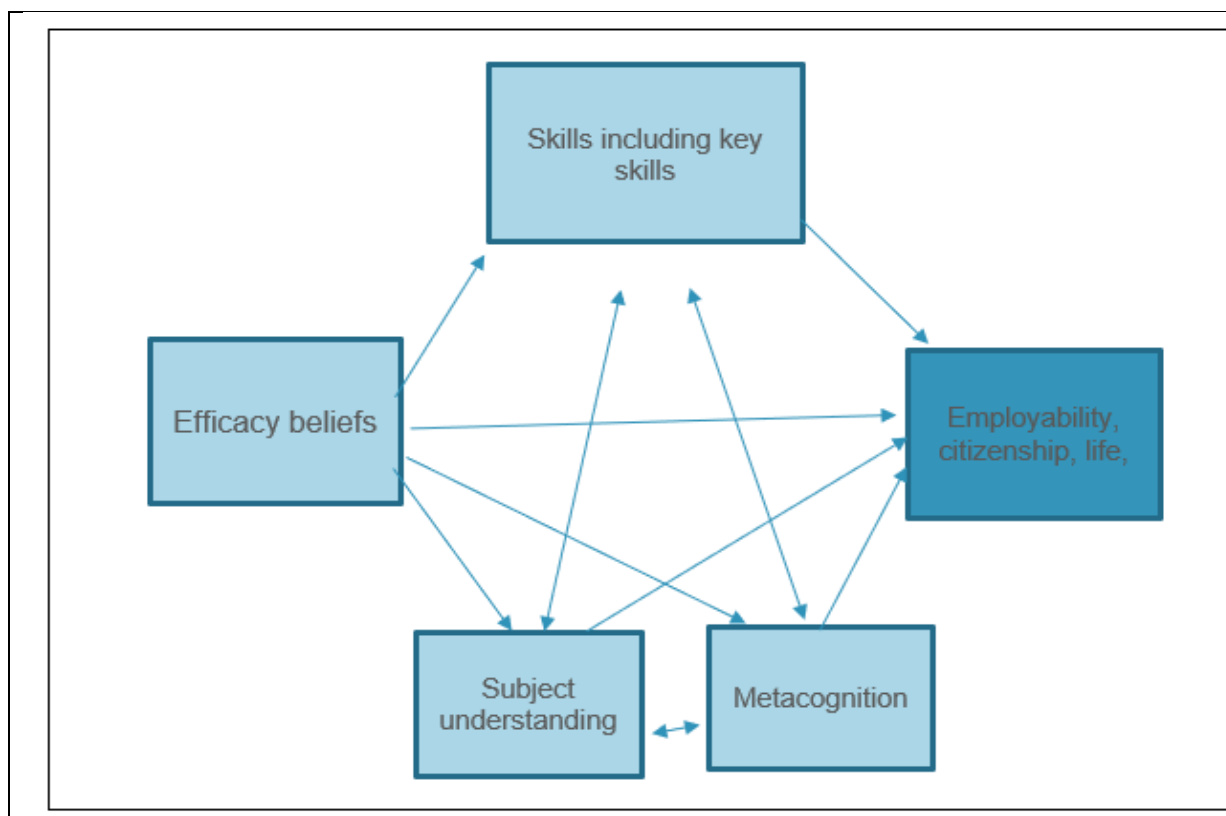
the most esteemed models in the field of employability. The USEM model provides for four interrelated factors of employability:

- Knowledge (of academic subject matter and how companies operate
- Skilful practices (employment, academic, and life in general);
- Beliefs in efficiency (reflecting learners' self-concept, self-confidence, and opportunity for self-improvement and development); and
- Metacognition (complements efficacy, includes self-awareness, ways of learning, and reflection).

-

The USEM model includes knowledge of learning, problem-solving and reasoning strategies. The USEM model also promotes and supports continuous life-long learning. Knight and Yorke created the USEM model "in an attempt to put thinking about employability on a more scientific footing, in part because of the need to address academic staff in their terms by referring to research findings and theories" (Knight & Yorke, 2004: 37). Figure 2.1 illustrates the model of employability, known as the USEM model, which refers to the concepts of understanding, skilful practices, belief in effectiveness, and metacognition.

Figure 2.1: USEM model (understanding, skilful practices, efficacy beliefs, metacognition)



Source: Yorke and Knight (2006)

The USEM framework was developed for thinking about how to integrate employability into the curriculum and emphasizes the need of taking into account the requirements of learners, employers, and all concerned stakeholders. It also inspires thinking about how curricula provide an assessment that promotes student effectiveness and metacognition and links this to the enhancement of expertise and specialised skills that can be transferred to real-world contexts (Cole & Tibby, 2013).

2.3.2 Decision, opportunity, transition and self-awareness model

One of the earliest models of employability, called the decision, opportunity, transition and self-knowledge model (DOTS), was developed by Law and Watts (1977), and is explained below:

Decision Learning – These are skills that students can acquire to make decisions in a way that is satisfying for themselves. These include approaches to making decisions, improving skills in prioritising, compiling knowledge, and self-knowledge;

acquiring knowledge to weigh risks against probable gains; and being accountable for outcomes and consequences.

Opportunity Awareness – This refers to the help students receive to experience, explore, and gain some understanding. Students need career planning assistance to understand the working world and understand the opportunities available to them, the requirements and responsibilities, and the rewards and gratification that will be gained.

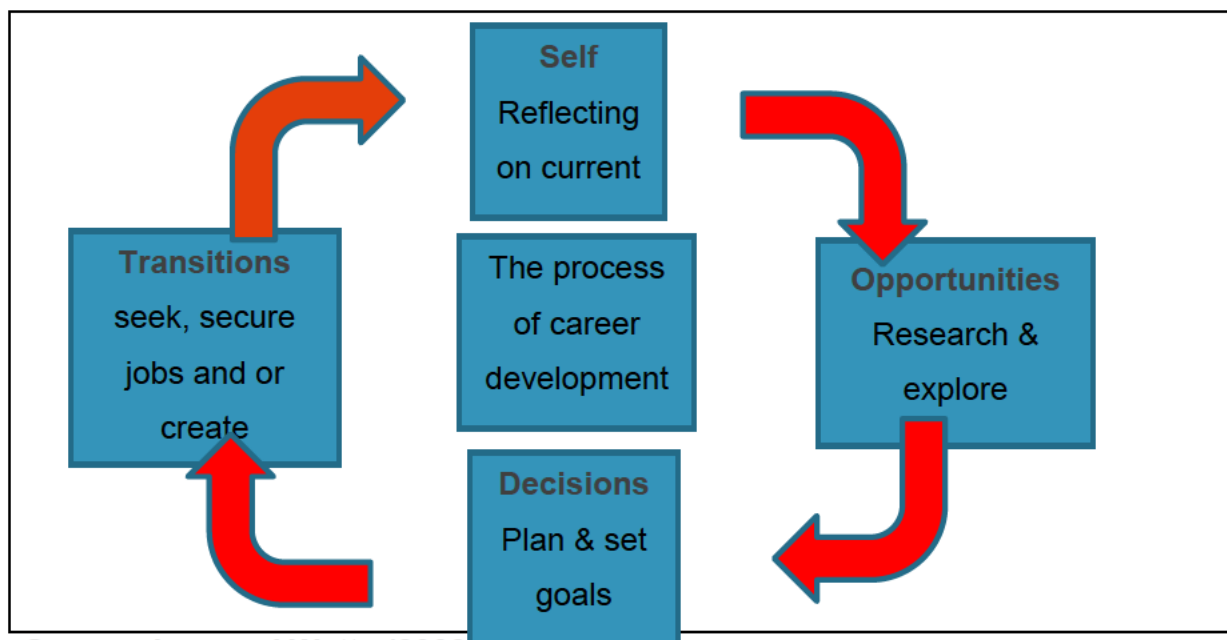
Transition Learning – This refers to helping students acquire the skills and information they need to master the new situations they will encounter. Students need assistance in developing their self-confidence and skills; managing the transition to adulthood and making decisions as adults, such as "getting to know" the differences between school and work; applying and linking what they have learned to the working environment; and developing soft skills to assist the navigation into the working environment such as representation, negotiation, rights, communication, and accountabilities.

Self-awareness - Students will have the opportunity to develop their personalities as unique individuals. Self-awareness requires students to reflect on their strengths and potential. This section will address concerns such as what kind of fulfilment is sought, what interests are established, what individual ambitions are formed, and what is most appreciated in an individual's world experience (Law & Watts, 2003). Students require career guidance to assist them to see themselves, acknowledge their commonalities and dissimilarities from others, fully comprehend their personality types and how this impacts their prospects, and investigate their actual and future qualifications, skills, capacities, abilities, qualities, physical strong points, as well as their constraints; and investigate their requirements, ambitions, gratifications, interests, and principles. Understanding the views of a family may affect and coincide with identity in some parts of the world.

The DOTS model is easy to understand for individuals concerned with the complexity of learning in professional development, but some scholars have argued

that the simplicity of the model has delayed the adoption of innovative theories and the development of creative new frameworks (McCash, 2006). The DOTS model has been debated by Pool and Sewell (2007) in that the model has shortcomings when applied beyond vocational education to broader concepts of employability. Pool and Sewell (2007) recognised that there is a gap in employability concepts and formulated a new definition of employability. The authors add that employability is a skills-set, expertise, comprehension, and individual qualities that enable an individual to select and obtain professions which award gratification and contentment. Figure 2.2 shows the model of employability, called the DOTS model.

Figure 2.2: DOTS Model



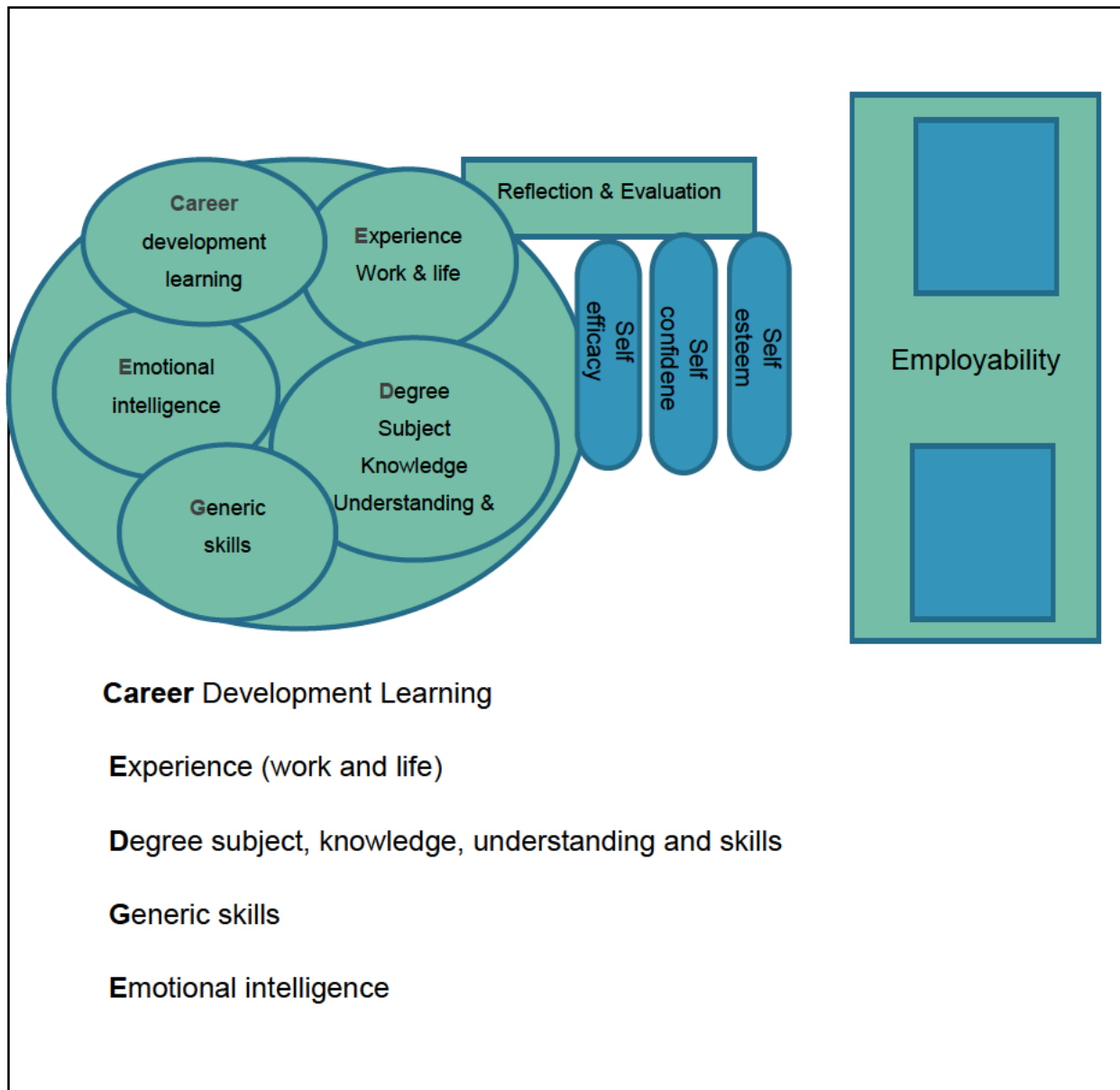
Source: Law and Watts (2003)

2.3.3 Career EDGE model

Pool and Sewell's (2007) new definition, as mentioned above, was used as a starting point for developing a new theoretical and practical framework for employability called the Career EDGE model. This model represents the five components, namely "career development learning; experience of work and life; degree subject knowledge understanding and skills; generic skills; and emotional intelligence, on the lower level of the model" (Pool & Sewell, 2007: 280). The components of the model

are explained in more detail below which is known as the Career EDGE model as shown in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3: Career EDGE Model



Source: Pool and Sewell (2007)

- **Career development learning**

As Pool and Sewell (2007) stated, undergraduates, need to receive some education in career development learning (CDL). Understanding the demands of the labour

market is an added benefit for undergraduates, which allows them to remain competitive (Tomlinson, 2012). According to Hillage and Pollard (1998), the way graduates present themselves plays an important role in securing employment. CDL has been defined in the context of HE as assisting students in acquiring expertise, concepts, abilities, and mindsets that allow them to facilitate their careers, particularly their continuous learning and employment. It can also assist them in preparing for a demanding job market by guaranteeing that they understand how to effectively demonstrate how they have grown personally and professionally during their time in HEIs to become the graduate that prospective employers seek.

- **Experience**

Work or employment experience is critical to employers. Employers value work experience and students' ability to apply what they learn to the career world, develop their confidence, and improve their skills and attributes for employment (Finch *et al.*, 2016; Jackson, 2016). Qenani, MacDougall and Sexton (2014) reported that students' internship experiences led to an increase in self-confidence related to their employability skills. According to Pool and Sewell (2007), students need to be provided with opportunities and guidance to enhance their employability skills through life and career-related experiences in their programme of study, volunteer work, or part-time work.

- **Degree in subject knowledge, understanding and skills**

The real inspiration for students to complete their studies at a HEI is to gain academic qualifications in subject-specific courses or a particular discipline and eventually secure a good job. Academic qualification is the first preference employers consider when evaluating applicants (Farashah & Blomquist, 2020). Tien *et al.* (2021) points out that in certain instances, university graduates are selected exclusively based on their educational qualifications. Although subject-matter knowledge and expertise are critical, the graduate's feeling of fulfilment and job placement success should not be overlooked.

- **Generic skills**

The term general skills refer to the skills that can be applied to any subject area and are transferable to a variety of settings at tertiary institutions and the work environment (Normand & Anderson, 2022). Normand and Anderson (2017) noted that graduates who have advanced general skills in specific areas are preferred by companies. Activities such as learning about oneself, planning to accomplish a specific learning task, monitoring self-concept, and assessing metacognitive character are imperative in assisting students to improve their generic skills (Normand & Anderson, 2017).

- **Emotional intelligence**

Emotional intelligence is described as the capability to recognise an individual's feelings and the feelings of others, to motivate people, and manage emotions well in oneself and relationships (Kanesan & Fauzan 2019). Managing emotions is an aspect that should not be underestimated as it represents a person's maturity in dealing with situations (Huq & Gilbert, 2013; Paadi, 2014). During work placement, undergraduates may be confronted by different emotions, and the employer considers these skills as personal qualities (Knight & Yorke, 2003). In addition, the ability to deal with anger, conflict and negative emotions has a positive impact on healthy well-being (Finch *et al.*, 2015). Emotional intelligence is not only applicable to students at work, but also in life when it comes to shaping one's understanding and actions (Armour, 2012; Paadi, 2014). Emotional intelligence also makes an important contribution to improving employability.

2.3.4 The Bridgstock's conceptual model

The conceptual model by Bridgstock concentrates mainly on the skills needed to develop graduate employability and the function of occupation management. Bridgstock (2009: 35) mentions that "the model will ultimately lead to the improvement of individual and societal well-being". It is further recommended that graduates should study occupation management skills, which will ultimately add to

the improvement of economic development through improved employability, productivity, education, and labour efficiency. The various skills required to develop graduate employability under this model are as follows: career management, self-management skills, career-building skills, discipline-specific skills, and generic skills.

2.3.4.1 Career management

According to Bridgstock (2009), occupation management concentrates on the procedures related to acquiring and retaining employment. According to this approach, students must participate in occupation management during their study which will enable them to clearly understand their abilities and capabilities, which will improve their chances of finding a suitable job (Bridgstock, 2009).

2.3.4.2 Self-management skills

The evaluation and appraisal of oneself concerning abilities, values, goals, and interests are referred to as self-management skills (Bridgstock, 2009). Graduates who understand the importance of their career aspirations, as well as their abilities and capabilities, are more likely to obtain acceptable work.

2.3.4.3 Career-building skills

The skills that allow people to gather and acquire information about jobs and the job market are referred to as career-building skills. These skills ultimately lead to more reasonable employment expectations and make it easier to find, secure and retain work. Career-building skills, then, permit graduates to take advantage of career prospects to advance in the workplace (Symington, 2011). These alternatives may be different work locations, training opportunities, career choices or ways of working, which promote proactive career management (Bridgstock, 2009). Bridgstock (2009: 38) explicates career-building skills as follows:

- Expertise in the field. An individual must be aware of the possibilities and threats that exist, as well as which factors are crucial to success. This includes

understanding the industry's 'rules of the game,' such as its beliefs, structure conventions, culture and values, as well as job market data such as average pay and unemployment rates.

- An individual must be able to identify and decide on the best possible opportunities for advancement in terms of tasks, projects and location.
- Individuals must be able to decipher the timeframe to remain in a specific job and when to look for other work or training chances, as well as be able to respond promptly when new possibilities occur.
- Individuals must be able to apply for jobs and acquire them by displaying their talents and abilities in a way that employers find appealing.
- As part of building social capital, individuals must develop strategic relationships (both professional and personal) with others who can afford opportunities and valuable resources.

2.3.4.4 Discipline-specific skills

Skills that are usually included in university courses to suit certain vocational criteria are known as discipline-specific skills. These abilities come from certain professions, areas of expertise, or disciplines (Bridgstock, 2009). A business management graduate should be able to implement proper business plans in a company, prepare reports, and handle difficulties.

2.3.4.5 Generic skills

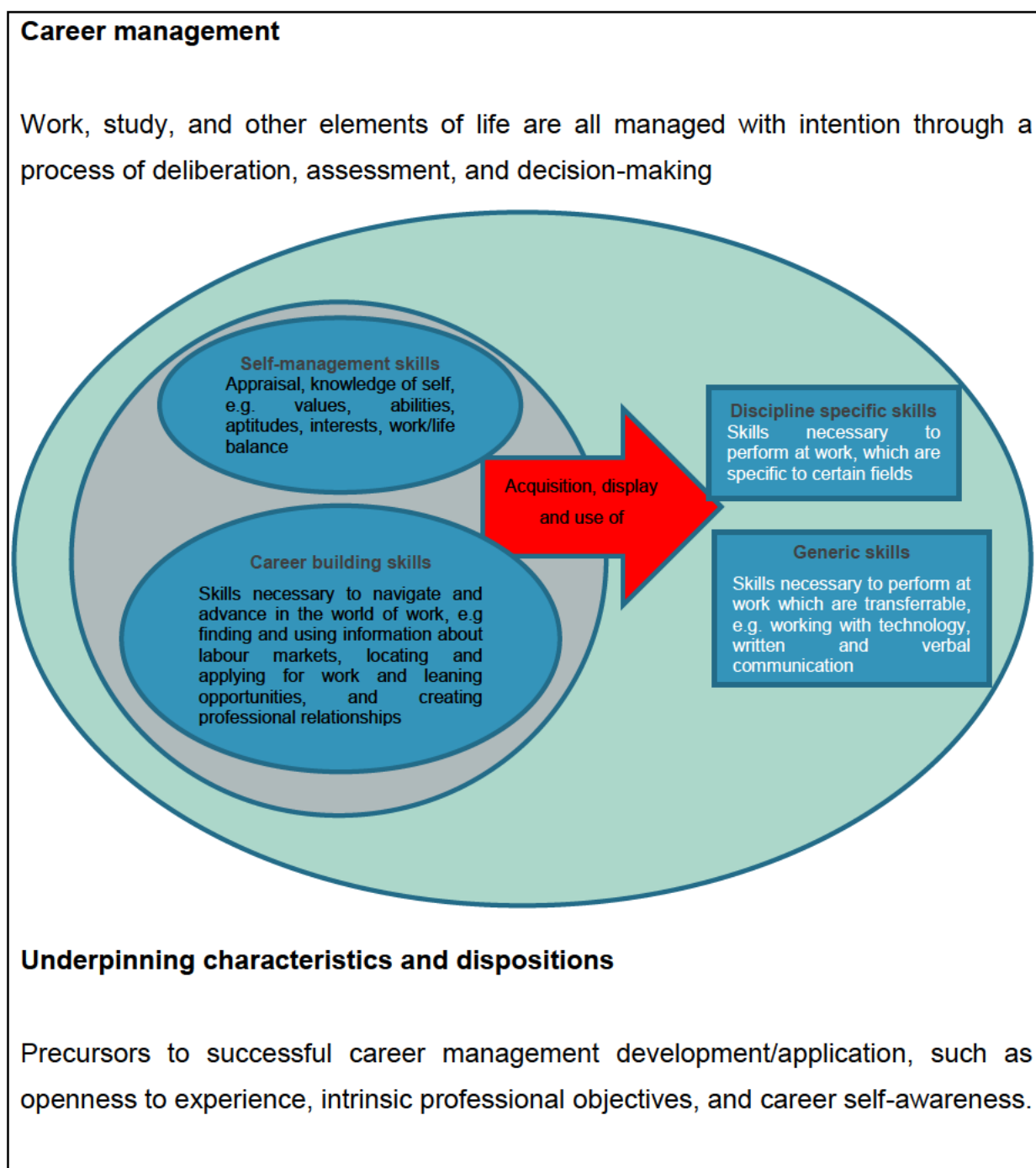
Generic skills according to Bridgstock's conceptual model are defined as transferable skills, core competencies, or practical employability skills. Knowledge management, technological use, nonverbal and verbal communication, teamwork, and numeracy are examples of generic skills (Bridgstock, 2009).

2.3.4.6 Underpinning traits and dispositions

The antecedents to the successful development and implementation of career management skills include fundamental qualities and dispositions (Bridgstock, 2009).

Openness to sociability, experience, initiative, agreeableness, internal motivation, career self-awareness, and consciousness, lead to increased job contentment and an easier adjustment from tertiary education to work (Symington, 2011). Figure 2.4 illustrates the Bridgstock model of graduate employability characteristics.

Figure 2.4: Bridgstock model of graduate employability



Source: Bridgstock (2009)

2.3.5 Bezuidenhout's employability model

The flexibility concept is central to the graduate employability paradigm. Furthermore, the method stresses that employability cannot be considered in isolation from the needs of a demanding new workplace (Bezuidenhout, 2011).

2.3.5.1 Career self-management

Seema and Sujatha (2013) define career management as the attempt to influence the career development of one or more individuals, as well as the formal activities of providing training, mentoring, and career counselling. It includes the capacity to consider career goals and establish clarification on what the individual desires to accomplish with regards to his or her career, identification of the skills-set that is needed to be successful, and the steps necessary to attain objectives with regard to career development. Career self-management is having the confidence and perseverance to engage continuously in development activities while pursuing your career goals (Bezuidenhout, 2011).

Career self-management is generating prospects, goal setting, and continually seeking new information, all of which contribute to the adaptive behaviour of an employable person. Following in the footsteps of others, Solverg and Ali (2017) define career self-management as the strategic manner whereby individuals control their careers, including the foresight individuals gain out of their personal career goals and the behaviours they use to control their careers, such as generating opportunities or networking. Individuals' attempts to identify and fulfil their personal career goals are also included in career self-management.

2.3.5.2 Disposition for employability

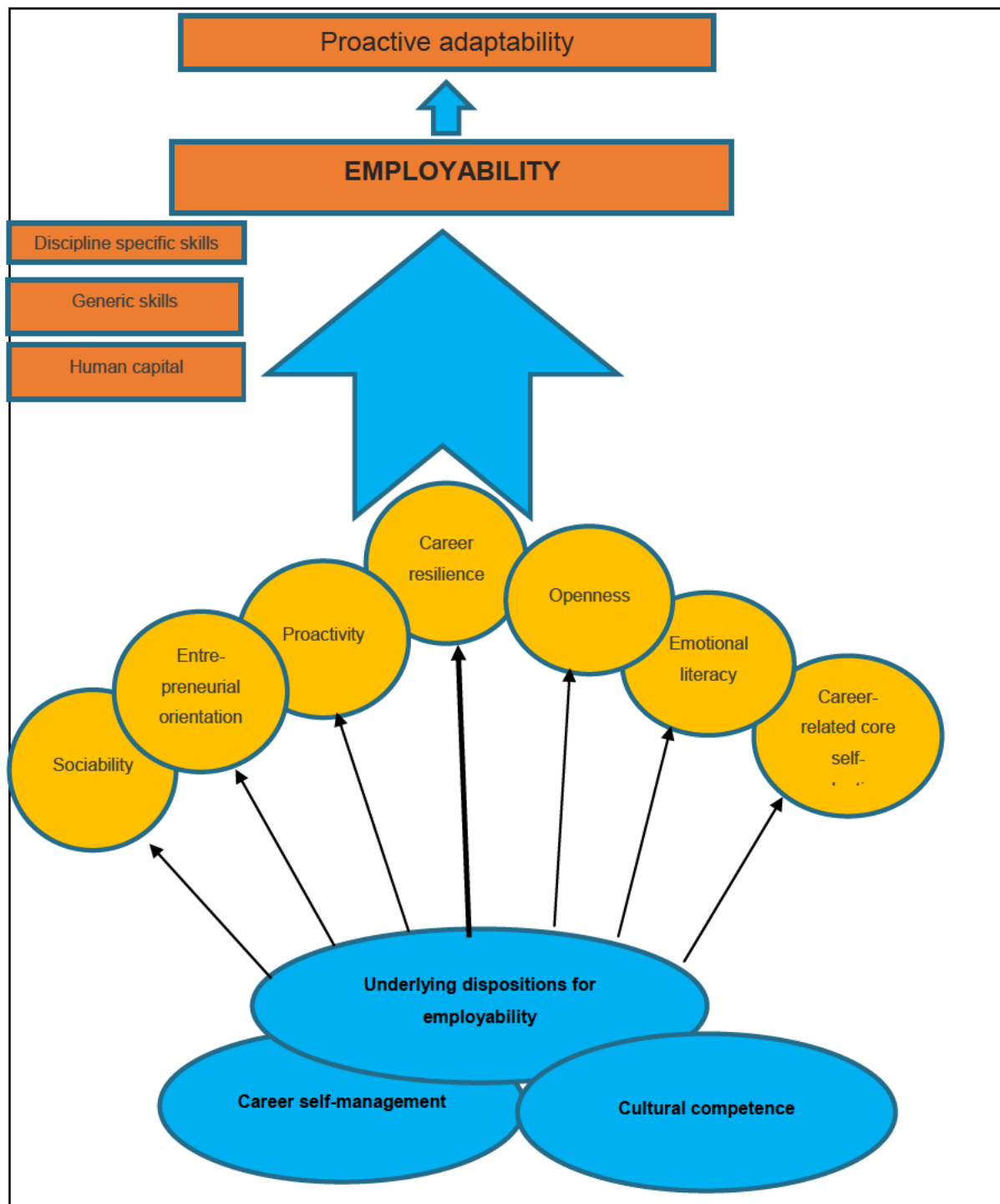
Individuals' constant and permanent tendency to display specific behaviour patterns in a range of contexts is referred to as disposition. Character traits, habits, abilities, intentions, and disposition are all examples (Solverg & Ali, 2017). The dispositions of entrepreneurial orientation, career-related core self-evaluation, proactivity, openness

to change and career resilience are included in the general model of employability. These dispositions, when coupled with other characteristics, enhance strategic adaptability, which may result in increased career success.

2.3.5.3 Cultural competence

Given the globalised context in the twenty-first century, cultural awareness is critical. This includes understanding other cultures' customs and traditions, as well as their ideas and morals, having the courage to speak cross-culturally, making it simple (and enjoyable), and being capable of building relations with individuals from various cultures (Bezuidenhout, 2011). Figure 2.5 shows the model of graduate employability, called the Bezuidenhout employability model.

Figure 2.5: Bezuidenhout graduate employability model



Source: Bezuidenhout (2011: 80)

- **Sociability**

Being sociable entails being capable of forming friendships with individuals who can help find new job prospects. It also entails aggressively requesting feedback from

others to enhance one's profession and a willingness to take chances (Potgieter & Coetzee, 2013; Bezuidenhout, 2011).

- **Entrepreneurial orientation**

Being entrepreneurial implies being creative and always searching for new business prospects. It also entails being receptive to new ideas and optimistic about the effects of change at work or in individual studies (Bezuidenhout, 2011, Potgieter & Coetzee, 2013).

- **Proactivity**

Taking responsibility for one's decisions, setting demanding goals, and spotting possibilities before others do is what proactivity entails. It also means being able to progress in a career by improving on knowledge and abilities, adapting to changing conditions, and persevering in the face of adversity. (Bezuidenhout, 2011; Potgieter & Coetzee, 2013).

- **Career resilience**

Accepting professional and organizational change, having self-confidence, being able to work with different and new people, and being courageous are all examples of career perseverance (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011). Regardless of difficult career circumstances, career perseverance enables high levels of adaptation, versatility, self-confidence, and proficiency (Bezuidenhout, 2011; Potgieter & Coetzee, 2013).

- **Openness**

Being open to new ideas and developments is what openness entails (Tracy & Baaki, 2022). It refers to the degree to which people seek out new adventures and are willing to explore new concepts in the context of the graduate employability paradigm. Both openness to transformation and openness to new encounters are

connected with optimistic attitudes about change, thus they are used equally in this context.

- **Emotional literacy**

Emotional literacy pertains to a person's capability to read, interpret, and control their own and others' emotions in an adaptable manner (Coetzee, 2010).

- **Career-related core self-evaluation**

Core self-evaluations (CSE) are deeply held assessments that an individual makes of his or herself with self-esteem. Core self-evaluations also refer to an individual's principles regarding their abilities (to rule their lives) and proficiency (achievement, coping, success, and perseverance), as well as their generic principles that life will get better. People with a greater CSE tend to assess circumstances more positively, are more motivated, and have more assurance in their ability to impact those around them optimistically.

2.3.6 Fugate and Kinicki's dispositional model of employability

Fugate and Kinicki (2008) take a dispositional perspective on employability, focusing on the issue from a supply-side perspective. Their model focuses on the theoretical foundation of Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth (2004) and Fugate (2006), who define dispositional employability as a constellation of individual differences that predispose employees to (pro)actively adapt to their work and career environments. Employability is a disposition that captures individual characteristics that promote adaptive behaviours and positive employment outcomes (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008).

Fugate and Kinicki (2008) claim that a dispositional approach to employability is needed, especially in light of the rapid change that leads to elevated degrees of doubt and needs staff to adjust positively. The authors further argue that researchers presume that skills, knowledge, and abilities required for a particular role are recognised and stable. However, it is argued, "These assumptions are too narrow and not representative of the modern employment situation" (Fugate & Kinicki 2008:

505). Therefore, Fugate and Kinicki's (2008) model of employability goes beyond the skills, knowledge, and abilities needed for employment and refers to a comprehensive, fundamental, overarching characteristic that enhances effective adaptability.

Moreover, “dispositional employability includes both reactive and proactive individual characteristics, which means that individuals with high dispositional employability are not only able to reactively adapt to environmental demands, but also tend to be constantly ready for change; that is, they proactively recognise and realise various opportunities” (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008: 505). Therefore, dispositional employability is considered a fundamental multidimensional and psychosocial concept that includes the extent of openness to adapt to the workplace; career resilience and work resilience; proactivity at work and career proactivity; career motivation; and work distinctiveness. The dimensions and their definitions can be found in Table 2.1. below.

Table 2.1: Dispositional employability dimensions

| Dimension of employability | Definition |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Career and work resilience | It is common for people with strong work and career resilience to have an optimistic outlook, a feeling of control over their future, and the idea that they can make genuinely meaningful contributions to their workplaces. |
| Open to change at work | In the workplace, those who are open to change have a willingness to change and/or see change as a good thing when it happens. |
| Career and work proactivity | A proactive approach to an individual's professional life displays inclinations and efforts to gather knowledge that might influence their work and professional life. |
| Career motivation | People who are driven by their careers are more likely to create detailed plans and methods for achieving them. Individuals in this group are more |

| | |
|---------------|--|
| | likely to take responsibility for their professional development and establish specific job and career-related objectives. |
| Work identity | An individual's work identity is the degree to which he or she is defined by a specific job, career, or industry. What you do, how effectively you do it, and how others perceive you are all aspects of your work identity. |

Source: Fugate and Kinicki (2008)

Fugate and Kinicki (2008) constructed a 25-item dispositional assessment of employability centered on the above variables. The construct validity of this measure is supported by three independent investigations conducted by the authors. “The instrument is applicable to both employed and unemployed individuals, to demographically diverse individuals, and samples in different contexts” (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008: 521).

Fugate and Kinicki's (2008) employability models are useful to this study because it extends beyond the specified skills that graduates require to be employable and is thus adaptable to a larger set of situations. “Dispositions are also important in constantly changing situations and are more likely to influence performance and behaviour in such situations” (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008: 504). The authors' model includes both reactive and proactive human characteristics, which gives the notion a new depth. An individual not only adapts to various expectations but also create and realize their job possibilities.

One potential drawback of the approach is that it concentrates just on dispositions, leaving out essential behaviours that are required to find work, such as networking to gather job information. It is also evident that social capital should be included. In terms of the latter, it is crucial to consider relationships, which are a crucial component of today's networked society. Furthermore, employability should concentrate not only on interpersonal interactions but also on the abilities required to form and maintain the relations. Employability should also focus on an individual's

underlying motivation to get involved in relationship building (Maslow & Press, 2019). Given the emphasis on undergraduates and postgraduates in their final year of study, presenting employability simply in the domains of employment is problematic, as many graduates will have minimal job experience.

Resilience is a key part of the employability of graduates because they need to remain in control of their careers and be confident that they will succeed (Parker, 2008: 4). They must also have confidence in their ability to take advantage of work situations to seek out and seize prospects. Graduates who are not resilient will struggle to recover from disappointments such as denied applications or lost growth opportunities.

The openness component of Fugate and Kinicki's (2008) paradigm is also crucial. To adjust to a new working environment, graduates must be receptive to new chances and methods of doing things. They will be more capable to gain the abilities needed to be more marketable to companies if they are willing to try new things. Finally, graduates must be actively involved in learning about employers, jobs, and careers, as well as take measures to enhance their position and build their careers to succeed (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008). As a result, Fugate and Kinicki's concept of dispositional employability is quite useful in this study.

2.3.7 Employability model for graduates

Haque (2013) proposed an employability model to improve the skills and potential of graduates to reduce unemployment. Haque (2013) studied various secondary data sources including the Higher Education Commission, annual reports of the Ministry of Human Resources, the employability programmes introduced by three countries – Australia, Singapore, and Malaysia and the Academic Journal of Human Resource Management. The model is founded on the employability programmes of Malaysia and Singapore.

The proposed graduate employability model is shown in Figure 2.6. To implement the employability model, Haque (2013) proposes that graduates should be enrolled

in an employability programme after graduation. They develop basic abilities in the first two months. They will study industry-specific skills during the next two months. Finally, they will be trained for job-specific capabilities during the next two months. The model's flaw is that the author failed to mention any specific competency.

Figure 2.6: Employability model for graduates



Source: Haque (2013)

2.4 HUMAN CAPITAL AND SIGNAL THEORY OF EMPLOYABILITY

The human capital (HC) theory and the signal theory are the two common theories of employability. However, there are two conflicting theories, namely conflict and consensus theory, both of which stem from the nineteenth century and give opposing theoretical frameworks for the shifting interaction between tertiary education, employment, and the job market in terms of graduate employability (Brown *et al.*, 2003).

2.4.1 Consensus theory

The similarities of social groupings are the focus of consensus theory, which frequently refers to societal expectations or common cultural views (Brown *et al.*, 2003). The creation of skills that are generic in universities, according to this view, improves the employability of graduates and helps them to be effective in the job. Consensus theorists point out that universities should in their curriculum promote employability by incorporating the creation of generic skills (Fallows & Steven, 2000). According to consensus theory, tertiary education is to blame for not ensuring that adequate skills are incorporated into the curriculum design. Perez *et al.* (2010) highlighted the difficulties of differentiating the impact of education and training systems from other factors in analysing job market results due to the multidimensional structure of the employability concept.

2.4.2 Conflict theory

The conflict theory emphasizes how various groups, namely the academics, employers, and employees, have varying levels of power and possibilities (Brown *et al.*, 2003). Employers' discontent with universities' efforts to give graduates adequate general skills to function well in the workforce is also highlighted by the conflict theory (Selvadurai, Choy & Maros, 2012).

Researchers who study conflict theory categorize general employability abilities into three context areas. Although certain components of these categories overlap, each contextual area takes a different approach to employability. The university context recommends that graduates ought to be capable of effective communication (written and oral), collaboration, critical assessment, and analysis. The next section focuses on job placement.

It is thought that graduates' ability to communicate vocally and in writing, competence in their subject matter, technical and practical experience, and people skills will all impact their right placement in the workplace. The last point to consider is the work environment. This setting is concerned with graduates' capacity to find

and retain their jobs. As a result, employers value graduates' ability to communicate verbally and written, as well as their ability to collaborate, take action when needed, technical and practical experience, and people skills (Nazir *et.al.*, 2021).

Since the conflict theory asserts that HEIs and employers must work together to create the employability abilities of graduates, it is recommended that the work experience of the graduate ought to be given while they are still studying. For universities, this means including internship programmes in their curricula, and employers need to provide opportunities for graduates to develop employability skills (Selvadurai *et al.*, 2012). In the conflict between capital and labour, there is always a discussion about the role of the employer in providing general skills and about the fact that employees do not acquire adequate skills through the training provided by employers.

At the same time, according to (Selvadurai *et al.*, 2012), there is the employer-academy conflict, in which employers believe that universities have not provided those who have graduated with sufficient generic skills. The conflict theory states that the employer should take responsibility for providing graduates with on-the-job experience and not shift the responsibility to universities alone (Selvadurai *et al.*, 2012). From the above discussion, consensus theory claims that HEIs should take the responsibility of ensuring that the generic skills of the graduates should be developed, while conflict theory assigns responsibility to both universities and employers. In the present economic and global climate, research suggests that HEIs and companies share responsibilities for the employability of graduates. As a result, conflict theory is seen as a foundation for enhancing the employability of graduates.

2.4.3 Human capital theory

The HC theory is based on the belief that teaching tertiary-level generic skills ensures the employability of graduates and their rapid advancement up the career ladder. Four areas of focus can be found in generic skills. The initial priority is to locate and manage data (analysis and classification). The second concentration is

that students who graduate should have the capability to effectively express and present information (written and oral communication). The third concentration is that graduates must be able to plan and solve problems (critical assessment, technical and practical experience); and finally, students who graduate must have the ability to grow and engage socially (people skills, responsibility, and collaboration). The incorporation of these generic competencies in curricula must be prioritised by universities, as it is believed that being knowledgeable of academic information alone is not sufficient in the present economic environment (Neel, 2012).

The HC theory, according to Shumilova, Cai and Pekkola (2012), state that employability is utilised to assess the quality of education given. Thus, the quality of HE leads to ease of employability. According to Rauch and Rijdsdijk (2013), HC is achieved through individuals' efforts to develop their skills and knowledge through various forms of instruction, including academic education and in-service training, as well as other forms of learning. HC theories are critical to this study as it seeks to understand students' perceptions of employability. HC theory addresses the relation between the job market and educational attainment outcomes (Jonck, 2014).

Prosser (2018) define HC as “the human factor in the organisation: the combination of intelligence, skills, and expertise that gives the organisation its distinctive character”. The social aspects of the business environment are those that can absorb, change, innovate and provide the artistic impetus that, when correctly motivated, can guarantee the long-term existence of the business (McCracken *et al.*, 2017). When applied to the workplace, HC theory indicates that those who invest in training and development will improve their skill levels and be more productive than those who do not; thus, they can justify higher returns because of their investment in HC.

2.4.3.1 Human capital at an individual level

The focus of HC at the individual level is on employee training and job performance. Other focus areas include “commentary development”, which also shows how a person's skills, knowledge, abilities and other aspects add to enterprise-level

abilities. A discussion of the function of employee training, opportunities to learn and occupation management in HC development follows.

- **Employee training**

Many studies show that HC investment in training generally improves individual and organisational performance (Georgiadis & Pitelis, 2016). Hence, there is strong empirical support in the literature that employee training improves individual-level outcomes (Becker, 1964). For Becker's theory on universal and business-specific training, studies have shown mixed results. Becker recommended that businesses should not compensate for training that is generic because it would lead to agility. Rostovskaya *et al.* (2021) agreed, finding that staff who earned postgraduate qualifications, when compared to holders of bachelor degrees, were most prone to leaving the organisation. On the contrary, Fallon and Rice (2015) and Koster *et al.* (2011) indicated that employees perceived investments in generic skills as investments that were positive in employee growth and that this did not impact turnover. Vidal-Salazar, Cordón-Pozo and Ferrón-Vilchez (2012) found that training an employee is critical to the skills of an employee, and that employee training was positively related to both employee knowledge and workforce engagement.

- **Workplace learning**

McCracken *et al.* (2017) emphasised that workers have several options for acquiring new knowledge, which include work-based learning, learning that is self-directed, online learning, and mentoring. Socialisation in the work environment and interaction with colleagues can facilitate workplace learning. Furthermore, encouraging people to develop material based on their triumphs and mistakes is critical. As a result, businesses must foster a culture that encourages knowledge sharing.

- **Self-directed learning**

The majority of self-directed learning is self-directed. Individuals reflect on what they have learned, what they have accomplished, their goals, how they intend to reach

those goals, and what new information they ought to attain (Armstrong, 2014). Self-directed learning, according to Armstrong (2014), is founded on the idea that individuals learn and remember more when they find things out for themselves. They do, however, require assistance in determining what they are searching for or how to get it. Self-directed learning is also becoming more crucial in businesses that are rapidly evolving.

Self-directed learning is not widespread, especially in terms of staff and business outcomes. Employee empowerment, on the other hand, is a critical supporter of self-directed learning, as it places accountability for major decisions and obligations on employees. Employee empowerment has been related to positive outcomes, contentment, and engagement among employees. Employee proposals for improvement and employee involvement in the product development process result in better operational capabilities and product quality at the organisational level (Armstrong, 2014).

- **Mentoring**

Klinge (2015) mentions that mentoring is "traditionally a process in which an experienced person (the mentor) guides another person (the mentee or protégé) in developing their ideas, learning, and personal/professional competence." A mentor's job is to give guidance and assist mentees deliberate on their experiences to help them grow. Mentors are also especially good at promoting two-loop learning because they can urge the mentee to deliberate on current learning and methods to enhance future learning (Klinge, 2015). Mentoring can also be used to supplement formal education and encourage job learning (Armstrong, 2014).

- **Career management and employee development**

Employee training and learning opportunities were covered in the preceding sections as crucial foundations of employee growth. This section discusses the necessity of employee development in companies, as well as the importance of integrating

growth plans into employee career goals to harmonize organisational and employee goals.

- **Employee development**

Nadler (1979: 88) points out that "Employee development is about preparing employees to move within the organisation as it evolves, changes, and grows." The ongoing development of an employee is important. Employee development is essential for a company to establish competitive strategies. Employee development is critical not only from the perspective of a company but also from the perspective of an individual (Armstrong, 2014). Employees act positively within a company when they believe the company is looking out for their best interests. This includes focused training, professional development plans, and new opportunities to learn.

Employee autonomy (empowerment) and training opportunities are substantially associated with job satisfaction in Southeast Asian petroleum retailing (Hosie *et al.*, 2013). Employee development is also an important subject to consider. Employee development is linked to a range of employee outcomes, including employee performance, as previously stated (Bapna *et al.*, 2013). Tracking the number of annual promotions in the company, evaluating the effects of training and feedback on the outcomes of the employee, the method of learning completed, monitoring employee productivity and detecting skill gaps are all examples of ways to measure employee development (Cabrito, Grubic-Nesic and Mitrovic, 2014).

- **Career management**

Employers must guarantee that staff have a clear path to advancement within the company. According to Byrne (2014), having employee development plans is insufficient. To reduce staff turnover and promote employee engagement, career plans must be implemented and matched with the goals of the employee. A career development route offers employees a constant way to increase their knowledge and skills, resulting in task mastery and further career development.

2.4.4 Signalling theory

Signalling theory assumes that an applicant's level of education is merely a symbol of the degree of efficiency that is estimated of him or her (Rukuni *et al.*, 2018). Signalling theory further states that education and skills are a means by which employers can identify good, capable, and highly motivated employees (Cai, 2013). It is predicated on the idea that recruiting staff is an investment choice for businesses. Employers however often lack information about the skills of job applicants.

When making recruitment decisions under uncertainty, employers tend to consider signals and indices. Signals indicate that individuals have some degree of control, such as educational attainment (Bailly, 2008). Employees with high levels of academic achievement, according to the signalling theory, are more productive, attract more job chances, and earn more than those with basic or no skills (Tomlinson, 2012; Broadley & Dixon, 2022). Signalling theory has also been used to explain individuals' investments in HE, advertising, cultural consumption, aggressive behaviour, and cooperation in social dilemmas.

2.5 BAILLY's MODEL OF EMPLOYERS' BELIEFS

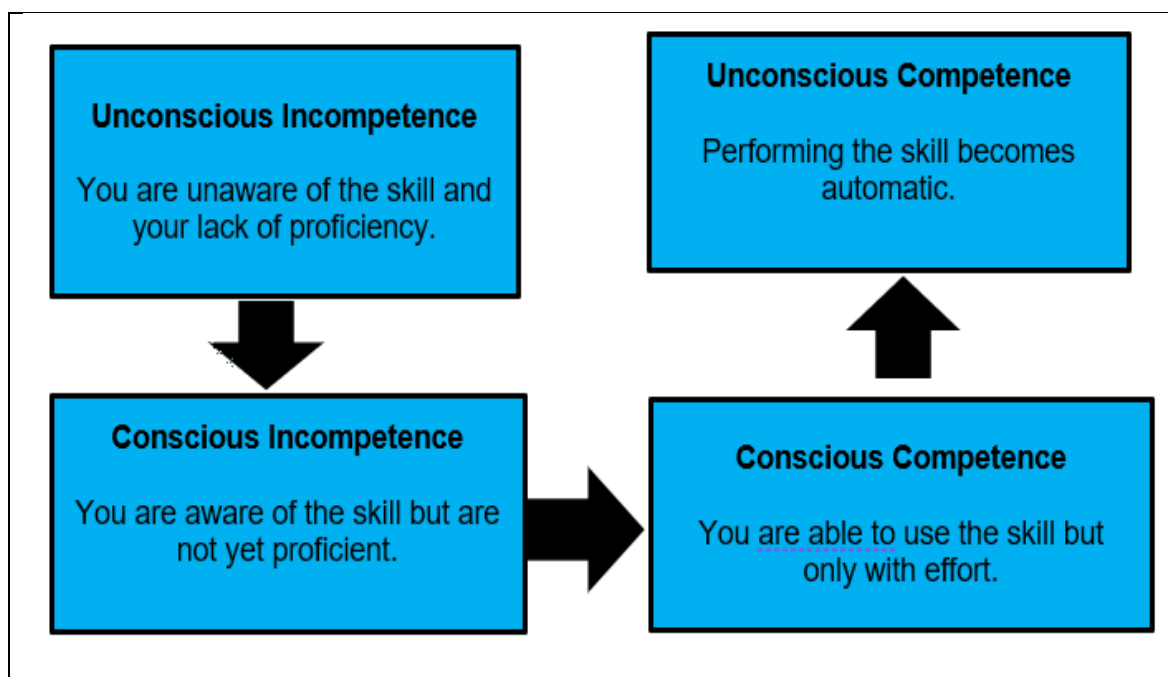
Human capital and job-signalling theories appear to support the idea that education has a favourable impact on individual job market outcomes, however, it is still unclear what factors businesses use to make hiring decisions. Bailly (2008) and Cai (2012), divide the formation of the belief systems of employers into three stages. An employer has no prior experience recruiting applicants with a specific set of academic qualifications in the first round. To borrow Spence's (1973: 359) definition, "the employer makes recruiting judgments based on his or her initial views about the applicants, or 'conditional probabilistic beliefs". Essentially, the company assigns a predicted level of production to these persons based on the information provided by the applicant's academic qualifications and then recruits on that basis. Initial signals might be interpreted as the information supplied by academic qualifications.

Cai (2012) states that the second stage begins with the recruitment of applicants. The employer's initial assumptions are altered after monitoring the quality of this newly hired personnel. If employee performance matches that which the employer assumed before hiring, the employer's beliefs are confirmed. In the third stage, the process continues until equilibrium is reached. This means that the employer has gained enough experience through these successive learning processes to estimate the applicant's 'true' value.

2.6 THE FOUR STAGES OF COMPETENCE

Figure 2.7 shows the stages of competency.

Figure 2.7: Stages of competency



Source: Burch (1970)

The four levels of competence described by Burch (1970) are explained below.

- **Unconscious incompetence (Ignorance)**

The person has no understanding or knowledge of how to perform something and is not always aware of the problem. Perhaps the person doubts the skill's utility. Before moving on to the next step, the person must acknowledge his or her inadequacy as well as the worth of the new skill. The duration of this stage is determined by the intensity of the learning stimulation.

- **Conscious incompetence (Awareness)**

Even if the person does not comprehend or know how to do anything, he or she acknowledges the problem and the importance of learning a new skill to address it. At this time, making mistakes can be an important part of the learning process.

- **Conscious competence (Learning)**

The individual comprehends or is capable of performing a task. Demonstrating this skill or expertise, on the other hand, necessitates focus. It can be separated into individual phases, and the new skill's implementation necessitates active conscious participation.

- **Unconscious competence (Mastery)**

The individual has honed skill to the point where it is habitual to him or her, and he or she can effortlessly execute it. As a result, the skill can be used while another work is being completed. The individual can teach it to others based on how and when it was learned.

The above four levels of competence in Figure 2.7 clearly outline the process by which business graduates assess their level of skill competence. The questions on key competencies on the questionnaire were crafted in order to make an assessment against the above levels of competencies for graduates. Rather than work experience, these levels of competency have a direct impact on graduates'

employability. The employability of graduates' hinges on the definition of employability, which is the combination of technical skills acquired through formal and informal education. In the next section an in-dept discussion on work experience is provided.

2.7 WORK EXPERIENCE

2.7.1 The evolution of employee experience

The amount of job experience of applicants can affect many hiring outcomes, including the interpretation of job advertisements, the perceived fit with the company, and the appeal of certain company characteristics. Many employers prefer to hire experienced employees to reduce training costs and ensure high levels of productivity and efficiency (Yockey, 2017). There is increasing concern that some graduates and entry-level workers are disadvantaged because they do not have the appropriate work experience.

2.7.2 Employee experience

- **Definition of employee experience**

Employee experience is described as a time of work that encourages introspection on the experience and the identification of learning opportunities (Kochan *et al.*, 2019).

- **Utility**

According to Morgan (2017), decades ago the relationship between employees and employers was relatively upfront. Employers needed to fill positions, and people needed to acquire jobs since they had bills to pay, to buy things and provide specific skills. Due to this fundamental link, employment was always about service, that is, the basic resources and tools that an employer could offer to its employees to do their jobs. Today, that is usually a computer, a desk, a cubicle, and a telephone.

- **Productivity**

Morgan (2017) adds that after the era of utility came the era of productivity. Stopwatches were used by managers to measure the length of time it will take for employees to complete a task, saving a few seconds here and there. All of this was to improve productivity and output, with an emphasis on repeatable processes, such as the famous factory assembly line. Today, people finally have the technology to do the jobs they were designed to do, and the people who were just placeholders are now in trouble. As in the utility era, there was not much emphasis on creating an organisation where employees wanted to work. Productivity was simply utility on steroids.

- **Engagement**

Next came engagement, a radical new concept where the collective business community said, "Hey, maybe we should pay more attention to employees and what they care about and value, instead of just trying to get more out of them". That was quite a revolutionary approach that shifted the focus from how the company could benefit and get more value out of employees to what the company could do to benefit employees and understand how and why they work. The more engaged an employee is, the better (Morgan, 2017). That was a ground-breaking approach that moved the emphasis from how the business might benefit and extract more value from people to what the business could do to be of benefit to employees and comprehend why and how they operate.

2.7.3 Employees' experience of the environment

What resonates more with people is designing an organisation that people enjoy being in by focusing on the cultural, technological, and physical aspects of the environment. Employee experiences are made up of several environments and variables, and leading organisations have invested time and resources to ensure that

these variables are properly implemented. Every organisation in the world has employees who have their own experiences (Morgan, 2017).

2.7.3.1 Cultural environment

Organisational culture is the collective impact of the shared beliefs, behaviours and values of the people in an organisation. These internal standards influence how workers work and service customers, how they collaborate, whether they are motivated to accomplish their objectives, and if they are devoted to the organisation's mission. Furthermore, how do staff do their duties? Working alone or with others? Are the staff inspired, devoted, and involved, or are they irritated, overworked, and undervalued? (Groysberg *et al.*, 2018).

Organisational culture and the employee experience is a fixed framework for the daily operations of any organisation. It makes no difference if the company is working on a high-quality product or organising a fantastic kick-off conference, if the underlying attitude is one of dissatisfaction, boredom or displeasure, the organisation's long-term prospects will not be promising. Everything else flows through the filter of organisational culture. Furthermore, while providing a great employee experience is a common aim, there are multiple paths to achieve it, and the distinctions between functions and activities are frequently blurred (Brown, Thomas and Bosselman, 2015).

2.7.3.2 Technological environment

The agricultural age, the industrial age, and the digital age are the three eras in which civilization has grown and progressed, each defined by its basic digital infrastructure. The ability to gain new knowledge and information has greatly influenced each of these eras. They have all, however, necessitated and allowed new economic relations, social revolutions, cultural shifts, and labour paradigms (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016).

Morgan (2017) defines technology as a set of methods, procedures, or practices followed in the creation of services or goods or the pursuit of goals such as scientific research. Technology can include amongst others information on techniques and processes, and so on, or it can be integrated with machinery, systems, devices, and industries that can be managed by people who do not have a thorough understanding of how they work. Cascio and Montealegre (2016) state that in the digital age, people focus on creating and trading products and services through digitised data, information, and knowledge. This age, according to the study, is founded on a structure that includes communication and information technologies, which the researcher further describes as the new infrastructure that not only provides support but also helps people. To produce a favourable high-tech workplace for employees, businesses must concentrate on the following key features (abbreviated as ACE):

- Accessibility to every individual;
- Customer grade technology; and
- Employee requirements versus corporate requirements.

Technology offers individuals in the work environment potential work for employees and employee encounters. It also serves as a potential adhesive and is the centre of a system that drives the organisation. Organisations must develop an ACE technical environment to improve the entire employee encounter as described below.

2.7.3.3 Physical environment

The physical environment is the one in which employees work, and it accounts for 30 percent of the employee experience. Magnificent physical environments act as positive symbols and representations. According to Ismail *et al.* (2015), the physical workplace, internal and outdoor office furniture, comfort zone, temperature, and workplace or organisation are all part of the physical workplace. The physical workplace incorporates comfort level, ventilation, heating, and lighting (Ismail *et al.*, 2015).

Kohll (2019) states that on the operative and appealing side, these structures complement the equipment and blueprint of the workplace and eventually help to develop the employee experience and inspire them to perform better. Spatial design contributes greatly to how employees perform their tasks (Kohll, 2019). Herrity (2022) emphasised that a favourable workplace environment should be a priority because it helped employees perform their tasks. It should be conducive to employees performing their tasks.

2.8 BENEFIT OF INVESTMENT IN EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

- **The business value of employee experience**

According to Morgan (2017), the business impact of employee experience consists of four components. The first relates to a more productive workforce, a larger talent pipeline, higher levels of innovation, and improved morale. The second relates to the lists and rankings of leading organisations to determine if experience organisations appear more frequently in these lists and rankings than organisations in other categories. The third relates to the best customer service list, which appears more often than any other category; and the last relates to employee turnover in the organisation.

- **Customer service**

Even a small difference can translate into millions of dollars for a company. Customers who receive better service often become more loyal to the brand, while disgruntled customers typically cost the company more because it takes longer to serve them, and they are more likely to share their unpleasant experiences with others (Morgan, 2017).

- **Innovation**

According to Hai-Jew (2022), innovation is defined as follows: "The introduction of an internally developed or purchased device, system, policy, programme, process,

product, or service that is new to the introducing organisation". Although the goal of innovation is to improve something, not all innovations lead to successful outcomes. Because the general environment of organisations often changes, organisations are expected to be innovative enough to survive and prosper.

Organisations that excel at focusing on culture, technology, and the physical environment can innovate at a much higher level. This makes sense because employees in experiential organisations are given the resources, they need to bring their best ideas to work every day. Innovation is what leads to new products, services and partnerships, which allow a company to remain competitive. Not surprisingly, innovation is consistently a top priority for business leaders around the world. Focusing on the employee experience seems to be an excellent way to achieve this.

2.9 EMPLOYERS' ATTRACTIVENESS

Employer attractiveness is critical to attracting and retaining top talent and contributes to a larger talent pipeline. Companies are increasingly concerned with hiring and maintaining competent personnel in the current competitive and dynamic workplace. Competition and a scarcity of talented personnel, according to Hejase *et al.* (2016), make attracting and maintaining qualified individuals a key issue for businesses. Employees who may bring value to the organisational performance by displaying the highest degree of talent and whose direct impact is felt over the long term are defined as talented staff (Chartered Institute of Personnel Development, 2013).

Esmaeli's (2016) study examined the "importance of talent management in reducing employee turnover intentions", and mentions that talent management provides employees with the assurance that they are well-placed in their current roles and will be compensated according to their critical, scarce skills. Esmaeli (2016) further argues that effectual talent management inspires staff; thus, reducing turnover.

2.10 COST OF EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

Table 2.2 indicates the nature and the level of the costs of the different variables in the work environment, namely, the technological, physical, and cultural environment.

Table: 2.2: The cost of employee experience

| Variable | Cost Level | Type of Cost |
|--|---------------------|---|
| Technological environment | | |
| Consumer-grade technology | Some cost | Some costs associated with shifting or creating modern technology |
| The technology available to everyone | Minimal to moderate | Potential costs associated with getting technology to more people |
| The technology focuses on employee needs | Free | Sometimes costs are associated with understanding how employers work and focusing on the right technology |
| Physical environment | | |
| Multiple workplace options | High cost | Costs to design and implement new workplaces |
| Physical space reflects the values of the organisation | Free | Potential design changes |
| Pride when bringing in a friend or visitor | Some cost | Potential design changes |
| Flexible work and autonomy | Free | No cost for freedom and autonomy |
| Cultural environment | | |
| Sense of purpose | Free | No cost to helping people understand how their contribution affects the company and the world |
| Being treated fairly | Free | No cost associated with treating people fairly |
| Feeling valued | Free | No cost to helping people feel valued |
| Managers are coaches and mentors | Free | No cost for having the right managers in place; some potential costs for training |

| | | |
|---|--------------|--|
| Being part of a team | Free | No cost for employees to feel part of a team |
| Opportunity and resources to learn new things and advance | Free | No cost for giving employees opportunities; potential costs for learning and development |
| Referring others | Free | No cost for referring others |
| Diversity and inclusion | Free | No cost for hiring a diverse group |
| Strong brand perception | Free | No cost to treating people well and being ethical |
| Employee well-being | Minimal cost | Costs associated with facilities, such as gymnasiums and training |

Source: Morgan (2017)

Table 2.2 shows what employee experience costs organisations. As stated earlier, the costs of the technological, physical and cultural environment are minimal or free.

2.11 EXPERIENCE LEARNING

Employability programmes imply that young adults must gain the skills, knowledge, and behaviours that will help them compete in the job market (Yorke, 2006). It is assumed that these practical skills are acquired in situations where they can gain relevant experience (Cuzzocrea, 2014). However, beyond demonstrating to potential employers that young people have done meaningful 'things,' how these experiences boost learning has not been thoroughly examined. Experience, according to Dewey (1925), is a 'double-barrelled' word that refers to both what individuals are doing and how they behave; in other words, it would be both object and subject. Dewey's perspective of classical Greek thought suggests a completely different relation between time and experience than this dedication to comprehensive inquiry and experimental procedure. Experimentation-based experience, according to Vaia, Arkhipova and DeLone (2022) leads us into the future rather than confining us to the past.

2.12 DIVERSE TYPES OF WORK EXPERIENCE

A structured work experience involves learning about the world of work through a post-secondary educational programme (for example field experience, work experience, cooperation, internships). There are several types of structured work experiences, which are discussed below:

2.12.1 Internship

In 2002, the Cabinet approved the Strategy for the Development of Human Resources in the Public Service, which included a framework for internships and a strategy for scarce skills (Galloway, Marks & Chillas, 2014). The framework sought to create an efficient and effective intern programme to ease the transition between competent performance and academic study in the work environment by offering structured internship opportunities for up to 12 months to students and to youth who are unemployed (Ismail, 2018). An internship is a graduate internship programme in the public sector targeted at unemployed graduates (Pietersen & Malatjie, 2022).

An internship allows students to gain on-the-job experience or to put into exercise the professional abilities they acquired during their study and will exercise in the future (Ismail, 2018). A public service internship is a planned, structured, and managed programme that provides work experience for a specified period, which could vary from three to 12 months (Saniter & Siedler, 2014). A designated mentor could support a government service intern. In SA, an internship is a hands-on programme, and it supports the ongoing growth of individuals for upcoming employment in the job market. An internship programme is aimed at youth who are graduating or those who have already graduated and have no jobs (Maertz, Stoeberl & Marks, 2014).

2.12.2 Objectives of internships

Internships are intended to achieve various objectives, as explained below:

- Internships address the overall shortage of qualified workers by supporting graduates to prepare for the practical experience that they need (Saniter & Siedler, 2014);
- Internships improve the chance of student landing a job; however, it also reduces their chances of pursuing postgraduate education (Saniter & Siedler, 2014);
- They help meet the strategic workforce needs of the public sector by providing practical and accelerated work experience programmes that expose interns to specific occupations (Galloway *et al.*, 2014);
- Internships give graduates who are unemployed essential experience and skills that help them find work (Saniter & Siedler, 2014);
- Internships provide public service internships to address the problem of young unemployment (especially among tertiary graduates) (Galloway *et al.*, 2014);
- Students who need to gain practical experience to earn points toward their qualifications should be allowed to do internships (Gault, Leach & Duey, 2010);
- Internships add to enhanced service delivery by the government via enriched induction of qualified public service employees (Maertz *et al.*, 2014);
- Internships help rural and marginalized populations including women and the disabled get the same accessibility to government jobs (Holyoak, 2013);
- Internships add to continuous learning, and hiring interns lowers the cost of recruitment and training (Dobratz, Singh & Abbey, 2014); and
- Internships raise student awareness of job and career opportunities in the public sector (Holyoak, 2013).

2.12.3 Fixed-term employment

Temporary fixed-term employment contracts are also used by graduates in many companies to gain work experience. "A fixed-term employment contract is an employment contract that terminates upon the occurrence of a specified event, the completion of a specified task or project, or on a fixed date other than the employee's normal or agreed retirement age," (The Labour Relations Amendment Act of 2004 Act No. 6 of 2014:1). Only if the nature of the work for which the employee is employed is of limited or definite duration, or if the employer can demonstrate another justifiable reason for determining the duration of the contract, may

employees be hired on a fixed-term contract or sequential fixed-term contracts for more than three months. Fixed-term contracts are acceptable if the worker is a student or recent graduate seeking to complete training or get practical experience before beginning a vocation or profession.

2.12.4 Work placement

The term 'placement' refers to any formal, structured work experience. Since the 1950s, internships have been a feature of engineering degrees in the United Kingdom. Gaining 'employability,' 'transferable,' or 'generic' abilities, building an awareness of the world and professional organizations, and learning how to use skills in the 'real world' have all been cited as their goals (Brown, 2016). Students gain experiential learning through placement-based training. The results of the study conducted by Brown (2016) indicated that transferable abilities are valued by learners, tutors, and managers, and students build transferable skills through work-based learning. Transferable talents are most efficiently cultivated in work-based learning.

2.12.5 Sandwich placements

Work proficiency can be obtained in a variety of ways: through short internships, part-time employment and employment preceding graduation, or by working with industry knowledge integrated into the curriculum. Sandwich assignments, on the other hand, are widely recognized as a highly effective approach to obtaining structured job experience while still pursuing formal education (Knight and Yorke 2004; Dean *et al.*, 2020). A placement must last at least 24 weeks and a maximum of 12 months to be considered a sandwich course. Placements are a great method to acquire hands-on experience.

2.12.6 Benefits of placements

Work placements, even if only for a short time, add greatly to a student's abilities and employability (Griffin & Coelho, 2019). According to Okolie *et al.* (2021), certain

abilities are more likely to be gained on the job than in the classroom, while the effectiveness of work-based learning may be boosted if it is included in a degree programme. Developing work-based improvement of abilities during the placement of individual students promotes personal development as the individual appreciates the commercial impact on the activities and subsequently maximises the learning process, as they must combine academic study with experience in the work environment (Detgen *et al.*, 2021).

Students gain the opportunity to acquire a variety of applicable or general skills in a work-related setting, such as communication, self-management, and solving problems. Placement students who develop such abilities in the industry appear to have a better chance of obtaining work after graduation. Demonstrating abilities based on actual working performance may also create a change in gaining first employment, with the former more inclined to find work within six months of graduating (Undale, 2021). Research (2014) showed that 37 percent of jobs at top recruiters who employed graduates were occupied by individuals who had previous work experience at a company, through either individual employment or placement.

2.12.7 Work shadowing

In work shadowing, graduates observe an employee at work in an organisation, gaining greater insight into their role, including the skills and challenges required. According to Buzzeo and Cifci (2017), job shadowing sometimes referred to as work shadowing, involves observing a competent employee at work for a short period. This might involve observing either one person or several employees performing various operational tasks. The goal of job shadowing for full-time students is to gain insight into specific work areas or career fields that interest them. It could be part of a work experience placement and could be considered a type of short-term work experience. Job shadowing could be especially helpful in high-skill and technical work areas, such as manufacturing, where it could be difficult to provide internships or involve students in primary work processes.

2.12.8 Practicum

Professional capabilities are created in the workplace as part of a practicum, to complete professional membership requirements. Job experience is frequently required for admission to an academic program, including learning and assessment based on the certifying body's requirements and professional abilities. Clinical placement, professional practice placement, and professional placement are other synonyms for practicum work experience (O'Shea, 2014).

2.12.9 Field experience

Field experience refers to work encounters that are relevant to the content of an academic degree and are intended to equip learners for professional practice. Learning is accomplished through supervision, guidance, and assessment during this job experience.

2.12.10 Fieldwork

Students are exposed to the working world through fieldwork experiences such as work activities, involvement in laboratories, site visits, field visits, or excursions (O'Shea, 2014). These exercises make advantage of previous experience to help students acquire specific academic topics. Work study and service industry placements are examples of fieldwork (O'Shea, 2014), which may or may not be related directly to the student's topic of study. These job experiences are intended to supplement students' general post-secondary education by providing non-curricular job experience connected to overall career and/or individual development.

2.13 WORK EXPERIENCE AND EMPLOYABILITY

Internships placements, cooperative education and internships, in which students apply and expand on-the-job skills and knowledge learnt at a tertiary institution, are not a recent characteristic of HE (Linn, 2015). However, they are constantly being highlighted as a panacea for bridging the gap between companies' need for

competent graduates and institutions' obligations to provide them (Silva *et al.*, 2016). When comparing graduates who have participated in a work placement to those who have not, job experiences, such as student work placement, are consistently related to greater employment rates. This is a strong argument for working while studying, but work-based learning is not available to all students through their academic programmes.

Employers consider work placement as a guide of capability. Capability, as recognised by employers, is typically founded on the willpower to find employment and bring work-related experience to the workplace (Smith and Worsfold, 2015). Work placement is seen as both a challenge and an opportunity. There are concerns about insufficient real learning prospects during the appointment and the possibility that prospective placement learners will be misused (Chillas, Marks & Galloway, 2015).

2.14 LINK BETWEEN EMPLOYABILITY AND HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS

Previous research has shown that possessing employability skills has the potential to ensure that graduates have successful careers by making them more employable during their working lives. Graduates' employability skills and real job prospects have become crucial measures of HEI success as a result of an expanding culture of responsibility and organisational corporatism at HEIs.

Employers have engaged in establishing curricula designed to achieve the development of particular skills or traits of graduates for employment (Jackson and Bridgstock, 2021), while new forms of HE governance have evolved to maximize resources. Higher education institutions are intended to generate graduates with a set of fundamental graduate skills, often known as employable skills, graduate qualities, or key competencies (Shivoro, Shalyefu & Kadhila, 2018). These talents, qualities, or learning outcomes principally support learners' acquisition of general and vocational/technical skills in response to the business or job market needs (Smail, 2014) or encourage a seamless process and incorporation into employment (International Labour Organisation, 2013).

Universities in SA have responded by emphasising the significance of employability for their learners and ensuring that it is given priority. The University of SA (UNISA) regards students' employability as a measure of its capacity to provide skills that match the demands of an international knowledge-based economy (Archer & Chetty, 2013). North-West University, on the other hand, expects graduates to have gained the requisite competencies and abilities to attain available positions in the workplace (Oladele, Nyambi & Mabe, 2013). Employers, on the other hand, question the quality of graduates, while HEIs believe that employers do not value their role in teaching qualified graduates (Cheng *et al.*, 2022; Ferns, Dawson & Howitt, 2019).

2.15 SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Hang (2021) points out that HEIs play a transformative function in equipping students to make societal changes. This necessitates a partnership between the HEIs and employers, which should not be viewed as a standalone nexus or "add-on" to academic learning. Furthermore, Tran *et al.* (2022) note that the employability of graduates should not be the primary focus; rather, it should be viewed as part of, and profoundly dependent on, the process of transformative lifelong learning. A turbulent economy and increasing unemployment describe the international scene. In light of this, SA, like several other countries, should be creating graduates who can survive in a decreasing international job market (Baron & Hartwig, 2020) given the country's extremely high unemployment rate (Ranchhod & Daniels, 2021; Metelerkamp, Drimie & Biggs, 2019).

As previously stated, many emerging economies, like SA, place a premium on HEIs that add to the overall economy. According to SA's National Development Plan (2011), HEIs serve two key roles in society: training individuals with strong skills for public and private sector employment needs and equipping them with new information for an evolving economy and society. The moral aim of HEIs is to satisfy the evolving requirements of the industry and employers (Shah & Nair, 2011) and to generate more employable graduates (Cheng *et al.*, 2022; Zighan & El-Qasem, 2021). Individuals' learning needs and expectations are met by improving their

cognitive capabilities throughout their life as mentioned in the White Paper on Education (1997).

The White Paper on Education (1997) highlights the importance of the HEI sector in satisfying society's developmental needs and fostering an expertise-driven and expertise-dependent society. For many years, South African HEIs have concentrated on career-oriented programmes with a strong focus on work-integrated learning. Closer relationships between HEIs and external stakeholders to improve employability may cause fears among HEI members that academic freedom would be compromised.

2.16 CURRENT TRENDS IN THE JOB MARKET

The labour market has changed, especially in recent years. Niemela (2016) notes that employers generally know that there is a large pool of applicants, so they can screen candidates and demand more from them. Recently, one of the main criteria for hiring a new employee has become the fact that the person is already employed. Accordingly, practical experience directly from the field is important. Various employers also have the idea of a dream employee in mind because there are so many job seekers available (Bolles, 2015).

The typical way companies fill their vacancies is to first look at current employees. This means that companies go through a list of existing full-time and part-time employees for promotion or rehire former employees or consultants to fill the vacancy. In this way, companies use a low-risk strategy for hiring. For the job seeker, this means they can take advantage of former employers and contacts by searching for job openings at these companies (Niemela, 2016). Many companies no longer hire workers directly, but instead meet their workforce needs through a network of smaller companies, shifting risk to the individual worker (Weil, 2014). Employers also use connections, such as friends and colleagues, when seeking candidates for trust reasons. Hence, job seekers need to expand their network connections to improve their chances of employment (Bolles, 2015).

2.17 REQUIREMENTS OF SOUTH AFRICAN INDUSTRIES FOR EMPLOYABILITY

A study authorised by Higher Education SA (HESA) and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) examined the qualities employers expect from graduates they hire and those they receive. Griesel and Parker (2009) mention that the key attributes sought by employers were the following:

- Skill in communication and English;
- Information communication technical skills;
- Soft skills (being able to adjust and survive);
- An excellent work ethic; and
- Individual creativity.

The main form of communication in SA and globally is English. Therefore, proficiency in this language had to be considered important by employers. Computer abilities are also highly recognized in this current digital age because they are part of everyday responsibilities in any company. Soft skills enhance hard talents, and an individual's capacity to adapt and adapt to an organisational setting will ultimately lead to employment success more than an individual who has trouble adjusting to a corporate culture or method of conducting business. An excellent work ethic and personal initiative are also important qualities sought by employers in SA. Work ethic plays an important role in any business and personal initiative and will result in a person working with little or no supervision.

2.18 IMPEDIMENTS TO GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY

When it comes to HE, students will not be able to consistently forecast their professional path with certainty, therefore they depend on information from teachers, parents, and support networks. In the face of this unpredictability, students choose a HEI based on the prospect of a large financial payoff upon graduation, and hence they invest finance in obtaining a qualification. These expectations more often

coincide with reality during economic booms when the market needs more workers to generate added productivity, and HEIs have a role to play in providing an educated future workforce during such times.

During a recession, however, when people are laid off, their anticipated returns may not be reached (Shapiro *et al.*, 2017). People can gain through education valuable skills that make them employable so that they can overcome unfavourable job conditions (Rae, 2010; Naong, 2011; Mbah, 2014). For example, learners who face critical economic insecurity reassess their future job routes to accommodate a more flexible workplace (Chen *et al.*, 2011). Graduates' perceptions of future returns are affected by these unpredictable circumstances. The assessment of job opportunities is influenced by both unpredictability and anticipation, and search costs are an expense factor in this process. Market factors also influence employment chances in diverse ways. Graduates are susceptible to differences in anticipated returns after graduation, and market flexibility is a major factor in anticipated outcomes. The prospect of political transformation and economic recession are included in the level of uncertainty. However, even if graduates have the necessary skills and talents to work, the market prevents them from doing so.

Economic and market developments, and graduates' traits, have an impact on graduate readiness for the workplace. Some graduates are still not employed as a result of being overeducated. Overeducation presents itself in graduates who have completed more than the socially appropriate amount of education. The inevitable imbalance between work opportunities and employees due to job flexibility and pay bargaining costs has been the topic of economic studies (Herz & van Rens, 2011). Meanwhile, the overflow of postgraduate degree holders might be seen as an example of a more realistic demand and supply law in the job market.

The above-average educated seek prospective jobs according to the qualification that they have achieved. With regards to the law of demand and supply in the labour market, graduates should find a job irrespective of their level of education which however is not taking place. Unemployment is a result of the mismatch between supply and demand. Overeducated graduates may have difficulty finding

employment, which negatively affects their earning potential, even if they eventually find employment (Salas-Velasco, 2021; Shi *et al.*, 2022).

When graduates think about what to do after they graduate, their plans and aspirations play a significant role in their decision. To make decisions about their future jobs, students consult additional sources of influence, such as social groups and academic advisors. The intrinsic decision-making process of students is influenced by social interactions (Constant, 2019; Tasgin & Coskun, 2018). Key stakeholders, including programmes offered by the government, can guide students when searching or planning for a job (Shamsuddin *et al.*, 2013). McKeown and Lindorff (2011) state that graduates tend to find employment on their own despite institutions' involvement in job placement.

During their studies, students learn about career paths, and in this process, their views and expectations are formed. Courses at educational institutions teach useful skills, but in practice, employment and rewards depend on individual circumstances. This is especially true when the chosen field of study is associated with specific occupations and industries. Societal needs and individual requirements determine the size of the labour force. Consequently, the unemployment rate in innovative fields such as health care is lower than in the established Liberal Arts and Humanities (Carnevale, Cheah & Strohl, 2013). Differently qualified graduates could therefore encounter very different conditions in the job market.

Lowden *et al.* (2011) cite several beliefs underlying employers' views of the skills that make new graduates employable. Institutions' work-related programmes, such as internships, are not viewed as contributing to realistic employability (Singh, 2022). Since the majors and academic backgrounds of individuals vary, such programmes may do little to enhance the employability skills of students. In addition, employers frequently question the support that institutions provide during such programmes.

Securing employment relies not only on academic success but also on the personal background of the individual. Gender, race, and socioeconomic elements have a role to play in whether an individual gets appointed (Pager & Pedulla, 2015).

Furthermore, the skills and experience acquired in tertiary education are at times insufficient for “entry-level jobs (Al-Shehab *et al.*, 2021). Sometimes training is restricted to a general level that does not cover the skills that are required for employment (Pauw, Oosthuizen & van der Westhuizen, 2008). Moreover, the conventional curricula offered by institutions do not meet the practical needs of society, and these differences contribute to unemployment (Sparber & Fan, 2012).

The job market needs both a suitably educated workforce and a precise perception of what the needs of the job market are to set the stage for appropriate job placement. The market also disseminates data about employment among its participants. Graduate competence and employability are linked to two concepts: the demands of the company and individual performance (Teijeiro, Rungo & Freire, 2013). Efforts to satisfy an employer's employment criteria are crucial to getting employed after graduation, and professionalism assesses how employable a person is.

2.19 DEVELOPING EMPLOYABLE GRADUATES

There are several definitions of employability that can be viewed from both an education and industry perspective. Industry views employability as the sum of related skills, attributes, and competencies that help individuals find a job and then perform the required job based on the expectations of technical and professional competencies acquired during their studies. On the other hand, academic institutions consider employability skills as transferable qualities and abilities that enable graduates to find suitable employment (Lowden *et al.*, 2011). Kelly, Moore and Lyons (2022) suggest that to improve graduate employability, HE would need to rethink the skills training offered to ensure more work-related activities. This would require the inclusion of employers in the curriculum.

Ferns *et al.* (2019) emphasise the need for collaboration among all stakeholders (government, industry, universities and students) to address the perceived and actual deficits in graduates. Evidence from the industry indicates that work experience is critical to improving graduate employability and points to the need for

the industry to be clearer, more precise, and more effective in formulating its requirements for universities to improve graduate employability (Inceoglu *et al.*, 2019). Insights into employability from employers' perspectives play a key role in developing graduates who are suitable for the workplace. Hence, close links between HE and industry need to be the norm and they need to be maintained to identify employability skills that should be embedded in the HE offers.

Suleman (2016) explains two approaches that can be used to achieve and maintain close links between HE and industry, namely the direct approach and the indirect approach. The direct approach involves collecting information on hiring criteria that indicate skill preferences, while the indirect approach involves examining employer satisfaction after graduates are employed. These approaches can be used as methods to ensure graduate employability in the workplace. Jackson (2016) points out that the responsibility of stakeholders in the industry in compiling market-based employability requirements is critical.

2.20 CONCEPT OF GRADUATENESS AND GRADUATE

2.20.1 Defining the concept of graduate

To complete tasks and find solutions, a graduate employs a fourfold system of skills-based problem-solving, as well as the capacity to cooperate with people, communicate effectively, and have self-awareness (Baran-Łucarz & Klimas, 2020; Wong *et al.*, 2022). An individual who has finished a degree or training and acquired an academic degree is also considered a graduate.

2.20.2 Defining the concept of gradueness

The concept of "graduateness" is defined by Grant (2010: 7) as "a job-literate, technically numerate, professionally skilled, communicatively competent, and ethically sound graduate who is ready for the world of work." The meaning of the concept 'graduateness' according to Boshoff and Fernandes (2020) has gradually changed to one that involves achieving an ever-increasing knowledge-based world.

The gradueness of HE credentials is defined by Crisp, Letts and Higgs (2019) and Mgaiwa (2021) as including the information, abilities, and attitudes that are necessary for today's industry.

The learning of subject-specific skills and competencies at a HEI is also part of gradueness, which comprises the development of various traits defined by teachers and employers to assist graduate growth and the completion of a degree (Cilliers, 2012). Tacit learning and tacit knowledge, according to Abbas and Sagsan (2020), is a graduate's mix of graduate traits at various levels of working know-how that a graduated individual may or may not have obtained via a degree programme or formal study. The confluence of graduate traits leads to a condition known as "gradueness" (Naidoo, 2013). Fynn, Dladla and Erasmus (2019) described gradueness as a set of attributes that typically characterise an individual who has completed a course of study developed under quality systems that are nationally monitored. In addition, it may also be referred to as a student's level of preparedness after finishing a course or degree programme (Jackson, 2019).

Graduation is evolving in response to an increasingly knowledge-based global environment. Tertiary education performs a formative role by creating a certain set of abilities and qualities that define a graduate's gradueness in three holistic, encompassing aspects of intellectual and personal growth: i) scholarship, ii) global and moral citizenship, and iii) lifelong learning are all aspects of graduate attitudes and perspectives on the world, as well as the graduate's self-perception (Coetzee, 2012; Steur *et al.*, 2012).

Graduates should be able to use what they have learned to solve significant and complicated issues and express what they have learned confidently and effectively (Coetzee, 2014). Graduate workers should seek to participate completely, creatively, morally, and appropriately in international and national society as members of local, international and national communities (Coetzee, 2014). Graduate workers, who are expected to be lifelong students, must be dedicated to and capable of doing so to further their knowledge of the world and their position in it (Coetzee, 2014). As a general rule, these talents are seen as an indication that an individual is prepared for

work and is marketable (Griesel & Parker, 2009; Raftapoulous, Coetzee and Visser, 2009; Coetzee, 2014).

2.20.3 Graduateness attributes

2.20.3.1 Scholarship

Scholarly endeavours are an expression of a graduate's approach toward learning. Those who are graduate students should be champions in the creation and application of new information and understanding via critical thinking, synthesis, and research. They should be able to use and effectively express their expertise to solve significant and difficult situations. Decision-making and problem-solving abilities; analytical thinking skills; and entrepreneurial skills were recognized by Coetzee (2012) as three sets of skills that are linked to graduates. Decision-making and problem-solving abilities refer to the capability to consider the intricacies of the greater business, cultural, economic, and business realities while addressing a situation or problem and begin the required adjustments to enable professional and personal progress. This involves the capacity to think outside the box and come up with unique solutions to problems, as well as the capacity to make precise judgments that inspire others (Coetzee, 2012).

For businesses to thrive, they must be able to solve problems creatively, which necessitates critical reasoning and confidence in making decisions (Yamoah, 2010). Higher-order critical or introspective thinking is required to effectively explain and make logical judgments based on the analysis of data and information, decomposing data into its parts to recognise relationships and patterns and drawing insightful conclusions from numerical data are all examples of analytical thinking skills (Coetzee, 2012).

Entrepreneurial abilities are the ability to engage in economic activities or enterprises with critical thought, ambition, and proactivity, whether as a founder and operator of one's firm or as an employee making a substantial contribution to a business (Coetzee, 2012). Knowing how to recognize and deal with organizational or team

politics, as well as having a good understanding of finances, is an important part of being entrepreneurial. It also involves addressing issues or circumstances in an autonomous, rational, and disciplined manner, taking into account the repercussions of possible solutions and analysing their implications in light of the wider cultural, corporate, or economic reality (Coetzee, 2012). Employees' entrepreneurial abilities may be used for the benefit of the organisation and their success and performance if they are channelled into projects that are aligned with the organisation's objectives, results, and strategy (Culbertson, Smith & Leiva, 2011).

2.20.3.2 Global and moral citizenship

Graduates' views or positions of the world and its people are reflected in their international and moral citizenship. Graduates must seek to contribute to the world and local communities in which they live as fully, meaningfully, morally and responsible members of their communities (Steuer *et al.*, 2012). There are three sets of talents related to international and moral responsibility in graduates: ethical and responsible behaviour, knowledge discovery and application skills as well as interactivity.

As a professional, community member, or employee, an individual must follow the ethical norms and values of a profession, community, and workplace. The ability to motivate and encourage people to act ethically in the context of their community and the environment is also an important part of being a leader (Coetzee, 2012). The importance of ethical and socially responsible behaviour in business operations is widely acknowledged by organisations and society at large. Thus, they are increasingly demanding that graduates comprehend the necessity and repercussions of ethical and socially responsible behaviour for their studies and employment (Nicholson & DeMoss, 2009).

The ability to present and apply information means being able to present one's knowledge, facts, ideas and opinions (orally or in writing) clearly and concisely to persuade an audience, evading jargon or language that is complicated when presenting insights or ideas. Thus, an individual can quickly remember data and

apply it to offer solutions to change their community, personal life, or workplace positively by deliberating a variety of options (Coetzee, 2012). There are three pillars to Reissner's (2014) definition of graduate education: reading and writing; critical thinking; and professional growth.

Organisation and confidence in presenting ideas, as well as the ability to concentrate and display excitement and clarity, are critical for success in the workplace (Watson & Adamson, 2010). Graduates who are adept at presenting and applying knowledge (written or spoken) to enlighten or persuade others are more likely to be successful in the job after graduation (Watson & Adamson, 2010). According to Cameron (2007), graduates who are proficient in analytical reading and writing will have an advantage over their peers when it comes to furthering their education and advancing their careers.

Interpersonal skills include the ability to communicate effectively and efficiently with individuals from a variety of backgrounds, cultures, and lines of authority, as well as the ability to create and maintain strong relationships with others (Coetzee, 2012). Griesel and Parker (2009) mention that in addition to fluency in English as a language of business, employers look for graduates with specific knowledge and diversified communication, interpersonal, and teamwork who can work with professionals from several other disciplines in a variety of contexts and who can critically choose, acquire, use, and generate new knowledge to benefit an organisation's goals.

2.20.3.3 Lifelong learning

Graduates' self-perceived commitment to lifelong learning is referred to as their lifelong learning mentality. Graduates who want to further their knowledge of the world and their role in it must be self-motivated and capable of self-improvement as lifelong learners (Merenkov and Sushchenko, 2016). How university students develop and meet their need for additional education. To be a global and moral citizen, a graduate must have two sets of abilities: intentional behaviour and a commitment to lifelong learning (Coetzee, 2012). To be goal-directed, an

individual must set realistic objectives, devise a strategy to accomplish those goals, carry out the plan, and fulfil deadlines.

The ability to locate new knowledge and use it to solve issues or make choices is an important part of having a goal-oriented way of behaving, as is using the Internet to do it (Coetzee, 2012). A person's self-directed employability, according to Bezuidenhout (2011), is influenced by his or her capacity to set and achieve goals. With an ongoing learning approach, graduates gain the ability to recognize and respond to their cognitive metacognition as well as an openness toward the process of learning new information, skills, and talents throughout their life (Coetzee, 2012). Higher-level critical thinking abilities may be developed through reflecting on and analysing one's work (Reissner, 2010). When it comes to the abilities and attributes of graduates. Coetzee (2012) follows global frameworks that emphasize decision making and problem-solving, rational reasoning, effective communication (verbal and written) proficiency in English, collaboration, interpersonal abilities, research skills (information literacy), and ethics as critical overall graduate skills in various fields.

2.21 GRADUATE RECRUITMENT

Recruitment, according to Kumari (2013), is the process of recruiting and motivating prospective individuals to apply for a position in a company. For a company to be successful, it must find the perfect person for the position. Additionally, the term "recruitment" refers to the actions taken by an organisation with the primary goal of seeking out and recruiting new personnel (Gilch & Sieweke, 2021). Grobler *et al.* (2012), on the other hand, characterise recruitment as the means of determining competent people who are willing and have the appropriate skills and expertise to fill open jobs in organisations. Recruitment thus encompasses determining what a job requires, recruiting candidates for that role, conducting interviews and making a final selection, as well as bringing in the new hires and ensuring their integration into the company.

Recruitment is defined by Tien *et al.* (2021) as the human resource management actions undertaken by organisations to hire properly qualified individuals who

possess the needed potential, abilities, and traits. In addition, recruiting aids organisations in achieving their objectives. Organisations' excellent public image is bolstered by their ability to recruit and retain talented people via the recruiting process. The majority of definitions of recruiting, refer to a communal phenomenon of finding a suitable applicant for a position in an organisation. All of the aforementioned definitions consider recruiting as a business process that is critical to an organisation's success.

2.21.1 Recruitment process

When a post becomes vacant and the necessary permission is given, the recruiting process starts. This is followed by the creation of a job specification, which outlines the abilities, skills, and experience needed to do the position. Measures must be taken to guarantee that the best potential applicant is hired, who has the necessary skills, knowledge, and abilities (Manzoor *et al.*, 2019; Werdhiastutie, Suhariadi & Partiw, 2020).

- **Recruitment policy**

A recruitment policy is an official document with extensive procedures of how an organisation should conduct the recruitment policy. In short-term, the recruitment policy specifies the institution's position regarding the general aims of recruitment and the standard of equal opportunities in recruitment. An appropriate recruitment policy comprises transparent procedures, which support the recruitment of the appropriate talent for the job at the right time, and by so doing contributes to the high-performance team culture (Benedict, 2012). It is essential for every organisation to have a recruitment policy to be used as guideline to regulate whether to recruit internally or externally.

According to van der Westhuizen *et al.* (2011), offer broad recruitment policy guidelines in very short-term to stipulate the position of the organisation regarding the general objectives of recruitment and the principles of job opportunities. An uncomplicated recruitment policy should be able to answer questions in terms of

addressing the aims of recruitment in an organisation, legal prescriptions on fairness and discrimination, conducting recruitment within budget limitations, urgency in filling vacancies and designated personnel responsible for the implementation of the policy (van der Westhuizen *et al.*, 2011). Van der Westhuizen *et al.* (2011) further added that government policy and regulations are the strategic documents to take into account in determining recruitment policy.

- **Recruitment practices**

Recruitment practices are procedures that an organisation incorporates into its recruitment processes. The chief objective of evaluating candidates in order to fill vacancies is to identify the ones who best meet the staffing goals of the organisation (Philips & Gully, 2014). Best practices relating to recruitment and selection enhance value to the organisation as they augment the recruitment and selection processes and benchmarking, thus, supporting the organisation to make the best possible appointments (Bazana & Reddy, 2021).

- **Screening**

Screening refers to the process employers assume when appointing new employees. This is done to regulate whether an applicant possesses the required qualifications and experience needed for the position for which he or she is applying (Doyle, 2017). According to Rushchenko, Rushchenko and Plakhova (2020), screening can be conducted in different ways across various stages of the recruitment process, including application tracking, pre-screening candidates and verifying the selected candidate for employment. Screening is further done to determine whether the applicant's skills, abilities and job preferences match any of the available jobs in the organisation (Byars & Rue, 2011). The phases of the recruiting process are shown in Table 2.3 below.

Table 2.3: Steps in the recruitment process

| Recruitment process | Brief description |
|---|--|
| <i>Step 1:</i> Identify the need to recruit | Generate a new position or ascertain a vacancy left by staff who have resigned or were promoted. |
| <i>Step 2:</i> Update the job description, specification and profile | To set a definite goal for recruiting and selection, choose the most relevant profile to use. All pertinent information regarding the context of the job should be reviewed. |
| <i>Step 3:</i> Refer to the recruitment policy | The policy offers a guide that is derived from primary legislation. |
| <i>Step 4:</i> Consider factors affecting recruitment programme | The factors incorporate legislation, the timing of recruitment and conditions of the labour market. |
| <i>Step 5:</i> Consider the sources of recruitment | The benefits and limitations of utilising internal or external recruitment companies should be deliberated. |
| <i>Step 6:</i> Choose the appropriate recruitment method | The benefits and limitations of utilising internal or external methods of recruitment should be deliberated. |
| <i>Step 7:</i> Develop the recruitment advertisement | The position, size, layout, visuals, organisation logo and name, nature of the job, kind of person required in terms of credentials, experience and abilities, as well as remuneration and conditions of employment, all be taken into consideration while developing the advertising of a position. |
| <i>Step 8:</i> Place the advertisement in the most appropriate and suitable media | Make use of the choices made in Step 6. Newspapers, online applications for jobs, journals, notice boards, and exhibits are all examples of HE-related media. |
| <i>Step 9:</i> Ensure availability of application blanks | An applicant's experience, job history, and credentials may be gleaned from the application forms they fill out. |

Source: Amos et al. (2008)

As indicated in Table 2.3, there are nine steps to be considered when recruiting in an organisation. Process clearly articulated with practically applicable steps for the graduate, and the organisation. Time management efficiency with direct cost benefit and agile placement of the graduate to the role. Guideline steps a clear framework to

promote a fair and transparent process for internal and external stakeholders, reducing the risks of delays and possible unrest or grievance process.

The organisation's judgement on whether to implement the internal or external depends on many factors. Motivating factors have been revealed on the recruitment and selection process in previous studies, but overall, there are similarities between those factors and differences that may occur based on the landscape of the work of each organisation and on the work environment in which the company does its business. Some factors, from a study by Islam (2010) are as follows:

- i) internal factors: recruitment policy, human resource planning, size of the organisation, cost of recruitment, growth and expansion.
- ii) External factors: supply and demand, labour market, image/goodwill, political/social and legal, environment, unemployment rate and competitors.

In addition, Mustapha, Ilesanmi and Aremu (2013) mention that the following factors have also been identified as factors that govern sources of recruitment; organisational policy regarding recruitment, availability of the requisite employee within the organisation and its effect on the overall organisational objectives, level of position to be filled, number of job positions to be filled. Aguado (2019) agreed with the factors as mentioned above, but added factors related to the criteria of recruitment technical criteria, which are professional skills and experience. Candidate's personality and charisma are the most effective criteria in the recruitment process in France. Communication skills and knowledge of foreign languages are also rated very important, in ensuring effective communication.

On advantages and disadvantages of internal employment, this was cited in the study by Zebedeus and Sihotang (2015) the advantages of the internal recruitment are as follows: a healthier evaluation for the candidates and lessens the training time, it is considered fast in compared to external recruitment, it is cheaper, and current employees are motivated. But at the same time, it has the disadvantages of creating vacancies that can suppress the diversity of politics and may be the shortage

of candidates. On the other hand, Bernardin and Russell (2013) mentioned the advantages of external employment, increases diversity, facilitates growth, can provide training time and is also considered to be able to solve new problems. The disadvantages of adopting external employment are expensive and the recruitment process takes longer time. The procedure may have less valid data on the candidates, and it may hinder the upward movement of individuals. However, it helps to generate a pool of talents from potential candidates for the benefit of the organisation (Pandita, 2019; Gilch & Sieweke, 2021). It increases the total number of candidates looking for work at the lowest cost. Increase the accomplishment rate of the selection process by reducing the amount of unemployment of qualified candidates.

2.21.2 Internal and external recruitment

Grobler *et al.* (2012) urge that organisations select the brightest graduates, contact multiple recruiting agencies and develop a recruitment portal on the company's website. Recruitment comes from both internal and external sources (Flippo, 2013). Internal sources of recruiting, such as past resumes or candidate databases, are included in Flippo's (2013) list of sources. Additionally, internal recruiting practices such as transferring personnel from one section to another without giving them any advancement in their position or status were discussed.

Several avenues of overseas recruiting are discussed by Kumar, Ramendran and Yacob (2012). These include professional relations, referrals, headhunting organisations, educational institutions, consultants, walk-ins, and agents. Shafique (2012), on the other hand, identifies various external recruitment methods used by companies. These include print and electronic advertisements, including electronic and newspaper media. There are advantages and disadvantages to internal and external recruitment. Gamage (2014) argues that internal recruitment has several advantages because it inspires individuals to get prepared for potential promotions or transfers. Internal promotions also lead to higher morale in an organisation. The disadvantage is that it could limit innovation and new talent.

Li (2015) states that any organisation that engages in external recruitment has a larger talent pool to select from, which raises the risk of discovering the right applicant. According to Li (2015), an organisation's ability to stay competitive is dependent on its ability to attract and retain top talent via external recruiting. Shafique (2012) argues that when hiring externally, the candidate takes longer to fit into the culture of the organisation, which could affect employee morale.

2.21.3 Sources of external recruitment

As the study focuses only on graduates who are being recruited for the first time, only external recruitment sources are included. Table 2.4 below illustrates the common sources of external recruitment.

Table: 2.4: Sources of external recruitment

| Reference | Description |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Grobler <i>et al.</i> (2003: 172) | Direct applications and employee referrals University/school campus recruiting Private employment/recruitment agencies Advertising Direct mail Radio and television Internet |
| Schultz (2004: 221) | Advertisements Employment agencies Campus recruiting Direct mail E-recruitment |

2.22 EMPLOYMENT LEGISLATION

- **The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996**

The Bill of Rights (Section 9) of the South African Constitution specifies essential rights, including the right to equality. This bill ensures that everyone is treated

equally in the eyes of the law. As a result, workers and citizens alike must share in the rewards of a more equitable workplace. Under Section 23 of the Constitution, every person has a right to a workplace free from discrimination. As noted by Swanepoel (2020) law protects the rights of those seeking work.

Selection process techniques, both internal and external, should be compatible with policies, procedures, and practices that promote equity and fairness. As a result, they should be directed by the constitutional duties of justice, equality, and non-discrimination. The organisation's selection techniques, procedures, and policies should be able to stand up to the Constitution's requirements for equity, non-discrimination and equality.

- **Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995**

Labour Relations Act (LRA) is designed to foster economic growth, social fairness, industrial peace, and workplace democratisation (LRA, 1995). In light of this, the LRA lays forth particular principles that apply to the workplace and must be adhered to in all instances by workers and employers. Specifically, the LRA prohibits employers from unjustly stereotyping employees, as well as discriminating against job applicants. In addition to employee and job-seeker safeguards, employers' rights to freedom of association are protected as well (LRA, Section 4-5).

- **Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998**

The Employment Equity Act (EEA) was signed into law by the Cabinet on October 12, 1998, to guarantee that all employees are treated equally and fairly in the workplace (EEA, 1998 Section 2a). Employers are required by the EEA that the interpretation of the Act by following the Constitution must be applied in all applicable norms of good labour practice, and with all relevant labour legislation. Human resource management responsibilities such as recruiting and selection are explicitly excluded from the scope of the law's focus on ensuring equality of opportunity in the workplace. Discrimination based on single or several reasons is explicitly prohibited under the law.

- **Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997**

“The purpose of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) is to promote economic development and social justice by fulfilling its main objectives. The main objectives of the BCEA are to implement and regulate the right to fair labour practices enshrined in Section 23, Subsection 1 of the Constitution” (BCEA, 1997: 6).

2.23 CONCLUSION

This chapter explored the concept of work experience and further discussed employability, theories of employability, and models of employability. This chapter highlighted the human capital and signal theory of employability emphasizes how various groups, namely the academics, employers, and employees, have varying levels of power and possibilities. The four stages of competency that unpack ignorance, awareness, leaning and mastering. Regarding work experience further discussion was done on revolution of employee experience, cultural environment, technological environment and physical environment. It was crucial to discuss the diverse types of work experience that are suitable for graduates. Work experience and employability forms an important part of the study and this area was highlighted in this chapter. The link between employability and HEIs was highlighted, since graduates are the product of HEIs, it was imperative to discuss that area. The concept of gradueness, graduate and its attributes formed an important discussion in this chapter. The chapter further addressed graduate recruitment, internal and external recruitment. The chapter concluded with the discussion of employment legislation that is applicable in South Africa. The next chapter addresses the graduate employability within a South African context.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Employability is not limited to a particular course of study. It transcends all facets of educational institutions, departments, and degree programmes, as long as the goal is to produce graduates. Employability is a lifelong process (Lu, Nghia, Bui & Singh, 2022), and no one is ever perfectly employed. The rapid increase in the unemployment rate has become a major cause for concern (Kayode, Arome & Silas, 2014). Several graduates and employable adults either are finding it difficult to secure employment or are being laid off for one reason or another (Uddin, 2013). Due to the increasing unemployment rate among graduates, many scholars and researchers have called for the reform and re-modularisation of the school curriculum (Kayode *et al.*, 2014).

It has also been argued that public and private HEIs should be evaluated based on the employability of their graduates (Amusan *et al.*, 2016). There is no doubt that a skills gap and educational imbalance already exists between educational institutions and the industry (Bowman, 2016). Today, the technological shift from product to service industries (El Mansour & Dean, 2016) is exacerbating employability problems. This has led to a skills gap in developed countries; while the mismatch between graduates' skills and employers' needs, as well as students' lack of contact with labour market realities, has been recognised as one of the elements responsible for high unemployment rates worldwide. Mansour and Dean (2016), like many other researchers, views employability as the capability of people to use their skills, knowledge, and attitudes effectively in a given context to support themselves and realise their potential by maintaining employment.

In this chapter, the conceptual basis of employability and the historical progression of the perception of employability is explored. A brief analysis of global graduate employability trends, globalisation, and the link between higher education graduates and labour market Graduate employability and the role of university education and developing academic competencies at the university is also discussed to get more insight. The chapter concludes with the last discussion on work experience with regards to study success and learning.

3.2 THE CONCEPTUAL BASIS OF EMPLOYABILITY

Nielsen (1999: 393) mentions that “employability conceptually expresses how well an individual's competencies and skills match the demands of the labour market, that is: whether it is possible to be employed with the skills and competencies available.” This perspective assumes that people's lack of employability is attributable to their unwillingness and desire to work, instead of a lack of job demand from employers. Other approaches, more in line with Gazier's (2001) enhanced version of employability, adopt a comprehensive approach to employability by focusing on contextual issues including the influence of limited job opportunities (Hartshorn & Sear, 2005).

It is suggested that the literature and government approaches to employability have emphasised employability as essentially a procurement or personal construct (Hartshorn & Sear, 2005; Sanders & de Grip, 2004; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Peck and Theodore (2000: 729) emphasise that while interest in employability is fairly recent, “the kind of supply-side fundamentalism involved is certainly not.” Generally, supply-side definitions of employability rely on limited characteristics and Bridgstock (2009: 32) emphasises that the “skills and dispositions that individuals use to make themselves marketable to potential employers are primarily concerned with short-term employment outcomes”.

3.3 THE HISTORICAL PROGRESSION OF THE PERCEPTION OF EMPLOYABILITY

The current discussion over employability has historical roots that go back approximately 100 years ago. Gazier's work on employability (1998a, 1998b, 2001) provides a valuable account of the evolution of the concept to the definitions accepted today. Gazier distinguishes between seven operational versions of the employability concept, as follows:

- **Dichotomic employability**

This version of the concept originated in the early twentieth century in Great Britain and the United States (US). This articulation of the idea of employability is described as "dichotomous" by Gazier (2001), because it concentrated on the opposing sides of "employable" and "unemployable," with little or no variation. Employable refers to individuals who were able and willing to work; and unemployable refers to individuals who were unable to work and need 'assistance' (Gazier, 1998a, 1998b, 2001).

- **Socio-medical employability**

This method was developed in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and other countries before the 1950s. It refers to the gap between physically, socially, or intellectually challenged people's present job skills and the job requirements of employment (Gazier, 1998a, 1998b, 2001).

- **Manpower policy employability**

This version was developed primarily in the 1960s in the US. The underlying themes of "socio-medical" employability have been expanded to other marginalised communities, once again focusing on the gap between the disadvantaged's existing labour abilities and the job expectations (Gazier, 1998a, 1998b, 2001).

- **Flow employability**

This formulation originated in the French Sociology literature of the 1960s, which focused on the demand side and accessibility of jobs in the local and national economy, defining employability as "the objective expectation or greater or lesser probability that a person seeking a job will find one" (Gazier, 1998b: 44).

- **Labour market performance employability**

Since the late 1970s, this method has been employed all over the world. This interpretation of the concept concentrates on employment outcomes achieved through policy interventions, which can be measured in terms of days employed, work hours, and pay rates, as well as other employment outcomes for people who take part in jobs-related programmes (Gazier, 1998a, 1998b, 2001).

- **Labour market performance employability**

In the late 1980s, this formulation appeared in the literature on North American and European human resource development (HRD). It represents individuals and businesses' recognition that successful career growth necessitates the growth of transferable abilities and the ability to switch professions. The emphasis is once again on the individual, with workers being encouraged to develop their skills and connections at work to enhance their placement when they want or prefer to find new employment.

- **Collaborative employability**

Towards the late 1980s, this approach gained traction in North America and then globally, emphasising personal initiative while also acknowledging that a person's employability is dependent on the employability of others as well as the opportunities, institutions, and regulations of the employment market. This might be seen as a statement about how important employers and labour demand are in establishing a person's employability. The positioning of policy toward the long-term

unemployed and other marginalised people, and the consequent focus by many Western governments on activation policies to prevent long-term joblessness and employment market disadvantage, are two major operational implications of this employability approach (Gazier, 1998a, 1998b, 2001).

3.4 DEFINING BUSINESS GRADUATES

According to Akter (2020), business student usually refers to a person who obtained a university degree in Business Administration. Graduates of Business Administration programmes typically major in general management, finance, accounting, marketing, or strategy. There is no clear and consistent definition of business education in the literature that is universally accepted. Many scholars and authors have different views about business education and define the term differently from different perspectives.

According to Colby, Ehrlich, Sullivan and Dolle (2011), the sum of knowledge, skills, and aptitudes that are required for successfully promoting and administering a business enterprise is perceived as business education. Furthermore, Ubulom (2012) stated that business education is a broad, comprehensive discipline whose instructional programme encompasses the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed by all people in order to effectively manage their personal businesses and economic systems, as well as the vocational knowledge and skills needed for entry-level employment and advancement in a broad range of business careers.

Business education can also be referred to as the pedagogical and business competencies necessary for teaching business attitudes, concepts, skills, and knowledge. Business education can also be defined as the aspects of an educational or training process that an individual receives with the primary goal of enabling him to acquire adequate attitudes, concepts, knowledge, understanding, and skills in business activities for personal or vocational use, such as a career as an administrator or manager, or wherever he may find himself in the business world (Ubulom, 2012). One of the major objectives of business education is to provide technical competencies to business graduates so they can have a successful career

as business professionals (Akter, 2020). Every organisation seeks competitive advantages that can be achieved through productive efficiency, creativity, and innovation, and business education enables them to fulfill that objective by provoking thoughts and discussions about business-oriented human development and the creation of new knowledge (Akter, 2020).

3.5 GLOBAL GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY TRENDS

Since the primary purpose of any HE is to generate graduates who are prepared for employment, the argument over employability has long dominated the conversation (Jackson, 2017). Graduate employment is a topic of enormous concern to researchers, governments, and curriculum developers globally because of its importance. Graduate employability has a wide range of consequences, from poor economic growth to psychological issues (Da Silva & Marcolan, 2015) to societal upheaval in some nations (Pervaiz, Saleem & Sajjad, 2012). Unemployment, in Pakistan for example, is said to cause social strife and psychological issues (Pervaiz *et al.*, 2012). In Turkey, a study by Bilgic and Yilmaz (2013) identified a link between joblessness and psychological health issues among graduate participants.

China generates approximately seven million graduates each year (Ding, Yu, and Yu, 2017), however, there were approximately two million jobless graduates in 2013 (Chan, 2015). Approximately 25 to 30 percent of graduates in India, one of the world's largest HE systems (second only to China), are employable (Tilak, 2020). Unemployment rates in Taiwan amongst graduates outnumber those who of other education levels (Wu, 2011). Graduate joblessness is a concern in the United States, according to Vedder *et al.* (2013, cited in Nghia, 2019), where roughly 48 percent of four-year college graduates are unemployed in occupations that need a degree (Nghia, 2019). In European countries, the picture is equally depressing. In the United Kingdom, graduates have a 47 percent unemployment rate (Mok & Jiang, 2018), while in Spain, graduates have a 15.5 percent jobless rate (Statista Portal, cited in Nghia, 2019).

Although there is no proven link between unemployment and rates of suicide in Japan, Chen *et al.* (2012) found a high link between unemployment and suicide rates in their study. Unemployment is thus a significant problem in various countries, particularly in developing ones, including SA. Overall, worldwide unemployment may be traced back to the internationalisation of the job market, which is fuelled by technological advancements that necessitate new skills. According to numerous research, internationalisation has resulted in a huge upheaval of economic relations and corporate models, owing in part to technological innovation (Walsh, 2018). Jobs are being displaced and the skills required in the job market are changing as a result of such disruption (Oliver, 2015).

In Europe, the constant shift from a service to a manufacturing economy (Dolphin, 2015) is unquestionably leading to changes in the labour market that require new skills and a more skilled workforce. Similarly, automation threatens 47 percent of US jobs (Frey & Osborne, 2013), 40 percent of Australian jobs (Durant-Whyte *et al.*, 2015), and 77 percent and 69 percent of Chinese and Indian jobs, respectively (Frey *et al.*, 2016). A study by Peters (2018) found that over the past decade automated machines using artificial intelligence and robotics have largely replaced routine and manual labour. These advancements will undoubtedly alter the nature of employment in both industries and occupations, resulting in job losses. For example, Ford (2009, cited in Peters, 2018) forecasted that technological advances will result in massive employment losses, with up to half of all occupations being lost. Even though various insightful research has been conducted on unemployment and graduate employability, many are limited to developed countries (Bennett, 2019).

3.6 HIGHER EDUCATION GRADUATES AND LABOUR MARKET

The rising trend of graduate unemployment can be seen across the world (Green & Henseke, 2014). In SA, a similar pattern is observed, and the difficulty is not to merely address unemployment among graduates, but also to integrate those newly entering the labour market after mass enrolment in HEIs. According to Tjonneland (2017), there are 26 public universities in SA with approximately one million learners, while 700 000 learners are enrolled in more than 50 Technical Vocational Education

Training (TVET) colleges. Another 90 000 learners are enrolled at several private institutions. SA has also witnessed a sharp increase in the number of learners. The number of learners at universities has increased from about 500 000 in 1994, while the number of learners in colleges has risen from about 200 000 in the year 2000. The majority of learners are now African. This is significant growth, however, in comparison to other middle-income developing nations, the percentage of learners in HEIs in SA is still inadequate with the size of the population (55 million). The government plans to increase the number of HE students to 1.5 million by 2030.

According to the Labour Force Statistics SA (2020:1), “unemployment breaks down by education level as follows: 54.8 percent of those with less than matric; 35.4 percent with matric; 6.8 percent with tertiary qualifications (not from a university); 2.3 percent graduates; and 0.7 percent classified as other”. As Mahlangu (2020) notes, graduates are increasingly finding themselves in dead-end internships and learnerships. Learnerships that historically employed those whose highest educational attainment was a baccalaureate degree are increasingly raising training requirements to a bachelor's degree. These learnerships and internships entice graduates by promising to provide them with skills that will make them more marketable after their contract ends.

3.7 GLOBALISATION

Since the demise of apartheid Jenkins (2006: 649) mentions that SA has become progressively integrated with the international economy, owing to political and economic modernisation as well as demands to transform the country's institutional and economic foundation to enhance demographic representation (Klein & Wöcke, 2007). Globalisation is a notable feature of the twenty-first century, and it refers to "trade without boundaries, as well as the interconnectedness of economic operations in many areas" (Cascio & Aguinis, 2005: 5).

Globalisation according to Schermerhorn, Hunt and Osborne (1997:22) is the “new world order that offers a new organisational setting distinguished by international interdependence of resources, product markets, suppliers and organisational

competition". However, globalisation encompasses more than just an open globalised economy and concomitant commercial processes. Economic, political, and social globalisation are the three elements of globalisation identified by Dreher (2006). Long-distance flows of money, commodities, and services, as well as opinions and information linked with market transactions, define economic globalisation. Political globalisation is concerned with the spread of policy decisions, whereas social globalisation is concerned with the distribution of information, concepts, individuals, and images. "All of these aspects of globalisation are largely responsible for changing the spatial nature of what work is, what activities it is composed of, and how individuals experience work and its impact on others" (Jones, 2008: 24).

The revolution in information technologies, for example, has had a significant impact on how organisations interact, money transfers, and reduced transportation costs, to name some examples. As a result, many businesses have discovered that staging different stages of production in various parts of the globe is cost-effective (Richardson 2000). Globalisation, in turn, brings enormous changes for consumers and employers globally through the flow of capital and commodities, as well as, to a growing extent, labour (Cascio & Aguinis, 2005). This has ramifications not only because of the way businesses operate but also for individual careers.

Globalisation has also changed the way businesses competed in the past. Organisations have started competing with developing countries globally and not only in the industrialised West. This is partly owing to the establishment of free trade zones, which have improved cross-national economic flows. To boost competitiveness, corporations have formed collaborative strategic alliances and have undergone other forms of reorganisation such as acquisitions, mergers, and privatisations (Sparks, Faragher & Cooper, 2001: 489; Thomas, Lazarova & Inkson, 2005: 342). This means that to improve the productivity of the organisation, personnel must learn new skills and launch innovative business models. This also means that staff must be more adaptive to deal with major changes in the organisation.

“In an article on the impact of globalisation in SA, Edwards (2001: 66) contends that technological changes have resulted in a move away from lower-skilled labour because of the higher skill requirements of companies”. This skill bias in the industrial trade, particularly exports, suggests that South African businesses are raising their skill levels to compete more effectively globally. On the negative side, basic and unskilled work is becoming extremely difficult to find work. As a result, the author believes that improving the educational quality of the workforce in SA is critical due to the high skill intensity of production. Lynham and Cunningham (2006) point out that this is especially significant in light of rising high-skilled workforce migration from SA to various other countries.

Organisations are increasingly concentrating on overseas markets in today's global world, primarily to cut costs. Developed-world businesses compete fiercely with developing-world competitors such as India and China, which can make items at lower costs. As a result, more work and jobs are being outsourced to relatively low-cost producers (Burke & Cooper, 2006). Organisations can be positioned nearer to their markets and prevent expensive transportation, administrative costs and insurance by moving operations to another country.

Less stringent government rules, especially on the control of pollution and safety requirements; increased access to growth opportunities not obtainable in the country in which it operates; and the benefit of workforce availability are all reasons why global companies are concentrating on international business (Grobler *et al.*, 2006). The greater visibility of global firms has significantly impacted management careers. To advance their careers, managers are increasingly required to gain significant experience managing foreign operations. To thrive in the modern global firm, managers must also study and grasp worldwide politics, economies, cultures, personnel, and new ownership styles (Greenhaus, Callanan & Godshalk, 2010).

3.8 GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY AND THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

Although companies are considered important agents of graduate employability, they must work with other stakeholders to generate job possibilities for graduates. Universities can help reduce graduate unemployment by implementing activities like work-integrated learning (Jackson, 2016; Oliver, 2015), internship programmes (Clarke, 2018), and curriculum design based on input from key stakeholders (Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017). Higher education institutions are essential to guarantee that their graduates are marketable. Degree programmes should be developed based on market requirements assessments, robust quality control, and effective university-industry collaborations and partnerships.

Transferring graduates into the workforce, which has been influenced by global HE marketisation, is a crucial and global challenge today (Boden & Nedeva, 2010; Mok & Neubauer, 2016). This has an impact on both society and HEIs. Higher education institutions require procedures to ensure that their graduates are not only marketable but also imaginative and innovative enough to contend for the few available jobs. Students are under continuous pressure to increase their academic qualifications to upgrade their abilities and raise their employability and attractiveness as a result produced by the mismatch between available employment and the number of graduates joining the workforce. As a result, academics have viewed internships through HE and business partnerships as key to improving the employability of graduates (Clarke, 2018). Universities must collaborate with the industry to understand what skills and knowledge are required in the workforce.

3.9 DEVELOPING ACADEMIC COMPETENCIES AT THE UNIVERSITY

Students report developing various competencies while studying (Almeida and Garca-Aracil, 2016). According to research, students do well on scales that assess analytical reasoning, cognitive flexibility, oral and written communication, collaboration, and relational comprehension (Badcock, Pattison & Harris, 2010; Keneley & Jackling, 2011). Students also said their capacity to take charge of

their education and adjust to change and unfamiliar settings was highly developed (Kember & Leung, 2005). Graduates also stated that they had improved their time management, learning, and stress management skills and their capacity to cope with a heavy workload (Edvarsson & Jungert, 2010). However, there was contradicting evidence in many research suggesting communication and teamwork abilities were the least developed (Kember & Leung, 2005; Keneley & Jackling, 2011).

Furthermore, studies demonstrate that students at a tertiary institution learn more academic knowledge than academic skills (Edvarsson & Jungert, 2010; Monteiro, Almeida & Garcia- Aracil, 2016). Most studies used questionnaires to measure skills and competencies, but there were a few qualitative studies as well. There were conflicting findings in the qualitative research. According to Chan (2011), students at tertiary institutions mostly communicate abilities and the ability to think from several perspectives. Graduates in political science said their clinical reasoning, cognitive, and communication skills improved while they were studying (Dahlgren *et al.*, 2006). Problem-solving, critical thinking, self-directed education, as well as teamwork and communication, were all mentioned as skills that they acquired during their education (Kember, 2009).

Andrew and Higson (2014) discovered that while students' formal communication and collaborative skills had improved, their speaking skills had not. Furthermore, communication, collaboration, and leadership abilities were chosen as the most important academic talents to master in university, whereas critical thinking, problem-solving, and diplomatic skills were identified less frequently (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2012). Students in the political science faculty added that the capacity to problem solve, as well as the ability to present such analyses and recommendations, were crucial professional abilities (Dahlgren, 2018).

3.10 WORK EXPERIENCE WITH REGARDS TO STUDY SUCCESS AND LEARNING

Evidence suggests that working learners have poorer marks than non-working learners (Salamonson *et al.*, 2012). However, a few research studies showed no link between employment and grades (Nonis & Hudson, 2006; Suleiman & Mohezar, 2006). There's also proof that the quantity of hours employed affects academic performance (Callender, 2008; Hunt, Lincoln & Walker, 2004). Working a limited quantity of hours each week has no negative impact on academic progress (Darolia, 2014; Triventi, 2014). In comparison to students who do not work, evidence suggests that working a restricted quantity of hours does not raise the chance of dropping out (Hovdhaugen, 2015; Moulin *et al.*, 2013). Research shows, however, that the link between hours worked and academic achievement is not constant. To put it another way, both working long hours and not working at all may be linked to lower academic achievement (Hovdhaugen, 2013; Moulin *et al.*, 2013).

A full-time job, according to numerous research, decreases an individual's academic advancement (Darolia, 2014; Katsikas, 2013; Triventi, 2014). Furthermore, Theune (2015) discovered that both full-time and part-time work lengthened the time it took to get a degree, but a full-time job lengthened it the most. When analysing the impact on degree completion, the line of work played a crucial role. Work that was connected to a student's subject of study improved their grade average (Brooks & Youngson, 2016; Patel, Brinkman & Coughlan, 2012; Wang *et al.*, 2010). Students who worked full-time outside of their field of study, on the other hand, received poorer grades (Sanchez-Gelabert, Figueroa & Elias, 2017).

3.11 CONCLUSION

The literature reviewed in this chapter outlined the fundamentals of employability and its historical development. It also highlighted globalisation and worldwide trends in graduate employability and the position of tertiary education in developing skills needed in the workplace. Finally, an overview of work experience as it related to

student success and learning was provided. The next chapter presents a discussion on the qualification's skills framework.

CHAPTER FOUR

LITERATURE REVIEW: SKILLS FRAMEWORK

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Graduates need to have a wide range of talents to get a job and contribute positively to the workplace in the future (Broadley & Dixon, 2022). Furthermore, a graduate's ability to perform a variety of tasks that require specific skills can be referred to as the personal brand of a graduate, which encompasses a timely and unique set of skills and abilities that are of value to a possible recruiter. Improving the employability of university graduates is seen as an important task. The changing business environment underscores the importance of employability education that focuses not only on skill development but also on practical application.

Edziwa and Blignaut (2022), in their article entitled 'Graduate Employability Skills: The voice of Agricultural Technical Vocational Education and Training (ATVET) students in Zimbabwe, said that there are many definitions of employability, but they could be divided into two general categories. As a preliminary step, students should consider whether or not they will be able to find (and keep) a job after they have graduated. Both groups are focused on enhancing knowledge, skills, attitudes, and capacities so that they can participate in critical and lifelong learning (Luke *et al.*, 2013; Edziwa & Blignauth, 2022). Improving the employability of graduates is not a new issue, and policymakers continue to make plans to improve the skills of graduates to meet the demands of today's workforce. HEIs are one of the key players in improving employability and are responsible for identifying how to improve the skills of the future employees they train.

Employability skills are becoming increasingly important. In the contemporary workplace, employability is defined as a collection of fundamental abilities that include a strong knowledge foundation, competence, and a mentality that are

required for success (Suartha *et al.*, 2017). For many occupations in today's economy, employability skills are regarded to be necessary. Consequently, they have become a need in practically every company setting for a person's professional advancement. Today's global economy places a greater emphasis on graduate employability such as problem-solving and critical reasoning, as well as abilities like communication and cooperation. When it comes to employment, employability skills are becoming an increasingly significant topic. Furthermore, employability skills are seen as the linchpin connecting formal education and training with the real world of labour. This chapter discusses the South African legal framework and the skills and attributes from the perspective of employers and graduates. It also addresses employability skills valued in the workplace, skills for the future, and the skills gap.

4.2 LEGISLATION AND POLICY

An overview of the applicable legislation and policies related to skills development is provided in this section. These policies and regulations summarise their objectives concerning skills development in SA.

- **Higher Education Act 101 of 1997**

As stated in the Government Gazette: 19 December 1997, No 18515 the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 that all students and employees should be given every opportunity to reach their maximum potential, as well as to cultivate respect for the uniqueness of each individual (RSA, 1997). The goal is to ensure quality assurance and quality promotion in HE.

- **Council on Higher Education**

The Council of Higher Education was established by the Higher Education Act of 1997 as an independent statutory body (RSA, 1997). The Council on Higher Education (CHE) aims to ensure quality assurance in HE, audit the quality assurance mechanisms of HE institutions, and accredit HE programmes (CHE, 2022).

- **Further Education and Training Colleges Act 16 of 2006**

Government Gazette 11 December 2006 No. 29469 states that the Act's goal is to help students gain the information, skills, and practical occupational and vocational competence they need to succeed in the workforce (Green Gazette, 2006). Furthermore, it provides students with the skills they need to get a job, enter a trade or career, or enrol at HEIs. The Act applies to any educational institution established or declared to be a public college or registered as a private college under the Act.

- **Department of Employment and Labour**

As stated in the Department of Employment and Labour (RSA, 2022), the Department of Employment and Labour is responsible for drafting laws and regulations on skills development and for issuing guidance to promote the application of the 'Skills Development Act and the Skills Development Levy Act'.

- **Quality Council for Trade and Occupations**

The Quality Council for Trade and Occupations (QCTO) was formed by the Department of Employment and Labour as a quality control framework to verify that occupational training matches the skill demands of the workforce and that educational experiences delivered are organized, suitable, and focused (QCTO, 2022).

- **South African Revenue Service**

Organisations subject to a levy are required to pay the South African Revenue Service (SARS). Any business with a payroll above R500 000 must pay a tax of one percent of that total as a contribution toward employee skill development (SARS, 2022).

4.2.1 National Qualifications Framework Act 67 of 2008

According to National Qualifications Framework Act 67 of 2008 (RSA, 2021) and its amendments aim to comply with the law, educational institutions and training providers in SA must provide diploma and degree-granting programs. Its objective is to improve the quality of education and training. The National Qualifications Framework's goal is to help students achieve their full potential, as well as help the country as a whole grow economically and socially. The Act aims to ensure that South African qualifications are of acceptable quality.

4.2.2 Skills Development Act 97 of 1998

Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 as gazetted in the Government Gazette aims to enhance the quality of life of South African employees by increasing their employment opportunities and mobility as well as enhancing their productivity at work and the competition of businesses (South African Government, 2022).

4.2.3 Sector Education and Training Authority

Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) were established under the Skills Development Act (Act 97 of 1998). There are different SETAs responsible for different sectors of the economy. Among the duties of a SETA are the following: creating sector development plans, allocating grant funding to employers, training providers, and employees, collecting and disbursing skills levies, and monitoring education and training initiatives in the sector. SETAs are responsible for all of the aforementioned activities (South African Government, 2022).

4.2.4 National Skills Development Strategy

The National Skills Development Strategy's objectives are to prioritize and educate essential skills for long-term growth, to encourage and expedite workplace training for all employees, and to enhance employability and long-term livelihoods via skill improvement (Department of Labour: RSA, 2004).

4.2.5 South African Qualifications Authority

SAQA is positioned to ensure that the goals of the Skills Development Act, of 1998, are met in terms of a comprehensive transformation and improvement of the South African workforce skill levels (South African Government, 2022). Training results are measured, quality is ensured, and it is linked to the proper educational level by SAQA.

4.3 BENEFITS OF LEGISLATION

Training in SA will benefit from the legislation because of the emphasis on applied knowledge, the monitoring of training quality, the encouragement of employers to work with accredited providers, the registration of subject matter experts from SETA as facilitators and assessors and the lower cost of training. SETAs evaluate training providers and promote outcomes-based learning, and workplace assessments are common.

The above legislation and policies are relevant to the research study because they outline the responsibilities of different structures towards students and graduates. The role of HE is to ensure that it provides quality education. The students' or graduates' goal is to gain information and skills to get a job. Further, these policies have a direct impact on the variables that are discussed in Chapter 3: skills, competencies, academic knowledge, and work experience, which have an impact on employability.

4.4 DEFINITION OF EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

Learner-centred abilities include the capacity to learn and the ability to analyse and solve problems, as well as the ability to communicate (Avgerinou *et al.*, 2016; Gurhan and Serkan, 2019). Personal image, interpersonal abilities, and positive habits and attitudes all go towards one's potential to get a job (Sahota *et al.*, 2022). The term "basic skills" or "C & ES" may refer to both a person's ability to function in

the job and the knowledge necessary to succeed in that environment (Ahram, 2019). Griffiths and Kabir (2019) define employability skills in terms of traditional intellectual skills, for example, critical evaluation, logical reasoning, and communication skills.

4.5 GLOBAL SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES OF EMPLOYERS' EXPECTATIONS

Graduates who can conform to the work environment, apply their talents and competencies to improve the organisation, and engage in creative cooperation are sought after by employers. From an employer's perspective, employability skills are defined as "skills required not only to find employment, but also to advance within an organisation, to realise one's potential, and to successfully contribute to the strategic direction of the organisation" (Weligamage, 2016:1). Because it is essential to driving innovation and predicting and leading change, employers prize critical thinking (reflection) in employees (Griffiths & Kabir, 2019).

According to Lowden *et al.* (2011), graduates' employability is heavily influenced by their capacity to maintain a "can-do" attitude, a desire to engage and contribute, an attitude of openness, and a readiness to place ideas into action. Lowden (2011) notes that employers value graduates who demonstrate an entrepreneurial and innovative approach, as well as creative thinking, which opens up new perspectives and challenges assumptions.

According to Bhola and Dhanawade (2017), from an employer's perspective, the most desirable skills for graduates are communication skills, interpersonal relationships, teamwork, problem-solving, resource management, leadership, conflict management, initiative, listening, flexibility, openness to change, team building, self-awareness, and understanding leadership styles. Bhola and Dhanawade (2017) also consider attitude important, stating that employers look for employees who show up on time, demonstrate commitment, and are eager to get the job done.

Researchers, Robinson and Garton (2008) conducted a survey of graduate students at the University of Missouri and discovered that they valued employability abilities such as problem-solving, autonomous work, positive thinking, stress management,

and listening as critical skills. Problem-solving was regarded as an essential employability skill by companies, HEI staff and students in Sri Lanka (Wickramasinghe & Perera, 2010). Working in teams, self-motivation, communication, Professional knowledge, and personal organisation were regarded as the most valuable talents by Bournemouth University graduates in the UK (Clark & Court, 2017).

In Japan, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Singapore, Zaharim *et al.* (2009) investigated the occupational skills needed by new engineers. Problem-solving communication and interpersonal skills were cited by employers in all four nations as the most critical. In Pakistan, graduates' communication, presentation, and practical abilities have been cited as a problem by employers (Warraich & Ameen, 2011). There were concerns regarding general business abilities and traits for successful on-the-job efficiency in the South Pacific Island country (Bhanugopan & Fish, 2009). According to Jackson and Chapman (2012), graduates in Australia lacked critical thinking and decision-making abilities that are essential for successful management.

Companies want people to enhance all their abilities and expertise to get better outcomes and increase their performance (Nuryake, Budiyo & Wiranto, 2020). Non-cognitive and technical skills are two of the three most essential categories of abilities that employers look for in workers. Non-cognitive skills such as communication, timeliness, problem-solving, and adaptability are more crucial in the job than fundamental cognitive and technical abilities (Pengnate, 2018). In addition, employers need individuals who can adapt to a dynamic work environment. Employers prefer to employ individuals who possess skills in technology, communication, problem-solving, and teamwork (Misra & Khurana, 2017). A study by Brewer (2017) found that employees must have the ability to continuously learn and adapt, communication skills, the ability to problem-solve independently, skills in technology, creative thinking, and the adeptness to work as part of a team. In addition, Nuryake *et al.* (2020) state that employers expect these soft skills to support job seekers' technical expertise so that they can solve problems that arise on the job.

4.6 EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS FROM A GRADUATE PERSPECTIVE

Policymakers who advocate investment in the HC theory (the link between employability and economic prosperity) drive the employability directive. Public policymakers are looking for ways in which HEIs might work together in creating the skills that firms feel are necessary for an efficient workforce. Higher education institution graduates are seldom regarded in these arguments and are typically left out of the conversation (Alexande *et al.*, 2018; Homyoun, 2017). Generally, graduate employability research focuses either on the professional ambitions of recent graduates or on how employers perceive their talents. Only a few studies have looked at the views of recent graduates, such as how they transition into the workforce, what skills they need or how they respond to training in these areas (Carter, 2019).

University students' expectations are shifting because of the economic backdrop and employment rivalry, combined with rising tuition costs (Chattopadhyay, 2023). When it comes to choosing a university, students are becoming more practical and expecting a return on their investment. Despite these developments, the graduate viewpoint is still underrepresented in the discussions on employment. Research by Tymon (2013) indicated that graduates believed that they could have obtained most of the required skills in both environments; however, they were not exposed to them enough at the university level to fully develop the skills in that context. This differs slightly from the policy view that internships and contacts with recruiters will offer the required skills. From the graduate's point of view, the correct activities may be performed to build abilities in both situations (Ahmadl, Suhaili & Shariati, 2015). There is still a lack of information regarding how the education of graduates has prepared them for the job, and this shows that more needs to be done. Employability methods will be weaker if the employer does not take into account the viewpoint of graduates (Shivoro *et al.*, 2018).

4.7 EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS ATTRIBUTES

Employability skills are becoming more important. Employers are looking for graduates with a combination of technical abilities (expressed by a degree in a particular subject), (Firth, 2020) and employability skills (represented by soft skills), (Carter, 2019). More significant than a student's subject of study are their personality traits.

4.7.1 Communication skills

Paton (2011: 485) explains, "Communication is the process of conveying thoughts, messages, or information from one person to another through written or spoken words, symbols, and actions, intending to reach a common understanding". When two or more individuals communicate with each other, a message is sent and received by the recipient. Listen and watch to acquire knowledge, communicate clearly and effectively, apply tactics and abilities to work well with others, and analyse and evaluate the efficacy of formalized and informal communication (Brewer, 2013).

Brewer (2013) adds that communication occurs daily in the work environment such as when leaders offer instructions to their employees, when employees communicate with each other to plan a project, or when employees relay information to customers. Problem-solving and conflict management are both intimately linked to effective communication abilities. A graduate's capacity to communicate is one of the skills important for success in the industry, as previously indicated (Suarta *et al.*, 2017).

4.7.2 Problem-solving

People in practically every profession need to be able to solve problems at some point in their careers (Whetten & Cameron, 2011). To find a solution to an issue, one must first identify the scenario at hand and identify the root cause of the problem. Universities and the faculty that educate students must recognize the relevance of

the ability to solve problems in a business setting and offer opportunities to learn where this talent may be developed to prepare students to be successful problem solvers (Daft *et al.*, 2010).

When an organisation's performance does not meet its stated objectives, there is a problem (Daft *et al.*, 2010). To put it another way, Paton (2011) says that problems are the difference between where we are now and where we want to go. "Problem-solving is the process one follows when solving a problem, taking corrective action to achieve goals and desired outcomes" (Daft & Marcic, 2014: 15).

4.7.3 Teamwork

Small groups of individuals working together to achieve the same objective and whose efforts are intertwined are becoming more and more prevalent in the workplace, and this trend is expected to continue (Thaler, 2021). Such situations need that workers should work together and display a shared identity (West, 2012). With teamwork, it's all about how well you can work together as a team. Additionally, the capacity to motivate and inspire others, compromise and other interpersonal skills like negotiation, influence, consultation, and interpretation are all necessary for this role.

People who can monitor and assess progress, energise the group when necessary, and provide fresh ideas are in high demand by employers. Teamwork skills include the ability to make decisions, including setting goals and constraints, considering risks, and developing and evaluating alternatives. It is also about following orders, respecting leadership, and knowing how to communicate concerns and positions (Brewer, 2013).

4.8 EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS VALUED BY EMPLOYERS

The importance of employability has been emphasized more lately. In today's job market, companies are looking for more than just technical talents, such as those defined by a degree and a certain subject area. According to Berdrow and Evers

(2010: 421), graduates need competencies and specific skills to be successful in the workforce, as indicated in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: Graduate skills and competences

| Managing self | Communicating | Managing people and tasks | Mobilising innovation and change |
|--|---|---|--|
| Learning Personal organisation/ time management Personal strengths Problem-solving | Interpersonal Listening Oral communication Written communication | Coordinating Decision-making Leadership/ influence Managing conflict Planning and organising | Ability to conceptualise Creativity/innovation/ change Risk-taking Visioning |

Source: Berdrow and Evers (2010: 421)

This country's employers rank diverse talents as "extremely significant" and their satisfaction with graduates' real abilities as "very pleased," according to a poll performed by the South African Graduate Recruitment Association (SAGRA). As shown in Table 4.2. Both table 4.1 and 4.2 indicate different skills but their combination is valued by employers.

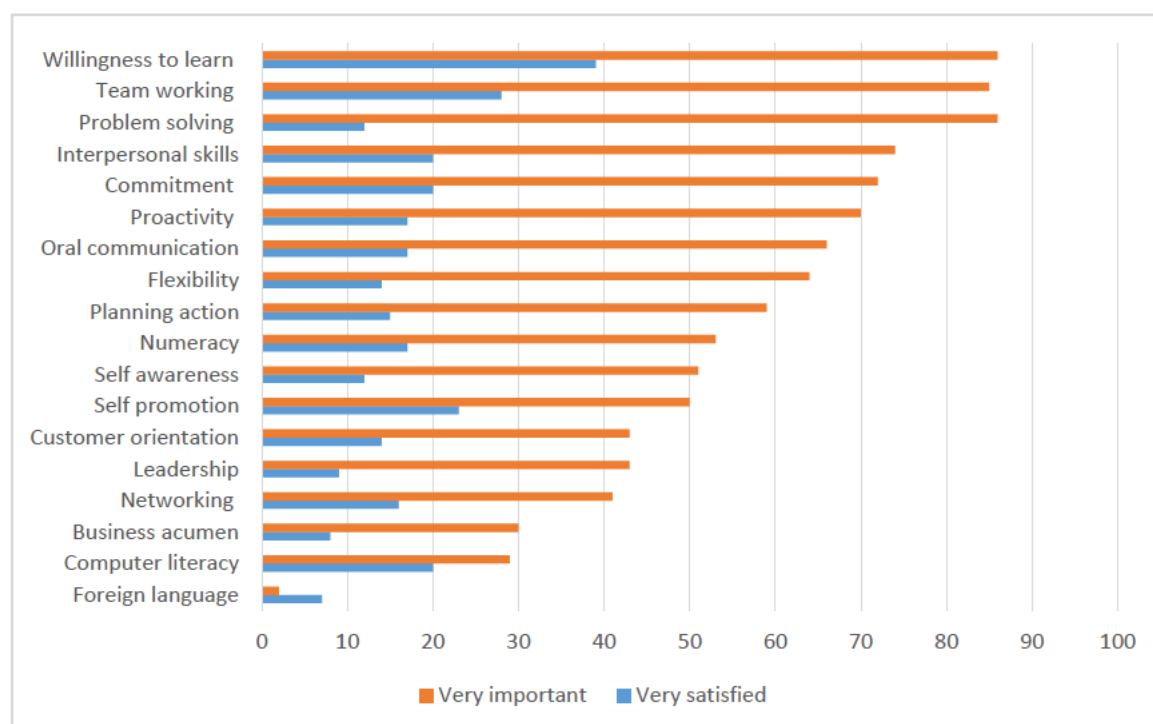
Table 4.2: SAGRA survey

| | Very satisfied % | Very important % |
|----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Willingness to learn | 39% | 86% |
| Team working | 28% | 85% |
| Problem-solving | 12% | 83% |
| Interpersonal skills | 20% | 74% |
| Commitment | 20% | 72% |
| Proactivity | 17% | 70% |
| Oral communication | 17% | 66% |

| | | |
|----------------------|-----|-----|
| Flexibility | 14% | 64% |
| Planning action | 15% | 59% |
| Numeracy | 17% | 53% |
| Self-awareness | 12% | 51% |
| Customer orientation | 14% | 49% |
| Leadership | 9% | 43% |
| Networking | 16% | 41% |
| Business acumen | 8% | 30% |
| Computer literacy | 20% | 29% |
| Foreign language | 7% | 2% |

Figure 4.1 below depicts the importance of graduate skills in SA from the perspective of employers.

Figure 4.1: Importance of graduate skills in South Africa



Source: McCowan (2014)

According to Figure 4.1, the willingness to learn is very important, at 86 percent, followed by teamwork at 85 percent, while speaking a foreign language at 2 percent.

4.9 IMPORTANT SKILLS AND CAPABILITIES WHEN RECRUITING GRADUATES

According to Suarta *et al.* (2017), employees with communication, teamwork, and interpersonal skills as personal attributes are highly valued. For example, workers with interpersonal traits can communicate effectively (both orally as well as in writing), can work well in teams, and can change their roles to suit the needs of different projects. Self-motivation, self-belief, curiosity, and the capacity to learn new things were all included in Zhou's (2021) study on people's personal qualities and capabilities. Employers are looking for graduates with a variety of backgrounds, including job experience (Zhou, 2021).

4.10 EMPLOYER'S SATISFACTION WITH GRADUATE SKILLS

Any country's economic and social progress depends on its willingness to make significant investments in its people (Brits, 2018). Consequently, education must play a different function in the economy, particularly in assisting the country's economic objectives, as well as spreading and applying new information, and generating a trained local workforce. Consequently, education must play an essential position in the economy (Bridgstock, 2009). Products that suit the demands of society are the purpose of HE. As a result, it's critical to figure out what employers want from HE (Moleke, 2010).

To boost an organisation's intellectual capital, hiring recent grads is not a novel idea. Moreover, hiring university graduates to aid a company's development and continuous innovation is considered a wise decision (Chetty, 2012). Employers want graduates who are equipped for the job, who can communicate and share their skills, and who value their place in an organisation (Pham, Tomlinson & Thompson, 2019).

4.11 SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

To succeed in a rapidly changing, technology-intensive work environment, Chirgwin (2021) recommends that people have the necessary skills. Individuals need to be given the correct incentives to invest in the talents that are most in demand in today's labour market, as well as effective information, counsel, and assistance suited to their circumstances (Deming, 2015).

Additionally, modern lifelong learning systems are needed to help workers adapt and update their skills throughout their careers (McKinsey Global Institute, 2017). In the future, two sorts of abilities will probably be very significant. To begin with, as ordinary jobs are automated, a greater focus will be placed on knowledge and abilities that are more difficult to replicate. Soft skills, such as being able to communicate, collaborate, lead, troubleshoot, and self-organise, are increasingly valued by employers (Deming, 2015). Digital abilities are also becoming more important. Despite the tremendous growth in the demand for ICT skills, the existing statistics do not indicate that there will be a serious shortage of workers with these talents (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2017). However, the general ICT skills of people, such as the capacity to utilise information and communication search or office production tools, are considerably more important.

Anecdotal information suggests that there is a substantial talent shortage (OECD, 2016). Adults in Italy and Korea indicate that around a quarter of them have never used a computer or are unable to handle a mouse (OECD, 2013). Skill gaps and mismatches, both of which have substantial economic consequences, are made more likely by the rapid evolution of workforce skill requirements (OECD, 2017). Job satisfaction may suffer when there is an imbalance between the supply or demand of certain skills. At the macroeconomic level, human resources misallocation and/or productivity declines harm economic growth, whereas skill shortages have a negative impact on labour productivity and raise equilibrium unemployment. Research has indicated that nations that are better equipped to fulfil the demand for skills also have lower pay disparity (OECD, 2015). Nonetheless, in the G20 countries

for which data are available, two out of five employers reported that they had difficulty finding the right employees for their jobs.

4.11.1 Type of skills that are required to be employed in the Industrial Revolution

While technical abilities are important, they are not adequate in today's technologically disrupted world of Industrial Revolution 4.0. According to Nuryake, Budiyo and Wiranto (2020), cognitive abilities, sophisticated problem-solving abilities, and systems expertise will be the most in-demand talents in the future. According to the World Economic Forum (2018), new talents will be required to handle the Industrial Revolution 4.0.

It was also suggested that knowledge and competence in information and communications technologies (ICTs), data handling and technical expertise (technical expertise), and human abilities (personal qualities) were essential for the Industrial Revolution 4.0. The eight skill areas of the Australian government's Employability Skills Framework are almost similar to the BRICS personal skills indicator. Communication, collaboration, ability to solve problems, initiative and entrepreneurship, planning and organisation, technology, self-management, and learning skills are the eight skill groupings (Jayaram & Engmann, 2014).

It was discovered by Singh, Thambusamy and Ramly (2014) that employers favour the practical abilities and competencies of new prospective workers above hard skills and formal degrees. Cognitive skills, fundamental skills, and cross-functional skills are the three major categories of work-related talents that will be most important in the era of disruption and the future (Pengnate, 2018). According to the World Economic Forum (2018), the most in-demand abilities in the future will be a combination of hard and soft skills. Despite the fast advancement of technology, soft talents and technical abilities are still highly demanded skills (Nuryake *et al.*, 2020).

4.12 EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS GAP

Several investigations have shown that graduates' abilities do not line up with the particular needs of businesses. Similar findings were made by Harris (2013), who found that just 25% of graduates were employed. They were corroborated by studies conducted by Arum and Roksa (2010; 2014), Barber *et al.* (2013), and Gergen and Rego (2014). They contended that the abilities of recent graduates did not meet the demands of the industry (Gergen & Rego, 2014). There are certain transferrable abilities, such as the ability to solve problems, leadership, collaboration, understanding, and social awareness, which were not covered in the curriculum of most HEIs, according to research conducted by van Velsor and Wright (2012). There was a considerable mismatch between the worlds of school and work, according to a poll conducted across nine nations with graduates, educators, and employers alike (Mourshed *et al.*, 2014). Educators overestimate the value of what they teach, according to the research. If universities and companies have different ideas about what graduates know and can do, and students have differing ideas about how ready they are for the workforce, this might explain why various stakeholders have such divergent viewpoints (Mourshed *et al.*, 2014).

4.13 CONCLUSION

This chapter examined the legislation and policy applicable in skills framework, the benefits of legislation in South Africa. This chapter explored the employability skills, global skills and its attributes from an employer's expectation. An important discussion of employability skills from a graduate perspective was included in this chapter. The crucial employability skills which are communication, problem solving, and teamwork, were discussed. An insight on important skills and capabilities when recruiting graduates. Included was literature on employers satisfaction with graduate skills. The skills for the future, where further discussion on types of skills that are required to be employed in the fourth industrial revolution. Lastly the employability gaps were explored. The next chapter discussed the research methodology.

CHAPTER FIVE

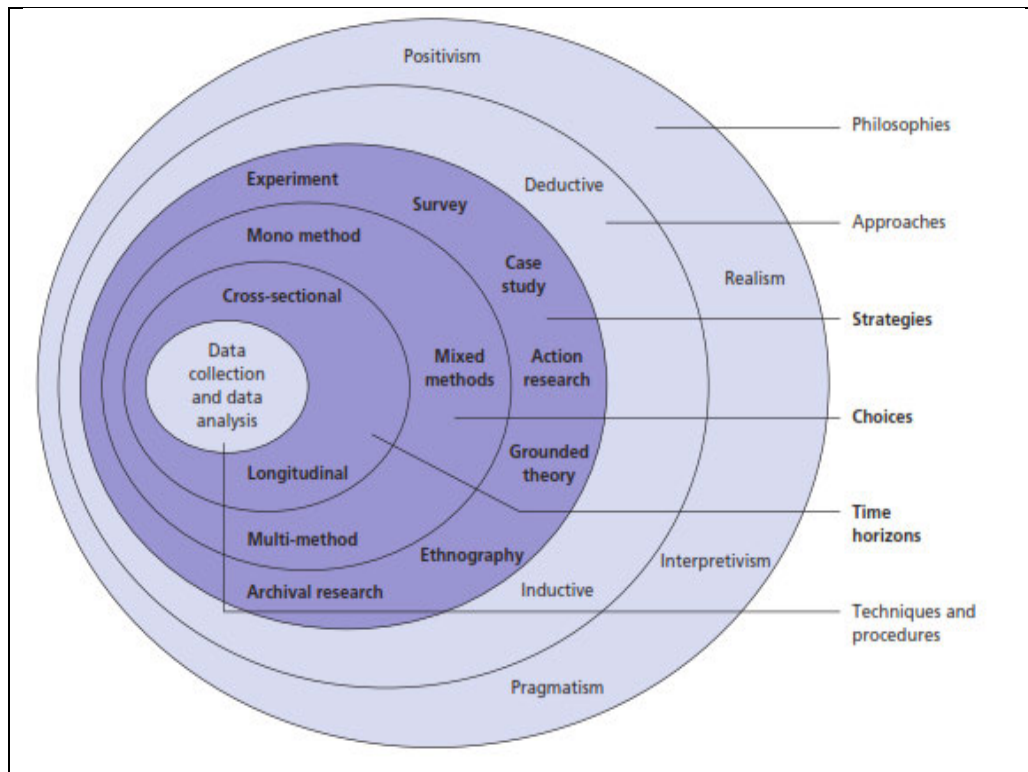
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the research process that was followed is outlined. This chapter's objective is to detail the research methods and design used to test the study's hypotheses. The research assumptions, philosophy, paradigms and approaches are be discussed in detail. The research population, sampling, and instruments are also detailed. The discussion on the pilot study, validity, reliability, data analysis, and ethical considerations, which are some of the key elements in any research, are done. The research onion method, as stated by Saunders *et al.* (2012) guides the sections in this chapter. The research onion depicts the six steps of the research process that must be completed to acquire data and produce knowledge relevant to the study's goal.

Figure 5.1 below is the research onion which provides a description of the main layers or stages which are to be accomplished in order to formulate an effective methodology. The research methodology has its starting point with delineation of the main philosophy, choosing approaches, methods and strategies as well as defining time horizons, which altogether take the research logic to the research design main techniques and procedures of data collection and analysis. The research onion consists of six main layers which are Research philosophy, Approach to theory development, Methodological choice, Strategy, Time horizons, and Techniques the procedures include data collection and analysis.

Figure 5.1: The research onion



Source: Saunders *et al.* (2012)

The research onion is a visual representation of the sequenced research elements that assist the researcher in research design, gathering data and analysis (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2015). The outer levels define the elements of the research design (methods and philosophies), accompanied by the layers explaining research methods (research approach, methodological choices, and periods), and finally the practical component (data collection and analysis). The research onion is important because it depicts the stages of research development, indicates a variety of different research elements, and emphasizes data gathering and analysis as a critical component of new knowledge production and management (Saunders *et al.*, 2012).

5.2 RESEARCH DEFINED

According to Naidoo (2011), scientific research is a methodical examination of nature and humans to confirm and perfect prior evidence while also generating new information. It is defined by several traits, which are explained below. Without these characteristics, it would be limited to the uncomplicated but critical activity of collecting data. The following are the characteristics of research, as stated by Naidoo (2011):

- **Relevance**

Research should be based on substance and contextual importance; or, it will be ineffective and immoral.

- **Conceptions of research**

Research, when conceptualised, can be aimed at specific outcomes.

- **Research orthodoxies**

The blueprint of the investigation is captured using research designs. Furthermore, it makes the researcher responsible for adhering to a specified procedure and serves as a requirement for ethical clearance.

- **Theoretical orientations**

Theoretical orientation helps to explain the investigation in terms of its scope while also serving as a literary anchor.

- **Ethical framework**

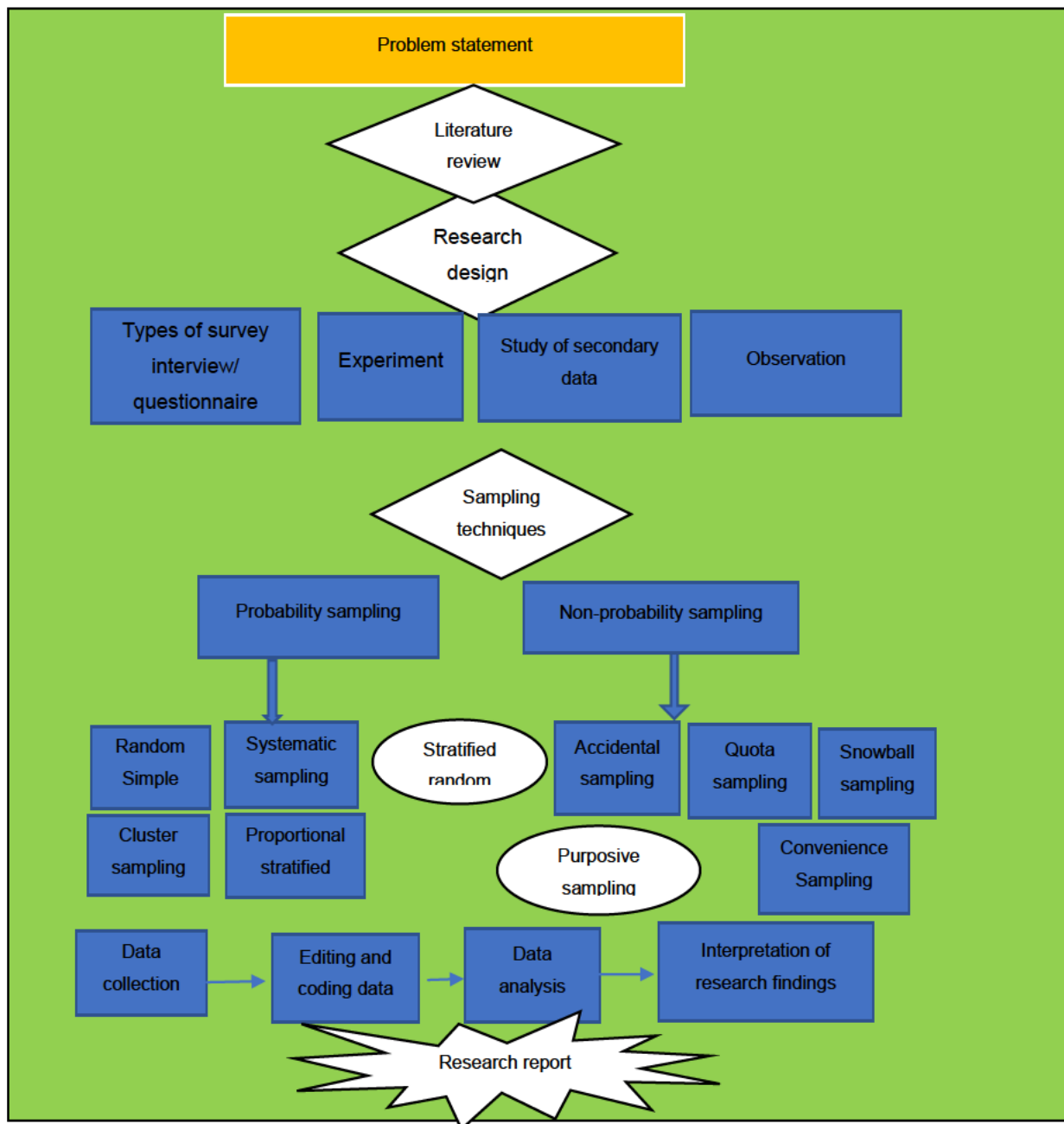
Non-maleficence, beneficence and consideration for the participants' autonomy must all be hallmarks of research. To avoid the possibility of injuring a group, proper consideration needs to be given to them.

According to Kumar (2011), research is an organised study in which an established scientific approach is utilized to solve issues and generate new, broadly applicable information. The methodical examination, classification, and analysis of findings are all part of scientific procedures. Scientific knowledge is gained through research, which employs a range of objective methodologies and procedures. The term 'objective' refers to the fact that these procedures and approaches are not reliant on human feelings or beliefs. Procedures for obtaining a sample, collecting data, measuring variables, and analysing that data are among these methods (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2012).

5.3 RESEARCH PROCESS

Irrespective of the research topic or methodology used, the process entails the same steps. The procedure is an illustration of the basic scientific method which includes specific steps namely: problem statement, literature review, clarification of research hypothesis/questions, research design, data collection, data analysis, and concluding. Figure 5.2 below illustrates the research process applied in this research.

Figure 5.2: Research process applied in this research.



Source: Zikmud (2003)

5.4 PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS

All scientific studies are predicated on a set of philosophical assumptions regarding the nature of the focus of the investigation, the nature of reliable data, and the proper research methodology to employ (Neuman, 2011). These philosophical assumptions are grouped into three groups based on the ideologies that a researcher has about the world and their investigation: “beliefs about the phenomenon or object of study,

beliefs about the notion of knowledge, and beliefs about the relationship between knowledge and the empirical world” (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991: 7).

5.5 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

The general growth and character of knowledge are referred to as research philosophy. “As the outermost layer of the research onion, it represents the overarching view of the research process responsible for providing a foundation of beliefs and assumptions about how knowledge about the phenomenon should be anticipated, collected, analysed and interpreted” (Creswell & Poth, 2018: 53). “Despite the alternative philosophies available to underpin research, the pragmatic view emphasises that research philosophy depends on the research objectives and is not necessarily limited to a particular discipline” (Bryman & Bell, 2015: 134). As a consequence, the factual nature of the study aims influenced the research philosophy chosen for this study. Ontology, epistemology, and axiology, as mentioned below, are three parts of the research philosophy that influence the research namely legitimate, reliable, and believable.

- **Epistemology philosophy (establishing what level of knowledge is appropriate)**

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy concerned with knowledge theory and establishing what knowledge is appropriate for a given topic (Repko & Szostak, 2017; Saunders *et al.*, 2012). The correct information is obtained from data that is free of bias and so more likely to mirror reality. Epistemology is the philosophical study of the nature, origin, and scope, as well as belief that is justified (Moser, 2012). Epistemology examines the nature of information and how it relates to concepts such as belief, truth, and justification. It also examines how information is generated, as well as scepticism about some claims of information. It is primarily concerned with issues relating to the generation and transmission of information in certain research areas.

- **Ontology philosophy (confirming new information)**

To authenticate new knowledge founded on beliefs about the nature of facts and how the universe functions, ontology is required (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). When researching a phenomenon that is thought to occur independently of any social group, a researcher utilises an objective ontological perspective (Baxter, 2010). Ontology is the doctrine of being or existence in philosophy; it is also a statement of a conceptualisation (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009). The study of the categories of objects that exist or may exist in a given area is known as ontology.

Furthermore, ontology offers criteria for identifying distinct types of things (concrete and intangible, existing and non-existent, realistic and preferable, self-reliant and reliant) and their relationships (associations, predication and dependences). It is utilised to make inferences about the objects in this domain (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Sale, Lohfeld and Brazil (2002), mention that ontology (the "science of being") is a term that is employed in a variety of ways, similar to metaphysics. It is sometimes confused with metaphysics, although researchers choose to define it as the component of metaphysics that describes the most fundamental characteristics of existence (the essential things or objects that make up the world).

- **Axiology philosophy – ethical, legal, and practical values**

According to Saunders *et al.* (2012), axiology enables researchers to recognize and understand the impact their values and views play in the gathering and analysis of data, rather than seeking to eliminate or balance it. Values influence the trustworthiness of outcomes and newly produced information at all stages of the research process. When conducting research, researchers use their judgment and make choices on research strategy based on their values (Saunders *et al.*, 2015).

This study ascribed to the ethical concerns proposed by the independent ethics committee of the Durban University of Technology from the proposal stage to the completion of the research. An ethical clearance certificate is attached (Appendix A). Moreover, it was crucial to ensure the anonymity of the respondents, informed consent, respect for privacy, confidentiality, and sincerity of the study. Additionally,

from an academic perspective, it is necessary to provide references to support the secondary sources used in the research and to manage and protect the primary data.

5.5 RESEARCH PARADIGMS

According to Rehman and Alharthi (2016), a paradigm can be thought of as a series of fundamental beliefs about ultimate or initial principles. It is a worldview that describes the nature of the 'world,' the participant's position in it, and the number of possible relationships to that world and its elements for the person who holds it. Beliefs are fundamental in the notion that must be accepted solely based on faith (though well-debated); there is no method to validate their eventual truthfulness (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Hesse-Biber (2010) describes a paradigm as “a theory or hypothesis”. A paradigm is more of a structure within which theories are constructed, essentially influencing the way an individual sees the world, determining an individual's perspective, and shaping an individual's comprehension of how objects are linked. Adherence to a specific worldview affects a person's actions, specialised practice, and eventually the view that the individual takes regarding the subject of a study. In the next section, the four types of paradigms – positivism-oriented, interpretivism-oriented, pragmatism and realism paradigm – are discussed.

5.5.1 Positivism-orientated paradigm

The classic or "oldest and most extensively utilized" research paradigm is positivism (Creswell, 2009). According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), the positivistic research paradigm originated in the scientific sciences, was initially utilised in the nineteenth century, and was then expanded to education and social sciences. According to the positivistic research paradigm, ontology, or the structure of knowledge or fact, exists in the physical and social environments (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The positivistic research paradigm further assumes that “causal laws”, which are awaiting exploration, govern both physical and social reality. The social world, on the other

hand, points out that positivism recognizes that truths or realities are created by people, who react to "each other as actors" (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2010).

Having the ability to produce or create realities is what it means to be an agent. Human agency refers to the fact that a human being adjusts his or her behaviour to the behaviour of other human beings. Humans are driven according to their desires, passions, demands, needs, interests, and curiosities, and as a result, they create social relationships (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Neuman, 2006; Lodico *et al.*, 2010). Humans take control of social relations to enhance the way things happen and forecast what will happen when they seek to satisfy their demands, needs, ambitions, and interests (Neuman, 2006).

Human behaviour is presumed or believed to be caused by intrinsic facts or facts in the positivistic approach, and it can be studied and recorded by observation (of behaviour) (Bryman, 2008). According to a positivistic paradigm, quantitative methodologies are necessary for comprehending and developing knowledge. Quantitative research methods pertain to the notion of measurement, in which data is measurable through conducting surveys, and positivist researchers keep a safe distance from the sample selected for the study (Cohen *et al.*, 2007).

5.5.2 Interpretivism-orientated paradigm

In ordinary social activities, the interpretive paradigm concentrates on human behaviours, participants' knowledge and processes of comprehending meaning-making (Eaton & Morris, 2019; Neumanm 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Punch (2009), the interpretative paradigm displays explicit human behaviours and procedures of meaning-making in three distinctive ways or traditions. The process of translating life experiences into awareness and language to generate different realities is referred to as the first tradition of the interpretive paradigm. Human awareness refers to how a person's ideas are translated into purposeful thoughts or personal factors that are enabled both external and internal in ordinary social life situations. This tradition is concerned with "how human beings make sense of

experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning” (Patton, 2002: 104).

The second tradition is concerned with the meaning of transcribed or printed documents and how basic meanings are obtained (Soeffner, 2004; Flick von Kardorff, & Steinke, 2004). Hermeneutics is a tradition that is concerned with uncovering human acts. Hermeneutics is the study of how people employ spoken and non-linguistic sociocultural actions to make meaning of their organized or structured social world (Soeffner, 2004). The interpretations of each participant are related to personal experience in a specific environment, as well as how he or she perceives, produces, and re-creates his or her social existence (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Bryman, 2008).

The third interpretative tradition is concerned with using language in the construction of symbolic interpretations, as well as the interpretation and construction of these meanings (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). Humans use semiotics to gain knowledge about meanings. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) states that the production and utilisation of symbols and signs in language to express meaning is referred to as semiotics. This type of communication is important to “the social world where the existence of symbols, like language, enables them to give meaning” (Cohen *et al.*, 2011: 20).

5.5.3 Pragmatism

Pragmatists focus on developing practical research methods, rather than ideals (actions and practices), to solve specific problems and achieve desired goals (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Pragmatism is a problem-oriented, goal-directed, and practice-centred worldview. In the search for practical solutions, concepts of positivism and constructivism are sometimes combined, resulting in controversial dualistic philosophies (Park, Bahrudin & Han, 2020).

5.5.4 Realism paradigm

In terms of processes and the notion that the social world and the investigator are

independent of one another and so would not yield biased conclusions, realism is similar to positivism (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). The difference, however, is that realism assumes that scientific techniques are not perfect. Realism believes that all theories are subject to revision and that the ability to know with certainty what reality is, is only possible by constantly researching and remaining open to new research methods (Saunders *et al.*, 2012).

5.6 RESEARCH APPROACH

5.6.1 Deductive approach

Hussey and Hussey (1997: 19) defined deductive research as “a study in which a conceptual and theoretical structure is developed and then tested by empirical observation; thus, particular cases are derived from general influences.” Deductive research, on the other hand, is a study in which a hypothesis is put to the test through empirical observation. Moving from the general to the specific is a term used to describe the deductive procedure. “Inductive research is a study in which theory is developed from observation of empirical reality; therefore, general conclusions are derived from particular cases, which is the opposite of the deductive method, since it involves moving from individual observation to statements about general patterns or laws” (Hussey & Hussey, 1997: 19).

In addition, a deductive theory is the mutual opinion of the nature of the association between research and theory. Based on what is known in theory and practice about a particular area, the researcher derives a hypothesis that must be subjected to empirical testing (Bryman, 2017).

5.6.2 Inductive approach

Inductive researchers, according to Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007), work from the bottom up, leveraging the perspectives of participants to create bigger themes and a theory that connects the topics. According to Saunders *et al.* (2012), to research inductively is to develop a theory. In contrast to the deductive technique, the

procedure starts with the investigator's working title rather than an established hypothesis. This indicates that the study progresses from a research question to an observation, then a description, then an analysis, and eventually a theory. Inductive research may be the ideal route to go if there is a minimal study on a topic.

5.6.3 Rationale for using the deductive approach

The deductive approach was used for this study. A quantitative method was utilised in this research; hence, the deductive approach is best suited as it allows the results to move from general to specific.

The use of the deductive approach is based on its characteristics, which are described by Park, Bahrudin and Han (2020) as follows: The deductive approach is based on existing knowledge from the literature. Many quantifiable data points are used to iteratively test the hypothesised philosophy or model. The theory or model can be termed law-like if the validation results are adequate. However, if the results obtained are unsatisfactory, the entire study can be regarded as new knowledge that can be utilised as a starting point for future research. The primary concern of deductive reasoning is a huge amount of quantifiable data. Furthermore, the quantitative interpretation of this data is carried out objectively, followed by a process of verification and generalisation. Thus, for this study, a deductive approach was utilised.

5.7 METHODOLOGICAL CHOICE

5.7.1 Qualitative methods

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), the qualitative approach is frequently associated with interpretive philosophy. It is interpretative in the sense that the investigator must comprehend the subjective and socially created interpretations presented about the phenomena under investigation rationally. The qualitative approach is a series of interpretive, tangible acts that help people see the world. Field notes, conversations, interviews, photographs, memoranda to the self and

recordings are all examples of how these behaviours convert reality into a sequence of representations.

Qualitative investigators research and study phenomena in their natural environment and seek to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people give them (Ritchie *et al.*, 2013). Creswell (2009) describes the qualitative approach as a method of detecting and comprehending the meaning people attach to a social challenge. Therefore, according to McLeod (2019), the qualitative approach is primarily a non-expressive form of research. It is interpretive in the sense that the investigator must comprehend the subjective and socially created interpretations expressed about the phenomenon under investigation logically.

The following are attributes of a qualitative approach (Saunders *et al.*, 2016; Leavy 2017; McLeod, 2019):

- Qualitative research uses a variety of data gathering methodologies and research methods to establish a conceptual framework and theory building by examining participants' identities and their relations;
- Since data collecting is not structured, questions and processes may alter and develop during a realistic and interactive research process;
- Non-probability sampling techniques are utilised; and
- In qualitative research, a single data gathering technique, such as semi-structured interviews, and a qualitative analysis process may be used.

5.7.2 Quantitative methods

Quantitative research, according to Saunders *et al.* (2016), explores correlations between variables that are numerically measured and analysed using a variety of graphical and statistical methodologies. Quantitative research usually draws a deductive approach, with the goal of testing theories with facts (Bryman, 2017). According to Rahi (2017), the quantitative method concentrates on gathering new information in response to the challenge provided by the general population; the data

are audited, and the individual's feelings or the circumstances in which they are collected are ignored.

The following are the characteristics of the quantitative approach (Saunders *et al.*, 2016; Jason & Glenwick, 2016; Leavy, 2017):

- Quantitative research examines the correlation between variables that are numerically measured and analysed using a variety of graphical and statistical approaches;
- It includes controls to assess data validity, similar to an experimental design;
- Probability sampling is frequently used in quantitative studies to ensure generalisability; and
- A quantitative research methodology uses a single technique of acquiring information, such as a questionnaire, as well as a corresponding quantitative analytical approach.

5.7.3 Mixed methods

A mixed-methods design has at least one qualitative and one quantitative research component (Moshirpour, Far & Alhajj, 2018). Mixed-methods research is the type of research in which a researcher combines elements of the qualitative and quantitative research approaches (use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inferential techniques) for the general purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and confirmation (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017).

Mixed methods research, according to Creswell (2009), entails the collecting and interpretation of both quantitative and qualitative data. Closed-ended information, such as attitude, behaviour, or performance instruments, is included in quantitative data. Qualitative data, on the other hand, is made up of open-ended material gathered through interviews with individuals. The open-ended questions addressed during these interviews allow individuals to express themselves freely (Clark & Ivankova, 2015).

Mixed methods research has strengths that offset the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Furthermore, compared to quantitative or qualitative research alone, a mixed-methods study delivers more complete findings to explore a research topic. Researchers can utilize any accessible data gathering technology rather than being confined to data collection methods connected with qualitative or quantitative research (Clark & Ivankova, 2015).

5.7.4 Rationale for using the quantitative method

The rationale for using the quantitative method is based on the organised study of phenomena by gathering numerical data and employing statistical, mathematical, or computational approaches. The positivist paradigm, which advocates approaches embedded in a statistical breakdown that includes other strategies such as inferential statistics, hypothesis testing, mathematical representations, structured protocols, and questionnaires with a limited variety of predetermined responses, is the source of quantitative research (Slevitch, 2011).

5.8 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research designs typically used in research are discussed below.

5.8.1 Exploratory

Akhtar *et al.* (2016) noted that exploratory study is the key stage of research, and it intends to obtain new-found knowledge about a fact. The exploratory study involves formulating a problem to investigate it in more detail or to develop a hypothesis (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). This method is employed when there are few or no past research reports/studies to look to for information. This study aims to gather insights and become acquainted with the subject matter to examine it in greater depth later on. When there is minimal research expertise, exploratory investigations are typically more acceptable (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). For example, if nothing is known about

the social interaction patterns of monastery members, an ambitious researcher may be interested in such an issue.

5.8.2 Descriptive

Descriptive research aims to portray the characteristics of a particular group or situation in an accurate manner (Kelly, 2009). Descriptive research may be concerned with a person's attitude or viewpoints on a subject. The research might lead to description being an aim. Research is creative, and it necessitates the finding of information to solve an issue. The major goal of descriptive research is to describe events, phenomena, and situations (Akhtar *et al.*, 2016).

5.8.3 Explanatory

The research strategy is dubbed explanatory when the goal of a study is to explore a new world that has never been explored before (Saunders *et al.*, 2015). The focus of the investigation is on the reasons for a phenomenon, or the "why" component. It is unconcerned with comparisons or changing circumstances. In this scenario, the goal of the study is to dive into previously uncharted territory. A problem is typically framed for a particular inquiry using an explanatory research approach (Akhtar *et al.*, 2016).

5.8.4 Rationale for adopting the descriptive research method

Descriptive research seeks to characterise the phenomena and features. This study is more concerned with what happened than with how or why it happened (Nassaji, 2015). Burns and Grove (2005: 201) stated that descriptive research is used to provide "a picture of a situation as it naturally occurs". It may be used to defend present methods, make decisions, and construct hypotheses. Descriptive research was employed in this study to generate a picture of business school graduates' attitudes on employability. Descriptive research was also used for the following reasons:

- *Exploring and describing phenomena:* descriptive research is useful for exploring and describing phenomena, such as the employability of graduates.
- *Understanding a specific population:* descriptive research can provide a detailed and accurate picture of a specific population, in this case graduates, assisting researchers in understanding the group's characteristics and behaviours.
- *Identifying patterns and trends:* Descriptive research allowed the researcher to identify patterns and trends among graduates, which helped the researcher understand the underlying dynamics of employability among graduates.
- *Generating hypotheses:* descriptive research can be used as a starting point for generating hypotheses, which can then be tested in further research.
- *Lack of prior knowledge:* descriptive research can be used when little is known about a topic or population and more information is needed to increase understanding.
- *Cost-effective:* descriptive research is often less expensive and time-consuming than experimental research, making it a cost-effective option for many researchers.
- *Data analysis:* descriptive research generates numerical data that can be analysed using descriptive statistics such as mean, median, mode, standard deviation, and frequency distribution to provide insights and draw conclusions.

5.9 RESEARCH POPULATION

Neil (2015: 3) defines a population as the full group or collection of people from whom study data will be gathered. Unemployed graduates from SACG database in the Johannesburg metropolitan area were used for data collection. There are 30 000 unemployed business study graduates in the SACG database.

5.10 SAMPLING METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

Probability sampling and non-probability sampling are the two types of sampling procedures (Patton, 2014). The researcher can assess the likelihood of any element or member of the population being included in the sample using probability sampling

(Sahaf, 2019). The types of probability sampling are simple random sampling, stratified random sampling, and cluster sampling (Sahaf, 2019; Arnab, 2017).

Non-probability sampling, on the other hand, does not allow the researcher to specify a possibility. Any element that has a chance of being included in the sample has a probability greater than nil. Random sampling, quota sampling, snowball sampling, and chance sampling are examples of non-probability sampling (Welman *et al.*, 2012). Accidental sampling, quota sampling, snowball sampling, and convenience sampling are examples of non-probability sampling (Welman *et al.*, 2012).

5.10.1 Probability sampling method

The following are probability sampling methods:

- **Simple random samples**

According to Mathers, Fox and Hunn (2009), the term 'random' suggests that a random or ad hoc method, such as including the first 20 persons a researcher encounters on the street for inclusion in the study, is conceivable. This is not random in the traditional sense. To be considered a 'random' sample, each person in the population must have an equal chance of being chosen. Strict processes must be followed to conduct a random sample. Simple random sampling and systematic random sampling are two types of random sampling strategies.

- **Simple random sampling**

When the selection is purely random, this is called basic random sampling. If a population of 5000 people exists, each person might be allocated a separate number (Sahaf, 2019). If a researcher wished to reach a sample size of 200, he or she may do it by randomly selecting 200 numbers from a hat. This is a simple random sampling example.

- **Systematic random sampling**

A more prevalent strategy is systematic random selection (Sahaf, 2019). According to Bhardwaj (2021), after all, individuals in the population have been assigned numbers, the first participant is chosen at random, while subsequent participants are chosen at a set sampling interval.

- **Stratified random samples**

Stratified sampling ensures that specific strata or groups of people are included in the sampling process (Arnab, 2017). If an individual undertakes to research consultation rates in general practice and knows that about 4% of the population is made up of a certain ethnic minority group, a simple or systematic random sample may have no ethnic minorities (or a considerably lesser proportion). A stratified sampling approach should be used if a researcher wishes to guarantee that the sample is representative of the population.

- **Proportional stratified sample**

Proportional stratified sampling, as defined by Lachman, Gallardo and Davis (2012), is a sampling approach in which distinct subcategories of the sample are identified and subsequently picked in proportion to their incidence in the population.

- **Cluster samples**

When conducting interviews with individuals spread across the country is not cost-effective, cluster sampling is frequently utilised in nationwide surveys (Lachman *et al.*, 2009). Cluster sampling can be used to select individuals in geographic groups. For example, before random selection, the researcher may decide to focus on specific cities or constituencies. People in the designated cluster units can then be randomly picked using multistage sampling. However, caution must be exercised to ensure that the cluster units chosen are broadly representative of the population and

do not display significant biases. For example, if all of the general practices chosen for research are fundholding, this does not reflect all general practices.

Multistage sampling

According to Bhardwaj (2021), multistage sampling, as the name implies, involves several stages and is thus called multistage sampling. In this process, each group of samples is further divided into smaller groups and members are randomly selected from each smaller group. This is a complex form of cluster sampling.

5.10.2 Non-probability sampling

Non-probability sampling is a method of sampling in which the likelihood of items from the population being included in the study's sample cannot be specified. Non-random (or non-probability) sampling is less common in quantitative social research, although it is becoming more common in market research surveys and commissioned studies. There are six frequently used non-probability sampling methods, namely convenience sampling, quota sampling, purposive/judgment sampling, snowball sampling, expert sampling, and accidental sampling which are discussed below.

- **Convenience sampling**

The most often used sampling method, according to Acharya, Nigam and Prakash (2013), is convenience sampling. The investigator selects the sample based on its convenience. Respondents are frequently chosen because they are there at the correct time. Its benefits include being the most often used, being less expensive, and not requiring a list of all demographic characteristics. The approach, however, is not without flaws. Variability is the most essential factor, and bias cannot be quantified or controlled. Second, the data's findings cannot be extrapolated outside the sample. Participants are typically chosen for convenience sampling because they are readily available. Convenience sampling is commonly used since it is affordable and simple compared to other sample methods (Taherdoost, 2016).

- **Quota sampling**

The quota sampling process guarantees that a certain attribute of a population sample is accurately represented to the investigator's satisfaction. The advantages are that it is inexpensive, widely used, and does not need a list of demographic components. It also has some stratification characteristics. The drawbacks are comparable to those of convenience sampling (Acharya *et al.*, 2013).

Quota sampling is a method in which the researcher decides ahead of time which essential features will be used to stratify the sample (Wolf *et al.*, 2016). Interviewers frequently set sample age and gender quotas. For a sample of 200 persons, researchers may select that 50% of the respondents should be male and 50% should be female and 40% of the respondents should be over 40 years old and 60% should be 39 years old or younger. The difference between a stratified and a quota sample is that in a quota sample, the respondents are not chosen at random within the strata. Respondents may be chosen only based on their accessibility to the interviewer. Because random sampling is not performed, inferential statistics cannot be used to generalize the results to a wider population (Bhardwaj, 2021).

- **Snowball sampling**

Initial respondents are chosen using probability or non-probability techniques in the snowball sampling approach, and further respondents are acquired using information supplied by the initial respondents. Snowball sampling, according to Davis *et al.* (2012), is a strategy in which study participants are asked to propose others who share the same characteristics as the researcher.

Doerfel and Taylor (2004), for example, investigated a Croatian organisation's social networks to better understand how organisations and the media in Croatia collaborate. Doerfel and Taylor (2004) identified organisations to include in their sample using snowball sampling. Snowball sampling has the benefit of being inexpensive and effective in some situations, such as locating unusual populations.

Bias exists because the sampling units are not independent, therefore extrapolation of data outside the sample is not warranted (Acharya *et al.*, 2013).

- **Purposive/judgment sampling**

According to Etikan, Musa and Alkassim (2016), the purposive sampling technique, also known as judgment sampling, is the deliberate selection of a participant based upon the characteristics that the participant possesses. Purposive or judgemental sampling, according to Taherdoost (2016), is a method in which particular places, persons, or events are purposefully chosen to gather critical information that cannot be gained from other options. It's a non-random strategy that doesn't require any underlying ideas or a predetermined quantity of participants.

Simply said, the researcher determines what information is required and then seeks out persons who, based on their expertise or experience, are prepared to supply it (Wolf *et al.*, 2016). In qualitative research, purposeful sampling is commonly used to discover and choose information-rich instances to maximise the use of available resources (Wolf *et al.*, 2016). Cases or participants are included in the sample because the researchers understand that they are significant to the study.

- **Accidental sampling**

According to Etikan and Babatope (2019), accidental sampling is predicated on the sample population's accessibility. When the requisite number of responders in the sample is attained, the researcher stops collecting data via accidental sampling. Furthermore, the sample is not led by evident features; some persons contacted may lack the information needed. Accidental sampling (also known as grab, convenience, or opportunity sampling) is when a sample is taken from a population that is convenient and easily accessible. Although accidental sampling does not produce a representative sample of the population, it can be beneficial for pilot testing (Etikan & Babatope, 2019).

- **Expert sampling**

According to Berndt (2020), respondents in expert sampling must be well-known specialists in the researcher's field of interest. This kind of sampling is usually employed in qualitative research. The researcher identifies respondents who demonstrate knowledge or are experts in the field of interest for the research study interest. Data can be collected individually or in a group.

- **Volunteer sample**

A convenience sample is comparable to a volunteer sample (Andrade, 2021). People who are willing to volunteer for a study, such as those who react to a flier mailed or placed by the researcher, make up the volunteer sample.

- **Network sampling**

To recruit participants, network sampling leverages social or other networks (such as workplaces, organisations, and support groups).

- **The rationale for adopting probability sampling method**

In this study, the probability sampling method was used with the aid of the stratified random sampling technique to select the sample. When examining data from different subgroups or strata (as in the case of this study), researchers typically make use of stratified random sampling. Stratified random sampling was used to create a sample population that was representative of the entire population under study. Other reasons for adopting the probability sampling method are as follows:

- *Representativeness:* Probability sampling ensures that the sample is representative of the population, as every member of the population has a known, non-zero chance of being selected. This increases the likelihood that the sample accurately reflects the characteristics of the population.

- *Generalisability*: Probability sampling lets researchers draw conclusions about the whole population from a small sample because the sample is a good representation of the whole population.
- *Random selection*: Random selection is used in probability sampling methods, which makes it less likely that there will be bias and makes the results more reliable.
- *Statistical analysis*: The use of probability sampling allows the researcher to use statistical methods to make inferences about the population based on the sample.
- *Cost-effective*: Since probability sampling does not need a full count of the population, it is often less expensive than non-probability sampling.
- *Stratification*: Probability sampling methods also allow for stratification of the population, which allows for more precise estimates for subgroups within the population.

5.10.3 Sample size

The sample for this study was selected using stratified random sampling. In total, 265 participants were selected to participate in this study, and the sample was broken down as follows: 130 graduates with national diplomas, 50 graduates with B Tech degrees, 50 Bachelor's degree recipients, 25 honours degree recipients, and ten Master's degree recipients. Graduates of business studies were included, whereas graduates of other programmes were omitted.

5.11 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

5.11.1 Observation

The systematic description of events, behaviours, and artefacts in the social situation chosen for research is characterised as observation (McNabb, 2017). The nature of observation allows the researcher to describe situations as they occur by sketching the scenario under investigation using the five senses. The researcher watches the participants' behaviour and notes the findings of these observations. The researcher

uses the method of observation to develop the most objective and accurate overall understanding of the phenomena under study (De Walt & De Walt, 2002). Participants in an interview, for example, may become aware that their replies are being recorded. They may provide answers that differ from what they do in real life to show themselves positively.

The observation approach, on the other hand, permits the researcher to observe people's behaviour without them realising it (Cargan, 2007). The researcher can use the observation approach to look for nonverbal signs regarding emotions, evaluate the pattern of interaction (who is talking to whom), monitor how participants engage and keep track of how much time they spend on different tasks. To conduct a structured observation, the researcher must first select the variables or indicators to be observed. The researcher must ponder the individuals, their behaviour, and the setting in which the observation is taking place, as well as any relevant bodily motions or symbols. To ensure that the observation notes are reliable, they must be compared at regular intervals (Trigueros & Sandoval, 2017).

5.11.2 Questionnaires

Because each individual (respondent) is asked to answer the same set of questions, a questionnaire is one of the most widely utilised techniques of data gathering in the usage of the survey approach. It allows for the efficient collection of responses from a large sample before quantitative analysis (Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

A questionnaire, according to Pandey and Pandey (2021) is a written list of questions, the responses to which are recorded by the respondents. Respondents in a questionnaire read the question, evaluate what is anticipated, and then write down their responses. The primary distinction between an interview and a questionnaire is that in the former, the interviewer asks the questions and records the participants' replies, whereas, in the latter, the respondents record their responses. According to Patten (2016), the following are some of the benefits of employing a questionnaire:

- Questionnaires are a quick and easy approach to obtaining information.

- Questionnaires are effective for gathering sensitive information since respondents can remain anonymous; and
- Research questionnaires are economical.

Wright (2017) points out that the main disadvantage of questionnaires sent by email is the high rate of non-response by potential respondents. Incomplete questionnaires also reduce the usability of returned surveys. Furthermore, there is no clarification on ambiguous questions. According to Patten (2016), the questionnaire may only provide a snapshot. Questionnaires may also elicit socially desirable responses.

5.11.3 Interviews

Kumar (2011) describes an interview as a verbal encounter in which an interviewer seeks information, beliefs, or views from another individual, usually face-to-face but also over the phone. An interview is any face-to-face or other person-to-person conversation between two or more persons for a defined reason. In research, interviewing is asking questions and receiving responses from participants (Patten, 2016). Individual face-to-face interviews and group interviews are two types of interviews. The telephone or other electronic devices (such as computers) can be used to ask and answer inquiries (Trigueros & Sandoval, 2017). In-depth interviews, clinical interviews, experiential interviews, and life narratives are all examples of organised, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews (as discussed below).

A research interview, according to Saunders *et al.* (2016), is a planned interaction between two or more persons in which the interviewer must be knowledgeable and ask exact and clear questions to which the interviewee is prepared to reply and listen carefully. Interviews are one-on-one conversations between an interviewer and a subject intended to obtain information on a certain set of topics. Interviews may take place in person or telephonically. The degree to which the contact is structured distinguishes interviews from surveys.

- **Structured interviews**

According to Bryman (2017), business researchers use structured interviews for quantitative studies. In this process, an interviewer uses a standardised interview schedule so that all respondents are asked the same questions in the same order. The purpose of a structured interview is to guarantee that all participants' responses can be summarised. According to Kumar (2011), in a structured interview, the researcher asks a sequence of predefined questions, following the same language and order as indicated in the interview schedule. In a face-to-face interview, an interview schedule is a prepared set of open-ended or closed questions asked by the interviewer. A key advantage of a structured interview is that it delivers consistent information, ensuring data comparability. Furthermore, controlled interviews require fewer interviewing abilities than unstructured ones.

- **Semi-structured interviews**

According to Saunders *et al.* (2016), the researcher has a list of topics and potentially some key questions to address in a semi-structured interview. These may be used differently in different interviews. If the researcher discovers a specific organisational setting relevant to the study issue, he or she may neglect some questions in a particular interview. Due to the nature of the questions and accompanying discussion, data is gathered either by an audio recording of the interview or by taking notes. It is feasible to develop some statements to begin the topic, a list of prompts to stimulate more discussion, and some comments to close it in semi-structured interviews.

- **Unstructured interviews**

According to Bihu (2020), an unstructured interview is referred to be an in-depth interview as it tends to engage with the units of analysis to gain critical information about personal experiences and viewpoints. The interview can be in the form of individual, group or telephonic interviews. Moreover, the analytical approach used to

generate knowledge on certain aspects of social life is subject to changes, which is an important attribute related to the functional use of unstructured interviews.

According to Kumar (2011), the strength of unstructured interviews is the virtually complete freedom they provide in terms of topic and organisation. There is also a lot of leeway in terms of language and how the questions are communicated to the responders. Depending on what is occurring to the responder during the interview, the researcher can design questions and highlight topics in an instant.

Unstructured interviews, as noted by Patten (2016), are common in both quantitative and qualitative research. The distinction is in how the information acquired in response to the questions will be used. In quantitative research, the researcher creates a response classification from the replies, which are subsequently coded and quantified. Responses are employed as descriptors in qualitative research, generally in verbatim form, and can be related to arguments, writing flow, and logical order. Furthermore, in qualitative research, unstructured interviews are commonly employed.

According to Kumar (2011), the following are the benefits of interviews:

- The interview is ideal for checking intricate and delicate regions and is more suited for challenging settings. For example, before asking delicate questions, the interviewer may prepare an interviewee in advance and explain tough questions to the interviewee directly.
- It is advantageous to gather detailed facts. When questioning, an investigator is likely to obtain information through investigation. As a result, when comprehensive facts are required, interviewing is the favoured method of data collection.
- Data can be finalized. An interviewer can enhance the information gathered from replies with information gleaned through nonverbal replies.
- If a question is not answered or if the interviewer expresses it in a manner that the responder understands, it is less likely to be misunderstood.
- Interviewing has a larger range of applications. An interview may be utilised with nearly any group, including children, the disabled, the illiterate, and the old.

According to Opdenakker (2006), the disadvantages of using an interview are as follows:

- They are more time consuming;
- They are more costly than quantitative studies;
- The interviewer must have control of the interview; and
- Conducting interviews may be costly.

5.11.4 Experimental strategy

An experimental design tests the effects of a treatment or intervention on an outcome, controlling for all other factors that might affect that outcome (Creswell, 2009).

5.11.5 Survey strategy

A survey design examines a sample of a population to produce a quantitative or numerical description of trends, attitudes, or views. The researcher generalises the population based on the sample data (Creswell, 2009).

5.11.6 Case study strategy

A case study, according to Zainal (2007), is an in-depth analysis of a person, group, circumstance, or event. It entails gathering information from several sources and combining strategies as needed. When an in-depth analysis and comprehension of a topic are necessary, case studies are utilised in research. Many social science studies apply this technique, particularly when investigating education, sociology, and community-based problems such as poverty, unemployment, drug addiction, and illiteracy (Zainal, 2007).

5.11.7 Archival research strategy

When gathering data, Saunders *et al.* (2012) stated that the archival research strategy relies on existing data sets or historical records that allow for the exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive analysis of changes that have been tracked over a long period. The accuracy and volume of material accessible, however, could be a challenge for a researcher who primarily depends on this sort of secondary data.

5.11.8 Rationale for the use of a questionnaire

A questionnaire is a type of data gathering tool that consists of a sequence of questions and other prompts designed to extract information from respondents. The purpose of using the questionnaire in this research is to simplify the statistical process, provide broad coverage of the participants' geographic location, and allow them to complete the questionnaire at their own pace. Furthermore, questionnaires can ensure anonymity, so respondents are more inclined to be honest, which usually helps to obtain more accurate and valid research information.

The questionnaire for the research study was designed in sequential order, using simple and unambiguous words that allowed the research participants to respond to the questions with ease. The four types of measurement scales that are normally used are nominal, ordinal, interval, and ratio. In this study, the ordinal scale was used, which ranks the variables in order of importance. Another scale used in this research study is the interval or Likert scale. Other reasons to use a questionnaire include:

- *Convenience:* Questionnaires can be administered easily and quickly, and can reach a large number of people in a relatively short period of time.
- *Cost-effectiveness:* Questionnaires are relatively inexpensive to administer and can provide a large amount of data in a short time.

- *Standardisation of data:* Questionnaires are a standard way to collect data, which makes it possible to compare data from different participants and makes statistical analysis easier.
- *Anonymity:* Questionnaires can be anonymous, which can encourage people to be more honest and candid in their responses.
- *Versatility:* Questionnaires can be used to collect data on a wide range of topics, including demographic information, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, and experiences.
- *Self-administration:* Questionnaires can be self-administered, which may lead to more honest and accurate responses as people are more likely to be open about sensitive issues.
- *Data analysis:* Questionnaires generate numbers that can be analysed using descriptive statistics like mean, median, mode, standard deviation, and frequency distribution to gain insights and draw conclusions.

5.12 PILOT STUDY

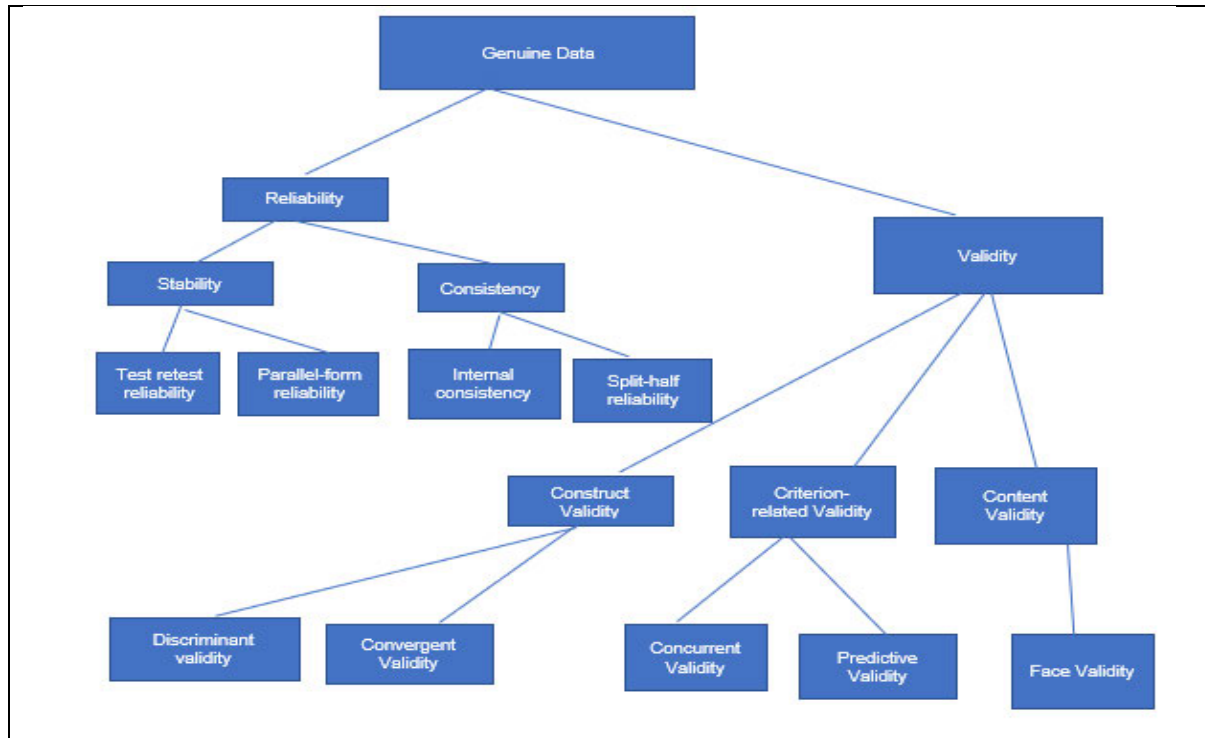
A pilot study, according to Welman *et al.* (2012), entails using the instruments on a small number of people from the same demographic as the final research project as a trial for the actual research investigation. Welman *et al.* (2012) further stated that the aim of pilot research is to:

- It is possible to eliminate the possibility of mistakes in the analytical procedure.
- Ambiguously worded items can be identified;
- Participants are asked to indicate their understanding of the questions asked; and
- The researcher has the opportunity to observe body language that might indicate awkwardness in the wording of questions.

Ten participants were used in the pilot study to identify any issues. The pilot study participants were business studies graduates. The pilot study participants did not form part of the main sample. The participants indicated no changes to the questions in the questionnaire and they said that the questions were simple and clear to understand. The questionnaire took approximately 15 minutes to complete.

5.13 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Figure 5.3: Structure of reliability and validity



Source: Bajpai and Bajpai (2014)

Figure 5.3 illustrates the structure of reliability and validity, and it is explained in the following sections.

5.13.1 Validity

According to Saunders *et al.* (2016:450), “validity is the extent to which the data collection process precisely quantifies what was intended to be measured”. Validity is defined by Heale and Twycross (2015) as the degree to which a notion is accurately measured in a quantitative investigation. As a result, the validity of a research instrument is determined by how well it measures what it is supposed to measure (Robson, 2011). In addition, it refers to the degree to which the results are accurate; that is, the research instrument (questionnaire) must accurately measure the topics under consideration (Pallant, 2011).

The degree to which the requirements of the scientific research method were met during the process of producing research results is known as research validity (Mohajan, 2017). It is a compulsory condition for all types of studies (Oliver, 2010). The extent to which a measurement instrument measures what it is intended to measure is referred to as validity in quantitative research (Thatcher, 2010). In the mid-twentieth century, Cronbach and Meehl (1995) introduced the issue of validity in quantitative research in the context of developing criteria for evaluating psychological tests.

In research, validity is divided into two parts: internal (credibility) and external (validity) (transferability). Internal validity indicates whether the study's findings are credible as a result of how the groups were chosen, whether the information was collected, or whether analyses were carried out. External validity denotes whether the study's findings apply to other groups of interest (Last, 2001).

5.13.1.1 Types of validity

Content validity, face validity, construct validity, and criterion-related validity are the four categories of validity tests (Creswell, 2005; Pallant, 2011), as explained below.

- **Content validity**

The extent to which the questions on the instrument and the results of those questions represent all possible questions about the content or skill is referred to as content validity (Creswell, 2005). The extent to which a research instrument accurately measured all parts of a construct and if it adequately caught all of the material it was supposed to cover concerning the variable is termed content validity (Heale & Twycross, 2015). It also guarantees that the questionnaire has enough items to adequately capture the notion. The greater the content validity, the more items on the scale represent the domain of the notion being measured (Shekaran & Bougie, 2010).

There is no statistical test for determining whether a measure adequately encompasses a content area. The knowledge of subject matter experts is usually required for content validity (Thatcher, 2010). To measure content validity effectively, Crocker and Algina (2010) recommend four steps: identifying and describing the domain of interest; assembling experts in the domain; developing a consistent matching method; and analysing the results of the matching task.

- **Face validity**

Face validity is regarded as a fundamental and lowest index of content validity and is determined after the test has been built (Allen & Yen, 1979). Although outwardly similar, the notions of content validity and face validity are distinct. The degree to which a test appears to assess what it claims to measure is referred to as face validity (Leedy & Ormrod, 2004). It is the most basic and imprecise approach to establishing validity, based solely on the assessor's knowledge and experience with the subject (Nwana, 2007).

- **Construct validity**

The degree to which the instrument's questions and their answers represent all potential queries about the content or capacity is known as construct validity (Creswell, 2005), as well as the degree to which a research instrument (or tool) measures the desired construct (Mohajan, 2017). According to Mohajan (2017), three types of evidence can be used to demonstrate the construct validity of a research instrument. Homogeneity denotes that the instrument measures a single construct, whereas convergence means the instrument measures theories that are comparable to those measured by other instruments. This is not practicable if similar instruments are not accessible. According to theoretical evidence, the behaviour is consistent with the theoretical propositions of the construct measured by the instrument.

- **Discriminant validity**

When two variables are anticipated to be uncorrelated in theory and the values acquired by measuring them prove to be uncorrelated, discriminant validity is established; that is, to identify one group from another (Heale & Twycross, 2015).

- **Convergent validity**

Convergent validity indicates the extent to which the results of one measurement on a high, medium, or low relationship with the results of another measurement are expected to capture the same construct (Messick, 1995). This can be established when the results of two separate instruments measuring the same notion are highly associated, (Mohajan, 2017).

- **Criterion validity**

To forecast future or current performance, criterion validity is used. It looks at the association between scale scores and a certain measurable criterion (Burns *et al.*, 2017); it also correlates test scores with another criterion of interest. It further examines how the scale distinguishes individuals on a criterion it was created to predict (Pallant, 2011), as well as the relationship between a research instrument and other instruments that measure the same variables. The amount to which multiple instruments measure the same variable can be determined via correlations. Criterion validity is assessed in three ways (Heale & Twycross, 2015):

- Convergent validity indicates that an instrument is highly connected with other instruments measuring similar variables.
- Divergent validity indicates that an instrument has a low correlation with other instruments that assess distinct variables; and
- Predictive validity refers to how well the instrument correlates with future criteria. Concurrent validity and predictive validity, as mentioned below, can be used to determine it.

- **Concurrent validity**

According to Mohajan (2017), concurrent validity is the degree to which the results of one test are connected to the results of another test that has already been established as valid, is designed to assess the same construct, and is administered at the same time, or to another valid criterion. It is required when constructing a test of ability to replace a less efficient test (Denga, 1987), and it is created by correlating one question with another that has initially been validated through standardization (Okoro, 2002).

- **Predictive validity**

Predictive validity is frequently employed in program evaluation studies and is appropriate for applied research. It is a test designed and developed to predict a specific type of behavior (Allen & Yen, 1979), and it signifies the measurement instrument's ability to discriminate between individuals with a future criterion. The tests are designed to identify applicants who are most likely to succeed later in their education while rejecting those who are most likely to fail if admitted (Nwana, 2007). The stronger the correlation between the criterion and the predictor, the more accurate the prediction.

5.13.2 Reliability

The second measure of the quality of a quantitative study is the reliability or accuracy of an instrument or the extent to which a research instrument consistently provides the same results when employed again in the same situation (Mohajan, 2017). Saunders *et al.* (2016) describe reliability as the extent to which the information collection method yields reliable results, and the derivations of other researchers are interpreted similarly or there is openness about how logical deductions were made from the raw data.

5.13.2.1 Types of reliability

Stability and internal consistency are the two major characteristics of reliability. The ability of a measurement to remain the same over time, despite uncontrolled test settings or the respondents themselves, is known as stability (Allen & Yen, 1979). A stable and reliable measurement will consistently produce the same results. Test-retest reliability and parallel form reliability are the two methods used to test stability (Mohajan, 2017).

- **Test-retest reliability**

The test-retest reliability coefficient is calculated by repeating the same measurement a second time (Graziano & Raulin, 2006). The degree to which findings differ from one test to the next due to a measurement error is known as test-retest reliability. Furthermore, it is a measure of the consistency gained when the same test is given to a group of individuals again over weeks to months (Madan & Kensinger, 2017).

- **Parallel-forms reliability**

A measure of reliability obtained by administering different versions of an assessment instrument to the same group of people is known as parallel-forms reliability (Mohajan, 2017). The results of the two versions can then be correlated to determine the consistency of the results across versions. Parallel-form reliability occurs when they are highly correlated (Yarnold, 2014). Internal consistency reliability is a metric for determining how similar different test items querying the same construct generate similar results. It investigates whether objects on a scale or measurement are homogeneous (DeVellis, 2006). As discussed below, it can be presented in two main formats: inter-item consistency and split-half reliability (Cortina, 1993).

- **Inter-rater reliability**

Inter-rater reliability is the degree to which data is collected and captured in a systematic way (Romero-Morales *et al.*, 2020). It establishes the equivalence of evaluations acquired by different observers using the same instrument. The coefficient of agreement of the raters' judgements or the correlation of the ratings of two or more independent raters determines reliability (Mohajan, 2017). Because human observers do not always interpret replies, in the same manner, it is useful. Raters may disagree on how well specific responses or materials reflect an understanding of the constructor skill being evaluated (Heale & Twycross, 2015).

Cronbach's Alpha (α), which is commonly regarded as the mean of all potential split-half coefficients, is the most used measure of internal consistency. It is determined by the average inter-correlations of the items and the scale's total number of elements. It normally ranges from 0 to 1, with 0 indicating no association between the items on a scale and 1 indicating absolute internal consistency (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Alpha values above 0.7 are generally seen as acceptable and adequate; values above 0.8 are regarded as good; and values above 0.9 are regarded as indicating exceptional internal consistency (Cronbach, 1951).

- **Split-half reliability**

It assesses internal consistency by comparing one-half of a set of scaled item scores to the other half (Ganesh, 2009). It only requires one test administration, which is especially useful when the test is very long. It entails comparing the outcomes of one half of a test to the outcomes of the other half. It is a quick and simple method for determining dependability. It is only effective for large questionnaires with all questions measuring the same construct; thus, it is not appropriate for tests measuring different constructs (Chakrabarty, 2013).

In order to make sure that the findings are genuine, believable, and trustworthy, the researcher scoured through the data to check for irregularities. The findings of this research also have to be dependable. Dependability of research findings was

achieved by checking and evaluating whether the research methods could demonstrate that if the activities were to be repeated in the same context with the same methods and research participants, the research could achieve similar findings, which in themselves are influenced by the researcher's own construction of meaning. After the research methods and findings were found to be dependable, the researcher checked for confirmability. The overriding goal of this criterion is to ensure that researcher biases are minimised and preferably eliminated as they might affect the results of the data analysis. To this end, the researcher ensured that, as far as possible, the work's findings were the result of the experiences and ideas of the participants and not the opinions, beliefs, or preferences of the researcher.

5.14 DATA ANALYSIS

According to Noble and Smith (2014), the data review process aims to modernize the information in a clear, meticulous, and detailed manner while remaining true to the participants' versions. Data analysis is the methodical examination and study of data to provide a meaningful explanation of a situation.

Due to the multivariate nature of the study, the collected data in this study were analysed using structural equation modelling (SEM). SEM is a well-known multivariate analysis technique that is used in academic and business spaces. It can use component analysis and multiple regressions to quantify correlations between complicated conceptual structures with numerous latent variables (Kline, 2011; Nusair & Hua, 2010).

SEM is available in many statistical software packages. SmartPLS® (Partial Least Squares) was chosen for this study as it has proven to possess a reliable capacity to predict correlations between constructs, as well as its accessibility, convenience of use, and compatibility (Hair *et al.*, 2017). SmartPLS® was employed in both the measure and structural model review phases of SEM, confirming a model with appropriate analytical capabilities. While SEM was used to produce inferential statistics, descriptive statistics were derived using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS®). The study's findings serve as the foundation for discussions and

judgments about the achievement of the research aims, as well as the study's contributions.

5.15 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In terms of ethical considerations, two main aspects are considered: how the data are collected and what they are used for. This is consistent with Paltridge and Phakiti (2010: 105) who state, "There are significant ethical issues in research. In particular, at the most basic level, the integrity and privacy of the individuals participating in the research must be maintained at all costs." Ethical considerations will determine the scientific validity of the research, including informed consent, and the ethical recruitment of the respondents. In addition, ethical principles should help ensure non-maliciousness, beneficence, and respect for the respondents' autonomy.

According to Saunders *et al.* (2015), ethical issues will develop as the researcher creates and plans the research, seeks access to individuals and organisations, and collects, analyses, manages, and presents data as part of the research. The ethical norms that regulate the researcher's behavior to the rights of individuals who are the topic of or affected by the research are referred to as ethics. The researcher followed the following ethical guidelines in this research study:

- Ensured that the participants provided informed consent and endeavoured to ensure that decisions about participation in this research were made from an informed position;
- Ensured that the participants did not suffer any harm. The researcher made every effort to ensure that the research participants were protected from inappropriate intrusion, suffering, indignity, and physical discomfort;
- Ensured that the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were maintained during the collection of the data in that no names were required;
- Ensured that permission was obtained and that contribute to the research was voluntary;
- Protected the rights of the participants, such as the right to privacy and the right to withdraw from the study; and

- Ensured that ethical clearance was established from the Durban University of Technology before the commencement of data collection.

5.15.1 Ensure participants are informed

The researcher ensured that the participants are informed which implies the following:

- Contributors have the necessary academic capacity and natural maturity to understand their contribution to the research;
- Participants make an unbiased decision to participate in the research;
- Participation in the research is completely voluntary;
- Participants are aware of the nature and aspects of the research being conducted;
- Participants are aware of their right to terminate the research;
- The researcher authentically informs the participants about the nature of the research; and
- Participants will not be forced in any way to participate in the research.

5.15.2 Ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

The researcher ensured confidentiality and anonymity by controlling access to data, keeping data securely, publishing results in a way that did not identify participants, and gaining permission to reuse data were all used to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

5.16 CONCLUSION

The numerous layers of the study onion were the focus of this chapter. There was a discussion of the research approaches which are deductive and inductive approaches and it was important to highlight the rational of the chosen approach. The methodological choice, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods were also discussed including the rational of using the chosen method. A crucial part of the

chapter is the research design where discussion was done on different designs and the rational of using the descriptive research method. The sampling methods and its techniques were explored in detail in this chapter. Furthermore, a detailed discussion of seven research instruments was done and the rational of using questionnaire for the research study. The types of validity and reliability were extensively discussed in this chapter and how they will be applied. It also described the data analysis methods considered for the study and referred extensively to the literature to justify the methods. The ethical considerations applied in this study were also highlighted. Having described how the data for the study were collected and analysed, the next chapter will focus on the report and analysis of the findings.

CHAPTER SIX

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The outcomes of the data analysis from the previous chapter's method are presented in this chapter. Following the completion of data collection, the data were examined and analysed to produce useful research information. The data analysis begins with population statistics that summarise the sample data based on the responder profile. This is followed by descriptive analysis and inferential analysis.

Descriptive analysis is concerned with describing phenomena; that is, how the individual imagines something to be. The descriptive analysis further attempts to examine the situations to define the norm (Waliman, 2011). Furthermore, the descriptive analysis explains what is already known and seeks to lay the foundation for additional information.

Inferential statistics are used to infer from the sample drawn from the observations of a population (Salkind, 2006: 165). In other words, deductions can be derived from the characteristics of the population based on the sample selected from the population. Inferential statistics can be used to extrapolate sample results to the wider population (Struwig & Stead, 2001).

6.2 RESPONSE RATE

A sample size of 265 was selected. After two months, 124 responses were received. Thus, the response rate was 47%.

6.3 DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

Demographic questions were used to obtain a general understanding of the participants in terms of gender, age group, and qualifications.

- **Gender**

Figure 6.1: Gender of respondents

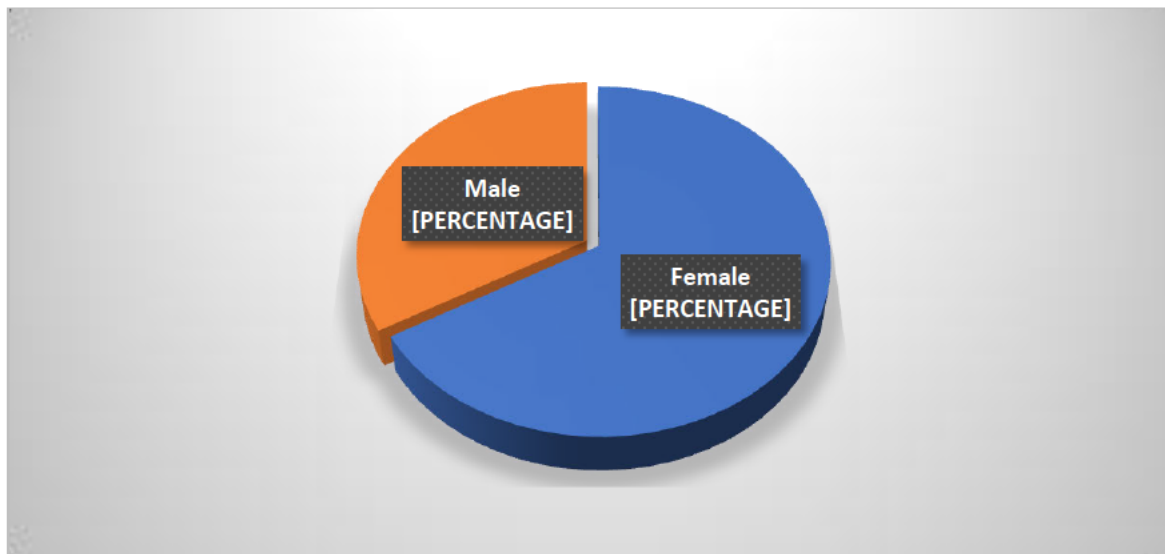


Figure 6.1 above represents the gender of the respondents. Males represented 33% of the study and females 67%. The fact that most of the respondents were females implied that more females pursue this career path. According to Statistics SA (2020), the demographic population of SA comprises 51.1% females and 48.9% males. The gender distribution in this study is thus in line with the South African population, which has more females than males.

- **Age group**

Figure 6.2: Age of respondents

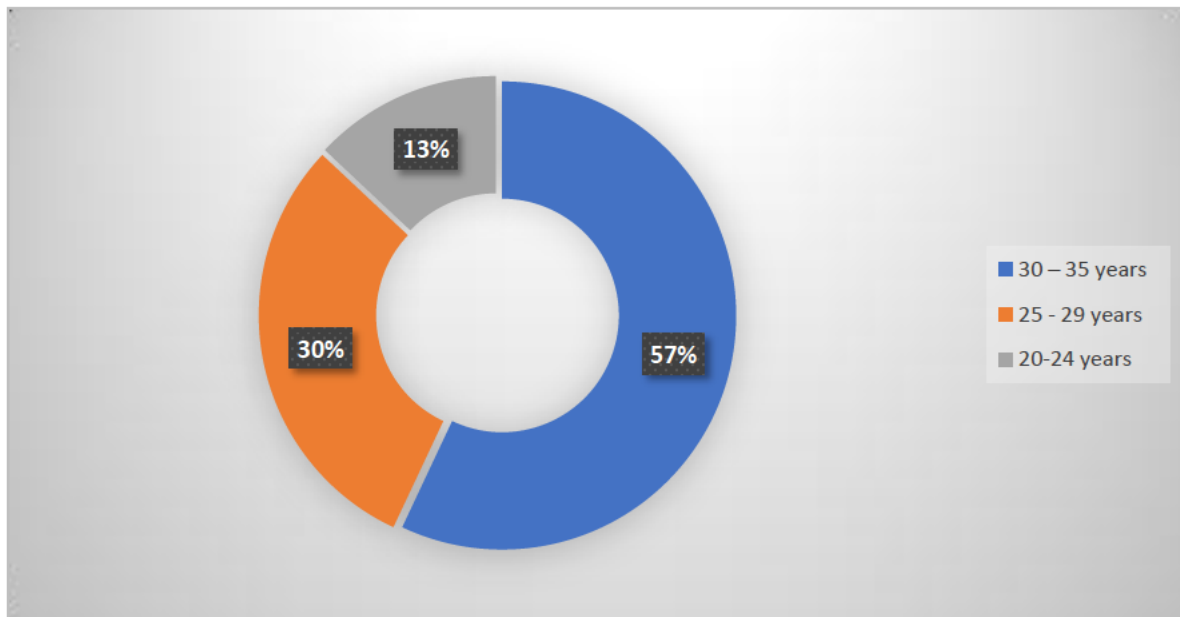
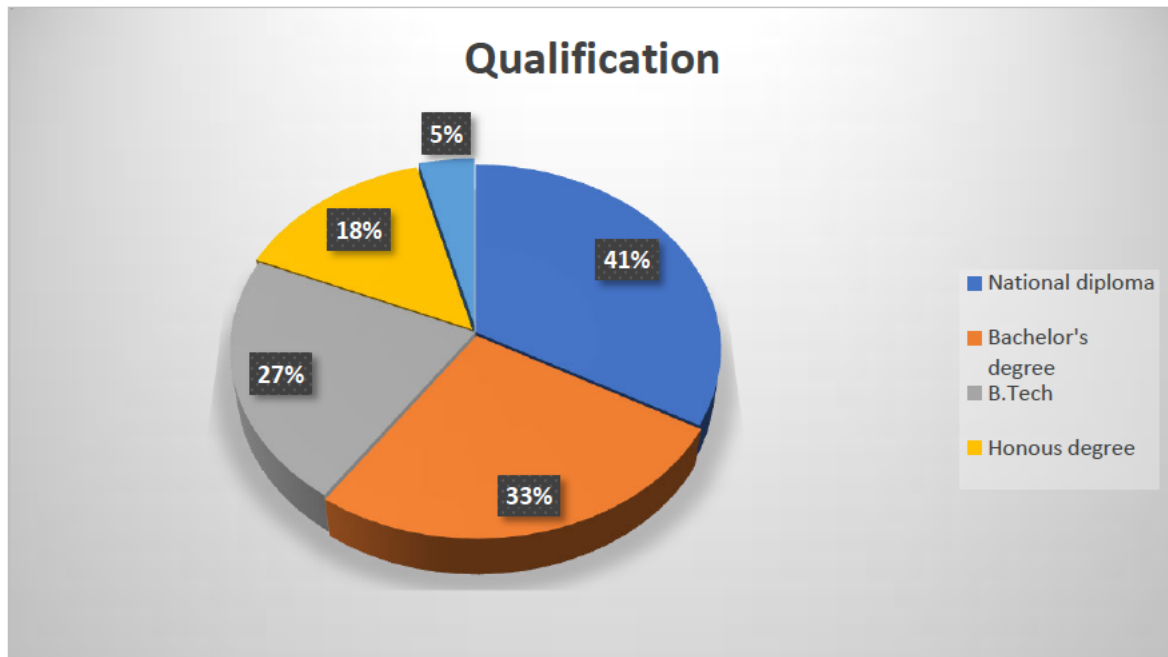


Figure 6.2 above represents the age group of the respondents who participated in this research. The age groups indicate that most of the respondents were between 30 and 35 years (57%); those between 25 and 29 years old comprised 30%; and those between 20 and 24 years old, 13%.

- **Qualifications**

Figure 6.3 below represents the qualifications of the respondents who participated in this study.

Figure 6.3: Qualifications of respondents

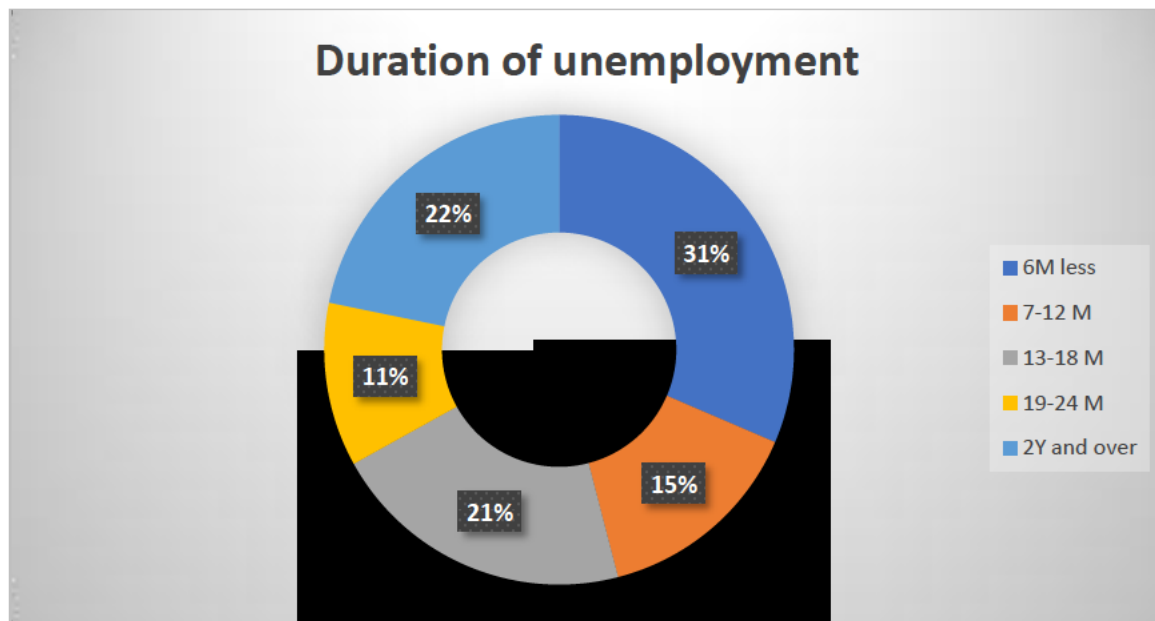


The figure above shows that the majority of the respondents held a national diploma (41%); then a bachelor's degree (33%); a technical degree (27%); an honours degree (18%); and lastly, a Master's degree (5%). The highest percentage relating to the qualifications of the respondents was 33% for a Bachelor's degree, and the lowest was 5% for a Master's degree.

- **Duration of unemployment**

Figure 6.4 below illustrates the duration of unemployment of the respondents who participated in this research.

Figure 6.4: Duration of unemployment



The majority of the respondents had been unemployed for less than six months (31%), followed by two years and over at 22%; then 13 to 18 months at 21%; 7 to 12 months at 15%; and lastly, 19 to 24 months at 11%. The highest percentage regarding the duration of unemployment was 31.3%. On average, the category with the longest duration of employment was 12 months to two years and more.

6.4 DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

Descriptive statistics are statistical descriptions of data that provide a broad, logical, and straightforward view of a vast quantity of information (Struwig & Stead, 2001). For the demographic variables in this study, descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies were used. The frequency of each response indicates how many people participated, such as how many females and how many males. Age, gender, and qualification level were represented by frequencies. The Alpha correlation

coefficients, means, and standard deviations were employed as descriptive statistics for the employability variables.

The main purpose is to provide a summary of the samples and measures done in this study. When combined with several graphic analyses, descriptive statistics form a significant component of all quantitative data analysis. According to Loeb *et al.* (2017) descriptive analysis is the application of the scientific method to advance knowledge. It involves observing phenomena, identifying questions, generating hypotheses, testing hypotheses, and then producing new observations, questions, and hypotheses. Descriptive analysis is a fundamental component of this process because of the role it plays in helping us observe the world or a phenomenon and, subsequently, in identifying research questions and generating hypotheses based on what has been observed.

According to Rawat (2021), the advantages of descriptive analysis are as follows: A high degree of objectivity and neutrality among the researchers is one of the main advantages of descriptive analysis. Descriptive analysis is considered to be more vast than other quantitative methods and to provide a broader picture of an event or phenomenon. This type of analysis is considered a better method for collecting information because it describes relationships as natural and exhibits the world as it exists. This reason makes this analysis very real and close to humanity, as all the trends are made after research about the real-life behaviour of the data. It is considered useful for identifying variables and new hypotheses that can be further analysed through experimental and inferential studies.

6.5 RESPONSE DISTRIBUTION PER CONSTRUCT

The mean and standard deviation of the response distribution per construct are shown in the tables below. These statistical calculations are explained as follows:

By dividing the sum of the observed values by the number of observations, the mean (also known as the average) is derived. Even if data points fall above, below, or in the middle of the mean, and can be used to forecast future data points. The standard

deviation indicates how near the entire collection of data is to the mean. Low standard deviation data sets have well-grouped, precise data. The data in data sets with a high standard deviation is spread out over a wide range of values. On a scale of 1 to 5, respondents were asked to rate how much they agreed with the statements: 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD), 2 = Disagree (D), 3 = Neutral (N), 4 = Agree (A), and 5 = Strongly Agree (SA). The percentage replies for each test item on the questionnaire are also shown in the tables below.

6.5.1 Descriptive statistics – academic knowledge

In Figure 6.5 below, the respondents' responses are indicated in the statement on academic knowledge. In addition, the details of each question are provided in Table 6.1 below.

Figure 6.5: Academic knowledge

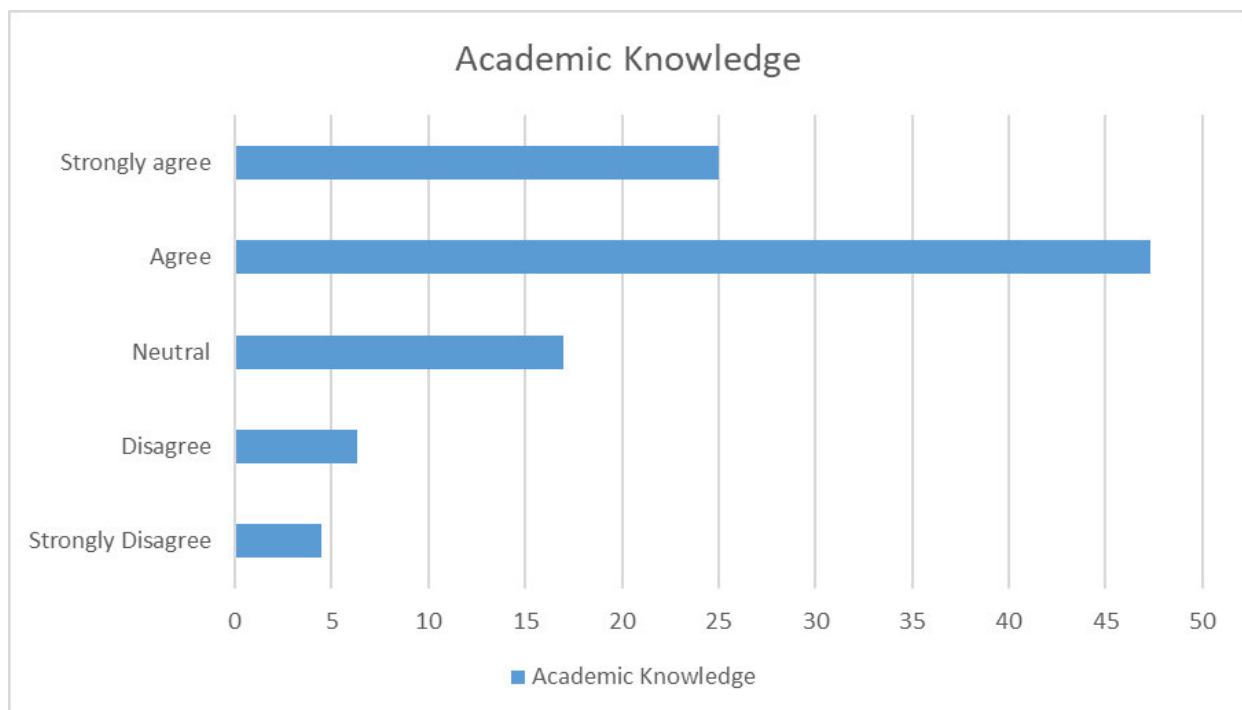


Figure 6.5 indicates that most of the respondents agreed with the questions on academic knowledge. The details of each question are provided in Table 6.1 below.

Table 6.1: Academic knowledge

| | | Mean | SD | SD | D | N | A | SA |
|-----|--|------|-------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| AK1 | The academic knowledge received provides skills required in the workplace. | 3.82 | 1.024 | 4.5% | 6.3% | 17.0% | 47% | 25% |
| AK2 | The academic knowledge received develops the knowledge required in the workplace. | 4.04 | 0.962 | 2.7% | 6.3% | 8.9% | 48.2% | 33.9% |
| AK3 | The academic knowledge provided by Higher Learning Institutions is of a high standard. | 3.96 | 0.995 | 4.5% | 4.5% | 10.7% | 50.9% | 29.5% |
| AK4 | The academic knowledge received is enough to gain employment. | 3.28 | 1.230 | 10.8 % | 15.3 % | 26.1% | 30.6% | 17.1% |
| AK5 | The academic knowledge received enables | 3.69 | 1.057 | 4.5% | 8.9% | 22.3% | 42% | 22.3% |

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|------|-------|------|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| | competency in the workplace. | | | | | | | |
| AK6 | Graduates rely on academic knowledge. | 3.44 | 1.129 | 5.4% | 19.6 % | 16.1% | 43.8% | 15.2% |

The findings in Table 6.1 above are discussed below.

- **The academic knowledge received provides skills required in the workplace**

The preceding statement has a mean of 3.82 and a standard deviation of 1.024, indicating that most of the respondents agreed with the statement, 'The academic knowledge acquired provides the skills needed in the workplace. The results show that 47% of the respondents agreed with the statement; 25% strongly agreed; 4.5% strongly disagreed, and 6.3% disagreed. A neutral response was offered by 17% of the respondents. The results agree with Quintini (2011) and Fiore, Graesser and Greiff (2018), which stated that graduates would use the skills they acquired in HEIs to continue developing and to adapt to workplace demands.

- **The academic knowledge received develops knowledge required in the workplace**

The above statement reflects a mean of 4.04%, with a standard deviation of 0.962%, which means that most respondents agreed with the statement. Many respondents (48.2%) agreed with the above statement, and 33.9% fully agreed. Another 2.7% of the respondents disagreed with the statement; 6.3% disagreed, and 8.9% remained neutral. The above results are in line with Quintini (2011), who noted that graduates were expected to continue learning and adjusting to the demands of their jobs using their higher learning skills.

- **The academic knowledge provided by higher learning institutions is of a high standard**

The statement had a mean of 3.96 and a standard deviation of 0.995, indicating that the majority of respondents agreed with the statement, 'The academic knowledge provided by HEIs is of a high standard'. The majority (50.9%) of the respondents agreed that the academic knowledge provided by HEIs is of a high standard; 29.5% fully agreed; 4.5% strongly disagreed; another 4.5% disagreed, and 10.7% remained neutral. The results are consistent with Clausen and Andersson (2019), who asserted that the academic knowledge graduates acquired at HEIs were generally of a sufficient standard to prepare them for their professional lives.

- **The academic knowledge received is enough to gain employment**

The above statement reflects a value of 3.28%, with a standard deviation of 1.230%, which indicates that the majority of respondents were convinced that 'The academic knowledge received is sufficient to gain employment. The results show that the majority (30.6%) of the respondents agreed with the above statement; 17.1% strongly agreed, 10.8% strongly disagreed, and 15.3% disagreed. A considerable percentage (26.1%) of the respondents remained neutral. The results are consistent with those of Bridgstock (2009), who postulated a positive relationship between academic knowledge and general employment skills.

- **The academic knowledge received enables competency in the workplace**

The above statement indicates a mean of 3.69%, with a standard deviation of 1.057%, which means that the majority of respondents agreed with the statement. The majority (42%) of the respondents agreed with the statement; 22.3% strongly agreed, 4.5% strongly disagreed, while 8.9% disagreed that the academic knowledge received enabled competency in the workplace. A large percentage of 22.3% of the responses were neutral. The results are inconsistent with the findings by Teijeiro *et al.* (2013), who advanced that graduate competence and academic knowledge were related and contributed significantly to employability. De Vos, De

Hauw and Van der Heijden (2011) stated that academic knowledge provided competencies that were crucial for career success.

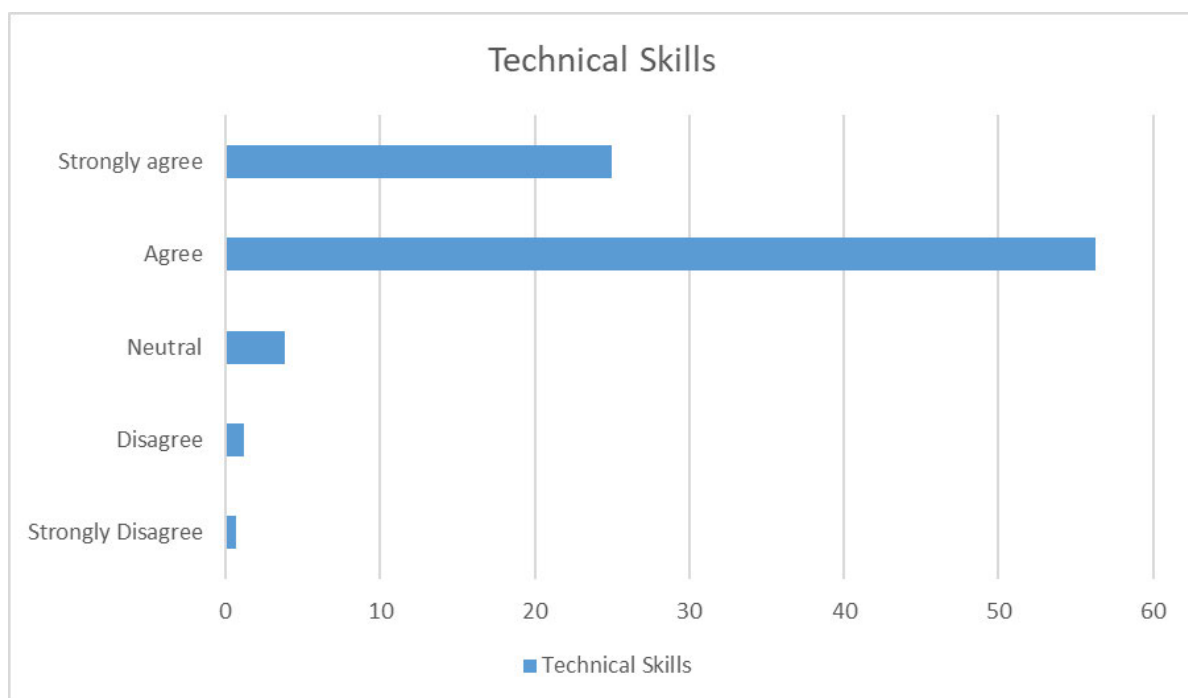
- **Graduates rely on academic knowledge**

The above statement reflects a mean of 3.44%, with a standard deviation of 1.129%, which means that the majority of the respondents agreed with the statement. The percentage of agreement was 43.8%, with 15.2% strongly agreeing, and 5.4% strongly disagree. Another 19.6% disagreed, while 16.1% were neutral. These outcomes are consistent with Herbert *et al.* (2020) and Clausen and Andersson (2019), who postulated that academic knowledge was the foundation of graduate employability.

6.5.2 Descriptive statistics – technical skills

The respondents were asked to indicate their responses to the statements on technical skills.

Figure 6.6: Technical skills



The majority of respondents agreed to all of the questions about technical skills, as shown in Figure 6.6. Table 6.2 below lists the specifics of each question.

Table 6.2: Technical skills

| | | Mean | SD | SDA | D | N | A | SA |
|-----|--|-------------|-----------|------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| TS1 | I have the ability to find and access information. | 4.25 | 0.735 | 0.9 | 2.7 | 4.5 | 55.9 | 36.0 |
| TS2 | I have the ability to use new information. | 4.33 | 0.653 | 0.9 % | 0.9 % | 1.8% | 58.0 % | 38.4 % |
| TS3 | I have oral presentation skills. | 4.18 | 0.722 | 0.0 % | 2.7 % | 10.7 % | 52.7 % | 33.9 % |
| TS4 | I have written and oral communication skills. | 4.41 | 0.683 | 0.0 % | 2.7 % | 2.7% | 45.5 % | 49.1 % |
| TS5 | I have numerical skills. | 4.20 | 0.755 | 0.0 % | 5.4 % | 4.5% | 56.3 % | 33.9 % |
| TS6 | I have computer skills | 4.50 | 0.684 | 0.9 % | 0.9 % | 2.7% | 38.4 % | 57.1 % |
| TS7 | I am creative and innovative. | 4.35 | 0.694 | 0.0 % | 0.9 % | 9.8% | 42.9 % | 46.4 % |
| TS8 | I have social, civil and cultural competencies. | 4.15 | 0.687 | 0.0 % | 1.8 % | 11.6 % | 56.3 % | 30.4 % |

The findings of Table 6.2 above are discussed below.

- **I am able to find and access information**

The preceding statement has a mean of 4.25 and a standard deviation of 0.735, indicating that the majority of respondents are in agreement and are confident with the ability to discover and obtain information. The percentage of agreement was 55.9%, with 36.0% strongly agreeing, and 0.9% disagreeing. The findings are consistent with Tejan and Sabil (2019) who advanced the ability to access information as an important skill that contributed to graduate employability. The findings further coincide with Lin-Stephens *et al.* (2019), who postulated that information literacy or the ability to obtain information and navigate an information-dominated society, develops knowledge.

- **I have the ability to use new information**

The statement above reflects a mean of 4.33, with a standard deviation of 0.653, which means that the majority of respondents agreed with it. The respondents agreed that they can make use of the new information. The percentage of agreement was 58.0%, with 38.4% strongly agreeing and 0.9% disagreeing. The findings are consistent with Tejan and Sabil (2019) and Lin-Stephens *et al.* (2019), who postulated that the ability to access the latest information and the ability to use the information to plan one's career through knowledge generation was an important factor in employability.

- **I have oral presentation skills**

The statement above reflects a mean of 4.18, with a standard deviation of 0.722, which means that the majority of the respondents agreed. The respondents agreed that they have oral presentation skills. The percentage of agreement was 52.7%, with 33.9% strongly agreeing, and 0.0% disagreeing. The findings are consistent with McGunagle and Zizka (2020) and Dyki, Singorahardjo and Cotronei-Baird (2020) who advanced that today's job demands emphasised the necessity for graduates to possess oral skills such as presentation skills to enhance employability.

- **I have written and oral communication skills**

The statement above reflects a mean of 4.41, and the standard deviation was recorded at 0.683, indicating that the majority of the respondents agreed that they have written and oral communication skills. The percentage of agreement was 45.5%, with 49.1% strongly agreeing, and 0.0% disagreeing. The findings are consistent with those of Bhola and Dhanawade (2017) and Suarta *et al.* (2017) who stated that employability skills could be attributed to critical thinking, problem-solving, and the ability to use communication skills.

- **I have numerical skills**

The statement above reflects a mean of 4.20, with a standard deviation of 0.755, which means that the majority of the respondents agreed. The respondents agreed that they have numerical skills. The percentage of agreement was 56.3%, with 33.9% strongly agreeing, and 0.0% disagreeing. The findings are consistent with Hack-Polay, Igwe and Okolie (2020) and Durrani and Tariq (2012), who emphasised the importance of numerical skills among graduates to enhance their employability.

- **I have computer skills**

The statement above reflects a mean of 4.50, with a standard deviation of 0.684, which means that the majority of the respondents agreed. The respondents agreed that they are computer literate. The percentage of agreement was 38.4%, 57.1% strongly agreed, and 0.9% disagreed. The findings are in line with Okolie, Nwosu and Mlanga (2019) and Tang (2019), who highlighted the role of computer literacy in graduate employability.

- **I am creative and innovative**

The statement above reflects a mean of 4.35, with a standard deviation of 0.694, which means that the majority of the respondents agreed. The respondents agreed that they are creative and innovative. The percentage of agreement was 42.9%, with

46.4% strongly agreeing, and 0.0% disagreeing. The outcomes are consistent with Suarta *et al.* (2017) and Carnevale, Cheah and Strohl (2013), who advanced that creative and innovative graduates were more employable compared to less innovative graduates.

- **I have social, civil and cultural competencies**

The statement above reflects a mean of 4.15, with a standard deviation of 0.687, which means that the majority of the respondents agreed. The respondents agreed that they have social and cultural competencies. The percentage of agreement was 56.3%, with 30.4% strongly agreeing, and 0% disagreeing. The importance of social and cultural competencies was highlighted by Mtawa, Fongwa and Wilson-Strydom (2021) who suggested that social, human and cultural values had the potential to enhance graduate employability.

6.5.3 Descriptive statistics – strategic skills

The respondents were asked to indicate their responses to the statements on strategic skills. Their responses are reflected in Figure 6.7 below.

Figure 6.7: Strategic skills

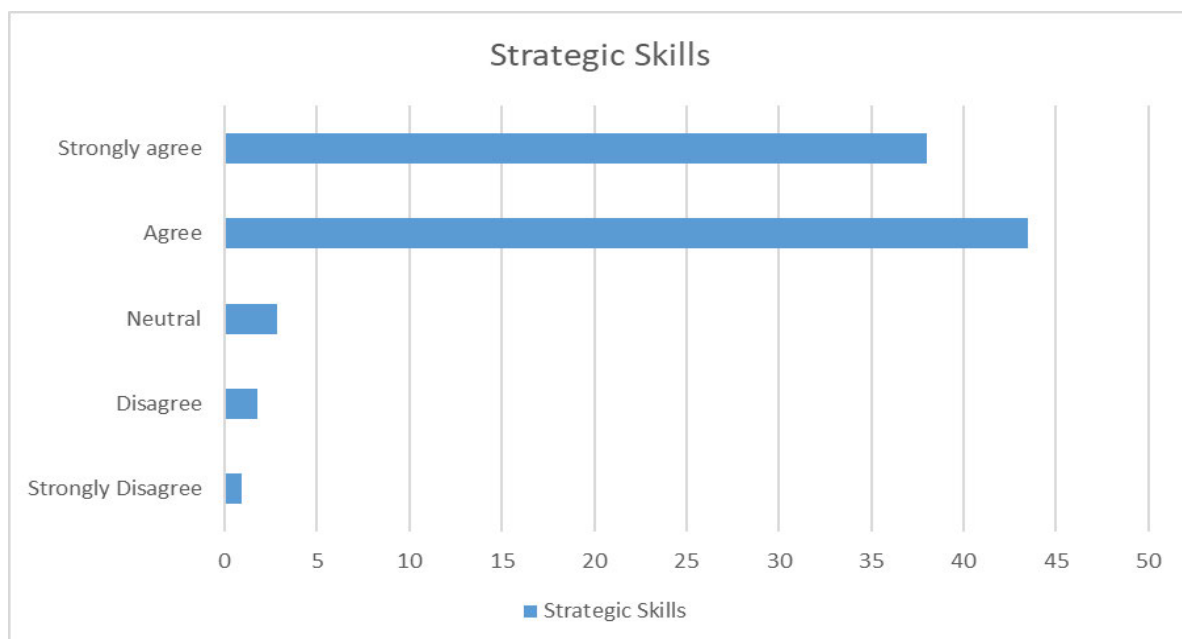


Figure 6.7 above summarises that the majority of the respondents agreed to all the questions on strategic skills. The details of each question are indicated in Table 6.3 below.

Table 6.3: Strategic skills

| | | Mean | SD | SDA | D | N | A | SA |
|-----|---|------|-------|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| SS1 | I am a critical thinker with problem-solving abilities | 4.28 | 0.668 | 0.0% | 1.8% | 6.3% | 53.2% | 38.7% |
| SS2 | I have collaboration and teamwork abilities. | 4.47 | 0.740 | 0.9% | 0.9% | 6.3% | 33.9% | 58.0% |
| SS3 | I am willing to learn. | 4.67 | 0.681 | 1.8% | 0.0% | 0.9% | 24.1% | 73.2% |
| SS4 | I have work ethic. | 4.61 | 0.637 | 0.9% | 0.0% | 2.7% | 30.4% | 66.1% |
| SS5 | I am willing to accept responsibility and accountability. | 4.63 | 0.588 | 0.9% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 34.8% | 64.3% |
| SS6 | I exercise professional judgement. | 4.49 | 0.675 | 0.9% | 0.9% | 1.8% | 41.4% | 55.0% |

The findings from Table 6.3 above are discussed below.

- **I am a critical thinker with problem-solving abilities**

The statement above reflects a mean of 4.28, with a standard deviation of 0.668, which means that the majority of the respondents agreed. The respondents agreed

that they are critical thinkers with problem-solving abilities. The percentage of agreement was 53.2%, with 38.7% strongly agreeing, and 0.0% disagreeing. Problem-solving and critical thinking are crucial employability skills according to employers, university professors, and students (Wickramasinghe and Perera 2010; Suarta *et al.*, 2017).

- **I have collaboration and teamwork abilities**

The statement above reflects a mean of 4.47, with a standard deviation of 0.740, which means that the majority of the respondents agreed. The respondents agreed that they can collaborate and work in a team. The percentage of agreement was 33.9%, with 58.7% strongly agreeing, and 0.9% disagreeing. Badcock *et al.* (2010) stated that the ability to collaborate and work in teams improved employability. However, in some studies (Keneley & Jackling, 2011), collaboration skills were perceived as poorly developed.

- **I am willing to learn**

The statement above reflects a mean of 4.67, with a standard deviation of 0.68, which means that the majority of the respondents agreed. The respondents agreed that they are willing to learn. The percentage of agreement was 24.1%, 73.2% strongly agreed, and 1.8% disagreed. This is consistent with the findings from Brits (2018) that willingness to learn increased employability.

- **I have work ethics.**

The statement above reflects a mean of 4.61, with a standard deviation of 0.637, which means that the majority of the respondents agreed. The respondents agreed that they have a work ethic. The percentage of agreement was 30.4%, 66.1% strongly agreed, and 0.9% disagreed. The importance of work ethic in improving graduate employability was also highlighted by Coetzee (2012) and Nicholson and DeMoss (2009).

- **I am willing to accept responsibility and accountability.**

The statement above reflects a mean of 4.63, with a standard deviation of 0.588, which means that the majority of the respondents agreed. The respondents agreed that they are willing to take responsibility and accountability. The percentage of agreement was 34.8%, 64.3% strongly agreed, and 0.9% disagreed. According to other studies, graduates' ability to assume responsibility and accountability contributed to employability (Selvadurai *et al.*, 2012).

- **I exercise professional judgement.**

The statement above reflects a mean of 4.49, with a standard deviation of 0.675, which means that the majority of the respondents agreed. The respondents agreed that they exercise professional judgement. The percentage of agreement was 41.4%, with 55.0% strongly agreeing, and 0.9% disagreeing. Spence (2019) also highlighted the role of professional judgement, and how it contributed to employability.

6.5.4 Descriptive statistics – functional competence

The respondents were asked to indicate their responses to the statements about functional competence. They were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statements on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 representing not at all important, 2 - low importance, 3 - neutral, 4 – important, and 5 - very important.

Figure 6.8: Functional competency

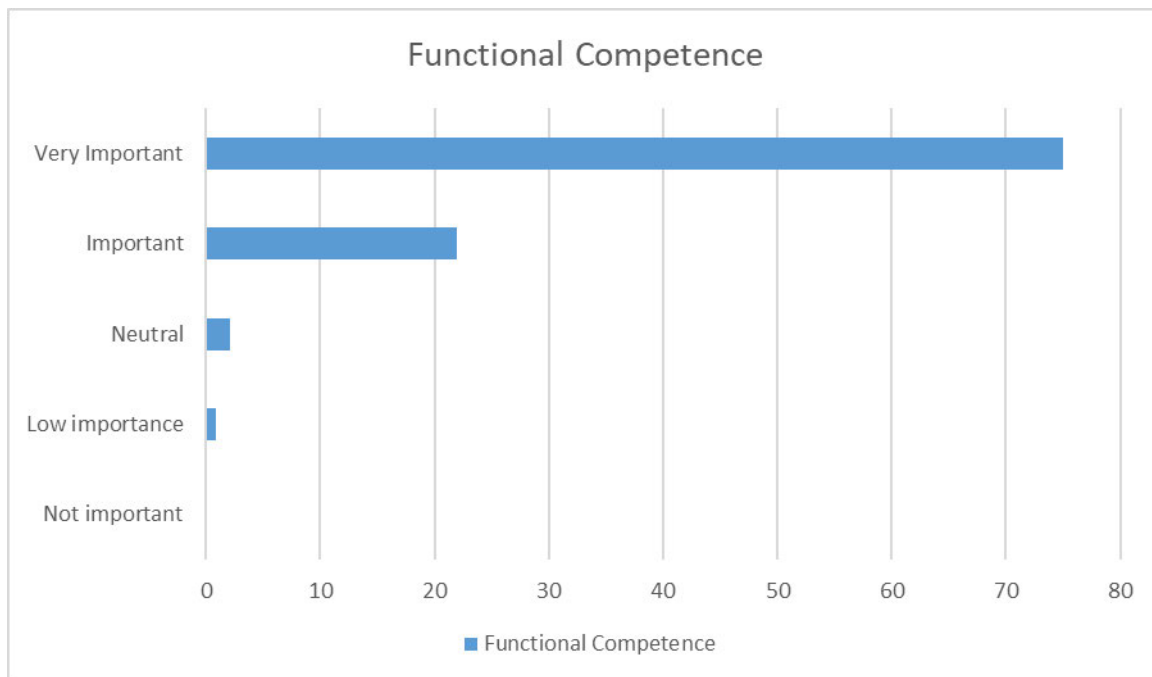


Figure 6.8 above summarises that the majority of the respondents considered functional competencies very important. The details of each question are indicated in Table 6.4 below.

SD = Standard deviation; NI = Not important; LI = Low importance; N = Neutral; I = Important; VI = Very important

Table 6.4: Functional competency

| | | Mean | SD | NI | LI | N | I | VI |
|-----|---------------------|------|-------|----|------|------|-------|-------|
| FC1 | Decision making | 4.68 | 0.524 | 0% | 0.0% | 2.7% | 26.8% | 70.5% |
| FC2 | Problem Solving | 4.72 | 0.489 | 0% | 0.0% | 1.8% | 24.3% | 73.9% |
| FC3 | Strategic thinking | 4.73 | 0.466 | 0% | 0.0% | 0.9% | 25.2% | 73.9% |
| FC4 | Continuous learning | 4.75 | 0.493 | 0% | 0.9% | 0.0% | 22.3% | 76.8% |
| FC5 | Adaptability | 4.72 | 0.575 | 0% | 0.9% | 3.7% | 17.4% | 78.0% |
| FC6 | Leadership | 4.54 | 0.670 | 0% | 1.8% | 4.5% | 32.1% | 61.6% |
| FC7 | Self-management | 4.72 | 0.573 | 0% | 0.0% | 0.9% | 22.3% | 75.9% |

The findings from Table 6.4 above are discussed below.

- **Decision making**

The majority of the respondents agreed that decision-making was an important functional competency, with a mean of 4.6 and a standard deviation of 0.5. A total of 26.8% of the respondents considered decision making important, and 70.5% considered it a very important functional competency. The findings support Crebert's (2002) assertion that the context of employability focuses on the functional abilities of graduates' capacity to take responsibility and make decisions.

- **Problem-solving**

The majority of the respondents indicated that problem-solving was an important functional competency, with a mean of 4.7 and a standard deviation of 0.4, while 24.3% considered problem-solving important, and 73.9% considered it a very important functional competency. The findings support Wickramasinghe and Perera's (2010)'s hypothesis that problem-solving is a crucial skill for employability for both

employers and students. Furthermore, the findings coincided with Suarta *et al.* (2017) who advanced that employability skills were attributed to critical thinking and problem-solving.

- **Strategic thinking**

The majority of the respondents considered strategic thinking to be an important functional competency, with a mean of 4.7 and a standard deviation of 0.4. Strategic thinking was important to 25.2% of the respondents, and it was a very important functional competency to 73.9% of the respondents. The findings are consistent with Messum, Wilkes and Jackson (2015) who advanced strategic thinking as an important functional competency that improved employability. Furthermore, Singh *et al.* (2018) postulated that strategic thinking was an important factor in employability.

- **Continuous learning**

The majority of the respondents considered continuous learning an important functional competency, with a mean of 4.7 and a standard deviation of 0.4. A total of 22.3% of the respondents considered continuous learning important and 76.8% considered it a very important functional competency. Graduates must be willing and able to learn continuously to increase their functional competence and understanding of their work and workplace (Coetzee, 2014).

- **Adaptability**

The majority of the respondents indicated that adaptability was an important functional competency, with a mean of 4.7 and a standard deviation of 0.5. Adaptability was identified as important by 17.4% of the respondents and as a very important functional competency by 78.0% of them. The principle of adaptability lies at the heart of the graduate employability concept (Bezuidenhout, 2011; Potgieter & Coetzee, 2013).

- **Leadership**

The majority of the respondents agreed that leadership is an important functional competency, with a mean of 4.5 and a standard deviation of 0.6. Leadership is an important functional competency for 32.1% of the respondents and a very important functional competency for 61.6% of them. According to Bhola and Dhanawade (2017), leadership is one of the most desirable skills for graduates. Nikitina and Furuoka (2012) add that teamwork and leadership skills were the most frequently recognised as crucial graduation qualities.

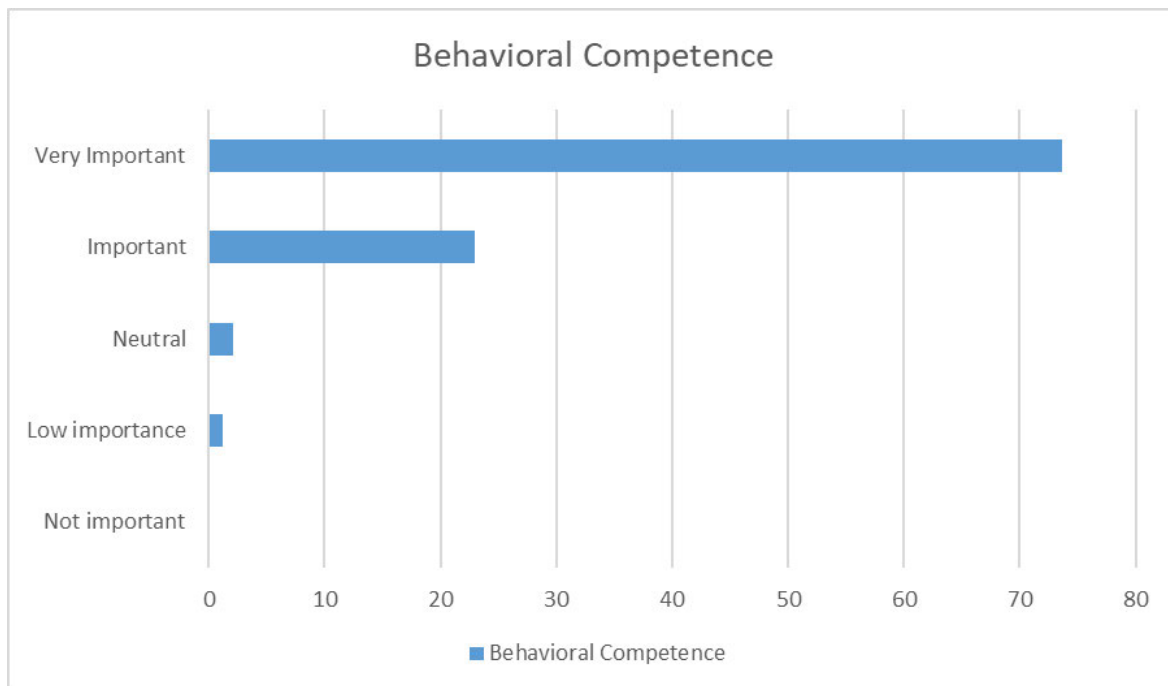
- **Self-management**

The majority of the respondents considered self-management an important functional competency, with a mean of 4.7 and a standard deviation of 0.5. Self-management was an important functional competency for 22.3% of the respondents and a very important functional competency for 75.9% of them. Career self-management refers to having the ability to engage continuously in development activities while pursuing career goals (Bezuidenhout, 2011). Career self-management was also recognized as a functional capability essential for employability (Krouwel, Luijn & Zweekhorst, 2020). Developing a processual employability model to provide education for career self-management. Education+ Training.

6.5.5 Descriptive statistics – behavioural competence

The respondents were asked to indicate the responses to the statements on behavioural competence. and to rate their concurrence with the assertions on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating not at all significant, 2 indicating low importance, 3 indicating neutral, 4 indicating important, and 5 indicating very important.

Figure 6.9: Behavioural competency



More than half of the respondents said that behavioral competence was important. Table 6.5 provides a breakdown of each question.

SD = Standard deviation; NI = Not important; LI = Low importance; N = Neutral; I = Important; VI = Very important

Table 6.5: Behavioural competency

| | | Mean | SD | NI | LI | N | I | VI |
|-----|------------------------|------|------|----|------|------|-------|-------|
| BC1 | Communication | 4.87 | .342 | 0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 13.4% | 86.6% |
| BC2 | Innovation | 4.46 | .600 | 0% | 0.0% | 5.4% | 43.2% | 51.4% |
| BC3 | Interpersonal skills | 4.56 | .550 | 0% | 0.0% | 2.7% | 38.4% | 58.9% |
| BC4 | Teamwork | 4.71 | .510 | 0% | 0.0% | 2.7% | 23.2% | 74.1% |
| BC5 | Ethical responsibility | 4.64 | .585 | 0% | 0.9% | 2.7% | 27.9% | 68.5% |
| | | | | | | | | |

The findings in Table 6.5 above are discussed below.

- **Communication**

The majority of the respondents agreed that communication was an important behavioural competence, with a mean of 4.8 and a standard deviation of 0.3. A total of 13.4% of the respondents considered communication important, while 86.6% considered communication a very important behavioural competency. The findings are constant with Griesel and Parker (2009); Badcock *et al.* (2010) advanced that communication was an important behavioural skill that contributes to employability.

- **Innovation**

The majority of the respondents agreed that innovation was an important behavioural competency, with a mean of 4.4 and a standard deviation of 0.6. A total of 43.2% of the respondents viewed innovation as important, while 51.4% viewed innovation as a very important behavioral competency. Various authors have established that employers viewed innovation as an important behavioural skill (Little, 2001; Lees, 2002; Culbertson *et al.*, 2011).

- **Interpersonal skills**

The majority of the respondents agreed that interpersonal skills were an important behavioural competency, with a mean of 4.5 and a standard deviation of 0.5. Interpersonal skills were important for 38.4% of the respondents and very important for 58.9% of them. Interpersonal skills are considered an important behavioural attribute for employability (Spencer *et al.*, 2012; Velasco, 2012).

- **Teamwork**

The majority of the respondents indicated that teamwork was an important behavioural competency, with a mean of 4.7 and a standard deviation of 0.5. Teamwork was important for 23.2% of the respondents and a very important behavioural competency for 74.1% of them. Teamwork is one of the behavioural

attributes most often cited as important to graduate (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2012; Keneley & Jackling, 2011).

- **Ethical responsibility**

The majority of the respondents indicated that ethical responsibility was an important behavioural competency, with a mean of 4.6 and a standard deviation of 0.5. Ethical responsibility was considered an important behavioural competency for 27.9% of the respondents and a very important behavioural competency for 68.5% of them. Employers often regard ethical responsibility as a behavioural ability that indicates an employee's readiness to work (Coetzee, 2014; Grant, 2010).

6.5.6 Descriptive statistic - work experience

The respondents were asked to respond to statements about the work experience and requested to rate their level of agreement with the statements on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 signifying strongly disagree, 2 indicating disagree, 3 indicating neither disagree nor agree, 4 indicating agree, and 5 indicating strongly agree.

Figure 6.10: Work experience

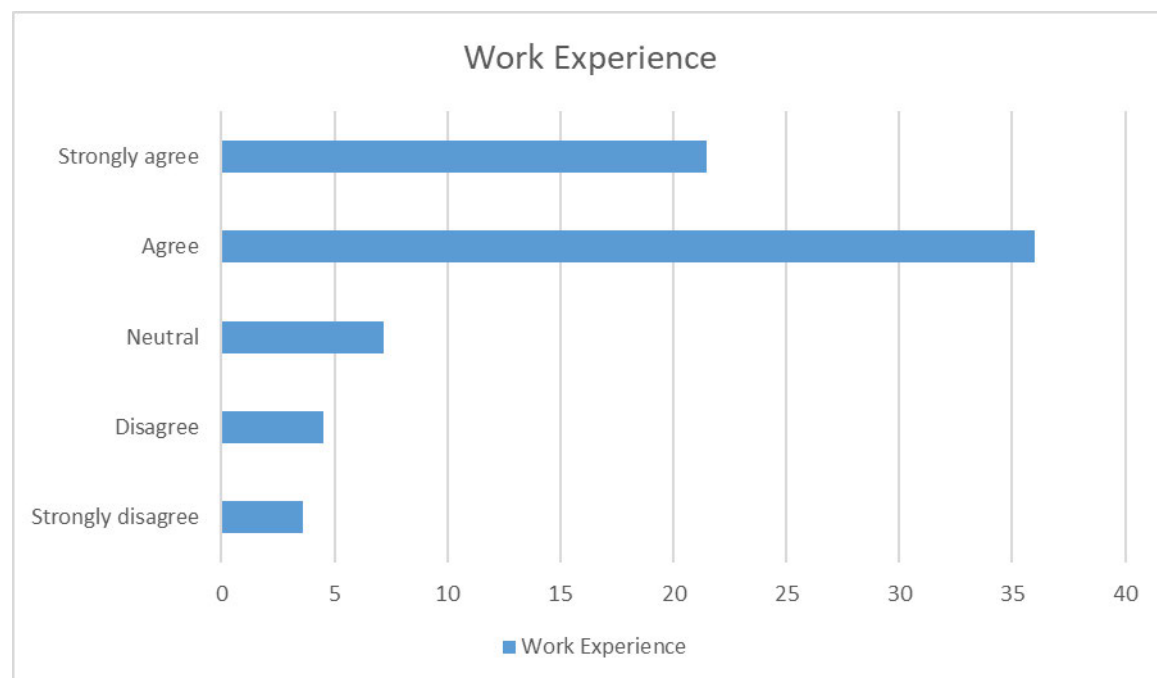


Figure 6.10 above summarises that the majority of the respondents agreed with the questions asked regarding work experience. The details of each question are provided in Table 6.6 below.

SD = Standard deviation; SDA = Strongly disagree; D = Disagree; N =Neither; A = Agree; SA = Strongly agree

Table 6.6: Work experience

| | | Mean | SD | SDA | D | N | A | SA |
|-----|--|-------------|-----------|------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| WE1 | Work experience is an important requirement to access employment. | 3.87 | 1.231 | 6.3% | 10.7% | 12.5% | 30.4% | 40.2% |
| WE2 | Work experience improves your chances to access employment. | 4.31 | .940 | 2.7% | 4.5% | 3.6% | 37.5% | 51.8% |
| WE3 | Work experience helps graduates gain valuable experience to prove their suitability. | 3.69 | 1.340 | 9.9% | 14.4% | 6.3% | 35.1% | 34.2% |
| WE4 | Work experience enhances working skills. | 4.25 | .844 | 1.8% | 2.7% | 7.1% | 45.5% | 42.9% |
| WE5 | Work experience enhances your competency. | 4.15 | .961 | 3.6% | 4.5% | 4.5% | 48.2% | 39.3% |
| WE6 | Work experience is an important aspect of any strong tertiary education applicant | 3.76 | 1.162 | 1.8% | 18.0% | 17.1% | 28.8% | 34.2% |

The findings from Table 6.6 above are discussed below

- **Work experience is an important requirement to access employment**

The aforementioned statement had a mean of 3.8 and a standard deviation of 1.2, indicating that the majority of respondents agreed with it. The majority of the respondents agreed that work experience was an important requirement for accessing employment. The percentage of agreement was 30.4%, with 40.2% strongly agreeing and 6.3% disagreeing. According to existing research, work experience is the most essential factor in determining whether applicants are qualified for a vacant post (Huanga et al., 2013; Hasluck, 2012; Tsai *et al.*, 2011).

- **Work experience improves your chances to access employment**

The statement above reflected a mean of 4.3, with a standard deviation of 0.9, which means that the majority of respondents agreed with it. The respondents agreed that work experience improved any chance of acquiring a job. The percentage of agreement was 37.5%, with 51.8% strongly agreeing, and 2.7% disagreeing. In support of these findings, Yockey (2017) posits that most employers prefer to hire experienced employees. Smith and Worsfold (2015) stated that relevant work experience improved your chances of being hired.

- **Work experience helps graduates gain valuable experience to prove their suitability**

The statement above reflected a mean of 3.6, with a standard deviation of 1.3, which means that the majority of respondents agreed with it. The respondents agreed that work experience helped graduates receive a valuable experience that allows them to demonstrate their suitability. The percentage of agreement was 35.1%, with 34.2% strongly agreeing, and 9.9% disagreeing. The majority of employers tend to focus more on previous relevant work experience as evidence of suitability for employment (Hasluck, 2012; Patel *et al.*, 2012; Huanga *et al.*, 2017).

- **Work experience enhances working skills**

The statement above reflected a mean of 4.2, with a standard deviation of 0.8, indicating that the majority of respondents agreed. The respondents agreed that work experience improved workability. The percentage in the agreement was 45.5%, with 42.9% strongly agreeing, and 1.8% disagreeing. This is consistent with Succi and Canovi (2020) and Huang *et al.* (2017) who indicated that work experience significantly improved work skills.

- **Work experience enhances your competency**

The statement above reflected a mean of 4.5, with a standard deviation of 0.9, which means that the majority of respondents agreed. The respondents agreed that work experience increased their competence. The percentage of agreement was 42.2%, with 39.3% strongly agreeing, and 3.6% disagreeing. Rizany, Hariyati and Handayani (2018) agreed that work experience increased the competence of graduates.

- **Work experience is an important aspect of any strong tertiary education applicant**

The statement above reflected a mean of 3.7, with a standard deviation of 1.1, which means that the majority of the respondents agreed. The respondents agreed that work experience was an important aspect of any good tertiary education application. The percentage of agreement was 28.8%, with 34.2% strongly agreeing and 1.8% disagreeing. This is consistent with Patel *et al.* (2012) and Huang *et al.* (2017) who indicated that work experience was an important aspect of HE.

6.5.7 Descriptive statistics employability

The respondents were asked to respond to statements about employability and to rate their level of agreement with the statements on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 signifying severely disagree, 2 indicating disagree, 3 indicating neither disagree nor agree, 4 indicating agree, and 5 indicating strongly agree.

Figure 6.11: Employability

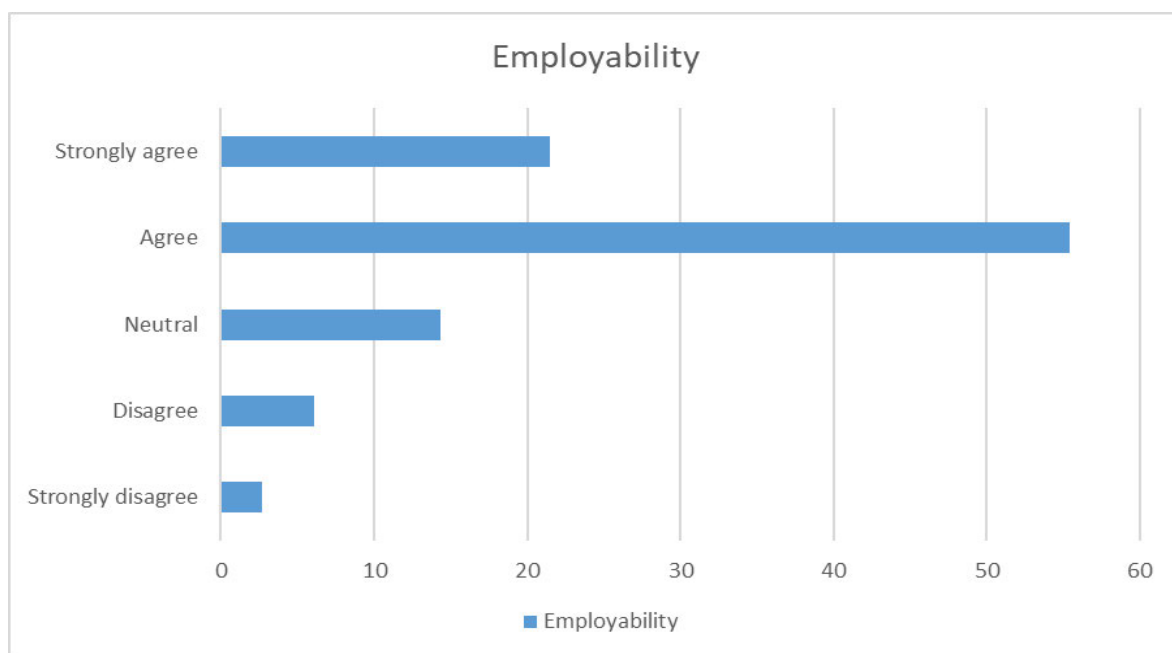


Figure 6.11 above indicates that the majority of the respondents agreed with the questions asked regarding employability. The details of each question are indicated in Table 6.7 below.

SD = Standard deviation; SDA = Strongly disagree; D = Disagree; N = Neither; A = Agree; SA = Strongly agree

Table 6.7: Employability

| | | Mean | SD | SDA | D | N | A | SA |
|----|---|------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| E1 | It was easy for me to find employment. | 2.21 | 1.308 | 36.9 % | 33.3% | 13.5% | 33.3% | 11.7% |
| E2 | It is easy for me to grow in my chosen career. | 3.03 | 1.255 | 14.3 % | 23.2% | 18.8% | 33.0% | 10.7% |
| E3 | Employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work. | 3.86 | .899 | 2.7 % | 5.4% | 16.1% | 55.4% | 20.5% |
| E4 | Employability is the ability to gain initial employment maintain and obtain new employment if required. | 3.80 | .957 | 3.6 % | 7.1% | 14.3% | 55.4% | 19.6% |
| E5 | Employability is having a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and appropriate personal attributes | 4.01 | .704 | 0.9 % | 1.8% | 13.4% | 63.4% | 20.5% |
| E6 | Employability is the acquisition of attributes that makes graduates more successful in their chosen occupation. | 3.52 | 1.107 | 5.4 % | 16.1% | 16.1% | 46.4% | 16.1% |

The findings of Table 6.7 are discussed below.

- **It was easy for me to find employment**

The statement above reflects a mean of 2.2, with a standard deviation of 1.3, indicating that the majority of respondents disagreed with this statement. The respondents disagreed with the statement that finding work was simple for them. This remark was strongly disputed by 36.8 percent of those polled, while 33.3 percent disagreed, and 11.7 percent agreed. Okolie *et al.* (2019) also came up with mixed results. Some graduates indicated that it was easy for them to find

employment, while a significant number indicated that it was difficult for them to find employment after graduation.

- **It is easy for me to grow in my chosen career.**

The preceding statement has a mean of 3.0 and a standard deviation of 1.2, indicating that the majority of respondents agreed. Although the majority of respondents agreed with the assertion that it was easy for them to advance in their chosen careers, a substantial percentage of people disagreed. The ratio of those who agreed with the statement was 33.4%, with 10.5% in strong agreement with the statement, while 23% disagreed and 14% strongly disagreed. There were divided opinions on the above statement. Tang (2019) also found that most university graduates found it relatively easy to advance professionally once they had chosen and followed a particular career path.

- **Employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work**

The statement above reflects a mean of 3.8, with a standard deviation of 0.8, which means that the majority of respondents agreed. The respondents agreed that employability means being able to find and keep fulfilling work. The percentage of agreement was 55.4%, with 20.5% strongly agreeing and 2.7% disagreeing. Rukuni *et al.* (2018) linked the concept of graduate employability to graduates' success in obtaining employment in fields related to their studies.

- **Employability is the ability to gain initial employment and to maintain and obtain new employment if required**

According to the following statement, employability is the capacity to get and hold your first job as well as find a new one if necessary. The mean is 3.8, and the standard deviation is 0.9. The percentage of agreement was 55.4%, with 19.6% strongly agreeing and 3.6% disagreeing. This is consistent with Harvey (2001), who defined employability as the ability of university graduates to find a job. Hillage and

Pollard (1998) and Maltby (2011), defined employability as the ability to locate initial employment, keep it, and seek new work when necessary.

- **Employability is having a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and appropriate personal attributes**

More than three-quarters of respondents indicated their agreement that employability is defined as the capacity to acquire and apply relevant knowledge, skills, and understanding, as well as the ability to demonstrate the right personal traits. The percentage of agreement was 63.4%, with 20.5% strongly agreeing and 0.9% disagreeing. The findings are in line with those of Yorke (2006) and Harvey (2001), who proposed that employability was a set of skills, accomplishments, and personal characteristics that made graduates more likely to obtain work.

- **Employability is the acquisition of attributes that makes graduates more successful in their chosen occupation**

It is clear from the data collected indicated that the majority of respondents believed that employability refers to the development of skills that help new graduates succeed in their chosen careers. A further 46.4% of the respondents agreed, with 16.1% strongly agreeing and just 5.4% strongly disagreeing, with the statement in question. Harvey (2001), Maltby (2011), Harry *et al.* (2018) indicated their agreement that acquiring attributes makes graduates more employable.

6.6 INFERENCE ANALYSIS

After the descriptive analysis, the next step was to conduct an inferential analysis. Inferential analysis was used to assess the strength of the association between the independent factors and the dependent (effect) variables. Inferential statistics are statistical processes that allow researchers to extrapolate or generalise findings from samples to the larger population from which they were drawn. The inferential analysis was conducted using Smart PLS and followed a two-step approach, first

analyzing the measurement model and then the structural model. The following section focuses on the evaluation of the measurement model.

6.6.1 Measurement model construct – reliability and validity

The measurement model assessed the dependability, validity and model fit of the collected data to determine their suitability for further use in the structural model. The guidelines of Hair *et al.* (2017) were used to calculate these coefficients. According to Hair *et al.* (2017), Cronbach Alpha, rho A, and composite reliability are used to decide on the reliability of the collected data, while AVE is used to decide on the convergent validity of the collected data. Table 6.8 shows the calculated results.

The ability of a variable to remain constant or steady over time, so that findings differ a little when tested many times or among various respondents in a sample, is referred to as reliability (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Furthermore, it is critical that things that contain several indications, such as constructions with many matching items, are internally consistent or have a high agreement with other items (Krommenhoek & Galpin, 2013; Teo, 2011). This indicates that the elements are closely linked and measure the same construct. Internal dependability refers to how little variance and how closely multiple responses to the same construct are related (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Two reliability tests were used in this study: Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability (CR).

Internal reliability for variables with many items is often estimated using Cronbach's Alpha, also known as coefficient alpha (Spitzer, Endicott & Robins, 1978). The elements are called unidimensional because they only describe one construct variable. It also implies that all items representing a variable have the same relationship with the variable and, as a result, have the same factor loading (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Table 6.8 illustrates the reliability and convergent validity of test data.

Table 6.8: Reliability and convergent validity test

| | Cronbach's Alpha | rho_A | Composite Reliability | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) |
|------------------------|------------------|-------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Academic Knowledge | 0.824 | 0.832 | 0.876 | 0.586 |
| Behavioural Competence | 0.739 | 0.742 | 0.829 | 0.497 |
| Functional Competence | 0.809 | 0.827 | 0.858 | 0.469 |
| Employability | 0.675 | 0.677 | 0.792 | 0.436 |
| Strategic Skills | 0.887 | 0.891 | 0.917 | 0.689 |
| Technical Skills | 0.869 | 0.881 | 0.897 | 0.524 |
| Work Experience | 0.798 | 0.808 | 0.853 | 0.495 |

The results show that academic knowledge, behavioural competence, functional competence, technical skills, strategic skills, and work experience had a Cronbach Alpha, a rho_A and composite reliability of 0.7 and above, which indicates that the data gathered had a high degree of reliability. However, the construct on employability had a Cronbach Alpha of 0.675, composite reliability of 0.792, and rho_A of 0.677, which is a slight shortfall for acceptable reliability.

However, in the spirit of Vaske, Beaman and Sponarski (2017), a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.6 is acceptable and considered reliable with a conservative model assessment. Thus, the employability construct is qualified, and its results are considered reliable in terms of Hair *et al.*'s (2017) guidelines, regardless of the marginal deviation. Overall, the collected data for all constructs in the hypothesised model passed the reliability test.

The AVE scores of the model constructs are shown in Table 6.8. Convergent validity is measured using AVE results. The most generally used convergent validity decision criterion is that AVE values greater than 0.5 are acceptable (Hair *et al.*, 2014); however, values less than 0.5 are acceptable if the composite reliability of the

construct is greater than 0.6. (Huang *et al.*, 2013; Tarhini *et al.*, 2016). Table 6.8 shows that the academic knowledge, strategic skills, and technical skills constructs meet the thresholds for convergent validity established by Hair *et al.* (2017), as the values of the constructs AVE are greater than 0.5, confirming acceptable convergent validity. The employability, behavioural competence and functional competence constructs scored an AVE that was below 0.5. However, their composite scores were above 0.6, attaining convergent validity as suggested by Tarhini *et al.* (2016). Although the model's components have already passed reliability and convergent validity tests, the model still has to be evaluated for discriminant validity.

- **Academic knowledge** has reliability because Cronbach's Alpha is 0.824 and convergent validity is 0.586; these values are acceptable. The academic knowledge passed the validity and reliability tests.
- **Behavioural competence** has reliability because Cronbach's Alpha is 0.739 and convergent validity is 0.497; these values are acceptable. The behavioral competence passed the validity and reliability tests.
- **Functional competence** has dependability because Cronbach's Alpha is 0.809 and convergent validity is 0.469; this is an acceptable value. Validity and reliability tests were passed on the functional competency.
- **Employability** demonstrates reliability by measuring Cronbach's Alpha at 0.675 and convergent validity at 0.436; these values are acceptable. Employability passed the validity and reliability tests.
- **Strategic skills** demonstrate reliability by measuring Cronbach's Alpha at 0.887 and convergent validity at 0.689; these values are acceptable. Strategic abilities passed the validity and reliability tests.
- **Technical skills** demonstrate reliability by measuring Cronbach's Alpha at 0.869 and convergent validity at 0.524; these values are acceptable. Technical abilities passed the validity and reliability tests.
- **Work experience** demonstrates reliability by measuring Cronbach's Alpha at 0.798 and convergent validity at 0.495; these values are acceptable. Work experience passed the validity and reliability tests.

The next section assesses the discriminant validity of constructs.

6.6.2 Discriminant validity

Ab-Hamid, Sami and Sidek (2017) stated that known methods for measuring discriminant validity are the cross-loading method, the Fornell-Larcker criterion, and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). The Fornell-Larcker criterion assesses discriminant validity by comparing the square root of the AVE of a construct to the correlations of the constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Henseler, Ringle and Sarstedt, 2015). When the square root of the AVE is greater than the construct's correlations with other constructs, discriminant validity is demonstrated. This signifies that the construct explains the variance in its items better than the variance in the other constructs' items. Discriminant validity was assessed using correlation loading between the Fornell-Larcker criterion (see Table 6.9 below).

Table 6.9: Correlation loading between Fornell-Larcker criterion

| | AK | BC | FC | EM | SK | TK | WE |
|------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Academic Knowledge | 0.766 | | | | | | |
| Behavioural Competence | 0.272 | 0.705 | | | | | |
| Functional Competence | 0.241 | 0.679 | 0.685 | | | | |
| Latent Variable 1 | 0.218 | 0.331 | 0.261 | 0.660 | | | |
| Strategic Skills | 0.470 | 0.402 | 0.373 | 0.160 | 0.830 | | |
| Technical Skills | 0.564 | 0.314 | 0.326 | 0.247 | 0.720 | 0.724 | |
| Work Experience | 0.112 | 0.094 | 0.094 | 0.248 | 0.249 | 0.279 | 0.703 |

Hence, the top value in each column represents the square root of AVE; the equivalent constructs and the values below are the shared variance. The shared variance values should be less than the square root of the AVE to satisfy discriminant validity. The square root of the AVE is greater than the sum of all construct variances. This indicates that the calculated Fornell-Larcker criterion is met, and the constructs have passed discriminant validity using the Fornell-Larcker criterion.

Discriminant validity is based on the constructs' unidimensionality, which emphasizes how much the construct differs from other constructs. This was determined using two

methods: the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) of correlations (Chin, 1998; Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair *et al.*, 2010). The Fornell-Larcker criterion evaluates discriminant validity by comparing the square root of a construct AVE with the construct correlations (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Henseler *et al.*, 2015). When the square root of AVE is greater than the construct's correlations with other constructs, discriminant validity is demonstrated. This signifies that the construct explains the variation in its items and not the variation in the items of the other constructs. Secondly, the HTMT Ratio of Correlations provides a more sensitive and specific assessment of discriminant validity (Henseler *et al.*, 2015).

- **Academic knowledge** has a shared variant of 0.766, which is less than the square root of the average. Academic knowledge passed the discriminant validity.
- **Behavioural competence** has a shared variant of 0.705, which is less than the square root of the average. Behavioural competency passed the discriminant validity.
- **Functional competence** has a shared variant of 0.685, which is less than the square root of the average. Functional competency passed the discriminant validity.
- **Strategic skills** have a shared variant of 0.830, which is less than the square root of the average. Strategic skills passed the discriminant validity.
- **Technical skills** have a shared variant of 0.724, which is less than the square root of the average. Technical skills passed the discriminant validity.
- **Work experience** has a shared variant of 0.703, which is less than the square root of the average. Technical skills passed the discriminant validity.

The next method for testing discriminant validity is the cross-loading method. In the cross-loading method, the indicator values for one's construct should be high compared to the correlations with other constructs in the model, for the results to satisfy the discriminant validity tests (Izquierdo, Olea & Abad, 2014).

6.6.3 Discriminant validity using cross loadings

According to Gefen and Straub (2005), discriminant validity is shown when each measurement item correlates weakly with another construct excepts for the ones to which it is theoretically associated. In cross-loadings, the researcher observes the various items to identify those that have high loadings on the same construct and those that load highly on multiple constructs. Thus, to establish discriminant validity at the item level means there is a high correlation between items of the same construct and a very weak correlation between items of a different construct (Henseler *et al.*, 2015).

Table 6.10: Assessment of discriminant validity using the cross-loading method

| | AK | BC | FC | EM | SK | TK | WE |
|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| AK1 | 0.816 | 0.181 | 0.202 | 0.135 | 0.353 | 0.478 | 0.040 |
| AK2 | 0.799 | 0.285 | 0.173 | 0.114 | 0.460 | 0.484 | 0.105 |
| AK3 | 0.752 | 0.158 | 0.152 | 0.108 | 0.325 | 0.336 | 0.090 |
| AK4 | 0.751 | 0.177 | 0.154 | 0.255 | 0.328 | 0.397 | 0.061 |
| AK5 | 0.705 | 0.219 | 0.238 | 0.233 | 0.310 | 0.436 | 0.130 |
| E2 | 0.200 | 0.266 | 0.187 | 0.568 | 0.192 | 0.282 | 0.121 |
| E3 | 0.087 | 0.213 | 0.177 | 0.714 | 0.009 | 0.163 | 0.144 |
| E4 | 0.114 | 0.236 | 0.181 | 0.704 | 0.096 | 0.065 | 0.217 |
| E5 | 0.182 | 0.241 | 0.193 | 0.743 | 0.091 | 0.142 | 0.140 |
| E6 | 0.128 | 0.091 | 0.098 | 0.547 | 0.158 | 0.141 | 0.230 |
| OC1 | 0.241 | 0.732 | 0.489 | 0.226 | 0.291 | 0.331 | 0.081 |
| OC2 | 0.206 | 0.541 | 0.427 | 0.218 | 0.221 | 0.137 | 0.023 |
| OC3 | 0.172 | 0.720 | 0.444 | 0.238 | 0.288 | 0.234 | 0.053 |
| OC4 | 0.151 | 0.704 | 0.418 | 0.254 | 0.280 | 0.172 | 0.037 |
| OC5 | 0.178 | 0.800 | 0.597 | 0.227 | 0.325 | 0.212 | 0.129 |
| PC1 | 0.170 | 0.536 | 0.578 | 0.289 | 0.239 | 0.250 | 0.073 |
| PC2 | 0.131 | 0.351 | 0.586 | 0.127 | 0.328 | 0.348 | 0.080 |
| PC3 | 0.132 | 0.441 | 0.613 | 0.118 | 0.308 | 0.233 | -0.061 |

| | | | | | | | |
|-----|--------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| PC4 | 0.202 | 0.562 | 0.770 | 0.114 | 0.223 | 0.178 | 0.032 |
| PC5 | 0.122 | 0.388 | 0.781 | 0.186 | 0.255 | 0.185 | 0.150 |
| PC6 | 0.232 | 0.474 | 0.821 | 0.207 | 0.275 | 0.226 | 0.060 |
| PC7 | 0.125 | 0.464 | 0.590 | 0.104 | 0.176 | 0.134 | 0.070 |
| SK1 | 0.442 | 0.308 | 0.267 | 0.053 | 0.807 | 0.626 | 0.175 |
| SK2 | 0.311 | 0.275 | 0.287 | 0.062 | 0.822 | 0.545 | 0.205 |
| SK3 | 0.450 | 0.361 | 0.350 | 0.146 | 0.875 | 0.650 | 0.171 |
| SK4 | 0.300 | 0.342 | 0.271 | 0.222 | 0.859 | 0.513 | 0.319 |
| SK5 | 0.425 | 0.365 | 0.364 | 0.166 | 0.783 | 0.637 | 0.170 |
| TS1 | 0.335 | 0.054 | 0.164 | 0.118 | 0.440 | 0.619 | 0.146 |
| TS2 | 0.483 | 0.072 | 0.058 | 0.042 | 0.518 | 0.682 | 0.078 |
| TS3 | 0.387 | 0.227 | 0.272 | 0.269 | 0.475 | 0.775 | 0.132 |
| TS4 | 0.391 | 0.250 | 0.304 | 0.256 | 0.588 | 0.775 | 0.251 |
| TS5 | 0.232 | 0.251 | 0.245 | 0.204 | 0.460 | 0.650 | 0.287 |
| TS6 | 0.390 | 0.384 | 0.307 | 0.206 | 0.489 | 0.687 | 0.170 |
| TS7 | 0.527 | 0.277 | 0.302 | 0.221 | 0.616 | 0.813 | 0.252 |
| TS8 | 0.465 | 0.262 | 0.209 | 0.104 | 0.554 | 0.766 | 0.281 |
| WE1 | 0.128 | 0.097 | 0.009 | 0.301 | 0.136 | 0.142 | 0.767 |
| WE2 | 0.155 | 0.044 | 0.179 | 0.146 | 0.314 | 0.297 | 0.711 |
| WE3 | 0.032 | 0.031 | -0.050 | 0.233 | 0.119 | 0.178 | 0.617 |
| WE4 | 0.085 | 0.070 | 0.070 | 0.077 | 0.167 | 0.218 | 0.747 |
| WE5 | 0.035 | 0.125 | 0.083 | 0.071 | 0.209 | 0.179 | 0.748 |
| WE6 | -0.048 | 0.038 | 0.117 | 0.146 | 0.032 | 0.113 | 0.612 |

The yellow sections in Table 6.10 show that the indicators of the variables have a higher correlation with their specific variables than the other correlation with all other variables. The yellow area shows that the indicators loaded more strongly with their associated constructs, so discriminant validity is met for all constructs in the model.

The final method for calculating discriminant validity is the HTMT. According to Henseler *et al.* (2015), the HTMT method is used to measure discriminant validity for reflective models. Considering that the models in both exogenous and endogenous models were reflective, this method was used in the present study. Henseler *et al.*

(2015) recommend calculating HTMT scores using a 0.85 threshold. Any number greater than 0.90 shows a lack of discriminant validity when utilizing the HTMT technique. Table 6.11 shows the calculated values for HTMT.

Table 6.11: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

| | AK | BC | FC | EM | SK | TK | WK |
|------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|----|
| Academic Knowledge | | | | | | | |
| Behavioural Competence | 0.339 | | | | | | |
| Functional Competence | 0.292 | 0.871 | | | | | |
| Employability | 0.297 | 0.455 | 0.324 | | | | |
| Strategic Skills | 0.536 | 0.492 | 0.444 | 0.242 | | | |
| Technical Skills | 0.647 | 0.403 | 0.390 | 0.331 | 0.812 | | |
| Work Experience | 0.155 | 0.167 | 0.194 | 0.348 | 0.280 | 0.320 | |

Table 6.11 shows that the values for the constructs in the correlation matrix are below 0.90; hence, the discriminant validity is confirmed for all constructs.

According to Malhotra, Schaller and Patil (2017), after the reliability and validity test, an assessment of model fit must be performed. Model fit can be ensured using SRMR, NFI, d_G, and rms theta (Malhotra *et al.*, 2017). However, Hair *et al.* (2017) discourages the application of model-fitting parameters to PLS SEM analysis because they are inconsistent with the basic operation of SMART PLS 3. Their application must therefore be treated with extreme caution.

- **Academic knowledge**

- **Behavioural competence:** The value of behavioural competence is 0.339; therefore, it passes the discriminant validity.
- **Functional competence:** The value of functional competence is 0.871; therefore, it passes the discriminant validity.

- **Employability:** The value of employability is 0.324; therefore, it passes the discriminant validity.
- **Strategic skills:** The value of strategic skills is 0.242; therefore, it passes the discriminant validity.
- **Technical skills:** The value of technical skills is 0.812; therefore, it passes the discriminant validity.
- **Work experience:** The value of work experience is 0.320; therefore, it passes the discriminant validity.

However, standard research practice insists on conducting a model fit test. Therefore, Table 6.12 below tabulates the results of the model fit test.

Table 6.12: Model fit test results

| | Saturated Model | Estimated Model |
|------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| SRMR | 0.086 | 0.131 |
| d_ULS | 6.324 | 14.811 |
| d_G | 2.569 | 2.906 |
| Chi-Square | 1327.335 | 1431.850 |
| NFI | 0.536 | 0.499 |

Therefore, using the SRMR values from the Saturated model, Table 6.12 shows a value of 0.086 – a value well below the 0.10 threshold for SRMR, as defined by Henseler *et al.*'s (2014) guidelines for conservative models. Furthermore, a RMS Theta of less than 0.12 represents a good model fit; hence, the value of 0.13 was achieved. This is a slightly higher value when compared to the recommended scales. The SRMR allows the average magnitude of discrepancies between observed and expected correlations to be assessed as an absolute measure of the criterion of (model) fit so that the test can be performed across all tests with cross cancellation; therefore, it dominates in the test of model fit. For this reason, model fit was retained in this study.

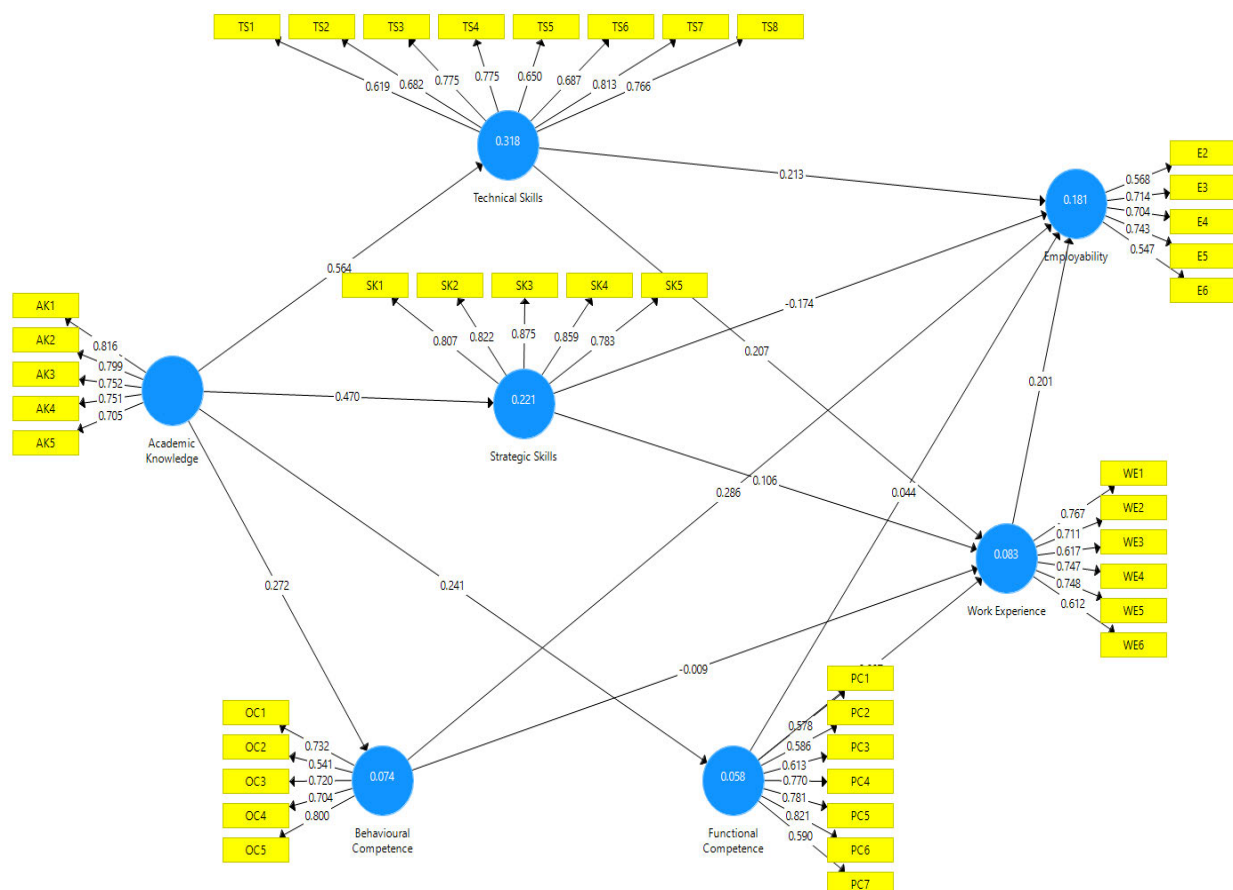
When the model was evaluated using the tests of reliability, validity and model fit, the model scored significantly in all three categories of the test of the measurement

model. This means that the instrument and the data collected are reliable and valid for further analysis, such as structural model analysis. In the next section, the structural model is examined.

6.7 STRUCTURAL MODEL

After securing significant results to evaluate the measurement model, the hypothesized model was bootstrapped using 5000 subsamples with a 95% confidence interval to test the model's path coefficients, R-squared values, and T-values. Figure 6.12 indicates the model with the estimated parameters from the calculations.

Figure 6.12: Tested conceptual model



The model was computed using a Bias-Corrected and Accelerated (BCa) bootstrap to reduce computational time and calculate the interval range used to accept or

refute the stated hypotheses. The following section discusses the results of the hypothesis tests.

6.8 HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Hypothesis testing either confirms or refutes the formulated established based on the importance of relationships. Using the estimated probability value (p-value) or a test statistic, significance determines the likelihood that the path estimate is attributable to chance (t-value). Although the p-value and the t-statistic function on different scales, can both be used to establish whether the results are attributable to chance and hence unacceptable, or are based on logic and hence are accepted. Applying the guidelines of Hair *et al.* (2020), a path coefficient is considered significant at the 5% probability of error level if its value is not within the 95 percent bias-corrected and accelerated confidence interval. Table 6.13 below tabulates an overview of the results of the hypothesis tests.

Table 6.13: Hypotheses testing results.

| H | Relationships | Original Sample (O) | Sample Mean (M) | (STDEV) | T Statistics | P Values | Comment |
|----------------|--|---------------------|-----------------|---------|--------------|----------|-----------|
| H ₁ | Academic Knowledge -> Behavioural Competence | 0.272 | 0.287 | 0.089 | 3.054 | 0.002 | Supported |
| H ₂ | Academic Knowledge -> Functional Competence | 0.241 | 0.260 | 0.088 | 2.748 | 0.006 | Supported |
| H ₃ | Academic Knowledge -> Strategic Skills | 0.470 | 0.488 | 0.062 | 7.644 | 0.000 | Supported |
| H ₄ | Academic Knowledge -> | 0.564 | 0.579 | 0.056 | 10.085 | 0.000 | Supported |

| | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|---------------|
| | Technical Skills | | | | | | |
| H5 | Behavioural Competence - > Employability | 0.286 | 0.293 | 0.143 | 2.005 | 0.045 | Supported |
| H6 | Behavioural Competence - > Work Experience | -0.009 | 0.012 | 0.179 | 0.052 | 0.958 | Not Supported |
| H7 | Functional Competence - > Employability | 0.044 | 0.065 | 0.125 | 0.351 | 0.726 | Not Supported |
| H8 | Functional Competence - > Work Experience | -0.007 | -0.005 | 0.173 | 0.040 | 0.968 | Not Supported |
| H9 | Strategic Skills -> Employability | -0.174 | -0.189 | 0.151 | 1.154 | 0.249 | Not Supported |
| H10 | Strategic Skills -> Work Experience | 0.106 | 0.083 | 0.181 | 0.587 | 0.557 | Not Supported |
| H11 | Technical Skills -> Employability | 0.213 | 0.216 | 0.190 | 1.121 | 0.262 | Not Supported |
| H12 | Technical Skills -> Work Experience | 0.207 | 0.232 | 0.135 | 1.534 | 0.125 | Not Supported |
| H13 | Work Experience -> Employability | 0.201 | 0.228 | 0.125 | 1.610 | 0.107 | |

H_1 : Academic knowledge positively influences the behavioural competence of graduates in SA

H1 has a Beta of 0.272, with a T-statistic of 3.054, which is greater than 1.96, and a P-value of 0.002, which is less than 0.5. In the South African context, the data supports H1 indicating that academic knowledge promotes behavioral competence favorably. This means that theoretical knowledge can be used to influence the behavioural competency of South African graduates. This theory supports Pool and Sewell's (2007) model, which emphasizes expertise as a component in graduate competence.

H₂: Academic knowledge positively influences the functional competence of graduates in SA

Table 6.13 shows that H₂ has a Beta of 0.241 and a T-test statistic of 2.748. The acceptance criterion for the hypothesis is that the Beta value should be greater than 0.05 and the T-test statistic greater than 1.96. The statistics confirm the requirements; thus, H₂ was accepted, which means that academic knowledge has an impact on the functional competence of public sector graduates in SA.

H₃: Academic knowledge positively influences the strategic skills of graduates in SA

The results in Table 6.13 show that Beta is equal to 0.470, with a T-test statistic of 7.644 and a P-value of 0.001, indicating that H₃ was supported. The hypothesis shows that academic knowledge has an impact on graduates' ability to develop strategic skills. The hypothesis is consistent with Bridgstock (2009) who emphasized that graduates can easily develop their strategic skills through good academic performance.

H₄: Academic knowledge positively influences the technical skills of graduates in SA

H₄ shows Beta results of 0.564, a T-test statistic of 10.085 with a P-value of 0.001. The results show that they met the decision criteria for accepting H₄. Thus, the

hypothesis states that graduates with high academic knowledge are likely to be able to develop the technical skills needed in their various occupations. The results support Bridgstock (2009), who postulates a positive relationship between academic knowledge and general skills.

H₅: Behavioural competence positively influences the employability of graduates in SA

H₅ has a Beta of 0.286, a T statistic of 2.005, and a P-value of 0.045. These findings suggest that H₅ is supported. According to this hypothesis, behavioral competence has a considerable influence on graduate selection in graduate employability. This highlights the need for a good attitude and ubuntu traits in graduates for them to succeed in today's workforce. This factor was also mentioned in Bezuidenhout's (2011) model, which shows that cultural competence is an important factor in employability.

H₆: Behavioural competence positively influences the work experience of graduates in SA

The results in Table 6.13 show that behavioral competence has no consequence on work experience ($B = -0.009$, $P = 0.958$). The results contradict the research findings of Fugate and Kinicki (2008), who found a positive and important relationship between behavioural competence and the ability of graduates to successfully gain job experience.

H₇: Functional competence positively influences the employability of graduates in SA

The results show that Beta is 0.044 and P is 0.726, indicating that H₇ is not supported. This indicates that functional competency has no bearing on graduate employment prospects in SA. These conclusions suggest that functional competence harms employability in a flattened labour market as the employment rate increases.

H₈: Functional competence positively influences the work experience of graduates in SA

H₈ has a Beta of -0.007 and a P value of 0.968, indicating that it is not supported. This means that functional competency, a typical criterion for work experience, has little bearing on the graduate job experience in SA. The findings indicate that functional ability has no bearing on graduate work experience in SA.

H₉: Strategic skills positively influence the employability of graduates in SA

H₉ shows that $B = -0.174$ and $P = 0.249$. The results indicate that H₉ was not supported. This again shows that strategic skills, which have long been a strong determinant of employability, are gradually losing influence on employability, suggesting that the market is flooded in terms of skills. This indicates that graduates should not only have the skills needed to perform their jobs, but also a good attitude to be employable in this era of high competition for jobs.

H₁₀: Strategic skills positively influence the work experience of graduates in SA

The results of H₁₀, with $B = 0.106$ and $P = 0.557$, show that strategic skills do not affect employability. These results explain a new trend in employability drivers in the context of challenging times, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, which has realigned work factors. According to McCowan (2014), employers ranked behavioural skills as the strongest and technical skills as the weakest employability factors during the period of Covid-19.

H₁₁: Technical skills positively influence the employability of graduates in SA

The findings show that $B = 0.213$ and $P = 0.262$. The results in Table 6.15 suggest that technical skills, which are generally a known determinant of employability, are not sufficient to drive graduate employability in the South African public sector.

H₁₂: Technical skills positively influence the work experience of graduates in SA

The findings show that there is an insignificant effect of technical skills on work experience ($B = 0.207$, $P = 0.125$). This contradicts Schwab (2012) who found that technical skills influenced the ability to gain work experience.

H₁₃: Work experience positively influences the employability of graduates in SA's public sector

The results for H₁₃ show that Beta equals 0.201, with a T value of 1.610, less than 1.96, and a P value of 0.107, greater than 0.05, thereby refuting H₁₃. The findings show that work experience has no effect on graduates' employability in the public sector. The findings contradict the main research findings of Fugate and Kinicki (2008) and the Bezuidenhout model (Bezuidenhout, 2011), both of which found a significant relationship between work experience and employability.

6.9 MODEL EXPLANATORY POWER

Table 6.14 shows that the T-statistic is 1.997 and the P-value is 0.046. The result shows that they have high explanatory power for employability, which is the outcome variable of the study. This means that the model can effectively explain the cause and effect between employability factors and graduate attractiveness in terms of employability. Other constructs that have high explanatory power are strategic and technical skills with a T-statistic of 3.601, a P-value of 0.001 and a T-statistic of 4.815, respectively. The results are detailed in Table 6.14 below.

Table 6.14: Explanatory power

| Construct | Original Sample (O) | Sample Mean (M) | Standard Deviation (STDEV) | T Statistics (O/STDEV) | P Values |
|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| Behavioural Competence | 0.066 | 0.082 | 0.050 | 1.312 | 0.190 |
| Employability | 0.142 | 0.230 | 0.071 | 1.997 | 0.046 |
| Functional Competence | 0.050 | 0.067 | 0.045 | 1.094 | 0.274 |
| Strategic Skills | 0.214 | 0.235 | 0.059 | 3.601 | 0.000 |
| Technical Skills | 0.312 | 0.333 | 0.065 | 4.815 | 0.000 |
| Work Experience | 0.049 | 0.116 | 0.075 | 0.645 | 0.519 |

The model was able to explain the South African market's 18.1 percent graduate employability. In addition, the model explained 31.5% of the variance in technical skills and 22.1% in strategic skills in the South African labour market. This means that the model can mean that 18.1% of the impact on graduate employability is in the South African market.

6.10 PREDICTIVE RELEVANCY

According to Hair *et al.* (2017), outcomes over 0 have a good prediction while results below 0 do not affect the PLS SEM model's prediction. Hair *et al.* (2014) proposed decision parameters for models with low predictive values (0.020.35). In the research study, the blindfolding construct with cross-validated redundancy was used to calculate the following results. The model's predictability demonstrates the variance explained by the independent constructs of the dependent constructs using Q-Square values, as well as predictive relevance by blindfolding and utilising cross-validated construct redundancy. The predictive relevance is shown in Table 6.15.

Table 6.15: Predictive relevancy

| Construct | SSO | SSE | Q ² (=1- SSE/SSO) |
|------------------------|---------|---------|------------------------------------|
| Academic Knowledge | 560.000 | 560.000 | |
| Behavioural Competence | 560.000 | 543.101 | 0.030 |
| Employability | 560.000 | 538.408 | 0.039 |
| Functional Competence | 784.000 | 765.760 | 0.023 |
| Strategic Skills | 560.000 | 484.346 | 0.135 |
| Technical Skills | 896.000 | 760.727 | 0.151 |
| Work Experience | 672.000 | 659.310 | 0.019 |

- **Academic knowledge**

Behavioral competency has a moderate prediction value of 0.030

Employability has a moderate prediction value of 0.039

Functional competency has a moderate prediction value of 0.023

Strategic skills have a moderate prediction value of 0.135

Technical skills have a moderate prediction value of 0.151

Work experience has a moderate prediction value of 0.019

The results show that Q2 is greater than 0, but less than 0.15, implying that the model has a small predictive relevance for graduate employability in SA (Q2 = 0.039). The model also showed moderate predictive relevance for technical skills (Q2 = 0.151).

6.11 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the descriptive and inferential analysis of both exogenous and endogenous constructs were analysed descriptively and inferentially. Behavioural competence was found to be the strongest driver of employability, suggesting that in today's world how employees behave and go about their daily affairs has a major impact on employability, although functional competencies and skills are highly

valued in assessing the employability of potential employees. This suggests a new ordering of the important metrics of employability recognised by the demands of today's work environment. Further discussion on hypothesis testing and reporting on the results. The next chapter concludes the study and provides recommendations and fields for additional research.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the study's findings, draws conclusions about how well the objectives were met, highlights theoretical and practical conclusions, and makes recommendations for future research. It starts with a summary of the previous chapters of the study to illustrate how each chapter contributed to the attainment of the research goals. Following that, it discusses and concludes the empirical results presented in Chapter 6. This is followed by research conclusions, theoretical and practical contributions, limitations, and recommendations for future studies.

7.2 ACHIEVEMENT OF THEORETICAL OBJECTIVES FROM THE STUDY

This chapter demonstrates how the theoretical aims were met, considering the theoretical and empirical objectives described in Chapter 1. Chapter 1 introduced the study, described the problem, provided preliminary literature, and stated the theoretical and empirical objectives of the study. Chapter 2 described the graduate employability research context by evaluating the scope and contributions of graduate employability in SA and internationally. The literature was reviewed in Chapters 3 and 4 to discuss the relevant frameworks on customer satisfaction in services, relationship marketing, and loyalty. This enabled the definition and operationalization of constructs, as well as the formulation of reasoned hypotheses for relationships between constructs. The research methodology was detailed in Chapter 5 using Saunders *et al.*'s (2012) research onion framework. The study was structured in a positivist and deductive philosophical manner. As a result, hypotheses and models on the following topics were derived from the literature.

To create a self-administered questionnaire and collect quantitative data, a survey technique was adopted. The information was cross-sectional and reflected the views

of 252 people at a certain point in time. Data analysis strategies were also discussed, with descriptive statistics and PLS-SEM for inferential statistics being the most popular.

Following the data collecting and analysis procedures outlined in Chapter 6, Chapter 7 presents the data analysis results after using descriptive statistics to examine the respondents' profiles and test the constructs' reliability and validity.

7.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

7.3.1 What are the perceptions of business study graduates on possible factors that would enhance employability?

- **Academic knowledge**

The outcomes of this study showed that the majority of graduates indicated that they believed academic knowledge would improve their employability. The respondents also believed that the academic knowledge they gained would equip them with the skills and competencies they would need in the workplace. The respondents also agreed that the academic knowledge they gained was useful in the job, and they believed that most graduates relied on academic knowledge to improve their employability. These results indicated that graduates believed that academic knowledge was the foundation for employability.

- **Work experience**

Regarding work experience, the results showed that most participants acknowledged that work experience improved their employability. The majority of the respondents are in agreement that work experience was a significant criterion for accessing employment and improved the chances of obtaining employment. The respondents also agreed that work experience improved work skills and helped graduates gain beneficial experience to prove their suitability for employment. In addition, the majority indicated that they believed work experience enhanced their competence.

These findings demonstrated that work experience was still one of the most important factors in graduate employability.

- **Technical skills**

The results of this study showed that the majority of graduates indicated that they recognised that technical skills were important and would enhance their employability. The participants also acknowledged that written and oral communication skills, social and cultural competencies, creative and innovative skills, and computer skills were critical to prepare them for the job market and their employability.

- **Strategic skills**

More than three-quarters of the respondents agreed that strategic skills would increase their chances of being hired. Respondents also agreed that critical thinking and problem-solving skills, collaboration and teamwork skills, a willingness to learn, a good work ethic, and a willingness to accept responsibility and accountability were important in enhancing employability. These findings indicated that strategic skills were an important factor in graduate employability.

- **Functional competency**

Regarding functional competence, the results showed that the majority of the participants believed that functional competence was an important factor in the employability of graduates. In support of this opinion, the respondents also confirmed that decision-making, problem-solving, strategic thinking, continuous learning, adaptability, leadership skills, and self-management were important in improving employability.

7.3.2 How can the relationship between employability factors and graduates' employability be measured?

According to the findings of the inferential statistics, behavioral competence positively influenced the employability of graduates in SA. This suggested that behavioural competence was a critical factor in selecting graduates when it came to their employability. This underscored the need for a good attitude and ubuntu traits in graduates for them to succeed in today's workforce. These findings were consistent with those of Bezuidenhout (2011) who stated that social skills were an important factor in employability.

Functional competence positively influenced graduate employability in SA. However, the influence was not statistically significant. This means that functional competence has no statistically significant influence on graduate employability in SA. These findings may have a negative impact on functional competence's ability to influence employability in a flattening labour market with rising unemployment.

Strategic skills had no influence on graduate employability in SA. This again showed that strategic skills, which have long been an important determinant of employability, were gradually losing influence on employability, suggesting that the market was flooded in terms of skills. This showed that graduates should not only have the skills needed to do the job, but also other important skills, such as behavioural skills, to be employable in the age of competition for jobs.

The results showed that technical skills had a positive but statistically insignificant impact on the employability of graduates in SA. The results further showed that technical skills, which are a known determinant of employability, were not strong enough in the South African public sector to influence graduate employability. This suggested that while technical skills had an important influence on employability, they alone did not determine employability.

Work experience had a favourable but statistically insignificant impact on graduate employment in the South African public sector, according to the findings. The results

Moreover, work experience had a statistically significant impact on the employability of graduates in the public sector. These findings suggested that a graduate's work experience alone was insufficient to make him or her employable. Behavioural skills, for example, had a statistically significant impact on graduate employability. The results contrasted with the main research findings of Fugate and Kinicki (2008) and the Bezuidenhout model (2011), which yielded significant findings regarding the relationship between work experience and employability

7.3.3 What is the influence of other factors on business study graduates employability based on work experience?

The results showed that work experience had a positive but not a statistically significant impact on graduate employability. These results suggested that work experience alone was not sufficient to promote graduate employability. There were other factors, such as behavioural skills, that had a statistically significant impact on graduate employability. Other factors such as technical skills, strategic skills, and functional skills did not have a statistically significant impact on graduate employability. These findings suggested that there was a shift in the South African labour market where factors such as behavioural skills were becoming increasingly important in determining graduate employability. Traditionally, factors such as work experience, technical skills, strategic skills, and functional competence were the most important factors in determining employability. However, the results of this study indicated a shift toward social and behavioural skills.

7.3.4 What are the roles of employers in integrating business study graduates into the work environment?

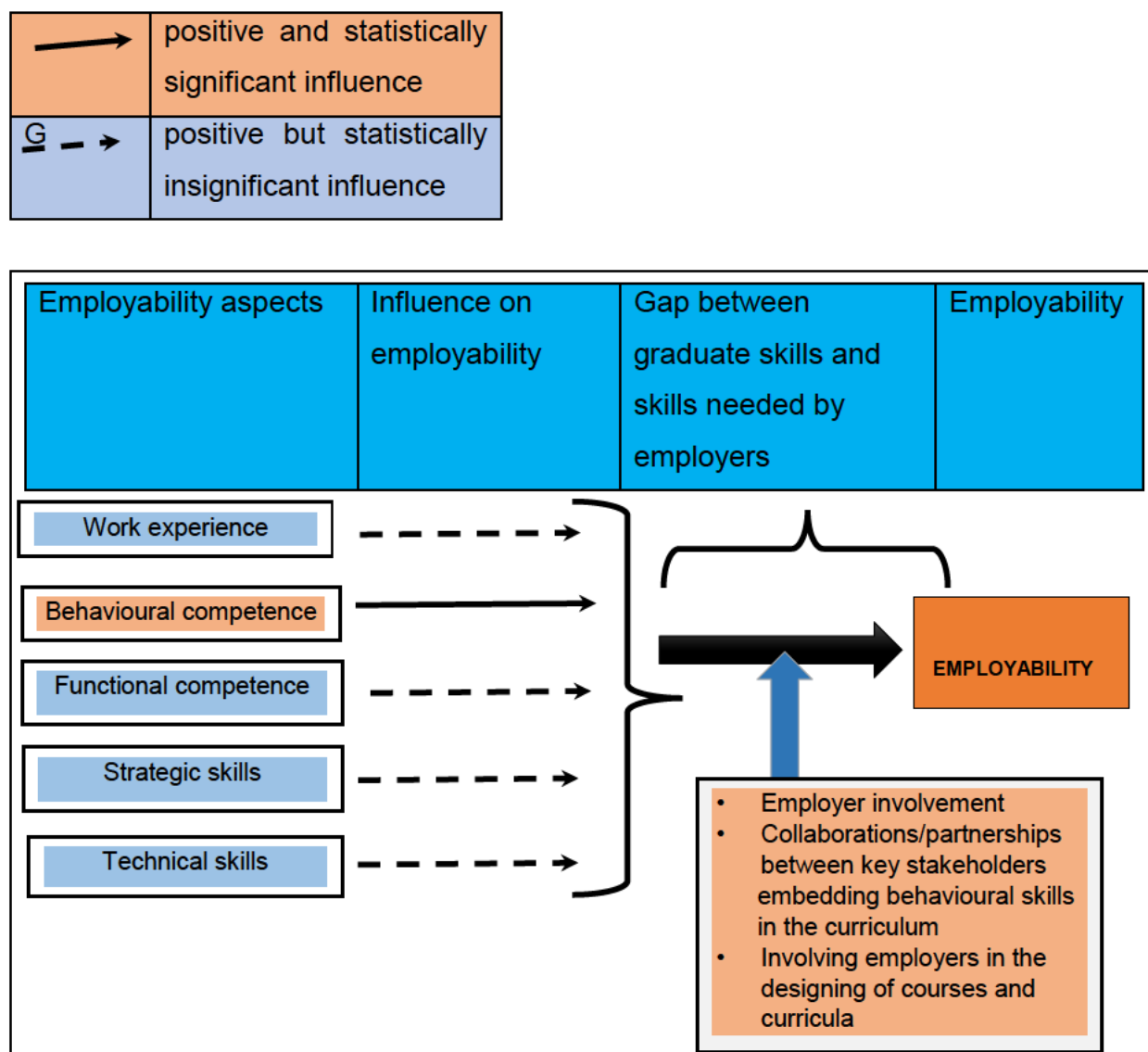
Employers know what the labour market demands. They are the ones who know exactly what the market expects from graduates. This means that employer involvement in course design and delivery may improve graduate employability. Such involvement could involve employers who provided advice on course content and gave guest lectures. When students learn what employers expect of them, it

could greatly improve the prospects for aligning the skills offered by HEIs with the employability skills required in the labour market.

The labour market environment is evolving, and the skills required are changing rapidly. These developments require keeping pace with the skills required in the labour market. Therefore, key stakeholders in the HEIs and employers must form meaningful partnerships in which they identify and prioritise the employability skills needed to integrate business graduates into the workforce. This would help match the skills offered by HEI with the employment skills sought by employers.

7.4 FRAMEWORK FOR BRIDGING GRADUATE SKILLS AND EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

Figure 7.1 Framework for bridging graduate skills and employability skills



Source: Researcher's creation

Figure 7.1 above shows how employability factors affect graduate employability and how the gap between graduate employability skills and graduate employability skills could be bridged to enhance graduate employability.

The framework shows that work experience, behavioural competence, functional competence and strategic skills have a weak positive influence on employability (positive but not statistically significant influence). It also shows that behavioural competence has the strongest influence on employability (positive and statistically significant influence). The dashed line (Figure 7.1) for work experience, behavioural competence, functional competence, strategic skills and technical skills shows that these aspects have a positive but statistically insignificant influence on employability. The solid line for behavioural competence shows that behavioural competence has a positive and statistically significant influence on employability.

The framework shows that the gap between graduate skills and employability could be bridged in the following ways:

- Create meaningful partnerships between key stakeholders in the HEI and employers to develop collaborations in which they identify and prioritise the employability skills needed to integrate graduates into the industry.
- Embed behavioural skills learning into HE curricula; and
- Involving employers in the course and curriculum design.

7.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Potential graduates are hired based on their knowledge and technical/professional skills in a particular field. Therefore, this study examined the broad range of skills that a graduate needed before they could begin their career. For graduates, skills such as knowledge, behavioural skills, soft skills, and personal skills are critical. Nowadays, each employer and the requirements for an employee to do a certain job are constantly changing, so it could be difficult for a business graduate who lacked these skills to obtain prolonged employment.

For this reason, only a few prestigious schools and their graduates manage to land excellent jobs with the best companies in the world. Thus, it is a graduate's primary duty to acquire these skills to overcome the entrepreneurial difficulties that lie ahead. Individuals live in an ever-changing labour market environment where the skills required are rapidly evolving. These developments require keeping up with and

adapting to the employability requirements in the current and future world of work. Key stakeholders in HE and labour markets must form meaningful partnerships in which they identify and prioritise the employability skills needed to seamlessly transition graduates into the industry. This could help match the skills offered by HEIs with the employment skills required by the labour market.

The findings revealed that work experience has no statistically significant impact on graduate employability in SA. However, work experience remains important for graduate employability. It would therefore be beneficial if all students were required to complete a work-based learning course or a structured internship as part of their studies, with students required to work in the industry for a while before graduation. This way, they would be prepared to integrate into the industry after graduation, having already gained experience during work-based learning. All of this could enhance their employability.

To the extent that work experience improves graduate employability, the findings of this study revealed that the effect was not statistically significant. This means that HEIs should focus not only on the job experience, but also on skill sets including behavioural skills, technical skills, and strategic skills, as well as factors like functional competence, which are becoming increasingly vital for graduates' employability. The researcher recommends that such aspects and skills be incorporated into university curricula and courses. Incorporating behavioural competencies into the curriculum and courses could improve the chances of matching graduates' skills with the employability requirements of future employers.

The researcher also suggests that involving employers in course design and delivery could improve graduate employability. Such involvement could include employers giving advice on course content and delivering guest lectures. When students learn what employers expect of them, it may also improve the chances of matching the skills supplied by schools to the skills needed in the labour market.

7.6 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

An important finding from this research is that job experience alone is not enough to boost a graduate's employability. The study suggests that there are other important factors, such as behavioural skills, that have a relatively significant impact on graduate employability. This important contribution provides both graduates and HEIs, as well as policymakers in HE, with insights into the current dynamics of factors that influence employability in the South African labour market.

The study found that current labour market dynamics regarding employability factors were shifting away from technical skills, strategic skills, and functional skills to social and behavioural skills. These findings could inform graduates on what skills they need to acquire to improve their employability. In addition, the findings could inform HEIs on which areas to focus on to equip graduates with the skills required by employers in the labour market.

7.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

To gain a better understanding of graduate employability, a mixed-methods approach could have been used. The study collected quantitative data from graduates. This could have been supplemented by collecting qualitative data from employers and university faculties, or representatives of HEIs. This could have been done through interviews with the stakeholders mentioned above. In this way, the study would have learned about the perspectives of various key stakeholders. For example, learning employers' perspectives on what should be done to boost graduate employment would have been interesting and helpful.

Another limitation was that the study yielded a low response rate. This may largely be due to the questionnaire being too long and to its being part of a larger 'graduateness' study in the form of an additional questionnaire. Those that responded may therefore comprise a qualitatively distinct group from those that did not respond to the survey questionnaire. Another limitation of survey research is bias, which can arise when respondents provide socially acceptable responses.

Although an attempt was made to reduce the central tendency by making use of a five-point Likert-type scale, the participants in this study consistently responded by choosing the response category of 5 (always true for the respondent). This may have resulted in an agreement bias amongst respondents and had the effect of items loading very highly on one factor. It may be that the sample was highly motivated to provide socially desirable answers, especially as the study was carried out as part of a larger 'graduateness' study that gauged university-related attitudes. Future research can consider including reverse-scoring questions to attempt to reduce response bias.

Further limitations arose from the fact that the selected respondents might not have provided honest responses. Since the research is cross-sectional, replication is required to preserve its timeliness. Since this is a quantitative approach, it is confined to the participants' perspectives on employability, though they may desire to express other personal characteristics. In the future, a qualitative approach could enable respondents to express their opinions in greater depth.

7.8 AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should aim to obtain balanced views and assessments from all key stakeholders involved in preparing graduates for employment, those who hire them, labour market experts, and policymakers who develop HE policies. Gathering information from all of these parties would provide better insights into how to prepare graduates for the workplace to ensure a smooth transition of graduates into the industry.

7.9 CONCLUSION

This empirical study has achieved the stated objective of suggesting an integrated framework, which could be employed to increase the employability of graduates through various skills training programmes (refer to Figure 7.1). This chapter concluded the study and provided practical recommendations that could be implemented with ease. Key stakeholders in HE and labour markets must form

meaningful partnerships in which they identify and prioritise the employability skills needed to seamlessly transition graduates into the industry. This would help match the skills offered by HEIs with the employment skills required by the labour market. The study's significant contributions stem from the findings, which revealed that job experience alone was insufficient to increase graduate employability. Other important factors, such as behavioural skills, have a relatively large impact on graduate employability.

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ANNEXTURE A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER



MANAGEMENT SCIENCES: FACULTY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (FREC)

27 November 2019

Student Name: **Ms V Nkomo**

Student No: 19401793

Dear Ms V Nkomo

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN MANAGEMENT SCIENCES: BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

TITLE: Bridging work experience to improve employability of business studies graduates in Johannesburg.

Please be advised that the FREC Committee has reviewed your proposal and the following decision was made: **Approved – Ethics Level 2**

Date of FRC Approval: 27 November 2019

Approval has been granted for a period of two years from the above FRC date, after which you are required to apply for safety monitoring and annual recertification. Please use the form located at the Faculty. This form must be submitted to the FREC at least 3 months before the ethics approval for the study expires.

Any adverse events [serious or minor] which occur in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration must be reported to the FREC according to the FREC SOP's. Please note that **ANY** amendments in the approved proposal require the approval of the FREC as outlined in the FREC SOP's.

Yours sincerely

Prof JP Govender

Chairperson: Faculty Research Ethics Committee

ANNEXTURE B: QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire on assessment of 'Bridging work experience to improve employability of Business Studies graduates in Gauteng Province'

PLEASE NOTE

Business studies graduates in Gauteng Province should only complete this questionnaire.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to obtain feedback from you on the employability of business studies graduates when they first enter the job market. The results of this survey will be used to determine the relationship between work experience and the employability of business studies graduates in Gauteng Province.

Participation in this survey is completely voluntary and anonymous. The questionnaire consists of six sections. The questionnaire should take approximately 15 minutes of your time. We greatly appreciate your willingness to participate.

All information will be treated with the utmost **CONFIDENTIALITY** and will only be used for academic purposes.

Instructions for participants

1. Please answer the questions as objectively and honestly as possible.
2. Place a cross (x) in the space provided at each question, which reflects your answer very accurately.
3. Please answer all the questions, as this will provide more information to the researcher so that an accurate analysis and interpretation of the data can be made.

We thank you for your participation. Hope you find the questionnaire interesting and thought-provoking. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact us at:

Dr Albert Tchev Agbenyegah: (033) 845-8876 or AlbertA@dut.ac.za

Vuyokazi Nkomo 076 220 0592 or nkomovuyo@gmail.com

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

The personal information is required for the statistical analysis of the data of respondents. All your responses will be treated with the paramount confidence it deserves. The researcher appreciates your participation in providing this important information.

Mark the applicable block with a cross (X). Complete the applicable information.

| | | |
|-----------|---------------------------------|---|
| A1 | Please state your gender | |
| | Male | 1 |
| | Female | 2 |

| | | | | | |
|-----------|--|------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| A2 | Please indicate in which age group are you? | 20 years or less | 20-24 | 25-29 | 30-35 |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

| | | |
|-----------|---|---|
| A3 | What is your highest level of educational qualification? | |
| | National Diploma | 1 |
| | B-Tech Degree | 2 |
| | Bachelor's Degree | 3 |
| | Honours Degree | 4 |
| | Master's Degree | 5 |

| | | |
|-----------|---|---|
| A4 | In what field of study have you obtained your qualification? | |
| | Human Resources | 1 |
| | Business Administration | 2 |
| | Business Management | 3 |
| | Marketing | 4 |

| | | |
|--|----------------------------|---|
| | Other, please specify..... | 5 |
|--|----------------------------|---|

| | | |
|----|--|---|
| A5 | From the duration groups below, please state the number of months you have been unemployed from the time of your qualification. | |
| | Less than 6 months | 1 |
| | 7-12 months | 2 |
| | 12-18 months | 3 |
| | 19-24 months | 4 |
| | 2 years or more | 5 |

SECTION B: ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1- Strongly Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - Neither Disagree nor Agree, 4 - Agree and 5 - Strongly Agree, indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements.

| | | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Disagree nor Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-----|---|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|
| AK1 | The academic knowledge received provides skills required in the workplace. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| AK2 | The academic knowledge received develops the knowledge required in the workplace. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| AK3 | The academic knowledge | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| | | | | | | |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| | provided by Higher Learning Institutions is of a high standard. | | | | | |
| AK4 | The academic knowledge received is enough to gain employment. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| AK5 | The academic knowledge received enables competency in the workplace. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| AK6 | Graduates rely on academic knowledge. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

SECTION C: TECHNICAL SKILLS

Please indicate the level of agreement on development of the following skills during your studies towards a qualification on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 - Strongly Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - Neither Disagree nor Agree, 4 – Agree, and 5 - Strongly Agree. Indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements.

| | Skills/ attributes | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Disagree nor Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|----|--|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|
| S1 | I have the ability to find and access information. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| | | | | | | |
|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| S2 | I have the ability to use new information. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| S3 | I have oral presentation skills. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| S4 | I have written and oral communication skills. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| S5 | I have numerical skills. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| S6 | I have computer literacy. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| S7 | I am creative and innovative. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| S8 | I have social, civil and cultural competencies. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

SECTION D: STRATEGIC SKILLS

Please indicate the level of agreement on development of the following skills during your studies towards a qualification on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1- Strongly Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - Neither Disagree nor Agree, 4 - Agree and 5 - Strongly Agree. Indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements.

| | Skills/ attributes | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Disagree nor Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|---|--------------|---------------------------|
| | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| S1 | I am a critical thinker with problem-solving abilities. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| S2 | I have collaboration and teamwork abilities. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| S3 | I am willing to learn. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| S4 | I have work ethics. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| S5 | I am willing to accept responsibility and accountability. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| S6 | I exercise professional judgement. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

SECTION E: FUNCTIONAL COMPETENCIES

Indicate the level of importance of the following key competencies, on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 - Not at all important, 2- Low importance, 3 - Neutral, 4 - Important, 5 - Very Important.

| | | Not at all important | Low importance | Neutral | Important | Very Important |
|-----|---------------------|----------------------|----------------|---------|-----------|----------------|
| KC1 | Decision making | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| KC2 | Problem solving | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| KC3 | Strategic thinking | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| KC4 | Continuous learning | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| KC5 | Adaptability | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| KC6 | Leadership | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| | | | | | | |
|---------|---------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| KC 7 | Self- management | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---------|---------------------|---|---|---|---|---|

SECTION F: BEHAVIOURAL COMPETENCIES

Indicate the level of importance of the following key competencies, on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 - Not at all important, 2 - Low importance, 3 - Neutral, 4 - Important, 5 - Very Important.

| | | Not at all important | Low importance | Neutra l | Importan t | Very Importan t |
|-----|---------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| KC1 | Communica- tion | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| KC2 | Innovation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| KC3 | Interpersonal skills | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| KC4 | Teamwork | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| KC5 | Ethical responsibility | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

SECTION G: WORK EXPERIENCE

Please indicate the level of agreement of work experience, on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 - Strongly Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - Neither Disagree nor Agree, 4 – Agree, and 5 - Strongly Agree. Indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements.

| | | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Disagree nor Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-----|------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|---|--------------|---------------------------|
| WE1 | Work experience is an important | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| | | | | | | |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| | requirement to access employment. | | | | | |
| WE2 | Work experience improves your chances to access employment. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| WE3 | Work experience helps graduates gain valuable experience to prove their suitability. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| WE4 | Work experience enhances working skills. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| WE5 | Work experience enhances your competency. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| WE6 | Work experience is an important aspect of any strong tertiary education applicant. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

SECTION H: EMPLOYABILITY

Please indicate the level of agreement of employability, on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 - Strongly Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - Neither Disagree nor Agree, 4 – Agree, and 5 - Strongly Agree. Indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements.

| | | | | | | |
|--|--|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|
| | | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Disagree nor Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|--|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|

| | | | | | | |
|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| E1 | It was easy for me to find employment. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| E2 | It is easy for me to grow in my chosen career. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| E3 | Employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| E4 | Employability is the ability to gain initial employment, and maintain and obtain new employment if required. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| E5 | Employability is having a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and appropriate personal attributes. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| E6 | Employability is the acquisition of attributes that makes graduates more successful in their chosen occupation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Thank you for participating in this study.

ANNEXURE C: LETTER OF PERMISSION



SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL FOR GRADUATES CO-OPERATIVE
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SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL FOR GRADUATES COOPERATIVE

CEO'S OFFICE

167 14th Road, Whitby Manor Estate, Building No. 2653, Noordwyk

Midrand – Opposite Midrand Protea Hotel.

Suite 8282, Private Bag X32, Kempton Park 1682

Tel: 011 048 2592/011 318 0066

Email: projects@cooperativecouncil.co.za

Website: www.cooperativecouncil.co.za

July 2, 2019

Attn: Mrs. Vuyokazi Nkomo

DUT PhD Candidate

Email: vnkomo@ihcityparks.com

CC: Mr. Thamsanqa Maqubela – Executive Chairman, SACGRA

Email Address: ceo@cooperativecouncil.co.za

Dear Mrs. Nkomo

Subject: Permission to conduct research at South African Council for Graduates (SACGRA).

On behalf of the South African Council for Graduates (SACGRA); the Executive Chairman, Mr. IC Maqubela herewith grants you permission to conduct research at SACGRA themed 'Bridging Working Experience to Improve Graduate Employability'. This letter also serves as a notification to whom it may concern from the Durban University Technology that Mrs. Vuyokazi Nkomo has been granted permission to conduct research at SACGRA offices in Midrand.

The data to be collected will be for research purposes only. Detailed information regarding the research Objectives/ methodology and outcome will be shared with the SACGRA personnel to provide input/suggestions.

Should you need any other assistance in regards, please don't hesitate to contact the CEO of SACGRA, Mr. Thamsanqa Maqubela.

We wish you success with your research project and will appreciate it if you kindly keep us informed on your progress with your research.

Yours Sincerely,

Ms. Amanda Dubelezi

PA to the CEO

011 318 0066.

Directors: O Kunene, D Mshopo, M Cunningham, N Nsutsu, T Maqubela (Executive) Reg. No. 2013/012348/24